universität wien

DISSERTATION / DOCTORAL THESIS

Titel der Dissertation /Title of the Doctoral Thesis

„Conflict and Reconciliation in the First Chosen Family: A Study on Genesis 12-50“

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doktor der Theologie (Dr. theol.)

Vienna, 2016

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt / degree programme code as it appears on the student record sheet:	A 780 011
Dissertationsgebiet lt. Studienblatt / field of study as it appears on the student record sheet:	Katholische Theologie
Betreut von / Supervisor:	Univ.-Prof. Dr. Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger

Conflict and Reconciliation in the First Chosen Family:
A Study on Gen 12-50

Mag. theol. Thomas Sahaya Thatheus

Abstract:

Reconciliation is one of theimportant themes in the Bible. While acknowledging the reality of conflict in the patriarchs' interactions with different individuals, the patriarchal narratives emphasise the importance of reconciliation. Interestingly, these narratives are not mainly intended to be the stories or biographies of individual persons; rather they are meant to narrate the national history of Israel and Israel's interaction with her surrounding nations. Since family was the basic social unit in ancient Israel, family-story-telling technique was used in the patriarchal narratives to tell the history of Israel - her relation with the surrounding nations, and the relationship among the twelve tribes of Israel. That would mean that the patriarchs' conflicts with heads/patriarchs of other nations are Israel's conflicts with other nations, and the conflict among the sons of Jacob (Gen 37-50) is the conflict between Israel and Judah. Therefore, these narratives need to be investigated at two levels: micro and macro. At micro level this project investigates the question: what do these narratives say about the individual in his/her own rights, and what insights do they contribute to the theme? At macro level it investigates the question: what do these stories say about Israel and her relation to the surrounding nations. While investigating these questions, this project tries to show the human and divine dimension in a true reconciliation process - that human relationship keeps evolving to its maturity through an on-going process of reconciliation; and behind this process there is the hidden hand of God, which uses both the evil and the good deeds of men in a mysterious way, in order to chasten the human characters and to enable them to work out a process of reconciliation, and to redefine their relationship in a way that would foster peace, harmony and growth.

Konflikt und Versöhnung in der Erstelternserzählungen:
eine Studie über Genesis 12-50

Mag. theol. Thomas Sahaya Thatheus

Abstrakt

Versöhnung ist eines der wichtigsten Themen in der Bibel. Anerkennend die Realität des Konflikts, betonen die Erstelternserzählungen der Wichtigkeit von Versöhnung. Interessanterweise sind diese Erzählungen nicht die Geschichten oder Biographien der einzelnen Personen zu sein; sie sind viel mehr die Geschichte Israels, in dem erzählen sie Israels Beziehung mit ihren umliegenden Völker. Da Familie die grundlegende soziale Einheit im alten Israel war, wurde in dieser Erzählungen die Familien-Erzähl-Technik verwendet, um die Geschichte von Israel zu erzählen. Das heißt, die Erstelternskonflikte mit den Leitern oder mit den Väter der anderen Völkern sind, sind Israels Konflikt mit diesen Völkern; und der Konflikt unter den Söhnen Jakobs (Gen 37-50) ist, ist der Konflikt zwischen Israel und Judah. Daher müssen diese Erzählungen auf zwei Ebenen untersucht werden: Mikro und Makro. Auf der Mikroebene untersucht dieses Projekt die Frage: Was sagen diese Erzählungen über das Einzelnen, und welche Erkenntnisse tragen sie zu dem Thema? Auf der Makroebene untersucht das Projekt die Frage: Was diese Geschichten über Israel und Israels Beziehung mit umlegenden Völkern sagen. Zusammen mit diesen Fragenbeweist dieses Projekt die menschliche und göttliche Dimension in Versöhnungsprozeß. Es zeigt, daß die menschliche Beziehung sich entwickelt durch ein Prozeß der Versöhnung; und hinter diesem Prozeß gibt es die verborgene Hand Gottes, die guten und bösen Taten der Menschen auf mysteriöse Weise, um die menschlichen Charaktere zu züchtigen und zu ermöglichen, einen Prozeß der Versöhnung zu arbeiten, das pflegen Frieden, Harmonie und Wachstum in menschliche Beziehung.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis embodies the result of my own work that it has been composed by me and that it does not include work that has been presented for a degree by others in this or any other university, except pp. 91-114, which is a summary of my own Master thesis, "Wrestling with God: Atonement and Reconciliation (Gen 32-33)." All quotations and the work and opinions of others have been acknowledged in the main text or footnotes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the support and the help of many people. First and foremost, I am grateful to God for His blessing. I thank very specially Univ. Prof. Dr. Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger for his guidance and for his supervision of the project for its successful completion. I thank Mrs. Glenda Turkowitsch for taking her valuable time for correcting the spellings and the grammatical errors. I thank the Archdiocese of Vienna and the team of ARGE AAG, especially Mag. Alexander Kraljic. for being the funding body for my studies. I also remember the two parishes, Schwechat and Retz, where I had the privilege of doing some pastoral ministry and at the same time do my studies, both my diploma and my doctorate. Thanks to all those who encouraged me through their prayer and encouragement!

ABBREVIATIONS

AAR	*American Academy of Religion*
BA	*Biblical Archaeologist*
BAIAS	*Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society*
Bib.	*Biblica*
BN	*Biblische Notizen*
BR	*Biblical Research*
BSac	*Biblotheca Sacra*
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
BW	*The Bible World*
BZ	*Biblische Zeitschrift*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
CJ	*Conservative Judaism*
ETL	*Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*
HBT	*Horizons of Biblical Theology*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
ICC	International Critical Commentary
Int	*Interpretation*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBC	The Jerome Biblical Commentary

JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JBQ	*The Jewish Biblical Quarterly*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JOT	*Journal of the Old Testament*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement*
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
MS	*Mission Studies*
NCCHS	A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture
NIB	The New Interpreter's Bible
NIDOTTE	New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis
OTE	*Old Testament Essays*
ÖB	*Ökumenische Bibelwoche*
PRS	*Perspectives in Religious Studies*
RQ	*Restoration Quarterly*
SEA	*Svensk Exegetisk Arsbok*
ThWAT	Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*
ZThK	*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft.*

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Introduction

From experience we know that conflicts do occur in human interaction and relationship, and that the arena of conflicts ranges at different levels - interpersonal intergroup, interstates, etc. Conflicts are often understood as destructive. However, they could also be productive[1] if they are handled and addressed properly. Dudley Weeks, a professor of conflict resolution at American University, is of the view that conflict can open up possibilities for improving a relationship because when people work together to resolve conflicts they can find better solutions, far more creative than the existing one.[2] The Bible also recognizes the reality of human conflicts. While acknowledging the reality of human conflict, the Bible emphasises the importance of reconciliation, as many of the conflict stories, narrated in the Bible, head towards a process of resolution of the conflicts or reconciliation between the conflicting parties. Interestingly, the Bible views these human stories from a theological perspective, emphasizing the divine dimension in the reconciliation process.

Reconciliation is, in fact, one of the most prominent themes in the Bible. The creation story in the book of Genesis presents an ideal world order, where God, man and the world are in perfect harmony (Gen 1-2). However, after man's fall this harmony is broken and, as a result, chaos and confusion enters and dominates human society. Finally, this harmony is restored by the atonement of Jesus, the Lamb of God (cf. Rev. 7). But in between these two ideal images, what the Bible depicts is God preparing a nation (Israel), a nation that would be reconciled to Him, and would serve Him as an instrument of reconciliation. Thus, reconciliation is one of the major themes in the Old Testament. Peter Stuhlmacher states, "The gospel of reconciliation of God with his creation through the sending of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, is the heartbeat of the New

[1] Coser distinguishes two types of conflicts, *realistic* and *non-realistic*. A realistic conflict aims at reducing or removing the underlying causes of conflicts without destroying the relationship, while non-realistic conflict involves the expression of hostility as an end in itself, and it destroys the relationship between conflicting parties. Cf. L Coser, *The Funcitions of Conflict* (New York: Free Press, 1956), 48-55.
[2] Barry Reece, *Human Relations: Principles and Practices* (7th edition; OH: South-Western, 2012), 167.

Testament. This heartbeat stops if one cuts the New Testament off from the Old … the Old Testament first gave to the New the language of Christology."[3]

Reconciliation is also one of the main themes in the patriarchal narratives, which is filled with conflicts – conflicts within the chosen family, and conflict with other people. However, each conflict finally comes to either a settlement or a resolution, reconciling the opponents with each other. This dissertation, while investigating the theme conflict and reconciliation in the patriarchal narratives (Gen 12-50), tries to show the human and divine dimension in a true reconciliation process – that human relationship keeps evolving to its maturity through an on-going process of reconciliation; and behind this process there is the hidden hand of God, which uses both the evil and the good deeds of men in a mysterious way, in order to chasten the human characters and to enable them to work out a process of reconciliation, and to redefine their relationship in a way that would foster peace, harmony and growth.

Interestingly, there are enough indications in the patriarchal narratives, which suggest that these narratives are not mainly intended to be the stories or biographies of individual persons; rather they are meant to narrate the national history of Israel. Since the family was the basic social unit in ancient Israel, this narrative technique (i.e. a form of a family story) was used to narrate the history of the nation. This would mean that the acts of both men and women in the narratives are *political actions*, and the experiences of the individuals with God, and the experiences of the main characters with men and women of other nations are the experiences of not merely the individuals but also the experience of the group as a nation.[4]

Although Abraham and Jacob are individual figures in the narratives, they represent and embody the people of Israel. The promise of Yahweh to Abraham (12:2) shows that he is to be a great nation. In Gen 18:19 Abraham is asked by Yahweh to teach his descendants to obey Him so that His promises to Abraham would be fulfilled. This refers to Abraham in the future, i.e. in the context of his descendants. Thus, it is clear that Abraham embodies and represents the people of Israel here. Similarly, it is with Jacob: firstly, at the very beginning of the Jacob Narrative itself it is made known

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[3] George W. Coats, "Strife and Reconciliation: Themes of a Biblical Theology in the Book of Genesis," *HBT* 2 (1980), 17.

[4] Matthias Köckert, *Vätergott und Väterverheißungen* (FRLANT 143; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 304-10.

to Rebecca that two nations are in her womb (25:23); secondly, Isaac's blessing of Jacob – "Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you" (27:29); thirdly the new name given to Jacob – Jacob becoming *Israel* (32:28); thus, identifying Jacob with Israel, and Israel with Jacob. These factors indicate that these characters or figures do not stand for themselves alone; rather they represent a people. Therefore, these narratives need to be read and interpreted at different levels, both for what they say about the individual in his/her own right, and for what they show about him/her/them as a people and as a nation.

This would mean that the patriarchs' interactions with other individuals are Israel's interaction with other nations. For instance, Abraham's interaction with individuals like Pharaoh, Lot, Hagar (Ishmael) and Abimelech, and Jacob's interaction with Esau and Laban are not merely the patriarchs' interactions with individual persons but Israel's interactions with other nations. For these individuals do not stand for themselves alone but, rather, as the heads or fathers of different peoples/nations. They represent their peoples – Egyptian, Moabite, Ammonite, Ishmaelite, Philistines, Edomites and Aromites respectively. That would mean that the national story of Israel is narrated through the stories of the patriarchs of the nation. The patriarchs' conflicts with the heads or the patriarchs of other nations are Israel's conflicts with other nations. From the fact that all the conflicts finally come to peaceful settlements or resolutions, one could conclude that these stories are written in a literary form in order to instruct the original audiences and their descendants (Israelites) to maintain a peaceful relation with the surrounding nations.

However, when we read the Joseph Story, unlike Abraham or Jacob, we find not a hint that would suggest that Joseph typifies or embodies Israel as a people. Joseph is portrayed as an exemplary character for other individuals. Moreover, the Joseph narrative is not mainly concerned about Joseph, though Joseph is the hero of the narrative. The Joseph narrative is, in fact, a continuation of the Jacob's story; or rather, it is a story about Jacob's sons, for it deals with the conflict and reconciliation of the sons of Jacob. Therefore, one can conclude, as the Abraham and the Jacob narratives instruct and encourage Israel to maintain a peaceful relationship with her surrounding nations, the Joseph narrative instructs the Israelite audience/reader to foster and maintain peaceful and good relationships within the twelve tribes of Israel.

Thus, Gen 12-50 reports the stories of the nation *Israel* through the life-story of the patriarchs. To unearth this point and to unfold the process of reconciliation this dissertation, *Conflict and Reconciliation in the First Chosen Family:*[5] *A Study on Gen 12-50*, investigates the patriarchal narratives at two levels: micro as well as macro. At micro level it investigates the question: what do these narratives say about the individual in his or her own right, and what insights do the events, as narrated in the book, contribute to the theme that is under discussion? At macro level it investigates the question: what do these stories say about Israel and her relation to the surrounding nations? And finally, while highlighting the message of these narratives, the project enlists the stages involved in the settlement or the resolution of the conflicts, and the reconciliation of the conflicting parties. The work is divided into three chapters; and each chapter is structured as follows: first, the interpretation of the texts; second, linguistic and historical connection of the texts with the historical events in Israel's history; third, the outlining of the steps adhered for the final resolution of the conflict and the reconciliation of the concerned parties.

The first chapter, *Abraham and his Interaction with the Surrounding Nations*, critically examines Abraham, highlighting his failures as the cause for many conflicts with others. Abraham, who demonstrated a heroic faith in the Lord in Gen 12:1-3, is seen faltering in his faith. His failure not only pushes him into an awkward situation but also endangers the life of others, especially those who are related to him. By his failure he brings curse upon others instead of blessing. The conflict episodes in the Abraham narrative (Gen 12:10-20; 13:2-18; 16:1-16; 21:8-14; 20:1-18; 21:22-34), on the one hand, explain Abraham's relation with individuals like Pharaoh, Lot, Hagar (Ishmael) and Abimelech, but, on the other hand, they indicate Israel's relationship with its neighbouring nations. Hence, these characters do not merely stand for themselves, but they represent their people – Egyptian, Moabite, Ammonite, Ishmaelite and Philistines. From the author's perspective these episodes are intended to instruct the original readers (Israelites) to learn from the mistakes and the success of the patriarch, and to foster and maintain a sincere and harmonious relationship with the neighbouring nations.

[5] Instead of "the patriarchal narratives," the phrase "the first chosen family" is used in order to include and give an equal footing for the feminist characters in the narratives. Since there is no equivalent term in English for the German expression, *Erstelternserzälungen*, "the first chosen family" is used in the title.

The second chapter deals with Jacob. The Jacob story is full of deceit and treachery, muddled with sin and confusion. In fact, the story begins with conflict between the twin brothers, Jacob and Esau – their struggle within their mother's womb, their contrasting physical appearance and their life-style, and the differential favouritism of the parents towards their sons. Their conflict reaches its climax when Esau decides to kill Jacob, as Jacob stole the patriarchal blessing reserved for Esau. To escape from Esau Jacob flees to Paddan-aram, to his uncle's house, where being cheated and manipulated by his uncle, he flees secretly along with his wives, children and with all his possessions from Laban's house. But Laban overtakes Jacob with the intention of harming him; but warned by God, Laban enters a peace treaty with Jacob. In spite of the fierce hostility with his opponents, Jacob experiences a number of surprising moments of reconciliations – first, Leah and Rachel overcome their differences and get united for the common cause of the family (cf. 31:14-16); second, Laban and Jacob enter into a peace treaty with each other (31:43ff); third, Jacob himself is reconciled with God after he has wrestled with the mysterious man at Jabbok (32:23-33); and, finally, there is a dramatic and peaceful reunion of Esau and Jacob (33:1-10). What is emphasised in all these reconciliation scenes is the role of the divine intervention. Almost all the incidents of reconciliation in the Jacob narrative highlight the divine intervention (31:24; 32:29; 33:10f). Thereby, these stories bring to light the divine and the human dimension in reconciliation. At a wider perspective the reconciliation stories of the patriarch also exhort the original reader to maintain a harmonious relation with their neighbouring nations, Aram and Esau. Israel should not be hostile to Edom and Aram because they are genealogically and culturally related to Israel.

The third chapter, *the Joseph Narrative as a Model for Reconciliation,* also critically examines the characters since almost every character in the story is responsible for the conflict in the family. In fact, the very first scene of the story refers to the animosity between Joseph and the ten brothers. They hate and envy Joseph for many reasons - Jacob's favouritism for Joseph, Joseph's attitude of talebearing, his boasting and his insensitiveness to the feelings of his brothers, and also the brothers' own inner struggle to win the attention of the patriarch to obtain the patriarchal inheritance. All these factors result in the selling of Joseph into slavery, and the consequent deception before their father. However, after a long period of time they

undergo a process of transformation in a foreign land. Joseph learns through his experience in Egypt (39-41) what it is like to be slandered by others (39:14f. 17f.), and he becomes gradually mature and sensitive towards others (40:4, 6f). G. Fischer says, "Die Verwandlung Josepfs hat mehrere Ursachen. Zum einen hat sein schweres Schicksal ihn in diesen dreizehn Jahren reifen lassen, wobei alle Momente früherer Schuld wiedergekehrt sind. Zum anderen war mit dieser Erfahrung der Abhängigkeit und Not auch die von Segen und Gelingen verbunden; in der 'Niedrigkeit' des Dienens (39:4; 40:4) öffnen sich Wege zu Gunst und Heil."[6] Similarly, Judah (Gen 38) and his brothers undergo transformation (42-44) because they too grow in their insight, solidarity and self-sacrifice. Their inner transformation, finally enables them to get reconciled and reunited with Joseph. But the most striking theological point in the Joseph narrative is that Joseph attributes the realization of the reconciliation and the reunion of their family to God (Gen 45:5, 7, 8). By acknowledging their reconciliation and reunion as God's work, he affirms the truth that the author and the architect of human reconciliation is God, who can use both the evil and good deeds of men to resolve human conflicts and enable reconciliation. Joseph confirms this truth once again when the brothers fear that Joseph will take revenge after their father's death (Gen 50:15-21). From the historical perspective the Joseph narrative refers to conflict between Judah and Israel, the southern and the northern kingdoms of the chosen people. Politically, the narrative sends out a call to its original audience that Judah and Israel must reconcile and reunite with each other for their own survival and for the success of their divine mission, i.e. to serve God as His instrument of reconciliation of the whole human family and human race.

Thus, the patriarchal narratives, while dramatizing the conflict theme, present reconciliation as one of the main themes. They depict reconciliation as a long and on-going process at two dimensions - vertical and horizontal; and during this process the concerned parties undergo a process of transformation. These narratives, moreover, historically relate to the stories of the chosen people - Israel's interaction with the surrounding nations, and Israel's internal relationship as tribes, namely, between Israel and Judah.

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[6] Georg Fischer, "Die Josefsgeschichte als Model für Versöhnung," *Studies in the Book of Genesis: Literature, Redaction and History* (BEThL 155; Leuven: University Press, 2001), 248.

CHAPTER – 1

Abraham and his Interaction with the Surrounding Nations

God's call and His promise to Abram in Gen 12:1-3 is a new beginning in the salvation history. For through Abraham, God intends to reconcile and bless the whole human race. Abram believes the divine promise, and by this specific act of faith he becomes righteous before God. Through this special relationship he becomes the bearer and the mediator of God's blessing to the nations: "I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you, I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves" (Gen 12:3). This verse suggests that the divine blessing and the divine reconciliation for the human families will be possible only if they are in reconciliation with Abraham, for Abraham, by virtue of his righteousness before God, stands as 'catalyst'[7] for divine blessing and curse.

Taking this divine call and this divine mission as the centre of Abram's life, Genesis portrays Abram in his relationship with God and with other peoples/nations such as Egypt, Gerar, Moab, Ammon, Ishmaelite, etc. Though Abram bears the divine promise of blessing for his family and for the families of the whole human race, he is not a perfect man. Genesis portrays him, at some times, as a man falling away from the divine mission; and at other times as the hero of faith, standing up to the divine test and to the divine mission.

As the patriarch of Israel, Abram represents Israel. Therefore, the divine call and the divine mission to Abram are the divine call and the divine mission to Israel as the chosen nation. Thus, Abram's interactions with different individuals should also be understood as Israel's interactions with different nations, that is to say, Abram's interactions with patriarchs/heads of other nations are Israel's interactions with other nations. And these stories about Abram's interaction with different persons are

[7] Coats, "Strife and Reconciliation," 25.

intended, in one sense, to tell Israel about her own story through the life-story of the patriarch; and, in another sense, to instruct the Israelites how they are to relate themselves with God and with other nations. Hence, it is fitting to conclude that these stories are intended to depict Abram as a model for Israel, how she should relate herself with God, and how she should relate with other nations in order to fulfil the divine mission entrusted to her.

1.1. Abram's Interaction with Pharaoh (Gen 12:10-20):

Though Abram responds to the divine call with a heroic act of faith (Gen 12:1-9), it soon begins to waver at the face of a severe famine in the Promised Land (Gen 12:10-20). Instead of trusting and relying on the divine word, he relies on his human wisdom. The narrator's statement, "So Abram went down to Egypt" (וַיֵּרֶד אַבְרָם מִצְרַיְמָה), suggests the decline of his faith. He stoops down so low even to the extent of misrepresenting his relationship with Sarai, his wife. His lapses not only endanger the ancestress but also bring curse upon Egypt; and at the end of this episode Abram stands not only unfaithful to God but also to Sarai, his wife. Brueggemann, therefore, describes Abram as an anxious and an unfaithful man.[8] As a consequence, he brings curse upon others instead of blessing, and instead of reconciliation he brings conflict. Thus, the bearer of the divine blessing acts as an adversary of the divine blessing, and the agent of reconciliation acts as an antagonist of reconciliation.

The literary structure of Abram's sojourn in Egypt (Gen 12:10-20) can be outlined under two main sections: 1) Abram's reaction to the famine; and 2) Pharaoh's reaction to Abram's deception; and in between these two sections there is the reference to Yahweh's intervention, which is the central act in this entire episode. Yahweh intervenes in order to liberate Sarai, the ancestress of Israel,[9] from Pharaoh. Thus, the

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[8] Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1982), 126.

[9] Two more similar accounts of wife-sister are found in the book of Genesis (Gen 20:1-18; 26:1-11). Some scholars argue that all the three stories are narrating the same events. The main scholars, who argue that these three accounts (Gen 12:10-20; 20:1-18; 26:1-11) are the parallels to the same story, are J. Van Seters and C. Westermann. According to them Gen 12:10-20 is the oldest version and Gen 20:1-18 and 26:1-11 are literary compositions based upon the earliest version, i.e. Gen 12:10-20. J. Van Seters argues that Gen 20:1-18 addresses a series of questions raised in Gen 12:10-20; and Gen 26:1-11 is the further revision of Gen 12:10-20 and 20:1-18. Cf. T. D. Alexander, "Are the Wife/Sister Incidents of Genesis Literary Compositional Variants?" *VT* 42 (1992), 145ff. But some other scholars disagree with such a view. They hold that all the three accounts are three separate independent events that occurred in the

episode, in one sense, symbolically foreshadows the Exodus story – Yahweh liberating Israel from the bondage of the Egyptians.

1.1.1. Abram and the Famine (vv.10-16):

Gen 12:10-20 is closely related to Gen 12:1-9. It is true that Abram had responded to the divine call with a heroic act of faith, and set out from his homeland to Canaan, relying on the divine promise, not knowing for sure what awaits him. However, this heroic faith of Abram soon begins to fade, as he finds himself in the midst of a severe famine in Canaan. But instead of relying on the Lord's promise and trusting His Word, Abram relies on his human wisdom. Here Abram might have complained and questioned the Lord as the Israelites did against the Lord and Moses in the wilderness (cf. Exod. 14:11; 16:2-3; Num. 21:5). Surprisingly, Abram leaves the Promised Land without even seeking divine counsel. Martine Luther, therefore, criticises that here Abram "let the Word get out of his sight."[10] E. Zenger describes Gen 12:10-20 as a *Kontrastgeschichte* [11] to Gen 12:1-9. W. Berg summarises Abram's action as *Sündenfall*,[12] because all the thoughts, words and actions of Abram in Gen 12:10-20 contradict the Abram of Gen 12:1-9.

1.1.1.1. Abram's Reaction to the Famine (v.10):

Famine was a common phenomenon in the ancient biblical world (cf. Gen 12:10; 26:1; 41:54-57; 42:5; 43:1-2; Ruth1:1). After reaching Canaan, Abram finds himself in the midst of a severe famine. The severity of the famine is emphasised by the use of the word "famine" (רָעָב), both at the start (וַיְהִי רָעָב) and at the conclusion of v.10 (הָרָעָב

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patriarchs' life. The proponents of this second view are C. A. Keller and D. L. Petersen. They argue that these narratives are three different stories that share only the patriarch's lying about the ancestress in order to save his life, but their themes and motifs are different. Petersen argues that the theme of Gen 12 is Abram's plan versus Yahweh's plan; Gen 20 deals about the dialectic of sin; and Gen 26 highlights on the success of the patriarch in a foreign land. Cf. Mark E. Biddle, "The 'Endangered Ancestress' and Blessing for the Nations," *JBL* 109 (1990), 601. In this paper all these three stories are treated as separate stories because the arguments and the evidences to prove them as parallel stories of the same event are not sufficiently convincing. Moreover, if one treats them as a single event, then the importance and the details of the other wife/sister stories and their themes and motive can be unnoticed because each episode deals independently on different themes and motifs.

[10] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 126.

[11] E. Zenger, "De Versuchung des 'alten' Menschen Gen 12,10-20," *Christ in der Gegenwart* 30 (1978), 215.

[12] Werner Berg, "Nochmals: Ein Sündenfall Abrahams – der erste – in Gen 12,10-20," *BN* 21 (1983), 8.

כָּבֵד), and by the use of the adjective "severe" (כָּבֵד). At the face of this life threatening famine, how Abram reacts is a testing of his faith in the divine promise. Similar situations of famines are mentioned later in Genesis (Gen 26:2; 46:1ff). For example, in Gen 26:2 the Lord appears to Isaac and tells him not to go down to Egypt. Something similar happens to Jacob and his sons, but Jacob prays and seeks for divine counsel concerning his journey to Egypt (Gen 46:1ff). Similarly, Jacob, on his return to the Promised Land, prays to God for deliverance from Esau (Gen 32:9-12). Whereas here neither the Lord appears to Abram and gives him guidance nor does Abram pray and seek for divine guidance and deliverance as Jacob does. Contrary to Jacob, Abram decides on his own to leave the Promised Land, and goes down to Egypt to sojourn (לָגוּר) [13] there. Concerning Abram's intention to sojourn in Egypt, Wenham comments, "To live as an immigrant (גָּוּר) suggests the intention of a long-time settlement, which is somewhat alien to Abram's wandering lifestyle." [14] According to the book of the Prophet Isaiah, in crisis Israel should not go down to Egypt for help; on the contrary, she should go to the Lord for help: "'Woe to the rebellious children,' says the Lord, 'who carry out a plan, but not mine; …, who set out to go down to Egypt, without asking for my counsel, to take refuge in the protection of Pharaoh, and to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt! Therefore shall the protection of Pharaoh turn to your shame, and the shelter in the shadow of Egypt to your humiliation" (Is. 30:1-3).[15] Isaiah's text suggests that the right place/person to seek protection from all the life-threatening dangers is the Lord (cf. Ps. 11:1). Thus, Abram stands here guilty of not trusting and seeking the counsel from the Lord. Kinder comments, "Abram did not stop to enquire,

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[13] The verb גּוּר occurs 81 times in the MT. In q. it means "to dwell as a stranger," or "to become refugee." It is often used in the OT to describe the journeys of the patriarchs (Gen 12:10; 32:4[5]; 47:4). The term is found frequently in Jeremiah 42-44 concerning the intent of the exiles to go to Egypt. Another important and common use of the word is to indicate the incorporation of the sojourner into the life and faith of Israel (Ex 12:48-49; Lev 16:29; 17:8, 10, 12; 19:33-34, etc.). cf. A. H. Konkel, "גוּר," *NIDOTTE*, vol. 1 (ed. Willem VanGemeren; UK: Paternoster Press, 1996), 836-839.

[14] Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15: Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1 (Texas: Word Books, 1987), 287.

[15] Egypt is portrayed in the Bible both negatively and positively, as a place of shelter, and as a place of mortal danger. Surprisingly, the Bible does not encourage Israel to hate Egypt despite the slavery and Exodus (cf. Deut. 23:8). Cf. Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 93.

but went on his own initiative, taking everything into account but God."[16] W. Berg says that by leaving the Promised Land without the approval from the Lord, Abram has jeopardized the *Landverheißung*.[17] K.F. Keil, A. Dillmann, H.L. Strack and Cassuto describe the reaction of Abram as *ein Paradigma des mangelnden Glaubens Abrahams*.[18] As a man of heroic faith, Abram should have sought the counsel from the Lord as Jacob did; on the contrary, he relies only on his own wits and shrewdness; and as a result, he has to fear an even more serious threat to his life in Egypt.

1.1.1.2. Abram's Fear and His Plan (vv.11-13):

Due to the severe famine Abram abandons the Promised Land and travels down to Egypt. But as he approaches Egypt he fears even a greater threat from the Egyptians, thinking that the Egyptians would kill him in order to covet his beautiful wife, Sarai. It is shocking to know Abram's reaction at this anticipated threat. In order to save his life he misrepresents Sarai as his sister. This cowardly act of Abram suggests that he is only concerned about his life, and not of Sarai, or at least he does not foresee or anticipate what could happen to Sarai.

However, one can ask the question: Is his fear about the danger concerning Sarai's beauty justified at all? Because when he was in Canaan, there was no report of any one harming him in order to covet his beautiful wife. Why should he now fear? In Hamilton's view Abram fears the Egyptians because he thinks that the law of hospitality that is central to the sematic and biblical culture is absent in the Egyptian culture.[19] Similarly, Gunkel says that it is dangerous to have a beautiful woman in Egypt.[20] Therefore, Abram fears and plans, how he should deal with the anticipated threat.

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[16] Derek Kinder, *Genesis: an Introduction and Commentary* (ed. D. J. Weisman; London: Inter-Varcity Press, 1974), 116.
[17] Werner Berg, *Urgeschichte des Glaubens:* Genesis (Stuttgart: Kath. Bibelwerk, 1987), 91f.
[18] Peter Weimar, *Untersuchungen zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Pentateuch* (BZAW 147; Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1977), 19.
[19] Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis 1-17: New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 379.
[20] *"Er (Abram) denkt so: eine schöne Frau zu haben ist in Ägypten gefährlich; wer sie besitzen will, muss ihren Mann töten; aber eine schöne Schwester kann man vom Bruder in Güte gewinnen…"* Cf. Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis übersetzt und erklärt: Handkommentar zum Alten Testament,* 2nd ed. (transl. D. W. Nowack; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1902), 149. However, from Gen 20:13 it is evident that this has been his general strategy. This would mean that Abram lied many times about Sarai, his wife.

So Abram strategizes and conceives a plan in his mind. The content of his plan has essentially three parts: a compliment to Sarai of her beauty (v.11b), Abram's fearful imagination of the threat (v.12), and his proposed solution (v.13).[21] Now, in order to implement his plan he needs the support of Sarai because Sarai, though portrayed as a passive character in this entire episode, is the central figure in his plan. So, in order to get her consent Abram makes, first, a compliment to Sarai: "I know that you are a beautiful woman to behold" (12:11b). Abram formulates his compliment with the Hebrew expression הִנֵּה־ נָא ("behold"). This formula is often used in the Bible to introduce a wish or a suggestion with the view of obtaining some favour from the other person.[22] Thus, his initial statement indicates that he has something in his mind that he wishes to get from her. After complimenting her, Abram tells Sarai his anticipated threat that would come upon him: "when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'this is his wife'; then they will kill me, but they will let you live" (v.12). The reason, why he fears the Egyptians is that he probably knows that the law in the ancient cultures strictly prohibits adultery; and severe consequences will follow upon anyone who breaks such a law. Therefore, Abram assumes that the only way for a man to posses the beautiful wife of another man would be to kill her husband and take her as a wife.[23] Skinner states, "The marriage bond is so sacred that even a foreigner, in order to possess the wife, will kill the husband first."[24] The evidence for such a view could be found in the Uriah-Bathsheba-David episode in 2 Sam. 11, where David let Uriah be killed, and after Uriah's death he takes Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, as his wife. Abram fears, something similar would befall him. Matthias Augustin says, "Die Todesfurcht Abrahams

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[21] Irmtraud Fischer, *Die Erzeltern Israels: Feministisch-theologische Studien zu Genesis 12-36* (BZAW 222; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1994), 124.

[22] B. Jacob, *Das Erste Buch der Tora: Genesis* (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1934), 348. In Hebrew the use of the participle נָא evokes attention in the addressee as well as obliges the addressee to the connoted meaning. In other words, it is a polite form used in speeches for softening blunt imperative. Cf. Francis Landy, *Beauty and the Enigma: and Other Essays on the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup 312; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 132.

[23] Hugh C. White, *Narration and Discourse in the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 181.

[24] John Skinner, *Genesis: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (ICC; Edinburg: T & Clark, 1910), 249.

erscheint in diesem Zusammenhang ganz real, wenn man nur an Urija denkt."[25] After explaining to Sarai the anticipated threat and the reason for the threat, he suggests a solution for the problem. He asks Sarai to tell the Egyptians that she is his sister. "Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on account of you" (v.13). Abram introduces his solution again with the speech form נָא, thereby he persuades Sarai to consent and cooperate with his plan.

Scholars are divided on judging Abram's action. One group of scholars take a soft stand on Abram's act, while others criticise Abram strongly. Those who take a soft position hold that Abram reveals only the half-truth about his relation with Sarai because Sarai is also his half-sister (cf. Gen 20:12). Therefore, the ancient Israel regarded Abram's lie much more mildly than we, because the intention of Abram was not bad. All the more, they praise Abram that he "lied so extraordinarily well and made a virtue of necessity."[26] According to Speicer's thesis, it was also a Hurrian practice that in marriage a man adopted his wife through a legal process as his sister in order to have more authority over her. The legal adoption of one's wife as sister, at the same time, also elevates her social standing.[27] Waltke, therefore, argues that it is not that Abram does not care about Sarai; rather by this Abram is intending to stall for time in order to "exploit suitors without actually giving her away."[28]

However, these arguments do not hold water for the following reasons: first, Mosche Greenberg rebuts the thesis of Speicer as "based on a faulty understanding of Akkadian texts;"[29] and according to Greenberg such a text never existed. Second, according to v.10 Abram goes down to Egypt to sojourn as a migrant (גָּוּר). In that case Waltke's assumption does not hold any water, because v.10 indicates that Abram goes down to Egypt not only to escape from the famine but also to settle there as a migrant, if

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[25] Matthias Augustin, "Die Inbesitznahme der schönen Frau aus der unterschiedlichen Sicht der Schwachen und der Mächtigen: ein kritischer Vergleich von Gen 12,10-20 und 2 Sam 11,2-27a," *BZ* 27 (1983), 148.
[26] Gunkel, *Genesis* (transl. D.W. Nowack), 149.
[27] Speicer's thesis is that in Hurrian socio-legal institution there was a provision, according to which a husband could also adopt his wife as his sister in the marriage simultaneously. For such practice gave more power to the man over the wife but at the same time, the adopted sister enjoyed correspondingly greater protection and higher social status. Cf. Ephraim A. Speicer, *Genesis* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1964), 92
[28] Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 213.
[29] Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (London: Routledge, 1995), 51.

not forever, for a longer period of time. Third, the following utterances of Abram – "that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on account of you" (v.13), clearly indicates that Abram is only interested in his safety, and so the thought of Sarai's safety does not arise in his mind. Therefore, many scholars have strongly criticised Abram. H. Holzinger describes Abram as of *schmählicher selbstsüchtiger Feigheit.*[30] O. Procksch criticises Abram as one who loves his life more than the sanctity of the matrimony.[31] Irmtraud Fischer criticises that by his plan Abram seems to make Sarai free for another man and thereby exposing their married life to jeopardy.[32] Ramban comments: "Know that our father Abraham inadvertently committed a great sin by placing his virtuous wife in a compromising situation because of his fear of being killed. He should have trusted in God to save him, his wife and all he had, …"[33] H. Werner says, "Die Angst hat diesen Abram wieder zu einem Gottlosen gemacht."[34] Thus, according to the views of many scholars, Abram does not appear here as a man of faith; on the contrary, he appears cowardice and selfish.

Though the whole episode revolves around Sarai, surprisingly, not a word on Sarai's reaction is recorded in the narrative. She has been portrayed in the narrative as an object, used both by Abram, Egyptians and Pharaoh. By presenting her in this way the narrator presents Sarai as a silent victim to her husband's plan: Abram controls her, he formulates even the lie he wants to put on her lips.[35] Abram devises the plan and wants Sarai to cooperate with it so that all would be in his favour; but unlike Abram, Sarai suffers silently the humiliation for the sake of her husband. Thus, Abram not only endangers their marriage union but also betrays Sarai as a person.

1.1.1.3. Egypt's Reaction to Sarai's Beauty (vv.14-16):

When Abram and Sarai reach Egypt, things begin to unfold exactly as Abram has envisaged. The text states, "The Egyptian saw that the woman was very beautiful"

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[30] Lothear Rupper, *Genesis 11, 27-25,18,* vol. 2 (Würzburg: Echter, 2002), 138.
[31] Rupper, *Genesis 11, 27-25,18,* 138.
[32] I. Fischer, *Die Erzeltern Israels*, 127.
[33] Sarna, *Genesis,* 95.
[34] Otto Wahl, "Die Flucht eines Berufenen (Gen 12,10-20): Gedanken zu einer stets aktuellen alten Geschichte," *Die Väter Israels*, (ed. Augustin R. Müller and Manfred Görg; Stuttgart: Kath. Bibelwerk, 1989), 351.
[35] Irmtraud Fischer, *Gottesstreiterinnen: Biblische Erzählungen über die Anfänge Israel* (2nd Pub.; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2000), 22.

(v.14). The Egyptians see Sarai most probably as the wife of Abram, for the text uses the term "the woman" (הָאִשָּׁה), rather than her name, "Sarai." The use of the adverb "very" (מְאֹד) with the adjective beautiful confirms Abram's compliment to Sarai in v.11. The Egyptians see her first, then the officers of Pharaoh, who then praise her (יְהַלְלוּ) before Pharaoh. They praise the beauty of "the woman" before Pharaoh because it is their duty to inform Pharaoh of all that is new and best in the land. Moreover, it is also the duty of the officers to play the role of procurers for Pharaoh, and Pharaoh, as the ruler of the land, may think that he has the claim to possess the best in his land.[36] So the woman (Sarai) is taken to Pharaoh. The passive use of the verb "take," (וַתֻּקַּח) suggests that Sarai is not taken forcefully, implying that no resistance from Abram's side; probably, he is frightened of being killed.

Pharaoh deals well with Abram, for it was customary to make large presents to the bride's family as bride money (מֹהַר).[37] The problem of Abram is now solved, but at the expense of Sarai, his wife. Things go well for Abram as he has envisaged; but the text does not mention how things are going with Sarai. Rupper comments, "Abrahams List hatte ihm zwar das Am-Leben-Bleiben gesichert, doch das Überleben seines Stammes gefährdet." [38] Although the text does not mention how it is going with Sarai, the divine intervention in v.17 implies that Sarai is in trouble and in anguish.

1.1.2. Pharaoh Suffers Plague and Confronts Abram (vv.17-20):

Sarai has been victimised by both, by her husband and by Pharaoh. She has been treated as an object. Things go well for Abram because Pharaoh deals well with him for the sake of Sarai. Pharaoh is happy because he has the most beautiful woman in his harem. But Sarai finds herself betrayed by her husband, and treated as an object, both by her own husband and by the most powerful man of Egypt. Her feelings and her distress are not recorded in the text. Probably, this could be the narrator's style of portraying her as a victim – victim of Abram's selfishness, and Pharaoh's lust. It is at this critical point, Yahweh strikes Pharaoh and his house with plagues. Through the

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[36] Gunkel, *Genesis* (tranl. D.W. Nowack), 150.
[37] Cf. Gen 24:52-53; Exod 22:16-17; 1 Sam 18:22-28.
[38] Rupper, *Genesis 11, 27-25,18*, 150.

plagues Pharaoh perceives that by bringing Sarai into his harem he has committed a crime; therefore, he confronts Abram with his accusations.

1.1.2.1. Yahweh's Intervention (v.17):

Though the text is silent about Sarai's fate, v.17 indicates that things do not go well with her. Therefore, Yahweh strikes Pharaoh and his house with plagues (נְגָעִים). Interestingly, the same word is used for the plague in Exodus (cf. Ex 11:1). Thus, taking Sarai into Pharaoh's harem can be understood as taking her into slavery, and the divine intervention can be understood as an act of divine liberation – Yahweh liberating the ancestress of Israel from the Egyptian slavery. Thus, this scene can be understood as foreshadowing the central event in the history of Israel, i.e., Yahweh liberating Israel from their slavery under Egyptians.

Sarai is portrayed as the pivotal figure in this episode, for Abraham prospers because of her, but Pharaoh and his household suffer because of her. "She is a catalyst for good and for evil."[39] Moreover, she symbolically represents Israel in Egypt. Just like Pharaoh and his house suffer plague because of Sarai, the wife of Abram, in Exodus entire Egypt suffers plagues because of Israel, Yahweh's bride. As Yahweh liberates Sarai, the ancestress of Israel, by striking Pharaoh and his household with plague, so does Yahweh also liberate Israel in Exodus by striking Egypt with plagues.

The text, however, raises here a couple of questions: has Pharaoh actually committed adultery with Sarai? And if he has not, why is he punished? The Hebrew phrase, וַתֻּקַּח הָאִשָּׁה בֵּית פַּרְעֹה׃ ("and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house" v.15) is a euphemistic description of adultery. Added to it, the narrative is completely silent on what is happening to Sarai in Pharaoh's harem. Thus, the scene does allude to a possible adultery.[40] But it can be established that no act of adultery has happened with Sarai, relying on the following reasons: firstly, according to Gen 20:1-18 and 26:7-11, which also report parallel stories, there is no evidence of any physical contact between the pagan kings and the ancestresses of Israel; secondly, if Pharaoh has committed

[39] Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 184.
[40] The parallel stories in Gen 20 and 26 deny any physical contact between Abimelech and Sarai, and Abimelech and Rebecca. Cf. Esther Fuchs, *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman* (JSOTSup 310; New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 121.

adultery his life would not have been spared, because the penalty for adultery according to the Pentateuch is death (cf. Deut. 22:22; Lev. 20:10). Thirdly, if such a thing has happened, according to Deut 24:1-4, Abram cannot take Sarai back as his wife.

If Pharaoh did not touch Sarai, what was happening to Sarai in his harem? The book of Esther could throw some light to dispel this mystery. According to the book of Esther when a woman is taken into a king's harem, before she comes closer to the king for any physical or sexual contact, she undergoes a series of purification – six months with oil of myrrh and six moths with spices and ointments (Esther 2:12). Possibly, it is during this period of preparation that Yahweh might have struck Pharaoh and his house with plagues in order to protect Sarai from Pharaoh.

If Pharaoh is not culpable of touching Sarai, why is Pharaoh punished, and not Abram, for it is Abram who is culpable of lie and deceit? M. Agustin says that Pharaoh is punished for the abuse of his power because by taking Sarai away from Abram he has crossed the boundary, which he should not have done.[41] Another argument made for punishing Pharaoh and his house is that Abram, as the chosen one of the Lord, is holy to the Lord. Therefore, anyone who ill-treats the chosen one of the Lord will be punished, even if the chosen one is primarily at fault (cf. Jer 2:3; 50:6ff; 51:5; Ezek 25:12ff; 2 Chr 28:10, 13).[42] Therefore, according to Yahweh's decree Pharaoh stands accused of laying hand on the chosen one of the Lord. However, one should not misunderstand that the Lord condones the fault of Abram;[43] on the contrary, the Lord acts for the sake of His promise to Abram,[44] because the Lord does not want to let His plan be spoiled at its very beginning because of human unfaithfulness or failures.[45]

But even if Pharaoh is found guilty according to the decree of Yahweh, it does not take away the responsibility of Abram for the plagues in Pharaoh's house, for the text makes the fact crystal clear that Pharaoh suffers because of Abram's fault. So Pharaoh confronts Abram with his accusations.

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[41] "*Das Begehren der Schönheit als solcher wird nicht negative gesehen. Die Verfehlung, die Jahweh zum Eingreifen veranlasst, tritt erst dort ein, wo der Pharao die Notlage ausnutzt und sich die schöne Frau ganz einfach nimmt, weil er die Macht dazu hat.*" Cf. Augustin, "Die Inbesitznahme der schönen Frau," 147f.

[42] Biddle, "The 'Endangered Ancestress' and Blessing for the Nations," 608.

[43] The punishment that Abram has to go through is the shame and humiliation of being found as a deceiver. He has to leave Egypt, ashamed of being found guilty.

[44] Rupper, *Genesis 11,27-25,18*, 148.

[45] Wahl, "Die Flucht eines Berufenen (Gen 12,10-20)," 357.

1.1.2.2. Pharaoh Confronts Abram (vv.18-19):

Through his suffering and the suffering of his entire household Pharaoh perceives that something has gone wrong with the arrival of Sarai in his harem. Although the text does not state how Pharaoh comes to know that Sarai is Abram's wife, he perceives from the plagues that he has committed some serious sin. Therefore, Pharaoh confronts Abram. Pharaoh confronts Abram with three rhetorical questions: "What is this you have done to me?" (מַה־ זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ לִּי v.18b). "Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?" (לָמָּה לֹא־ הִגַּדְתָּ לִּי כִּי אִשְׁתְּךָ הִוא: v.18c). "Why did you say, 'she is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife?" (אֲחֹתִי הִוא וָאֶקַּח אֹתָהּ לִי לְאִשָּׁה לָמָּה אָמַרְתָּ v.19a). These three questions reveal that the pagan ruler knows that adultery is a sin, and they also expose the patriarch's moral deficit; for Pharaoh here seems to have "a higher degree of moral sensitivity than does the patriarch."[46]

Though Pharaoh accuses Abram of lying, he does not wait for a response from Abram; therefore, he immediately hands Sarai over to Abram saying, "Now then, here is your wife, take her and be gone" (v.19b). Pharaoh's decision to give Sarai back suggests that he is very certain that Sarai is Abram's wife. That is why his questions are not intended to get answer from Abram, nor do they intend to judge Abram; on the contrary, they are intended to accuse his opponent of his guilt. Turner notes, "His questions to Abram are pregnant accusations."[47] And Abram's silence to Pharaoh's rebuke is a sign that he acknowledges his guilt.

These types of rhetorical questions are also used elsewhere in the Bible as *Beschuldigungsformel.*[48] However, Pharaoh's allegations are directed only at Abram and not at Sarai, because it is Abram who has misrepresented Sarai before Pharaoh and the Egyptians; and there is no indication of Sarai saying that Abram is her brother or she is his sister. W. Berg reads into Pharaoh's allegation as Yahweh's allegation of Abram. He concludes that it is Yahweh, who accuses Abram of his offence through the mouth

[46] Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 385f.
[47] Laurence A. Turner, *Genesis* (2nd ed.; England: Sheffield Phonix Press, 2009), 61.
[48] cf. Gen 3:13; 4:10; 26:10; Josh 7:19

of Pharaoh. "Pharaoh, in some sense, stands for Yhwh against Abram."[49] So, Berg describes Abram's act as *Sündenfall*.[50]

Normally, punishment follows once the offence is established. But in this case instead of punishment, Pharaoh restores to Abram Sarai, his wife, and says: קַח וָלֵךְ ("take and go"). Yahweh used the same word, לֶךְ ("go"), earlier, when the Lord called Abram and sent him to Canaan (Gen 12:1). Pharaoh uses the same word here and sends him back to the Promised Land, which Abram, without the consent from the Lord, has abandoned. And the reason why Pharaoh does not punish Abram is that he fears Abram, because he perceives that Yahweh is at the side Abram.

The episode concludes with Pharaoh ordering Abram to leave his land with all his belongings. The surprising element in this scene is that Pharaoh does not punish the offender, Abram, who deceived none other than Pharaoh, the most powerful man of Egypt. Moreover, Pharaoh does not take back any of the gifts that he has given to Abram in exchange for Sarai; and he even orders his men to escort Abram and his company till the boundary of his country. Many scholars are of the view that Pharaoh has understood by now how dangerous Abram is; therefore, he takes all the precautions that no further injustice falls upon Abram, for Pharaoh fears that anything done against Abram or his belongings would bring fresh judgment upon Egypt.[51] Therefore, he orders his men to escort the patriarch and his belongings for their safe exit from Egypt.

1.1.2.3. The Expulsion of Abram from Egypt (v.20):

Finally, Abram must leave Egypt, ashamed and crestfallen. True, Abram does not suffer the punishment; Pharaoh and his household do, but his shameful departure from Egypt itself is the punishment for his offences.[52] W. Werner says, *Zu jeder Lüge! Zu jedem Betrug! Sein Personsein ist ihm verlorengegangen*.[53] C.H. Gorden describes the

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[49] Thomas Römer, "The Exodus in the Book of Genesis," *SEA* 75 (2010), 8.
[50] Berg, *Urgeschichte des Glaubens*, 93.
[51] Gunkel, *Genesis* (transl. D.W. Nowack), 151; Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 385f; Skinner, *Genesis*, 230. Scharbert says, *Der Pharao erkennt auch, dass Abraham unter dem Schutz seines Gottes steht; darum begnügt er sich mit der Ausweisung*. Cf. Joseph Scharbert, *Genesis 12-50* (Würzburg: Echter, 1986), 130.
[52] Claus Westermann, *Am Anfang 1 Mose: die Urgeschichte Abraham* (Neukirchen: Neukirchen Verlag, 1986), 155.
[53] Wahl, "Die Flucht eines Berufenen (Gen 12,10-20)," 356.

scene aptly: "The ignominious dismissal of the couple is a fitting end to a most unheroic episode."[54]

Reading the episode from a larger perspective of the book, the concluding verse of the episode portrays Abram contrasting to the mission entrusted to him in Gen 12:1-3. The man, who is elected to mediate God's blessing to his family and to the entire world, by his spiritual and moral lapses brings curse instead of blessing upon his own family and others. Egypt suffers, not because of its own fault, but because of Abram's misdemeanour. Moreover, Abram also endangers God's promise of a great nation, when he let Sarai be taken by Pharaoh into his harem. Therefore, Gerhard von Rad remarks, "The bearer of the promise himself the greatest enemy of the promise and its greatest threat comes from him."[55]

But in spite of his infidelity the Lord stands by him, and sends him back again to the Promised Land unpunished. This is also the story of the people of God. In spite of their infidelity, the Lord remains faithful to His promise. Hamilton says: "Infidelity of the people is subordinated to the faithfulness of Yahweh."[56] By abandoning Canaan Abram lost Yahweh's promise. To regain the promise of Yahweh he must now return to Canaan and begin anew. So, Abram returns to Canaan. He journeys from the Negeb as far as Bethel to the place where he had built an altar at his first arrival to Canaan. Arriving at Bethel, Abram calls on the name of the Lord (Gen 13:1-4). Abram repeats almost all that he has done earlier (Gen 12:4-8). Thus, Abram begins his spiritual journey once again from the beginning, and Yahweh offers him a new beginning by renewing His promise to him (13:14-18).

1.1.3. Gen 12:10-20 Foreshadows Israel's Story in Egypt:

Gen 12:10-20 has many resemblances with the Exodus story. The verbal and the structural sequences of the events have close association with the Exodus event. Weimer, therefore, is of the view that the story in Gen 12:10-20 is more national than theological, for it foreshadows the events of the slavery of the Israelites in Egypt and

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[54] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36* (Neukirchen: Neukirchen Verlag, 1981), 194.
[55] Gerahrd von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (transl. John H. Marks; Philadelphia: Westminister Press, 1972), 169.
[56] Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 386.

her liberation by Yahweh,[57] which is the central event in the history of Israel. U. Gassuto believes that the Exodus story is not a story by accident, but a divinely planned story as it connects with the story of the patriarch.[58] In other words, Gen 12:10-20 foreshadows Israel's national story. So Peter D. Miscall sees Gen 12:10-20 as "A Mini Exodus."[59] For "everything that occurred to the father happened to the children."[60] Thus, one can conclude that Gen 12:10-20 is not merely the story about the patriarch, but also the story about his descendants.

In both the stories there are both similarities and dissimilarities. The main similarities in both the stories are the use of certain similar key Hebrew terminologies and the resemblance of the sequence of events. The striking similarity in both of them is the use of the key Hebrew words: in both the stories Pharaoh and his house are struck with plagues (נְגָעִים in Gen 12:17; and נֶגַע in Ex 11:1);[61] even Pharaoh's order to Abram to leave Egypt resembles that of Pharaoh's order to Moses (קַח וָלֵךְ in Gen 12:19 and קְחוּ וָלֵכוּ in Ex 12:32).[62] Another important resemblance between them is the association of sequences of events in both the stories: Abram goes down into Egypt to escape the threat of famine (v. 10); similarly, the sons of Israel go down to Egypt to escape famine (cf. Gen. 46). Abram's fear in 12:12 that "… they will kill me and they will let you live," is an echo of Ex 1:22: "Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live." As Abram becomes rich in Egypt (v.16), his descendants become rich in Egypt (Gen 47:27). As Sarai is taken into Pharaoh's harem (v.15), the descendants of Abram are enslaved and oppressed in Egypt (Ex 1-11). God strikes Pharaoh and his house with plagues (v.17); similarly, in Exodus God strikes Egypt with plague (Ex 10-11). As Abram is very rich when he leaves Egypt (v.20), so too is Israel when she leaves Egypt (Ex 12:35). In many respects

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[57] Weimer, *Untersuchungen zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Pentateuch*, 18.
[58] Weimer, *Untersuchungen zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Pentateuch*, 18f.
[59] Brettler, *The Creation of History in ancient Israel*, 48.
[60] Brettler, *The Creation of History in ancient Israel*, 52.
[61] In Exodus the verb נָגַע is used only once (Ex 11:1), when Yahweh announces to Moses the beginning of the final of the ten plagues. But elsewhere in the Book of Exodus, the plagues are described with the use of the more common root נָכָה, which means 'to hit'. This suggests that the presence of Sarai in Pharaoh's harem might have struck the firstborn sons of Egyptians in Pharaoh's house with death.
[62] Erhard Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (WMANT 57; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner, 1984), 309.

Gen 12:10-20 resembles the later Exodus events. Thus, it is a prefiguration of the Exodus, and a piece of salvation history at the beginning of the history of Israel.[63]

Although there are many similarities between both the episodes, there are also dissimilarities. In Genesis Abram, who represents Israel, plays rather a dubious role, while Pharaoh appears to be genuine and right. On the contrary, in Exodus Israel does not indulge in dubious acts like Abram, their patriarch, but Pharaoh – the Pharaoh of Exodus is a tyrant against the Pharaoh of Genesis. Pharaoh in Genesis reacts immediately as he learns his mistake from the divine punishment, while the Pharaoh of Exodus is reluctant to release Israel despite the repeated warning and plagues.

However, the similarities clearly outweigh the dissimilarities. The close similarities between both the stories suggest that Gen 12:10-20 does not only speak about the patriarch but also through the patriarch it speaks about the story of his descendants. The omission of the names of Pharaohs, and the omission of the definite article to them, both, in Exodus and in Genesis, indicates that Pharaoh stands for Egypt.[64] Therefore, Brettler concludes: "the author of the story either refashioned a common story to reflect the events of the exodus or wrote this story deliberately for that purpose."[65] R. De Hoop says, "These stories are shaped in form to function as some kind of pre-enactments of later historical events."[66] Thus, one can conclude that the patriarch's interaction with Pharaoh and the Egyptians is Israel's experience in Egypt.

1.1.4. Additional Motives of the Story in Gen 12:10-20:

Since Gen 12:10-20 resembles in many ways the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, its main motive might have been to connect the Exodus events with the life of the patriarch. The story in its oral form might also have had an additional motive for the original audience. Because according to the book, Exodus, one of the main challenges that Moses has to face after the liberation of Israel from Egypt, comes from the people

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[63] Most likely the Episode Gen 12:10-20 was composed in knowledge of the Exodus narrative. Cf. Blum, *Vätergeschichte*, 309.

[64] Pharaoh represents the whole Egypt because in the story Pharaoh has no name. Cf. Klaus Koch, *Was ist Formgeschichte? Methoden der Bibelexegese* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag des Erziehungvereins, 1964), 147.

[65] Brettler, *The Creation of History in ancient Israel*, 54.

[66] R. De Hoop, "The Use of the Past to Address the Present: the Wife-Sister-Incidents (Gen 12,10-20; 20,1-18; 26,1-16)," *Studies in the Book of Genesis: Literature, Redaction, and History* (ed. A. Wenin; BETL 155; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001), 362.

themselves. During their journey in the wilderness Moses is often confronted with the question, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?"[67] It is most probable that Moses must have repeatedly narrated this patriarchal story to explain and to convince the Israelites that in a somewhat similar situation the patriarch has also left Egypt,[68] because sojourning in Egypt means abandoning Yahweh's Promise – the Promise of the Land and the Promise of a great Nation. The patriarch learned from his experience in Egypt that leaving the Promised Land was his biggest mistake. Therefore, the Israelites, his descendants, should learn a lesson from the mistake of the patriarch, and should not commit the same mistake, for it is the Lord's cosmic plan that the descendants of the patriarch possess the Promised Land. Therefore, their decision to leave Egypt is the right decision, a decision in coherence with Yahweh's cosmic plan. Thus, one of the motives of the story is to tell the Israelite audience that sojourning in Egypt means abandoning Yahweh's Promise – the Promise of the Land and the Promise of a great Nation.

The theological motives of this episode are Yahweh's plan verses human plan, and the faithfulness of Yahweh despite the unfaithfulness of his chosen one. Petersen remarks: "The narrative switches from a history under the control of Abram's plan (12:10-16) to a history under the control of Yahweh's plan (12:17-20). Yahweh takes the initiative by plaguing Pharaoh because of Sarai. From Yahweh's and the Yahwistic perspective, Sarai has not become Pharaoh's wife or even 'the woman.' She is still Abram's wife."[69] Therefore, in spite of Abram's unfaithfulness Yahweh protects him. Pharaoh perceives that Abram stays under the protection of the Lord; therefore, he does not dare punish him. Thus, the story tells that Yahweh redeems His chosen, and in spite of their failure He offers another chance to renew their commitment to Him.

Another theological motive of this episode is that divine blessing is purely and totally gratuitous. It comes from relying on the divine word and the divine promise, and not from relying solely on human wisdom. Faith demands reliance on God, and not on human wisdom, though faith does not contradict human wisdom. Human wisdom can

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[67] Cf. Ex 16:3; 17:3; Num. 14:2f; 21:5.
[68] Richard L. Pratt, "Pictures, Windows, and Mirrors in Old Testament Exegesis," *WTJ* 45 (1983), 166.
[69] David L. Petersen, "A Thrice-Told Tale: Genre, Theme, and Motif," *BR* 18 (1973), 37.

be helpful only if it is in coherence with divine wisdom and divine will. Abram's return to Canaan is his return to the source of his faith and to the source of his blessing.

1.2. Abram's Interaction with Lot, the Patriarch of Moab and Ammon:

If Gen 12:10-20 is marked with Abram's spiritual downfall, Gen 13 is marked with Abram's spiritual and moral renaissance. It portrays Abram as an ideal man of faith as against his nephew Lot, who seems selfish and self-dependant. The Abram-Lot episode is scattered in different chapters in the book of Genesis (Gen 11, 12, 13, 14, 18 & 19). The conclusion of Lot's story portrays him as the patriarch of two nations – Moab and Ammon.

According to the biblical narratives, Lot is related to Abram in a special way, not merely because he is his nephew, but more than that. When Terah set out from Ur to Canaan, he "took" Lot with him along with Abram and Sarai. Similarly, after Terah's death Abram "took" Lot with him, when Abram left Haran for Canaan. Since Abram has no heir, he considers Lot to be his heir. Thus, Lot is very much a member of Abram's family. However, later, conflict begins to emerge between the men of Lot and the men of Abram on the issue of pasturage. In order to avoid any further conflict they decide to separate from each other. In spite of their separation Abram is concerned about the good of Lot – he rescues Lot and his family from the captivity of the eastern kings, and then later Abram intercedes with the Lord for Lot. Because of Abram's intercession Lot is saved along with his two daughters from the destruction of the cities. But Lot's daughters, finding no man to preserve their family line, commit incest with their own father and give birth to Moab and Ammon, who later become the fathers of the Moabites and the Ammonites respectively. By concluding Lot's story with the birth of Moab and Ammon, the narrator presents Lot as the patriarch of the Moabites and Ammonites.

Though Abram is good towards Lot and his family, Israel's relationship with the descendants of Lot – the Moabites and the Ammonites – was historically one of hostility. Therefore, it would be right to say that the Abram-Lot episode is included in Genesis to present Abram as a model for Israel and how she should deal with the Moabites and the Ammonites.

1.2.1. The Dispute and the Separation of Lot from Abram (vv.1-13):

In Gen 12:10-20 Lot is not in the picture, but in Gen 13 the narrator mentions the name of Lot as he reports the return of Abram from Egypt to Canaan. However, unlike Gen 11:31 and 12:5, the narrator distances Lot from Abram by separating Lot from Abram's camp: "So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him" (13:1). According to Gen 12:5 Abram "took" Lot with him, whereas here the narrator states, "Lot went with him." The narrator, thus, introduces the theme on the separation of Lot from Abram; and as the narrative proceeds, it becomes evident that Lot distances himself from Abram not only geographically but also ethically. Lot's movement is portrayed as "downward movement," as against the "upward movement" of Abram. For Abram "went up" from Egypt to the place, where he had first built an altar and called upon the Lord (12:7). Abram, by calling on the name of the Lord again, acknowledges God's protection for his safe return to the Promised Land, and then he renews his commitment to the Lord (13:4), which he had apparently abandoned (Gen 12:10-20). Lot, on the contrary, does not perform any such act that would witness his acknowledgement of the divine protection or divine presence.

The narrator distances Lot from Abram once again, when he states, "Lot, … also had flocks and herds and tents" (v. 5). Though Lot moves with Abram, he has his own livestock and men. Undoubtedly, Lot might have acquired them in Egypt because of Abram, for Pharaoh dealt well with Abram for Sarai's sake (12:16). Since Lot is the nephew of Abram, either Pharaoh or Abram himself might have gifted them to Lot. Consequently, both Abram and Lot have great possession of flocks and herds and tents now; and so great are their possessions that they are not able to stay together due to the scarcity of pasturage in the region. Besides, the Canaanites and the Perizzites are already settled in the land. So the scarcity of the pastural grounds and the increase in the demand for space for pasturing the livestock cause constant dispute (רִיב) between the men of both the camps. The dispute between them is so frequent that Hamilton describes, "The situation is potentially explosive."[70]

[70] Hamitlon, *Genesis 1-17*, 390.

Therefore, Abram takes the initiative to defuse the strife, and tries to settle the issue amicably once and for all. As a solution to the problem, Abram asks Lot to part from him; and he offers him the first choice to select the land that he wishes to possess. By offering him the first choice, Abram displays a great act of nobility. In spite of being the superior and uncle to Lot, he selflessly offers the first choice to his nephew. Here we see a new Abram as against the manipulating Abram of Gen 12:10-20. The Abram in Egypt manipulated his wife and Pharaoh in order to save his life and win favour from Pharaoh. But now he is ready to surrender his privilege of choosing the land first. Therefore, Waltke notes, "Abram's faith gives him the freedom to be generous."[71] However, in contrast to Abram, Lot does not suggest any alternative plan so that Abram can have the choice of land. This attitude of Lot portrays him as separated from Abram "not only geographically but also ethically."[72]

Abram's suggestion, "Separate yourself from me" (v. 9) reads literally, "Please separate yourself from upon me" (מֵעָלָי). This expression מֵעָלָי, "from upon me," indicates that the narrator views Lot as a burden on Abram. Therefore, from the narrator's point of view it could be understood that the "separation was not simply out of convenience but out of necessity."[73] According to Larry R. Helyer, when Abram asked Lot to separate from him, what he meant was that Lot chooses either the southern or the northern part of the Promised Land. Because Helyer understands, when Abram refers to the 'whole land' (כָּל־ אָרֶץ הָ), he means the whole land of Canaan; for usually when Hebrew speak about the direction they faced the east. Therefore when Abram tells, "If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left" (v.9), he offers Lot either to choose the southern part of Canaan (the region around Hebron/Mamre [Gen. 13:6, 9; 13:1, 18; 20:1]), or the northern part of Canaan (i.e., the region around Shechem with Bethel-Ai region as the southern boundary [Gen 12:6; 33:18-34, 31; 37:12-17]).[74] So, Abram's intention was that both settle within the Promised Land, one on the southern part of the land and the other on the northern part of the land. But, unfortunately, Lot prefers to move towards

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[71] Waltke, *Genesis*, 221.
[72] Sharon Pace Jeansonne, "The Characterization of Lot in Genesis," *BTB* 18 (October 1988), 125
[73] Dan Rickett, "Rethinking the Place and Purpose of Genesis 13," *JSOT* 36 (2011), 49.
[74] Larry R. Helyer, "The Separation of Abram and Lot: Its Significance in the Patriarchal Narratives," *JSOT* 26 (1983), 79.

the east and decides to settle down among the cities of the plain, near Sodom, outside the territory of the Promised Land.

The text clearly indicates that Lot's choice is based on his sight. Going by his sight, Lot deceives himself as Eve deceived herself and Adam in Gen 3. It states, "Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar; … So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan valley, and Lot journeyed east" (vv. 10-11). The language and the descriptions suggest that Lot makes a good survey of the land and makes his decision on the basis of the survey. These details reveal that Lot is a selfish and a greedy man, who is only concerned about his material possession. The description of the valley of Jordan and the decision that Lot makes remind the reader of the fall of Eve in Genesis 3. Eve "saw" that the tree was good and took and ate the fruit; so too here Lot "saw" that the Jordan valley is like the garden of the Lord, and like the fertile ground of Egypt, and he chooses all the Jordan valley for himself and pitched his tent there. Thus, Lot's act resembles Eve's act in Gen 3. In both the stories the choice they make turns out to be the greatest disaster for them in the future. Though the land seems 'like the garden of the Lord,' the narrator adds a remark – 'this was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah'. By adding this remark the narrator, "gives his verdict on Lot's decision"[75] that his decision is a poor and destructive one. The narrator confirms his verdict on Lot's poor decision by adding another sentence, "and Lot journeyed east" (v. 11). This statement reminds the reader of Cain's movement towards the east, after he had murdered his brother, Abel (Gen 4:16). Similarly, Adam and Eve journeyed eastward after their disobedience (Gen 3:24).[76] This was also the direction that the people in the story of the tower of Babel came from to build a tower as high as heaven (Gen 11:1). Therefore the expression, "and Lot journeyed east" is the narrator's comment on the moral decline of Lot, for in Genesis "east often symbolizes movement away from God."[77]

The narrator, finally, affirms the separation of them stating: "Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot dwelt among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far

[75] Helyer, "The Separation of Abram and Lot," 79.
[76] Jeansonne, "The Character of Lot," 125.
[77] James MacKenow, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 84.

as Sodom" (v. 12). This statement indicates, "Yahweh has ruled Lot out."[78] The clause, [Lot] "moved as far as Sodom" not only suggests his distancing from Abram and from the Promised Land but also suggests his gradual downfall in the moral sense. Because the following description about the Sodomites serves as a commentary on their moral status, "Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord" (v. 13). This verse also hints at the problems, which would be associated with Lot in Genesis 19. So, Coats concludes, "To separate from Abram is to separate from the Lord's blessing, indeed, to invite the Lord's curse." [79] Jeansonne comments, "Lot's journey will culminate in a region of great evil. The astute reader will wonder why Lot would reside in such a city and must consider whether or not he will also succumb to the standards of this sinful place."[80] Rickett understands their separation episode from the perspective of Abram's response to the Lord's call. In his view, this episode is related to Abram's coming into alignment with God's original command in Gen 12:1. According to Gen 12:1 Abram is supposed to leave his country, his kindred and his father's house. The lingering of Lot around Abram is a hindrance to Abram to have the full possession of the Promised Land. Therefore, it was necessary that they separate from each other.[81] Therefore, it would be proper to conclude that, in one sense, the separation of Lot from Abram completes Abram's departure from his father's house.

1.2.2. Renewal of the Promise, and Abram's Settlement in Mamre (vv.14-18):

Once Abram is separated from Lot, the Lord speaks to Abram, "Lift up your eyes" (שָׂא נָא עֵינֶיךָ). Earlier in 13:10 Lot lifted his eyes and surveyed the whole Jordan valley and decided to settle there, but now the Lord tells Abram to lift up his eyes and take a complete survey of the land from all directions and to walk through the length and the breath of the land. And the Lord promises Abram that He will give the whole land to him and to his descendants. Sarna says, "Abram's survey of the land has quasi-legal

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[78] Laurence A. Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis* (Eugene: Sheffield Academic Press), 67.
[79] George W. Coats, "Lot: A Foil in the Abraham Saga," *Understanding the Word: Essays in Honor of Bernhar W. Anderson* (ed. James T. Butler, Edgar W. Conrad and Ben C. Ollenburger, JSOTSup 37; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 117.
[80] Jeansonne, "The Character of Lot in Genesis 13, 125.
[81] Rickett, "Rethinking the Place and Purpose of Genesis 13," 51.

implication,"[82] because in the Ancient Roman practice the transfer of land was done by a ceremony, in which the real owner of the land pointed out the boundaries of the land to the other party, who, then, took the survey of the land. This survey of the land by the new party is considered as taking possession of the land. However, it is not certain such an institution existed in the Ancient Near East.[83] Moreover, the language suggests that the land was given to Abram and to his descendants, when God says, "Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you" (v.17). To 'walk through the length and the breath of the land' was a symbolic act, signifying the legal possession of the land.[84] With this divine assurance Abram moves to the south and dwells at Mamre, and builds an altar to the Lord as a sign of thanksgiving and as an acknowledgement of the divine protection and the divine presence. Here again, Abram differs from Lot; for Lot neither builds an altar nor calls upon the name of the Lord (13:12) to acknowledge the divine protection or the divine presence.

Gen 13, thus, by highlighting the opposite characteristics of Lot and Abram and their settlement in different places, confirms that Abram and his descendants are the sole owners of the Promised Land. Lot and his descendants have no right over the Promised Land because Lot, the ancestor of the Moabites and the Ammonites, has rejected Abram's offer and has chosen to go down to the east and settle outside the territory of the Promised Land.[85] However, Lot's descendants have the right to live in Moab and Ammon because Abram respected Lot's decision; therefore, Israel should also recognize Moabite's and Ammonite's right to their land.

1.2.3. Lot and his Family Rescued (Gen 14, 18 & 19):

Though Lot has separated himself from Abram, Abram has been concerned about the wellbeing of Lot. Sarna comments, "Although Lot had quarrelled with his uncle and had chosen to live among the Sodomites of his own free will, yet he was still a member

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[82] Sarna, *Genesis*, 100.
[83] Sarna, *Genesis*, 100.
[84] David Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law* (New York: Ktav, 1969), 37. The divine promise sounds here much more definite and fuller than the earlier promise in Gen 12:7. Wenham identifies three aspects in the promise: first, the land is more precisely defined; second, the land is given to Abram and his descendants; and third, it is given "for ever." Cf. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 298.
[85] According to Rickett Gen 13 deals with two main points: 1) Abram's settlement in the Land, and 2) his fulfilment of the divine call in Gen 12:1-3. By separating Lot from his camp, Abram has finally fulfilled the divine call in Gen 12:1-3. Cf. Rickett, "Rethinking the Place and Purpose of Genesis 13," 31-53.

of the family and clan and the ties of blood imposed a sense of solidarity or responsibility upon the patriarch so that he could not be indifferent to Lot's fate."[86] Gen 14, 18 and 19 report the rescuing of Lot and his family from the captivity of the eastern kings. Lot's story in Genesis finally concludes with the birth of Moab and Ammon to Lot from his two daughters.

1.2.3.1. Abram Rescues Lot and his Household:

Genesis 14 reports essentially three battles: the first two battles are fought between the eastern kings and the western kings (Gen 14:1-12), and the captivity of Lot and his family, and the third battle is between Abram and the eastern kings, and the rescuing of Lot and his family from the captivity of the eastern kings (Gen 14:13-16). In the first battle the eastern kings of Shinar, of Ellasar, of Elam and of Goiim wage war under the leadership of Chedorlaomer, the king of Elam, against the western kings of Sodom, of Gomorrah, of Admah, of Zeboiim and the king of Bela (Zoar) and subdue them. The defeated western kings serve Chedorlaomer for twelve years, but in the thirteenth year they refuse to submit to the eastern kings. Therefore, Chedorlaomer makes his second campaign in alliance with the kings, who were with him in his first military campaign, and Chedorlaomer defeats various inhabitants of Canaan and the Dead Sea kings, and takes the men and women and property captive, and he also takes Lot along with his family and with all his possessions.

As soon as Abram hears the fate of his nephew, he organizes an army of 318 men and pursues and defeats the Chedorlaomer and his allies, and rescues Lot and all the other captives. This heroic act of Abram also indicates his future intercession for these cities, and for Lot and his family in particular (cf. Gen 18). Abram's prompt response to the fate of his nephew reveals that, in spite of their separation, Abram is concerned about the safety and good of Lot and his household.

1.2.3.2. Abram's Intercession for Lot and for His Family (Gen 18-19):

[86] Turner, *Announcement of Plot in Genesis*, 69.

For the second time, Lot and his family are rescued. But this time Lot and his daughters are rescued through a divine intervention. The saving of Lot and his family from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is closely connected to Abraham's intercession for the cities (cf. 18:22-33). The narrator alludes to it when he states at the end of the Sodom and Gomorrah story: "when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow" (19:29).

The fact that God tells Abraham what he is going to do against the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah reveals that God has chosen Abraham to teach the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, and thereby to be the blessing to the nations. This suggests that if people live according to the way of the Lord, they will be blessed and if they do not live according to His way they will be under divine judgement. Therefore, the reason for His decision to punish the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah is that they have not walked the way of the Lord, and their sin against God reached beyond the limit (18:17-21). Sarna describes the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah as "heinous moral and social corruption, and arrogant disregard of elementary human rights, cynical insensitivity to the suffering of others."[87]

Yet Abraham intercedes for the cities for the sake of the righteous living in the city. Commenting on Abraham's intercession, Hamilton says, "Just as the nations of the earth find blessing in Abraham and his seed, so the guilty of Sodom and Gomorrah finds mercy in the lives of their fellow citizens who are innocent."[88] But the fact of the matter is, there is not a single righteous person in the city. Even Lot, who is acknowledged by the apostel, Peter, as righteous in the New Testament (2 Pet 2:7-8), seems to be a very ambiguous character. His dealing with Abraham in Gen 13 and his incest with his daughters later in Gen 19:30-38, do not portray Lot as a righteous man. The reader can therefore conclude, though Abraham intercedes for all the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot is very much in his mind. The Lord knows it; therefore, He helps Lot and his family to escape, in spite of Lot's reluctance to leave the city. The two messengers/angels of God seize him, his wife and his two daughters by the hand, and bring them forth, and set them outside the city (19:16). The kindness shown upon Lot

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[87] Nahum M. Sarna, *Understading Genesis: The Heritage of Biblical Israel,* Melton Research Centre Series, vol. 1 (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 145.
[88] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis 18-50: New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 25.

continues when the angels allow him to take refuge in Zoar and settle down there, as Lot wishes. So the angels spare the city from destruction in spite of Zoar being on their destruction list of (19:21).[89] Lot's wife, however, turns into a pillar of salt because of her blatant disobedience to the divine order, because by her act of looking back, she manifests her desire to return to the city[90] (Gen 19:17). The episode about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah concludes with the statement: "When God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt" (19:29). Thus, it would be fitting to conclude that Lot is rescued not because of his own righteousness, but because of his connection with the righteous Abraham.[91]

1.2.4. Lot as the Patriarch of Moab and Ammon (19:30-38):

Lot's story does not end with the dramatic deliverance of him and his two daughters, but with the birth of Moab and Ammon, born to his two daughters from their incest with their own father. Many scholars have focused mainly on the incest of the two daughters and Lot's role in it. However, from the narrator's perspective that does not seem to be his motive, on the contrary, he is mainly concerned about telling the origin of the Moabites and the Ammonites. For the narrators main concern is to show their (Moabites and Ammonite) ambiguous relation with Israel by connecting it with the story of Lot's ambiguous relation with Abraham.

A close look into Lot's personality would reveal that he is an unpredictable character. At first he is afraid to move to the mountains, therefore, the messengers spare Zoar (19:17-20) so that he can take refuge and settle down in that city. But once he reaches Zoar, he is again afraid to stay there, so he changes his plan and moves to the mountains and lives in a cave with his daughters. No reason is provided, why he is afraid of settling down in Zoar. But if one analyses Lot's dealings with Abraham in Gen 13, and his dealing with the messengers of the Lord in Gen 19, it becomes evident that

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[89] Paul Tonson notes that Lot is saved not out of divine compassion but for the sake of Abraham (19:29). Cf. Paul Tonson, "Mercy without Covenant: A Literary Analysis of Genesis 19," *JOST* 95 (2001), 1.
[90] Jeansonne, "The Characterization of Lot," 127.
[91] Jeansonne, "The Characterization of Lot," 128.

Lot is a man who always wants to control his destiny.[92] This attitude of Lot sets him apart from Abraham – Abraham surrenders his destiny in the hands of the Lord, whereas Lot wants to control his fate by himself. Because of this attitude Lot makes another bad decision, which makes him a "buffoon,"[93] to be tricked by his own daughters. Earlier by abandoning the Promised Land for the sake of material gains, he has lost the right to have a share in the Promised Land. Now by changing his mind to go to the mountains, he puts his daughters' future into a crisis, for the daughters fear that they can find no man to preserve their family line. So Jeansonne comments, "Lot has been neither a good provider nor a protector of his unmarried daughters."[94] Therefore, they intoxicate their father with wine, and commit incest with him in order to conceive children.[95] However, it should be noted that their intention to sleep with their father is not because of their desire for their father, rather because of their concern to preserve their family line. The repeated statement: "he did not know when she lay down or when she arose," indicates how much he was intoxicated. Lot's vulnerability to be intoxicated by his daughters is indeed "a comment on his character."[96]

Finally, both his daughters become pregnant by their father, and they each bear a son. The elder daughter names her son *Moab*, means "from my father," and the younger daughter names her son *Ben–Ammi*, means "son of my kin." The names they give to their sons suggest their blatant acknowledgement of their incest with their father, and it also suggests that they are not ashamed of their act. Their sons also are not ashamed of their parentage; instead, "they proudly proclaim the heroism of their mother and the purity of their blood."[97] These two sons, born to Lot's daughters, will later become the fathers of the Moabites and the Ammonites respectively.

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[92] Sharon Pace Jeansonne, *The Women of Genesis: from Sarah to Potiphar's wife* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 42.
[93] Coats, *Genesis*, 148.
[94] Jeansonne, "The Characterization of Lot in Genesis," 128.
[95] Gunkel says that according to the legend a great catastrophe destroyed the whole humanity except Lot and his daughters. Therefore, the daughters made such a desperate decision to preserve the line or human race by indulging in incest with their father. Cf. Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (Transl. Mark E. Biddle; 3rd edition; USA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 217.
[96] Jeansonne, "*The Character of Lot in Genesis*," 128.
[97] Gunkel, *Genesis* (Transl. by Biddle), 217. However, the narrator does not in any way support the act of the two mothers, on the contrary, he disapproves it. If he has approved their act, he would have handed down to us their name, on the contrary, he omits their name from the text. By omitting their names, he disapproves their act. Moreover, any sexual intercourse between relatives of the first degree is also

By concluding Lot's story with the birth of Moab and Ammon, and connecting these two sons genealogically with the Moabites and the Ammonites, the narrator tries to portray Lot as the ancestor of the two nations – Moab and Ammon. Thus, the narrator's main intention in this episode is not to judge the act of Lot's daughters, rather to narrate about the birth story of the two nations – Moab and Ammon, and to introduce their relationship with Israel by linking them to Lot's story.

1.2.4.1 The Birth of Moab and Ammon:

Since Abraham and Lot were genealogically related, despite their separation from each other, Abraham is concerned about Lot's wellbeing. Abraham rescues Lot, when he is taken captive along with his household by the eastern kings; and when Abraham learns that the Lord is going to destroy the cities in which Lot is dwelling, Abraham intercedes for him. This fraternal attitude and the deeds of Abraham towards Lot serve as a guiding principle for Israel, how she should deal with Lot's descendants – the Moabites and the Ammonites. However, in spite of their common genealogy, Israel's relationship with Moab and Ammon is historically hostile. Moab and Ammon are often portrayed in the Old Testament as Israel's rivals. Though a few positive texts concerning Moab and Ammon do appear (Deut 2:9, 19 and Ruth 1-4), the polemic and negative texts against Moab and Ammon dominate throughout the Old Testament.

1.2.4.2 Israel's Relationship with Moab:

As Lot's relationship with Abraham is ambiguous, so is Moab's relationship with Israel also ambiguous. In spite of their racial affinity and the common history of their origin, their relationship is historically hostile. There are a number of texts throughout the Old Testament that witness the hostility between Moab and Israel.

Balak, son of Zippor and the king of Moab, invites Baalam to come and curse the people of Israel, who have camped along the Jordan across from Jericho (Num 22-24). Balak's motivation to curse Israel arose, however, from his fear, when he hears all that Israel has done to the Amorites. According to the song of Moses, the leaders of Moab tremble when Israel left Egypt (Exod 15:15). During their camping in Transjordan the

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forbidden and regarded as abhorrent among all nations of the Ancient Near East. Cf. A. H. Van Zyl, *The Moabites*, vol. 3 (ed. A. Van Selms; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960), 5.

Israelites are seduced into joining a heathen celebration in honour of Baal of Peor. This brings divine judgement upon Israel, and as a result of it a great number of Israelites lose their life (Num 25:1-5). For these reasons and Moab's refusal to provide bread and water to Israelites, they are refused entrance to the Assembly of God's people (Deut 23:1-8).[98] Eglon, a later king of Moab, subjugates Israel for eighteen years before being assassinated by Ehud, who then leads Israel to a noble victory (Judg 3:12-30). On another occasion, the Ammonites, the Moabites, and the Edomites united together to attack Judah, but with the divine intervention the allies fought among themselves and killed one another (2 Chro 20). We also find prophesies against Moab because of their excessive pride and contempt against Judah (Is 11:14; 25:10b-12; Jer 48). Amos announces God's judgement on the people of Moab because of their callous disregard even for the dead (Amos 2:1-3). Ezekiel predicts Moab's destruction because of the nation's refusal to acknowledge God's special place for Israel (Ez 25:8-11). The Moabites and the Ammonites scorn Judah, therefore, the Lord of host warns Moab and Ammon of destruction like in Sodom and Gomorrah upon them (Zeph 2:8-11). Thus, we find a number of texts against Moab, portraying Moab's hostile relationship with Israel.

However, there are also few other texts, which admonish Israel not to harass or fight against Moab. In the book of Deuteronomy there is a divine prohibition to Israel not to harass or contend with Moab in battle: "Do not harass Moab or contend with them in battle, for I will not give you any of their land for a possession, because I have given Ar to the sons of Lot for a possession" (Deut 2:9). This text corresponds to Lot's separation from Abraham (Gen 13), where Lot decided to settle down on the plain of Jordan. Therefore, in spite of constant hostility between Israel and Moab, Israel had never driven away the Moabites from their land. The book of Ruth narrates the marriage of the two sons of Elimelech and Naomi with the Moabite daughters when they flee to Moab to escape a famine in Bethlehem. On Naomi's return to Bethlehem after the

[98] Deut 23:2-9 could have been the reflection of the sanction laid by Ezrah and Nehemiah against the foreign wife, promulgated in post-exilic time. Cf. Zyl, *The Moabites*, 13. The reason given for the exclusion of Moabites from the assembly of the Lord contradicts with Deut 2:29, which states that the Moabites did give food and water to the Israelites. Mayes argues that the incestuous story of Lot and his daughters in Gen 19:30-38 is basis on Deut 23:2-9. For Deut 23:2-9 suggest some sexual impurity as impediment to enter in the assembly of the Lord. Cf. Craig W. Tyson, *The Ammonites: Elites, Empires, and Sociopolitical Change (1000-500 BCE)* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 135f.

death of her husband and her two sons, one of her daughter-in-law, Ruth the Moabitess, accompanies her. Ruth later marries Boaz, and from their line comes King David (Ruth 4:22). David, while a fugitive from Saul, takes his parents to live in Moab in order to protect them from the hatred of Saul, as they are too old to wander with him; and the king of Moab is quite willing to accommodate them, since Saul is also harassing him (1 Sam 22:3-4). Among the many foreign women loved by King Solomon, there was a Moabitess (1 Kg 11:1, 7). Moreover, in Isaiah's prophecy there is a message of hope extended to the Moabites (15:9b, 16:2ff), but with a condition that the Moabites would have to come to Zion and ask for help (16:3-4a), which would mean that they would have to sacrifice their haughtiness, self-confidence and fortified cities.[99]

Though the relationship between Moab and Israel was historically very bitter, room is provided for reconciliation between both the nations. however, Moab should mend her way and return to the God of the patriarchs. Israel, on her part, should imitate her ancestor, Abraham, in dealing with Moab, their neighbour.

1.2.4.3 Israel's Relationship with Ammon:

Israel's relationship with Ammon corresponds in many ways to her relationship with Moab. Like the Moabites the Ammonites also share the common racial affinity with the Israelites because of the common history of their origin. However, historically, the relation between Ammon and Israel is mostly hostile.[100] Though there are few positive texts, which encourage Israel to promote a peaceful relationship with Ammon, the number of negative texts against Ammon outnumbers the positive texts by far.

Deut 23:2-7 prohibits Ammonites from being part of the assembly of the Lord for they refused to give food or water to Israelites on their return to Canaan from Egypt,

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[99] But the Moabites did not accept the invitation therefore the invitation was afterwards withdrawn (Is 16:14). Cf. Zyl, *The Moabites*, 22f.

[100] The Ammonites are a Semitic tribe that came from the Syrio-Arabian desert in the second millennium BCE. During the first half of the thirteenth century they were a small tribe in Rabbath-ammon (Amman); but gradually they grew and became a sizable kingdom, stretching along the River Jabbok in central Transjordan. By the mid-eleventh century, they became a military power with an organized army. They frequently clashed with the Israelite tribes till the reign of David (cf. Judg. 11; 2 Sam 10-11). Though the Bible records the hostility between Ammon and Israel, it also mentions the kinship between the two nations. It is most likely that like Judah many of them were deported to Babylon. But later with the invasion of the Arabs the Ammonite kingdom completely disappeared. Cf. Randall W. Younker, "Israel, Judah, and Ammon and the Motifs on The Ballis Seal from Tell el-ʿUmeiri," *BA* 48 (1985), 176.

and also because of their affiliation to incest.[101] The Ammonites have united with Eglon, king of Moab, to oppress Israel and to control the City of Palms, Jericho (Judg 3:13). The Ammonites have oppressed Israel until Jephthah delivers the Israelites (Judg 10-11). Saul rescues the people of Jabesh of Gilead from the attack of the Ammonites (1 Sam 11). When David sends a delegation to offer condolence to Hanun at the death of his father, Nahash, the Ammonites humiliate the delegation. This has brought war between Israel and Ammon; and so Joab attacks the Ammonites and defeats them in the battle near Medeba (2 Sam 10:1-14; 1 Chro 19:1-15). The joint campaign of Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites against Judah finally turns into their own destruction (2 Chro 20:1-24). The Ammonites are subdued, and they have to pay tribute to King Uzziah (2 Chro 26:8) and King Jothan (2 Chro 27:5) of Judah. God condemns the Ammonites for attacking Gilead, an Israel land (Amos 1:13-15). After Jerusalem's fall to the Babylonians, the king of Ammon sends Ishmael to assassinate Gedaliah, the governor of Judah, appointed by the Babylonian, and after assassinating him he flees to Ammon (Jer 40:13-14; 41:2-15). Jeremiah predicts the imminent destruction of "Rabbah of the Ammonites." But he also predicts eventual restoration of the Ammonites (Jer 49:6). Ezekiel predicts the imminent destruction of the Ammonites because they rejoiced when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem (Ez 25:1-7). The Ammonites harassed the Jews who returned from captivity, threatened the security of those who were rebuilding Jerusalem, and tried to corrupt the remnant through intermarriage (Ezra 9:1; Nehemiah 4:7; 13:23). These texts witness that throughout Israel's history that there was tension between Israel and Ammon.

In spite of all these negative reports about Ammon, Deut 2:19 tells the Israelites to acknowledge the rights of the Ammonites to their land: "When you approach the frontier of the sons of Ammon, do not harass them or contend with them, for I will not give you any of the land of the sons of Ammon as a possession, because I have given it to the sons of Lot for a possession" (Deut 2:19). Rehoboam, the king of Judah was born to Solomon from Naamah, who was an Ammonitess (1 Kg 14:21, 31; 2 Chr 12:13). Thus, in spite of the hostile relationship between Israel and Ammon, Deut 2:19 admonishes the Israelites not to harass or fight against Ammon, but to acknowledge

[101] Tyson, *The Ammonites*, 135f

Ammon's ownership of its land. The divine admonition in Deut 2:19 corresponds to Lot's separation from Abraham in Genesis 13, for it is the Lord who has given them the land; and Israel has no right to deprive the Ammonites of their land.

The number of Old Testament texts against Moab and Ammon portrays that Israel's relationship with Moab and Ammon is historically one of hostility in spite of their genealogical affinity. Israel's hostile relationship with Moab and Ammon, however, contradicts Abraham's relationship with Lot. Therefore, it would be proper to conclude that the Abraham-Lot episode might have been included in the book of Genesis in order to serve as a model to Israel, how she should deal with the descendants of Lot – the Moabites and the Ammonites.

In spite of Lot's separation from Abraham, Abraham helps Lot and his family in the moment of crisis – Abraham rescues Lot and his family from their captivity, and Abraham intercedes for Lot and his family. This suggests that Abraham is concerned about Lot's and his family's safety. Therefore, it would be proper to conclude that the reasons for including Lot's story in the Abraham cycle might be: first, to highlight Abraham's relationship with Lot; second, by concluding Lot's story with the birth of Moab and Ammon, the narrator encourages the Israelite to promote peaceful relation with the Moabites and the Ammonites. Thus, the Abraham-Lot episodes, on the one hand, admonish Israel to treat her Eastern neighbours, Moab and Ammon, with respect, and, on the other hand, they also caution Israel not to interfere in the internal affairs of Moab and Ammon. Thus, the Abraham-Lot episodes try to appeal to Israel to respect Moab and Ammon and also to respect their territorial integrity.

1.3. Abraham and Abimelech, Israel and Philistine (20:1-20; 21:22-34):

Abraham's interaction with Abimelech, the Philistine king of Gerar, reminds the reader of Abraham's sojourn in Egypt, for Abraham repeats a similar mistake that he had committed in Egypt (12:10-20). Some scholars consider Gen 20 as doublet to Gen 12:10-20 because of the close parallels between both the narratives,[102] while other scholars hold, though similar, they are not about the same event. Kinder says, "Who is to say that an individual, caught in a potentially dangerous situation, is not capable of

[102] Westermann is of the view that Gen 20 is a reflection on Gen 12:10-20 and an attempt to answer some unresolved questions of the earlier episode. Cf. Westermann, *1 Mose*, 217.

stooping twice to use other people?"[103] However, it is surprising that Abraham, in spite of his military success against the eastern kings (Gen 14), and enjoying divine protection and assurance, fears a foreign king. It is even shocking to learn about his lack of integrity, whereas the Philistine king demonstrates a genuine sign of intergrity. Hamilton, therefore, concludes that Abraham has perhaps not learned from his previous mistakes. He is still much like the pre-covenant Abraham despite all his spiritual experience. Such persons and instances are, however, not uncommon in the biblical stories.[104]

Abraham's ambiguous dealing with Abimelch, the king of Philistine, and his treaty with the Philistines somewhat resembles David's dealing with the Philistines and his treaty with the Philistine king in the later history of Israel (1 Sam 25 and 27). So it would be proper to conclude that the Abraham-Abimelech episode, on the one hand, tells Israel's ambiguous relation with Philistines, and, on the other hand, it encourages Israel to have a peaceful relation with Philistines, their arch-rivals at the time of David's ascension to the throne.

1.3.1. Sarah in Abimelech's Harem (v.1-2):

From Mamre (Gen 18:1) Abraham moves towards the territory of the Negeb, and dwells between Kadesh and Shur for a brief period of time, and then he enters into the territory of Philistine to sojourn in Gerar. The text, however, does not state the reason for his arrival in Gerar. In Gerar, Abraham hides Sarah's identity, but the text does not say why he needs to hide the truth about Sarah, except the later reference, which states that it is his general practice whenever they sojourn in a foreign land: "This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, He is my brother" (v.13).

The lack of details about, why Abraham moves into Gerar, and why he again hides the true identity of Sarah, and the abrupt act of Abimelech in taking Sarah into his harem, suggest that the narrator of this episode is already aware of the earlier episode (Gen 12:10-20). Many scholars believe that this is the reason why the introductory of Gen 20 lacks details. Van Saters, Westermann and many other scholars conclude this

[103] Kinder, *Genesis*, 137-138.
[104] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 59f.

episode as a doublet to Gen 12:10-20.[105] Whereas some other scholars conclude that it is not the doublet, but it is another report of a somewhat similar event that occurred in the patriarch's life at a different time and at a different location, but sharing the wife/sister motif as in Gen 12:10-20.[106] Moreover, one of the excuses that Abraham makes later at Abimelech's charges reveals that it has been their general practice, whenever they sojourn in a foreign land (v.13). This suggests that Abraham might have lied more than twice about Sarah's identity. Therefore, it is proper to conclude that this episode is not a repetition of Gen 12:10-20, rather a similar event that occurred in the life of the patriarch with another king.

The use of the verbs "sent" (וַיִּשְׁלַח) and "took" (וַיִּקַּח) in their active form here suggests that Abimelech took Sarah without the consent of Abraham, her "brother." Sarna is of the view that Abimelech had forcefully abducted Sarah.[107] Rupper comments, "Ihr 'Bruder' wird gar nicht gefragt. Der König möchte sie eben haben. Und dem Willen eines autokratisch regierten Fürsten muss sich der Untertan, erst recht der rechtlose Fremde wie Abraham beugen."[108] Kilian shares a similar view. According to Kilian the use of the verb לָקַח suggests here, "nicht nur die Bedeutung von 'ergreifen, an sich nehmen, der Freiheit berauben, etc,' sondern 'sich zur Frau nehmen'" (vgl. Ex 34:16; Lev 18:17f; Hos 1:2) und damit im Sinne von 'verkehren'."[109] An additional argument could be, if Abimelech has taken Sarah with the consent of Abraham, he may have paid the bride price to her "brother". But in the narrative there is no reference of Abimelech paying bride price to Abraham, her "brother." Therefore, it is right to conclude that Abimelech has taken Sarah away from Abraham without consent – neither from Abraham nor from Sarah.

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[105] Van Saters comments: "It is another version of the same theme, which has the older account very much in mind and which seeks to answer certain important theological and moral issues that the narrator felt were inadequately treated in the earlier account." Cf. John Van Saters, *Abrham in History and Tradition* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1975), 173. Westermann concludes that Gen 20 as a *Nacherzählung*, "reproduction" of Gen 12:10-20. Cf. Westermann, *1 Mose*, 217.

[106] Hamilton remarks that most discussions in Gen 20 are focused on the relationship between its parallels in 12:10-20 and 26:1ff. And as a result the significance of Gen 20 to its immediate context has gone unnoticed. He is of the view that the central discussion of Gen 20 is the deception of Abraham verses the innocence of the foreign king, and on the justice of God whether God would destroy people, who are innocent, a theme dealt in Gen 18. Cf. Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 58.

[107] Sarna, *Genesis*, 142.

[108] Rupper, *Genesis 11,27-25,18*, 445.

[109] Rudolf Kilian, *Die vorpriesterlichen Abrahams Überlieferungen: literarkritische und traditionsgeschichtlich untersucht* (Bonn: Hanstein, 1966), 190f.

1.3.2. Divine Intervention and the Warning to Abimelech (vv.3-7):

Sarah is taken and brought into Abimelech's harem, and she finds herself once again in danger, and the promise of a son to Abraham by Sarah, which is reiterated in Gen 18, is again under threat. Therefore, God intervenes through a dream, and threatens Abimelech with the death penalty if he does not return the woman to her husband. In the earlier episode Pharaoh came to know the identity of Sarah from the plague that he and his household had suffered; but now Abimelech is made known of his mistake through a dream; and the dream is introduced and concluded with the threatening with the death penalty.[110] The contents of his dream can be categorized as: a charge against Abimelech (v.3); Abimelech's defence (vv.4-5); and the verdict (vv.6-7).

First, God threatens Abimelech with death: "Behold, you are a dead man, because of the woman whom you have taken; for she is a man's wife" (v.3). The charge against Abimelech begins with the Hebrew participle הִנֵּה ("behold"), which emphasises the definitiveness of the punishment because the ancient world regarded adultery as a serious sin (v.9), and the penalty for adultery was death (cf. Lev 20:10; Deut 22:22). The charge against Abimelech strongly states the seriousness of the sin of adultery. Westermann comments: "Das Wort, das Gott zu Abimelek spricht, ist der Urteilsspruch eines Richters mit der dieses Urteil begründeten Beschuldigung, und zwar in der Sprache profaner Rechtsprechung."[111] The reason for the charge and the penalty attached to it is that she is married to a man (בְּעֻלַת בָּעַל). This Hebrew expression literally means "owned by an owner). In other words, Sarah belongs to Abraham, not in the sense of property but as his *alter ego*. Because she is much more than any property a husband possesses: "she is his *alter ego* and one flesh with him (cf. 2:18-24); she is at least her husband's most precious possession, and to take her is the worst kind of theft."[112] Westermann says that abducting another man's wife is *das Verletzen einer göttlich sanktionierten Ordnung*.[113] And even Abimelech, the pagan king, also knows the seriousness of such sin and its potential repercussion (v.9).

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[110] In Genesis there are four reports of dream of revelation of God for the outsiders (cf. 31:24; 40:5; 41:1). Interestingly, the message in all these dreams is a message of warning.
[111] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 393.
[112] Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50: Word Biblical Commentary 2* (Dallas: Word Books, 1994), 70.
[113] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 394.

Abimelech, therefore, defends his innocence by asking a question: "Lord, wilt thou slay an innocent people?" (v.4) Abimelech could ask such a question because, firstly, he has not yet come close to Sarah, therefore, he is innocent of adultery; secondly, both Abraham and Sarah have hidden from him the true identity about Sarah; thus, he is ignorant of Sarah's married status; therefore, he defends himself: "In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this" (v.5). Abimelech's defence revolves, in fact, around the question on divine justice, "Lord, will thou slay an innocent people?" Earlier in Gen 18:23 Abraham had raised a similar question: "Will thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked?" Both these questions are concerned with divine justice.[114] In both the instances the interrogators are mainly concerned about others: Abraham was concerned of the righteous people in Sodom in 18:23, and here Abimelech is mainly concerned with his people. Abimelech raises this issue again in vv. 7, 8, 9. Why does Abimelech fear that God's wrath will fall on his people, when God has specifically threatened him in v.3? Because according to the ancient worldview when the king commits a sin the judgement falls not only on the king but also on the whole nation; similarly, the sin of the high priest brings guilt upon the whole congregation (cf. Lev 4:3),[115] for kings and priests represent the people. That is the reason Abimelech fears that the disaster would fall not only upon him but also upon his whole kingdom.

Abimelech's line of defence on his innocence is that he has been deceived both by Abraham and Sarah; therefore, he confesses that whatever he has done is in the integrity of his heart and the innocence of his hand. I. Fischer comments: "Abimelek ist schuldlos. Er handelte mit bestem Wissen und Gewissen. Nicht nur der Mann hatte ihn belogen, auch die Frau hat die Lüge der Geschwisterbeziehung ausgesprochen. Beide werden direkt zitiert. Der fremde Herrscher ist getäuscht worden, das muss Gott zur Kenntnis nehemen"[116] Kinder states: "the moral terms *righteous, integrity, sinning, etc.* are clearly used here in a narrow sense, which throws some incidental light on the emphatic claims of innocence."[117] Because of Abimelech's innocence, God vindicates Abimelech from the charge but with the condition that he should return Sarah to her

[114] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 394.
[115] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 394.
[116] I. Fischer, *Gottesstreiterinnen*, 51.
[117] Kinder, *Genesis*, 138.

husband, Abraham. Interestingly, God's reply to Abimelech's defence almost repeats verbatim Abimelech's speech (בְּתֻם־ לְבָבְךָ עָשִׂיתָ זֹּאת) "in the integrity of your heart you did this"). Thereby Abimelech is acquitted from the charge but on condition.

Although Abimelech is innocent, he cannot take credit for his integrity and innocence because it is not his commitment to integrity or innocence that has prevented him committing adultery, rather it is God who has prevented him from sinning: "It was I who kept you from sinning against me; therefore I did not let you touch her" (v.6b). By this statement God reveals that adultery is not merely a sin against the husband or wife, but it is essentially a sin against God (cf. 26:10; 39:9b). Now, how does God prevent Abimelech from sinning against Him is mentioned later in vv.17-18, where it is stated that God has closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech. According to v.17 Abimelech is also healed, which suggests Abimelech is also struck with impotency. It must also be noted that Abimelech and his wife and his female slave are punished with infertility, not because of any sin by Abimelech but to deter him from committing adultery.[118]

Finally, the dream-scene concludes with the divine verdict: "Now then restore the man's wife; for he is prophet, and he will pray for you, and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you, and all that are yours" (v.7). Abimelech is now aware of his mistake, therefore, he must now rectify his mistake by returning the man's wife; and he must also appeal to Abraham for his intercession. If Abimelech does not comply, not only he, but also his belongings will bear the weight of the divine judgement.

Interestingly, Abraham is called here as a prophet (נָבִיא). For the first time, the term נָבִיא is used in the Bible, and the term is used for an intercessor. A prophet, therefore, is identified as someone who has a close communion with God, and someone who can intercede for others.[119] Westermann is of the view that the term here stands for

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[118] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 63f.

[119] The Hebrew word נָבִיא seems to be related with the Akkadian term *nabu*, "to call." Assyrian kings were entitled as "the one called." The Hebrew term could either signify "one who receives the (divine) call," "one who proclaims," or a "spokesman." So the prophet is a spokesman for God to man; but intercessors before God in favour of man, which is an indispensable aspect of his function. Cf. Sarna, *Genesis*, 142.

Gottesmann (man of God), whose function is one of an intercessor.[120] The intercession of Abraham is very necessary because "by forcefully abducting Sarah, Abimelech has made Abraham an aggrieved party. It is only fitting that the one wronged should intercede on behalf of the wrongdoer."[121] Rupper comments: "Abraham erscheint hier nicht nur als Segensmittler für Nichtisraeliten (vgl. 12:3b), sondern darüber hinaus auch noch als 'Prophet' wie Mose" (Deut 18:18; 34:10; Num 12:6-8).[122] Thus, the episode is closely connected to the promise of God to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3). With this divine verdict the decision is now upon Abimelech whether to obey the divine order or to face the consequence.

1.3.3. Abimelech's Response to the Divine Warning (vv.8-16):

After the dream, the first thing Abimelech does is that he calls all his servants in the morning and narrates the whole dream. Hearing the dream and the warning, the servants are very much frightened. Abimelech could have quietly returned Sarah to her man, and avoided any embarrassment; on the contrary, he publicly acknowledges he has been tricked. Which king would admit publicly that he has been tricked? "His willingness to be open and tell the truth contrasts with Abraham and his subterfuge."[123] McKeown notes, "Abimelech has high moral standards, and apparently these are shared by his servants, who are very afraid when they hear how they could have inadvertently sinned against God."[124]

Abimelech's second course of action to address the crisis is that he confronts Abraham directly with his rhetorical questions as Pharaoh did. But the difference between Pharaoh and Abimelech is that Pharaoh was concerned about himself; Abimelech, on the contrary, is concerned about his people, when he asks Abraham, "What have you done to us?" (v.9). Abimelech speaks here not only as an individual but also as representative of his people, who stands under the wrath of God because of Abraham's trickery. Pharaoh's questions were intended only to accuse Abraham, whereas Abimelech's questions are not mere accusation but they are mixed with moral

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[120] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 396.
[121] Sarana, *Genesis*, 142.
[122] Rupper, *Genesis 11,27-25,18*, 448.
[123] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 67.
[124] McKeown, *Genesis*, 111.

indignation and a sense of shock:[125] "How have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done me things that ought not be done" (v.9). Pharaoh did not wait for any reply from Abraham; he just accused him and sent him away immediately with Sarah and with his belonging. Abimelech, on the contrary, expects a reply, when he asks Abraham, "What were you thinking of, that you did this thing? (v.10). Thus, Abimelech demonstrates a greater leadership than Pharaoh.

Just as Abimelech protests his innocence before God, Abraham now tries to justify his action. Abraham says to Abimelech that he has hidden the truth about Sarah's wifehood because he has thought that there is no fear of God in Gerar, so he fears death because of her (v.11). The second reason that Abraham brings forward is that he has, in fact, not lied, when he says that Sarah is indeed his sister (half-sister), the daughter from his father but not daughter from his mother.[126] His third reason follows from the second that it has been his general practice from the time "God caused him"[127] to wander from his father's house.

If one closely examines Abraham's justifications, it is evident that they are not very convincing, but mere excuses. His defence reflects "sensitivity to resorting to falsehood, even in self-defence."[128] For example, Abraham thought that the people of the city have no fear of God. But from vv. 3-8 it is very evident that Abimelech and his people have, indeed, fears of God. Petersen, therefore, says, "Abraham has underestimated the scope of Elohim's influence and power."[129] Westermann comments: "Gottesfurcht bedeutet demnach ein Verhalten, das die Grundordnungen menschlicher Gemeinschaft auch Fremden gegenüber beactet. Nun zeigt 20,3-8 nachdrücklich, dass Abimelek und seine Diener in dieser Gottesfurcht leben und handeln; Abraham hat sich in seiner Befürchtung getäuscht."[130]

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[125] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*,72

[126] Of Later, biblical text condemns marrying one's half-sister (cf. Lev 18: 6-11; 20:17; Deut 27:22; Ez 22:11), yet the story of Amnon and Tamar in 2 Sam 13:13 and the fulminations of Ez 22:11 show that such practice persisted in Israel despite the law.

[127] The word *Elohim* normally takes a singular verb when it refers to God, but here it takes a plural verb. Robert Alter says that the idea of monotheism is new to the pagan king; therefore Abraham uses a plural verb for *Elohim* this occasion. Cf. Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company Inc., 2004), 100.

[128] Sarna, *Genesis*, 143.

[129] Petersen, "A Thrice-Told Tale," 39.

[130] Westermann, *Genesis 12-50*, 398.

Moreover, Abraham's defence that he has married his half-sister, and that it is his general practice of hiding the true identity of Sarah in foreign lands portrays him as a man of little faith. Therefore, Wenham remarks: "Abraham, while explaining his motives, actually condemns himself out of his own mouth."[131] Moreover, reading the episode from the immediate and from the broader context of the patriarchal narrative, his arguments raise suspicion in the mind of the reader because the pagan king and his people fear God, but Abraham seems to have no fear of God. Moreover, the reader finds it difficult to comprehend Abraham's fear, given Abraham's victory over the eastern kings (Gen 14), and his intimate relation with the Lord (Gen 17-18). Therefore, Arnold concludes: "Abraham's explanation is a montage of excuses."[132]

The third course of action that Abimelech undertakes is restitution. He returns Sarah back to her husband, and compensates him for the injury he has unwittingly inflicted on them. Abimelech not only returns Sarah as per the divine command/verdict but he also gives sheep, oxen, male and female servants to Abraham. In Gen 12:10-20 Pharaoh gave gifts to Abraham for the sake of Sarah as a kind of bride price (מָהַר), but here Abimelech offers presents to Abraham when Sarah leaves his harem. Thus, Abimelech's presents must be understood here as an act of restitution – price paid to the injured party. In addition to this bounty, he gives him the right to dwell anywhere in his land. His invitation to Abraham to stay and settle in his land is in contrast to Pharaoh, who sent Abraham away from his land (Gen 12:20).

Then to Sarah he says, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; it is your vindication in the eyes of all who are with you; and before every one you are righted" (v.16). After compensating for the injury he has caused to Abraham, Abimelech, now, compensates for the injury he caused to Sarah's reputation. As a compensation, he gives a thousand pieces of silver to Abraham, "to your brother"[133] as vindication (כְּסוּת). According to the biblical law if any one causes injury to a woman, he must compensate this with whatever is due to her. If she is a married woman, the offender must give the compensation to her husband, and if she is unmarried he must

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[131] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 72.
[132] Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 191.
[133] The use of the term "to your brother" instead of "to your husband" is a sarcastic remark indicating, Abimelech's resentment against Abraham's behaviour in spite of his magnanimity towards him. Cf. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 74.

pay the compensation to her relatives.[134] The Hebrew phrase כְּסוּת עֵינַיִם ("covering of the eyes") is an ancient legal form, which is figuratively used as recognition of one's honour that he or she will not be an object of any scorn by others.[135] Alter interprets it as "something that will ward off public disapproval."[136] The use of the verb יָכַח (reprove) means "to decree" (24:14, 44), "to set right," or "to give judgement" (31:42). This verb carries a legal or disciplinary connotation.[137] Here the verb used in the passive form (וְנֹכָחַת) means "be shown right, declared guiltless." In other words, it is a legal declaration of her innocence.[138] This means that Sarah is vindicated legally before everyone, and her honour is restored, and therefore no one will look at her as an object of scorn.

Abimelech restores her to her original status, also paying compensation for the damage he had done to her. In fact, he does more than what God and the law demanded. Thus, in comparison with Abraham he stands clearly far more genuine. His genuineness to restore Sarah to Abraham, and his effort to compensate the injury, caused both to Abraham and Sarah, and his generous offer to Abraham to settle down in any part of his land clearly shows forth his authenticity and genuineness. Walther Zimmerli, therefore, comments about his act as "Eine echte Sühneleistung für den objektiven angerichteten Schaden."[139]

In response to Abimelech's good will and generosity, Abraham prays for him; and "God healed Abimelech, and also his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. For the Lord had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife" (vv.17-18). Here in v.17, the narrator mentions how God has prevented Abimelech from sinning against Him (cf. v.6). This implies that Abimelech has also fallen ill after he took Sarah; that is why he did not approach her (v.4). Furthermore, the Lord has closed the wombs of his household so that none of his wives give birth. The Hebrew expression כִּי־ עָצֹר עָצַר יְהוָה בְּעַד כָּל־ רֶחֶם ("for the Lord had

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[134] Cf. Ex 22:15f; Deut 22:23f.
[135] Sarna, *Genesis*, 144.
[136] Alter, *The five Books of Moses*, 101.
[137] Speicer, *Genesis*, 150.
[138] John E. Hartley, "יָכַח," *NIDOTE*, vol. 2 (ed. Willem A. VanGemeren; UK: Paternoster Press, 1996), 441- 45.
[139] Walther Zimmerli, *1 Mose 12-50: Abraham* (Züruch: Theologischer Verlag, 1976), 98.

closed all the wombs") is "a standard idiom for infertility."[140] This idiom can be understood as "an epidemic of impotence that has struck Abimelech and his house."[141] In this way God has not only punished Abimelech, but also prevented him from committing adultery with Sarah.

The epidemic of impotence is cured through the intercession of Abraham. Thus, in offering compensation to Abraham, Abimelech has owned up to his error, and by accepting it and reciprocating it with his intercessory prayer for Abimelech, Abraham has acknowledged the matter as settled. The conflict between Abimelech and Abraham comes to a peaceful ending. However, later, when Abimelech approaches Abraham to "cut a covenant" with him, one more contentious issue will be brought before Abimelech, i.e., the issue about a well of water (Gen 21:22-34).

1.3.4. The Covenant between Abraham and Abimelech (21:22-34):

The covenant or the treaty between Abraham and Abimelech in Gen 21:22-34 should be understood in the context of Gen 20.[142] Though the treaty between them could have happened some years later, it is closely connected with the wife/sister episode because in Gen 20 Abimelech has invited Abraham to dwell anywhere in his land; and accordingly Abraham dwells within the territory of Gerar. It is in this context Abimelech along with his commander, Phicol, approaches Abraham, and wishes to enter into a covenant with him because Abimelech perceives that God is with Abraham. That means Abraham has become, by this time, rich and strong. Wenham thinks, the reason that "Abimelech is accompanied by the commander of his army implies that Abraham himself has a considerable retinue and is a force to be reckoned with,"[143]

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[140] Alter, *The five Books of Moses*, 101. The same word (עָצַר) had been earlier used by Sarah to describe her own infertility. So the question here is if the Philistine women have had their fertility restored, will Sarah's fertility also be restored?

[141] Alter, *The five Books of Moses*, 101.

[142] Blum, *Die Kompozition der Vätergeschichte*, 411; Alter, *The five Books of Moses*, 106. According to Westermann and Van Saters Gen 21:22-34 is the combination of two units: Gen 21: 25-26, 28-31a is the first and the oldest unit, and Gen 21:22-24, 27, 31b-34 is the second supplement to the earlier account, which corresponds to Gen 26:26-33; Many scholars are of the view that Gen 21:22-34 is connected to Gen 20. Therefore, they conclude that both the units are from the Elohist source. Cf. Westermann, *1 Mose*, 229; Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*,185ff.

[143] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 92. The recognition of Abimelech that God is with Abraham (Gen 21:22) connects this episode with Gen 12:3. This suggests, "The narrator is primarily concerned with the fulfilment of the second aspect of the promissory agenda (i.e. the mediation of blessing to the nations)."

therefore, he wants to make a covenant/treaty with Abraham, so that there would be no threat from Abraham either to him or to his people in the future.

Abimelech initiates the negotiation for the treaty on the basis of his good dealing with Abraham: "As I have dealt loyally with you, you will deal with me and with the land where you have sojourned" (v.23). Essentially, what Abimelech seeks here is a treaty of non-aggression that both the parties will have the right to live and let live without any hostility. According to this treaty "all previous and future relations between them should be characterized by an absence of hostility."[144] However, it is evident that Abimelech does not dictate or impose a term on Abraham; rather he seeks a favour from Abraham.[145] So, Abraham swears to Abimelech and enters into a treaty of non-aggression. And as a sign of the ratification of the treaty he gives sheep and oxen to Abimelech (v. 27), for it was customary to exchange gift when treaties or covenants were made (cf. 1 Kgs 15:19; Isa 30:6; Hos 12:2 [1]).[146]

However, before ratifying the treaty, Abraham brings a contentious issue between him and the Philistines to Abimelech's notice. The issue is about the claim over a well of water which Abimelech's servants had seized (גָּזְלוּ) from Abraham. The Hebrew verb גָּזַל means to "steal with force" or stealing illegally.[147] So, in order to materialize the treaty, Abimelech must first resolve the issue. Surprisingly, the king tells him that he is not aware of the problem; but at the same time he seems to bypass Abraham's grievance, when he asks Abraham: "What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs which you have set apart?" Wenham comments: "Abimelech is portrayed as a man with good intentions but one not as aware of the situation as a responsible ruler ought to be. Then he was unaware that Sarah was married; now he is unaware of his servants'

Cf. Paul R. Williamson, *Abraham, Israel and the Nation: The Patriarchal Promise and its covenantal Development in Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 257.

[144] Victor H. Matthew, "The Wells of Gerar," *BA* 49 (1986), 121.

[145] D. J. McCarthy, "Three Covenants in Genesis," CBQ 26 (1964) 182-84.

[146] Later laws (Ex 23:33; Deut 7:2) forbade making any treaty with the inhabitants of Canaan and insisted on strict separation (Lev 20:26).

[147] גָּזַל means "gewaltsam fortreißen" ("to forcefully take away," cf. 2 Sam 23:21; 1 Chr 11:23; Mich 3:2 and Job 24:9). The word could also be understood as snatching a baby forcefully from its mother's breast. Cf. Schüpphaus, "גָּזַל," *ThWAT*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1973), 999-1001.

actions. What he proposed to do about remedying Abraham's grievance is left unsaid."[148]

Abimelech's confession of his unawareness of the issue and his disengagement with Abraham's grievance suggests, he is perhaps trying to evade the issue. Therefore Abraham diplomatically draws Abimelech's attention back to the issue by separating seven ewe lambs in front of him. At this Abimelech enquires about the meaning of his action; and in answering the question, Abraham draws his attention back to the issue, saying, "These seven ewe lambs you will take from my hand, that you may be a witness for me that I dug this well" (v. 30). By this statement Abraham makes his stands clear that the treaty would be possible only after the issue is rightly settled. And it is only after settling the issue that the treaty is ratified between them at *Beer-sheba*.

After making the treaty with Abraham, Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, return to the land of the Philistines.[149] The return of Abimelech and Phicol to the land of the Philistines suggests that Abraham now has the legal claim over the well and the region near to it.[150] And so, as a sign of his possession of the well and the area around it, and as a gesture of gratitude to God for the peaceful settlement of the issue, Abraham plants a tamarisk tree[151] in Beer-sheba, and calls on the name of the Lord, the "Everlasting God" (אֵל עוֹלָם). The narrative concludes with a positive note, "Abraham sojourned many days in the land of the Philistine," suggesting Abraham's peaceful stay with the Philistines.

1.3.5. The Abraham-Abimelech Episode as an Allegory to David's Relationship with the Philistine:

Abraham's interaction with Abimelech in Gen 20:1-18; 21:22-34 narrate not merely the interaction between Abraham and Abimelech, but it also indirectly reports

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[148] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 93.

[149] Many argue that the reference, "to the land of the Philistine," is anachronistic because the Philistines did not arrive in Canaan before 1200 B.C. They argue that the Philistines arrived in Palestine early in the twelfth century after being repulsed by the Egyptians. Howard F. Vos says, "If Caphtor, the home of the Philistines (Jer. 47:4; Amos 9:7), is to be identified with Crete (as is commonly held), two waves of Philistines may have come to Palestine: peaceful commercial Minoans early in the second millennium (during the patriarchal period) and more warlike Mycenaeans in the latter part of the millennium (during the days of the judges). Cf. Howard F. Vos, *Genesis – Everyman's Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 100.

[150] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 94.

[151] According to Sarna planting tree indicates the act of worship. Cf. Sarna, *Genesis*, 149.

Israel's interaction with Philistine, as the Genesis episode is related to David's interaction with Philistines. For resemblance to the Genesis story could be found later in David's story in the book of Samuel especially in 1 Sam 25 & 27. Some identical materials of Gen 20:1-18 could be traced in the David and Nabal story (1 Sam 25) on the basis of their theme and vocabulary; and Gen 21:22-34 could be read as "a political allegory" and as "an apology for David's pact with the Philistine."[152]

1.3.5.1. Resemblances between Gen 20 and 1 Sam 25:

A resemblance between the wife/sister episode in Gen 20:1-18 and the David-Abigail-Nabal story in 2 Sam 25 could be found on the basis of the themes and vocabularies. Dominic Rudman, in his article "The Patriarchal Narrative in the Book of Samuel," brings out some of the similarities between both the stories. They are similarities on the basis of: location and movement, use of key Hebrew verbs, the conflict of an unsettled life, consequences of their action and divine prevention from committing sin against God.[153]

First, there are some similarities between Abraham and David on the basis of the location of their movement and their lifestyle. In Gen 20:1 Abraham is said to have moved into the territory of the Negeb and to have sojourned in Gerar. Similarly, in 1 Sam 25:1 David is said to have moved to the wilderness of Paran. It is true that the locations of the movement of both are not exactly identical, yet both the stories portray that both, Abraham and David, "had a wandering lifestyle."[154]

Second, the use of the similar Hebrew verbs "send" (שָׁלַח) and "take" (לָקַח) in both the stories. When Abimelech was informed that Sarah was Abraham's sister, he "sent" (וַיִּשְׁלַח) and "took" (וַיִּקַּח) Sarah into his harem as his wife (cf. Gen 20:2). Similarly, when David was informed about the death of Nabel, he "sent" (וַיִּשְׁלַח) and "took" (לְקַחְתָּהּ) Abigail to be his wife (1 Sam 25:39).[155] In both the stories the same

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[152] David Sperling, *The Origin of Torah: The Political Intent of the Bible's Writers* (New York and London: New York University Press), 98.
[153] Domnic Rudman, "The Patriarchal narratives in the Books of Samuel," *VT* 54 (2004), 239-49.
[154] Rudman, "The Patriarchal narratives in the Books of Samuel," 241.
[155] Similar verbs are also used in 2 Sam 3:15 and 11:4, which narrates the taking of another man's wife by the king.

verbs “send” (שָׁלַח) and “take” (לָקַח) are used for the king’s act of taking another man’s wife as his. Thus, there is a parallel between both the stories on the basis of the use of the same and the important vocabularies for taking another man’s wife as one’s own wife.[156]

Third, in both the stories the conflict is resolved by presenting gifts to the offended parties for the offence. Abimelech gives Abraham sheep, cattle, male and female slaves, and he gives Sarah a thousand silver as compensation, and he gives them right to dwell anywhere in his land (cf. Gen 20:14-16). Similarly, to avoid bloodshed and the consequence of it, Abigail, the wife of Nabal (but not Nabal), offers David bread, wine, sheep, grain, raisins and figs (1 Sam 25:18). But the contrast between both the stories is that in Genesis Abimelech is portrayed as an innocent man, but in 1 Samuel 25 Nabal is portrayed as an evil man.

Fourth, in both the stories the consequence of their action is revealed to them through a divine intervention. Abimelech comes to know his mistake and its fatal consequence through a dream revelation. David understands what would be the aftermath of his revenge when Abigail gently cautions him. David fortunately believes her caution as coming from the Lord (cf. 1 Sam 25:32-34). Similarly, in both the stories the servants of Abimelech and Nadal, when they come to know of the consequences of their masters’ mistakes, come under a great fear (cf. Gen 20:8; 1 Sam 25:17). Dominic Rudman notes: “Nabal ignoring David’s message are equivalent to those that would have been experienced by Abimelech and his people if they had ignored God’s message.”[157]

Fifth, in both the stories the individuals are prevented (חָשַׂך) by God from committing serious sins: “It was I who kept you” (וָאֶחְשָׂךְ) from sinning against me (Gen 20:6); “… and [the Lord] has kept back his servant from evil” (1 Sam 25:39). A similar Hebrew verb (חָשַׂך) is used in both the narratives for the divine prevention of the respective characters from committing a serious sin against God.

A close examination of both the stories suggests that the narrator has the historical incident in David’s life in mind, when he wrote Genesis 20. Therefore, when the reader

[156] Rudman, “The Patriarchal narratives in the Books of Samuel,” 243ff.
[157] Rudman, “The Patriarchal narratives in the Books of Samuel,” 247

reads the Abraham-Abimelech episode he is not only aware of the "immediate context of the story of David, but to the wider one of the Primary History, the author of the narratives in Samuel establishes a series of connections and parallels intended to make his audience reflect on the attitudes and motivation of the characters he describes."[158]

1.3.5.2 The Abraham-Abimelech's Treaty as an Apology for David's Pact with the Philistines:

As the Abraham-Abimlelech episode (Gen 20) is connected with the David-Nadal story (1 Sam 25), Abraham's treaty with Abimelech (Gen 21:22-34) is also connected with the pact between David and Achish, the Philistine king of Gath (1 Sam 27). The closing verse in Gen 21:34 suggests that Abraham dwelt in the territory of Philistines for a considerable period of time. According to 1 Sam 27 David escaped from Saul and took refuge in the territory of the Philistines. Achish, the Philistine king of Gath, gives David asylum in his kingdom, and offers him the city of Ziklag to dwell there (1 Sam 27:6). David dwells in Ziklag for one year and four months. As Abraham lies to Abimelech by hiding the identity of Sarah, in a somewhat similar manner, David lies to Achish about his military raids from Ziklag (1 Sam 27:8-12). Staying in Ziklag, David follows a deliberate strategy of attacks against the tribes (the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites) on the fringes of the southern desert, but he lies to Achish, saying it is against Israelite groups that he makes the raids. And the reason why David engages himself with such secret raids against these tribes is to maintain his reputation in Israel. David Jobling comments: "He was biding his time and being extremely careful to do nothing to hurt his reputation in Israel."[159]

The Philistines were the archenemies of Israel throughout the history of Israel. Therefore, David's joining hand with Philistine could be critically looked at. But this criticism can be refuted from the support of Abraham's treaty with Abimelech. Sperling argues, "If Abraham, the great hero of the past, could cooperate with the Philistines, there was no reason that David could not."[160]

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[158] Rudman, "The Patriarchal narratives in the Books of Samuel," 248.
[159] David Jobling, *1 Samuel* (Berit Olam; Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 237.
[160] Sperling, *The Origin of Torah,* 89

In the episode on the Abraham-Abimelech treaty, Abimelech initiated the treaty by acknowledging that God is siding with Abraham: "God is with you in all that you do" (Gen 21:28). Somewhat similar statements about David are also found in the books of Samuel. For instance, different people in the book of Samuel have witnessed the Lord's support for David – by an attendant of Saul (1 Sam 18:14), by Saul himself (1 Sam 17:37; 18:39), and by the narrator (1 Sam 18:14; 2 Sam 8:7). Therefore, if one concedes that the treaty of Abraham with Abimelech is right, one could also justify David's stay in Philistine and the friendly relation that he maintained with the Philistine. Therefore, it is not wrong to conclude that the Abraham-Abimelech treaty might have been intended to serve as an apology for David's later policy with the Philistines.

The similarities and parallels found between Gen 20; 21:22-34 and 1 Samuel 25 & 27 witness that the Abraham-Abimelech narrative in Genesis explain not only the story of the ancestor, but it also helps the reader to understand the historical events that took place later in the history of Israel, during the time of David. The Genesis episode foreshadows the later events in Israel's history. The Abraham's interaction with Abimelech encourages Israel to foster and maintain a good and peaceful interaction with the Philistines; and the David story in 1 Sam 25 & 27 confirms and encourages such a peaceful relation with Philistines, who were considered as the archenemy of Israel at the time of David's ascension to the throne.

1.4. Sarah's Rivalry with Hagar and Ishmael (16:1-16 & 21:8-21):

Abraham's relationship with Hagar and her son, Ishmael, serves as a model for Israel how Israel should relate herself with Ishmaelites, the descendants of Ishmael. Though Hagar appears to be the main character in Gen 16:1-16 and 21:8-21, the focus gradually shifts from Hagar to Ishmael. Therefore, it would be proper to conclude that in the mother's story the story of the son is unfolded.

Hagar's story is narrated in two episodes – the first is from the Yahwistic perspective (Gen 16:1-16), while the second is from the Elohistic perspective (Gen 21:8-21). Though both the episodes are from two different traditions, a full understanding of the story about Hagar and Ishmael is possible only by a combined study of both the traditions. According to the two traditions of the story, the episodes about Hagar/Ishmael can be categorised under two main sections: Hagar's flight and

Ishmael's birth (Gen 16:1-16), and the casting out of Hagar with her son from the patriarch's family (Gen 21:8-21).

It is evident that in spite of Hagar being the main character in both the episodes, their main concern is to tell the birth of Ishmael, the origin and the history of the Ishmaelites, and how Ishmael and his descendants are related to Abraham and to Israel. Moreover, the experience of Hagar and Ishmael in the house of Abraham under their taskmistress Sarah, their liberation from Sarah's oppression, and their experiences in the wilderness resemble in many ways Israel's experience in Egypt and in the wilderness. Thus, through these stories the narrator tries to convey to Israel that the Israelites are related to the Ishmaelites not only genealogically but also by their common wilderness experience. Therefore, Israel should maintain a peaceful relationship with Ishmaelites as they are related to each other by their genesis and experience.

1.4.1. Hagar's Flight and Ishmael's Birth (16:1-16):

The Lord has promised Abram a son, and has categorically told him that it is not Eliaszer, his slave, but his own son, son of his "own flesh and blood," that will become his heir (Gen 15:4). Although Abram believes that he will have his son, he is not certain if the son will be through Sarai. Therefore, Abram listens to Sarai's advice and goes in unto Hagar, her maidservant, and she conceives. When Hager learns that she is pregnant, she despises her mistress. In retaliation Sarai persecutes Hagar, and as a result of this Hagar flees from her mistress. However, at the divine command, Hagar returns and submits herself to her mistress. The episode in Gen 16, as a whole, is marked with hatred and enmity between the two women. The mishandling of the issue both by Sarai and Abram is another fall in their life. Comparing the acts of Sarai and Abram with the fall of Adam and Eve, Werner Berg describes it as *der zweite Sündenfall Abrahams*.[161]

1.4.1.1. Hagar's Flight into the Wilderness (vv. 1-6):

The preceding chapters to Gen 16 mention that Abram has become wealthy, but childless. In Gen 15:4 the Lord promises him that he will have a son (Gen 15:4). However, Abram is not certain that the son will be from Sarai, his wife. Therefore,

[161] Berg, *Urgeschichte des Glaubens*, 114-19.

Sarai, who suffers from her barrenness, perhaps concludes that her barrenness stands inbetween God's promise and its envisioned fulfilment.[162] Moreover, anxiety and restlessness creeps gradually into her mind, for "there is no greater sorrow for an Israelite or Oriental woman than childlessness."[163] So, she takes the matter into her own hand to find a solution by herself. She proposes to Abram to consort with her maidservant to beget a son through her. Though her proposal is in conformity to the practice of the time,[164] it does not portray Sarai as a woman of faith. Commenting on her initiative S. E. McEvenue notes, "The place of tension is in the mind of Sarai, the place of solution is the mind of God."[165] Sarai, by taking the matter into her own hand rather than trusting in the promise of the Lord, invites crisis in her family.[166]

The first verse of the episode, while connecting the issue with Gen 11:30, introduces the problem and the potential conflict between the main characters. The narrator, while introducing the main characters of the episode, places them opposed to each other by placing Sarai at the beginning, her barrenness at the centre, and Hagar at the end of the very first verse (אֵשֶׁת אַבְרָם לֹא יָלְדָה לּוֹ וְלָהּ שִׁפְחָה מִצְרִית וּשְׁמָהּ הָגָר׃ וְשָׂרַי). By introducing the story in this way, the narrator indicates the upcoming conflict between both the women. Moreover, both the women are opposed to each other on various factors such as social, ethnic, physical, etc. Trible comments, "Beginning with Sarai and ending with Hagar, the sentence opposes the two women around the man Abram. Sarai, the Hebrew, is married, rich, and free but also old and barren. Hagar the Egyptian is single, poor, and slave but also young and fertile. Power belongs to Sarai; powerlessness marks Hagar."[167]

Sarai is convinced that the Lord has closed her womb, and her time has already run out. Therefore, she persuades Abram to consort with her maidservant and beget a

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[162] W. Lee Humphreys, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Appraisal* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2001), 99.
[163] Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 191.
[164] According to the code of Hammurabi if a woman could not bear a child to her husband she could give her maidservant to her husband to bear offspring for her. Cf. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Patriarchal Family Relationships and Near Eastern Law," *BA*, 44 (1981), 211.
[165] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 280.
[166] Waltke, *Genesis*, 251.
[167] Phyllis Trible, "Ominous Beginnings for a promise of Blessing," *Hagar, Sarah, and their children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives* (ed. Phyllis Trible and Litte M. Russel; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 38.

son for her (v.2). Abram listens to her proposal, and so she takes her maidservant and gives her to Abram as wife[168] in order to "build up" her house through Hagar. A closer reading of the text makes it evident that Sarai dominates throughout the first scene of the episode, for she is the subject of all the actions. Thomas Mann says, "For the first time Sarai appears as a character in her own right rather than a passive victim of circumstances, and she is anything but passive."[169] However, Sarai's move is in conformity with the practice of the time;[170] for according to oriental thinking motherhood is a great honour and childlessness is a great shame. Therefore, if a woman is barren and cannot bear offspring, it was legitimate to get offspring through her maidservant or from her slave woman.[171] Hamilton defends Sarai's action, "given the emphasis on the indispensability of (male) progeny to perpetuate the family line, I am inclined to think that Sarai's action was obligatory, and that no ignominy was attached to such a procedure."[172]

Even though Sarai's scheme to acquire offspring through Hagar was socially legitimate, a close reading of the text reveals a serious flaw in Sarai. Wenham lists her mistakes under the following points: first, it overlooks the divine promise (15:4); second, her manner of handling the issue resembles Abram in Gen 12:10-20; third, the choice of wording and the actions alludes her acts with that of Eve's in Gen 3:6b.[173]

First, though her proposal is in accordance with the general practice, it overlooks the divine promise (15:4), which suggests that something abnormal will happen with Sarai. Moreover, her own words betray her actions, for she blames the Lord for her barrenness when she says, "the Lord has prevented me from bearing children" (16:2a). Robert Alter comments that Sarai's first reported speech is "like that of Rachel" (30:1-

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[168] According to ancient oriental thinking it was a privilege and honour for a maidservant or a slave woman to sleep with her patriarch or her master of her mistress. Cf. Jo Ann Hackett, "Rehabilitating Hagar: Fragments of an Epic Pattern," *Gender and Differences in Ancient Israel* (ed. Peggy Lynne Day; Minneapolis: Fortress Press,1989), 13.

[169] Thomas Mann, *The Book of the Torah: The Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988), 36.

[170] Gunkel says that according to Israelite legal practice, the wife, if she is infertile, substitutes another wife to the man in her place and then adopts her children as her own (30:3,9); however, the substituted remains always as the "maidservant" of her mistress. Cf. Gunkel, Genesis (trasl. Mark E. Biddle), 184. The Hammurabi Code § 146, a Nuzi text, and an Old Assyrian marriage contract and a Neo-Assyrian text also have similar views on this matter. Cf. Hamiltan, *Genesis 1-17*, 144.

[171] Rad, *Genesis*, 191.

[172] Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 445.

[173] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 7.

6). Her statement, on the one hand, accuses the Lord and, on the other hand, it expresses the popular belief of the Old Testament people, which holds that it is the Lord who grants or denies childbirth.[174] If she has already known and believed this popular belief of the Old Testament, she ought to have trusted in the divine promise. Roop notes: "She recognizes the Lord as Creator of life; however, she does not interpret her infertility in terms of God's promise."[175] Waltke says: "without a word from God to authorize her scheme, she is guilty of synergism."[176]

Second, the way Sarai takes the initiative to solve the problem parallels Abram's folly in Gen 12:10-20. Like Abram in Gen 12:11 Sarai uses the Hebrew term הִנֵּה־נָּא in order to persuade Abram to act on her proposal. She not only persuades him but also compels him to act on her proposal. For the Hebrew expression בֹּא־נָא ("please go") is not merely a request, but it is a firm expression of one's wish: "die Verstärkung ein dezidierter Wunsch, von dem von vornherein angenommen wird, dass ihm nachgekommen wird."[177] As Abram was earlier concerned only about his life and his wellbeing (Gen 12:13), Sarai is now concerned only about herself and her problem. Moreover, the use of the verb בָּנָה ("build up") suggests something more. This term is normally used for building a house (בָּיִת). But the Hebrew word בָּיִת (house) may also mean house as structure or house as family or dynasty.[178] This would mean that Sarai is not merely concerned with finding a solution for her barrenness but she also expects to make something more from it. Trible concludes, "As Abram schemed to save himself by manipulating Sarai and Pharaoh, so Sarai schemes to promote herself by manipulating Abram and Hagar."[179]

Third, the choice of the terminologies, used in vv.3-4a, and the actions undertaken are identical to Gen 3:6b. The sequence of events is similar in both the cases: the woman "takes" something (here her maidservant) and "gives" it to her husband, who accepts it and acts as the woman wishes. "By employing quite similar formulations and an identical sequences of events in Gen 3:6b and 16:3-4a, the author makes it clear that

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[174] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 7. Cf. Gen 25:21; 30:2; Lev 20:20, 21; Deut 28:11; Ps 113:9.
[175] Waltke, *Genesis*, 251.
[176] Waltke, *Genesis*, 251.
[177] I. Fischer, *Erzeltern*, 274.
[178] James C. Okoye, "Sarah and Hagar: Genesis 16 and 21," *JOT* 32 (2007), 167.
[179] Trible, "Ominous Beginnings for a promise of Blessing," 38.

for him both narratives describe comparable events, that are both counts of a fall."[180] Werner says: "Das Hören auf die Stimme der Frau durch den Mann ist in beiden Fällen der Beginn der Sünde. Die Schuld Abrahams und Saras liegt darin, dass sie eigenmächtig – ohne Legitimation durch Jahwe – auf ihre Weise dafür sorgen, dass sie zu einem Sohn kommen. Sie nehmen selbst die Dinge in die Hand und führen sie einer Lösung zu"[181]

But to Sarai's dismay, Hagar, when she sees that she has conceived, becomes aware of her worth as a person and a woman. Although things have happened exactly as Sarai wanted, she now feels threatened. The text does not mention anything that Hagar did that might have threatened Sarai, but the text hints Hagar's feeling of her importance before her mistress, which Sarai could not tolerate. Hakett says, "She [Hagar] is represented as a woman who would for the first time have some status in this society because she is pregnant with the child we logically assume to be Abram's heir. This type of situation would bring tension into any household."[182] O. Procksch justifies Hagar's stand because it is natural for any mother to be proud of her motherhood: "Der natürliche Mutterstolz ist stärker als die Rechtslage."[183] "Sarai is now a non-child-producing *issa*, and Hagar is a child-producing *issa*. And that is what annoys Sarai and not any barbs that Hagar is throwing at her."[184] J. Skinner notes, "The writer was referring … to Sarah's having lost status, because of the new standing which Hagar had acquired …"[185] It could be possible that Hagar might be showing some signs of not parting with her child with her mistress. Therefore, Sharon assumes, "Sarai senses, even before Hagar's child is born, that her plan has failed. Hagar shows no intentions of releasing her child to be considered the child of Sarai."[186]

Considering the views of different scholars, it is proper to conclude that Sarai feels that her status as wife and mistress is under threat, and she foresees the humiliation that would accompany this. Therefore, Sarai demands justice from her man and threatens to take the matter even to Yahweh, the supreme Judge. Why does she

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[180] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 8. Werner, *Urgeschichte des Glaubens*, 115.
[181] Werner, *Urgeschichte des Glaubens*, 115.
[182] Hackett, "Rehabilitating Hagar: Fragments of an Epic Pattern," 13.
[183] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 286.
[184] Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 447.
[185] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 286.
[186] Jeansonne, *The Women of Genesis*, 45.

approach Abram for justice instead of settling the issue with her maidservant? For she could have easily asserted her position before Hagar, after all, Hager is her maidservant. But the fact of the matter is that Sarai does not enjoy the same authority over Hagar as before, because in giving her as wife to Abram she has transferred her authority over Hagar to Abram;[187] and by dealing the issue with Abram directly and not with Hagar, Sarai rejects the changed social status of Hagar.[188] Moreover, in the patriarchal society the maintenance of justice in the family is the responsibility of the patriarch.[189] However, this is not likely in this case, for Abram, the patriarch, himself stands accused, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my maid to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me!" (16:5). Here, Sarai not only demands Abram to judge her case; but she also accuses him of the violence done against her. Therefore, she threatens to take the case to Yahweh if her status is not restored.

What is all the more shocking is to learn the passivity of Abram in the midst of the tension in his house. Instead of settling the dispute between the two women, he hands Hagar over to Sarai's authority – "Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her as you please" (16:6a). As if he has nothing to do with Hagar! Abram's handling of the issue is highly questionable because Hagar is now his wife and she carries his baby in her womb; therefore she deserves his protection. Abram, on the contrary, acts so insensitively as though he has nothing to do with Hagar's plight. His passive reaction reminds the reader of Adam in Gen 3:12: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate".

Hagar is now handed over to her mistress, and her mistress deals harshly with her.[190] The Hebrew word used for Sarai's treatment of Hagar is עָנָה. This is the same

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[187] Okoye, "Sarah and Hagar: Genesis 16-21," 167.
[188] Sarai rejects "*die veränderte soziale Wertordung Hagars*." Cf. I. Fischer, *Erzeltern*, 278.
[189] Rad, *Genesis*, 192.
[190] According to the law of Hammurabi No. 146 "If a man married a *naditu* and she gave a female slave to her husband and she (the slave) has then borne children: if later that female slave has claimed equality with her mistress because she bore children, her mistress may not sell her, (but) she may mark her with the slave-mark and count her among the slaves." Cf. Frymer-Kensky, "Patriarchal Family Relationships and Near Eastern Law," 211. Van Seters interprets that if the maidservant of the wife bears children by her mistress's husband, she (the maidservant) must not abuse her status by belittling her mistress; if she belittles her mistress, the mistress has the right to humiliate her as a slave, but she cannot expel her. cf. John Van Seters, "The Problem of Childlessness in near Eastern Law and the Patriarchs of Israel," *JBL* 87 (1968), 403.

term used in Exodus to describe how the Egyptians treated the Israelites (Ex 1:12). But unable to bear the persecution of her mistress Hagar flees (בָּרַח) from her.[191] The same Hebrew term בָּרַח (flee or escape) is used in Exodus for Israelites' leaving Egypt (Ex 14:5). This is also the term often used in the Bible to describe the flight of anyone running away from death threat.[192] A. Brenner comments, "Sarai's reaction is too severe. Victimized by barrenness and Hagar, Sarah now becomes the victimizer. Neither Sarah nor Hagar acquits themselves well here: the mistress is harsh and overbearing; the maidservant is unrepentant and insubordinate."[193] I. Fischer says, "Hager ist jedoch nicht bereit, sich unterzuordnen und entscheidet sich für den zweiten möglichen Weg ihrer Emanzipation, indem sie von ihrer Herrschaft flieht."[194]

The Hebrew terminologies used to describe Sarai's harsh treatment, and the extreme step that Hagar undertakes to flee from her mistress suggest, on the one hand, the cruelty of Sarai, and, on the other hand, it also indicates Hagar's defiance of Sarai.

1.4.1.2. Hagar Is Sent Back to Her Mistress (vv.7-14):

Hagar flees in defiance to Sarai's mistreatment, for she, perhaps, thinks that it is better to suffer the dangers of wilderness than to suffer insults and humiliation under Sarai.[195] But in the wilderness the angel of the Lord finds her on her way to Shur[196] by a spring of water, and commands her to return and to submit herself to her mistress. The angel also promises her a son, and descendants, too numerous to count. Because of the divine intervention and the divine promise to Hagar (cf. v.11) I. Fischer calls this episode a *Rettungserzählung*.[197]

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[191] It is an extreme and dangerous step that a slave takes. Because according to Near Eastern Slave Law the slave who runs away from his/her owner would face the most drastic punishment possible. In spite of such a harsh consequences Hagar flees from her mistress. This indicates the degree and intensity of Sarai's oppression.
[192] Cf. Gen 27:43; 35:1; Ex 2:15; 1 Sam 19:12, 18.
[193] Waltke, *Genesis*, 253.
[194] Waltke, *Genesis*, 294.
[195] H. Gunkel, "The two Accounts of Hagar (Genesis xvi. and xxi., 8-21)" *The Monist*, 10. 3 (April, 1900), 325.
[196] Shur is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible for the first time; but later Shur will become one of the dwelling places of her son Ishamel (25:18). Moreover, Hagar's descendants here will be in conflict with the descendants of Sarai. Saul and David will later struggle with the people of these territories (1 Sam 15:7; 27:8). Cf. Sharon Pace Jeansonne, *The Women of Genesis*, 45.
[197] I. Fischer, *Gottesstreiterinnen*, 33.

Hagar has fled from Sarai to the wilderness, but the narrative portrays the wilderness as a place of hospitality for Hagar, symbolized by a spring of water. Hager is now on her way to Shur,[198] a region near the Egyptian boarder, suggesting that she is heading towards her homeland Egypt. But the angel of the Lord finds her by the spring on her way to Shur and interacts with her. Unlike Sarai and Abram, who treated her as an object to meet their need, the angel addresses her with her name: "Hagar, maid of Sarai". The angel, on the one hand, acknowledges her as a person, and, on the other hand, he reminds her of her status as a maid to Sarai, for "to be 'of Sarai' is to be 'of the Lord'."[199]

The angel poses two questions to Hagar: "Where have you come from and where are you going? The first question refers to her present and the second refers to her future. She answers the first question straightforward; "I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai." Hagar is honest enough to admit to the stranger why she flees from her mistress. Her honest admission suggests that her fleeing is a conscious and deliberate decision. I. Fischer comments, "Hagar antwortet nicht als Frau, die ein schlechtes Gewissen hat, sondern selbstbewußt und entschlossen zu ihrer Entscheidung stehend."[200] However, she does not answer his second question: "Where are you going?" Probably, she does not know or is not sure about her future. Hagar's indecisiveness about her future plan suggests that the primary reason for her flight is to escape the oppression of her mistress.

Once Hagar admits the reason for her flight, the angel commands her to return and to submit herself to her mistress. He also promises her innumerable descendants (vv.9-12). The command follows with promise; therefore, the fulfilment of the promise depends on her obedience to the command i.e. her submission to Sarai. The monologue of the angel in vv.9-12 introduces different themes: the command (v.9), the promise (v.10), the annunciation (v.11), and the prophesy about the child's future (v.12). Trible summarises the message of the angel as "desolation and consolation."[201] Because the message, on the one hand, commands Hager to return and submit herself to her mistress

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[198] But when Israel came in the wilderness of Shur after crossing the Red Sea, they walked through the wilderness for three days and found no water (Ex 15:22).
[199] Pyllis Trible, *Text of Terror:Literary-Feminist Reading of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 14.
[200] I. Fischer, *Erzeltern*, 294.
[201] Trible, "Ominous Beginning for a Promise of Blessing," 40.

to suffer oppression and humiliation under her hand, and, on the other hand, it also announces a birth of a son and an assurance of innumerable descendants.

First, the angel commands her to return to her mistress and submit to her. According to the Ancient Near Eastern slave law the run-away slave should at all costs be brought back to his/her owner. If anyone finds a run-away slave, he is bound to bring him/her back and hand him over to his master. If he fails, he could be charged with a death penalty (Hammurabi Code § 15-19), for this was the only way to protect the slave institution.[202] Therefore, Hagar must go back to her mistress, Sarai, because "Yahweh will not condone the breach of legal regulations."[203] Furthermore, the angel commands Hagar to submit (עָנָה) herself under her mistress' hands, which means "the angel is sending Hagar back to a certain death."[204] Trible describes the angel's command as a "divine word of terror to an abused, yet courageous, woman."[205] But J. Gerald Janzen interprets this positively that by her act of submission to Sarai, Hagar will "become subject to Sarai without losing her own subjectivity." [206]

Second, the angel assures Hagar that she would be the mother of innumerable descendants. Interestingly, Hagar is the only matriarch in the Bible to receive such a promise of innumerable descendants. "Just as Abram had been told in chap. 15 that suffering and numerous descendants are interconnected, so too is Hagar here."[207]

Third, the angel announces the birth and the naming of her son - she will bear a son and he will be called *Ishmael*, which means "God hears". The explanation given to the name corresponds to her situation – "because the Lord has given heed to your

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[202] I. Fischer, *Women who wrestled with God: Biblical Stories of Israel's Beginnings,* (Trans. L.M. Maloney; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2005), 16f.
[203] Rad, *Genesis*, 19. However the Hebrew Bible speaks the contrary. For instance Deut 23:16-17 forbids handing over the escaped slaves to the master; on the contrary it instructs the local community to receive and integrate them. The Book of the Covenant (Ex 21:7-11) gives preference to slave women who have had sexual contact with free male persons in the family. Cf. I. Fischer, *Women who wrestled with God*, 17.
[204] Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 452.
[205] Trible, *Text of Terror*, 16.
[206] Toba Spitzer, "Where do you come from, and where are you going? Hagar and Sarah Encounter God," i*The Reconstructionist* 63.1 (1998), 10.
[207] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 10. The difference between the divine promise to Hagar and to Abram is that the promise to Abram has the covenant context, whereas the promise to Hagar lacks the covenantal context. Cf. Tribel, *Text and Terror*, 16.

affliction" (v.11). Though Hagar is not promised relief from oppression, she is reassured that the Lord takes note of her suffering.[208]

Fourth, the angel predicts the future of the child. The description about Ishmael as a "wild donkey" is a metaphor for an individualistic lifestyle unrestrained by social convention (Job 24:5-8; 39:5-8; Jer 2:24; Hos 8:9).[209] The description: "He shall be a wild ass of a man, his hand against every man and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen" (v.12) raises question whether it is a blessing or curse. Because, on the one hand, it speaks of Ishmael as a free man as his mother wanted to be free from Sarai, and, on the other hand, it describes Ishmael as the one against his brother. This would suggest, "Ishmael's love of freedom will bring him into mutual conflict in his dealings with all other men."[210] Gunkel comments, "Ishmael is a worthy son of his bold and defiant mother, who also refused to bend her neck under the yoke."[211] Trible interprets that Ishmael would live in continuous strife with his brothers,[212] thus, indicating a future conflict between the descendants of Sarai and the descendants of her maidservant, Hagar.

The message of the angel could be thus summarised as "desolation and consolation," for it is a mixture of promise of freedom through means of strife. Like the mother the son is destined to live "on the boundary of affliction and release, a boundary decreed by God."[213] In other words, in Ishmael, Hagar's story would continue.[214]

The encounter between the deity and Hagar comes to its climax when Hagar recognizes the divine presence and names the deity, "Thou art a God of seeing" (רֳאִי אֵל). Hagar's reaction to the divine encounter concentrates, in fact, more on her experience than the message delivered to her. She does not speak about her continuing affliction, on the promise, the future of her son, nor does she speak of the God who hears; rather she names the God who sees. "She is fascinated more by the origin of the

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[208] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 10.
[209] Waltke, *Genesis*, 255.
[210] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 11.
[211] Herman Gunkel, "The two Accounts of Hagar (Gen 16, 21:8-21)," *Specimen of a Historico-Theological Interpretation of Genesis. University of Berlin, Monist* (April, 1900), 329.
[212] Trible, "Ominous Beginning for a Promise of Blessing," 41.
[213] Trible, "Ominous Beginning for a Promise of Blessing," 41.
[214] Trible, *Text of Terror*, 17.

revelation than by the content of the revelation."[215] Astonishingly this is the only instance in the Bible where a human being confers a name on God. "Uniting the God who sees and the God who is seen, Hagar's insights move from life under affliction to life after theophany. Fittingly, they conclude the divine-human encounter in the wilderness."[216]

It is also an expression of her strong conviction that her sufferings under her mistress do not go unnoticed, for someone, not less than God Himself, takes note of her affliction. She not only names the deity but also interprets her experience, "have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?" (v.13b). There are different interpretations of v.13b. According to Booij the meaning of Hagar's words in v.13b is: "Would I have gone here indeed searching for him that watches me?" or "Would I have gone here indeed looking for him that looks after me?"[217] Though there are difficulties and differences of view about interpreting v.13b, one thing is clear that Hagar is by now convinced that God takes notice of her afflictions, even if she has to suffer under the hand of her mistress.

1.4.1.3. The Birth of Ishmael (vv.15-16):

Hagar, finally, returns and submits herself to her mistress as the angel of the Lord commanded her. The last scene of the episode reports the fulfilment of the angel's announcement. As the angel foretold, Hagar gives birth to a boy child, and Abram names the child Ishmael. By naming the child, Abram legally accepts Ishmael as his son. The fact that "Ishmael was born in Abram's house and named by Abram himself indicates that he is to be fully reckoned as Abram's son."[218] That means Ishmael, as the son of Abram, has the full right to his inheritance. Moreover, in this short concluding section the name of Abram appears four times and Hagar's name appears three times,

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[215] Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 455. Many scholars are of the view that the aetiologies of divine name (*El Roi*) and place (*Beer-lahai-roi*) do not follow from the annunciation of Ishmael's birth (vv. 11-12). The annunciation (vv. 11-12) focuses on Ishmael, his relationship with God, his character, and his future fate, while aetiologies (vv. 13-14) focuses on Hagar and her encounter with God. Cf. Thomas Dozeman, *The Wilderness and Salvation History in the Hagar Story*," *JBL* 117 (1998), 26. R. W. Neff proves that the annunciation is a later addition to the present narrative. Cf. R. W. Neff, "The Annunciation in the Birth Narrative of Ishmael," *BR* (1972), 51-60.
[216] Trible, "Ominous Beginning for a Promise of Blessing," 41.
[217] T. Booij, "Hagar's Words in Genesis XVI 13B," *VT* 30 (1980), 7.
[218] Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 258.

but Sarai's name is nowhere in the picture. So Trible comments, "the ending undercuts Sarai. The one who spoke of building up herself, not Abram, through Hagar's child receives no mention at all. Neither Hagar nor Sarai but Abram has a son whom he names Ishmael."[219] The expression, "Hagar bore Abram a son," and not to Sarai also indicates that the hostility between Hagar and Sarai continues, thus, linking the future conflict in the family on the issue of inheritance between Isaac and Ishmael in Gen 21:8-21.

1.4.2. Hagar and Ishmael Are Casted Out from Abraham's House (21:8-21):

In Gen 16 Sarai gives Hagar to Abram to be his wife in order to beget a son through her. Hagar does, indeed, bear a son, Ishmael, but not for Sarai but for Abram; and Ishmael remains as the son of Abram, and never of Sarai. So, Sarai's dream to "build up" her house is shattered. However, according to the promise of God, Sarah conceives and bears miraculously a son in her advanced age. With the birth of Isaac, Sarah's desire to build up her house becomes reality. But with the birth of Isaac a new issue of contention emerges in Abraham's family, i.e. the issue of inheritance. Since Abraham now has two sons – the younger son from his first wife, Sarah, and the elder son from the Egyptian maidservant, Hagar. Now, therefore, the contention is, who will become the heir to Abraham? Is it Abraham's first son, Ishmael, the son born to the maidservant, or Abraham's second son, Isaac, the son born to his legitimate wife, Sarah? With the issue of the inheritance the conflict between Sarah and Hagar continues and, finally, results with the expulsion of Hagar with her son, Ishmael, from the house of Abraham.

1.4.2.1. The Expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael (vv. 9-14):

The issue about the inheritance comes to light on the day of Isaac's weaning ceremony, when Sarah sees (רָאָה) the son of Hagar mocking (מְצַחֵק) her son, Isaac (v.9). Sarah's seeing the scene of Ishmael's mocking her son, reminds the readers of Gen 16:4b, when Hagar despised her mistress ("When she [Hagar] saw [רָאָה] that she had conceived, she looked with contempt [קָלַל] on her mistress"). Earlier Hagar had

[219] Trible, *Text of Terror*, 19.

despised Sarah, and now Hagar's son Ishmael mocks her son, Isaac. There are differences of interpretation about the act of Ishmael.[220] Hamilton interprets that Sarah observes that Ishmael is *Isaac-ing* (צָחַק the original Hebrew word for מְצַחֵק, resembling Isaac's name) with Isaac, and Sarah understands it as "Ishmael doing something to make himself like Isaac, setting his sights on a familial position equal to that of Isaac."[221] Such a thing could not be acceptable to Sarah, for in the act of Ishmael she sees the future threat to her son. In the words of Gunkel "Sara sieht in die Zukunft."[222] Coats concludes, "The threat of Ishmael throughout the narrative is that he would replace Sarah's son … as the heir of Abraham. Now the wordplay so crucial for the whole story sets out the weight of the conflict. It does not imply that Ishmael has done something amiss with Isaac. It suggests, on the contrary, that Sarah saw Ishmael *mesaheq*, playing the role of Isaac. Indeed, the act implies some disdain on Ishmael's part perhaps equivalent to the curse of Hagar in 16:4."[223]

Therefore, Sarah says to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac" (v.10). Sarah foresees that the presence of the son of the Egyptian slave woman threatens the future of her son, Isaac, therefore, taking the mere playing/laughing of Ishmael with Isaac as an excuse, Sarah bursts out in anger, and demands Abraham to "cast out" (גָּרֵשׁ) Hagar with her son from the house. The word גָּרֵשׁ was earlier used in 3:24 and in 4:14 to describe the banishment of Adam and Cain. The verb also conveys the idea of dismissing one from the authority or position (1 Kings 2:27). In a legal sense this term is also used for divorce (Lev 21:7, 14; 22:13; Num 30:10; Ez 44:22).[224] Thus, v.10 suggests, on the one

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[220] The Hebrew word מְצַחֵק "playing" has been interpreted differently. In Gal 4:29 Paul interprets this event as Ishmael persecuting (*edioken*) Isaac, which could be "verbal or physical/sexual. But most scholars are of the view that Ishmael was only playing with Isaac and they do not attribute any bad motive to Ishmael's action. Speiser comments: "There is nothing in the text to suggest that he was abusing him, the motive deduced by many troubled readings in their effort to account for Sarah's anger." Cf. Speiser, *Genesis*, 155. According to the books of Jubilees (17:4) "Sarah saw Ishmael playing and dancing, and Abraham rejoicing with great joy, and she became jealous of Ishmael." Cf. Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 79.

[221] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 79.

[222] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 414.

[223] Wenham, *Genesis 18-50*, 82.

[224] The verb גָּרֵשׁ, is also used in Exodus for the expulsion of the Hebrews by Pharaoh (Ex 6:1; 10:11; 11:1; 12:39). Cf. Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 79f.

hand, Sarah's fear, and, on the other hand, it suggests her determination to deny any share to Ishmael in the family inheritance.

Therefore she demands, "Cast out this slave woman with her son." The term used for Hagar here is אָמָה (slave woman), which is different to the one conferred to her in Gen 16 (שִׁפְחָה). "A change in nouns connotes a change in status."[225] Hagar is no more the שִׁפְחָה (maid) of Sarah, but the אָמָה of Abraham, i.e. she is now legally the second wife to Abraham. Since Hagar is Abraham's second wife, her son has every right to have a share in his father's inheritance. According to the Code of Hammurabi § 170 the son from the slave woman has a legal claim on his father's property, even though the son of the first wife supersedes the son from the second wife.[226] According to Nuzi adoption law and the Code of Hammurabi the natural son receives two third of the inheritance from his father, and the son born from the slave woman, irrespective of their chronological order, will obtain one third of the property.[227] However, Sarah is not satisfied with the preferred status of her son. She is determined that Ishmael will have no share in the inheritance at all. Therefore, she wants that Abraham divorces Hagar and her son, so that Isaac can become the sole heir to Abraham, for if Abraham denounces Hagar and her son, then they will be free from their slave status, but will have no claim to the father's property.[228] So Sarah wants Abraham to divorce them when he is alive, that after his death Isaac becomes the sole heir to Abraham. Hence, the real intention of Sarah for demanding Abraham to cast out Hagar with her son is to divorce Hagar, and

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[225] Trible, *Text of Terror*, 21.

[226] Frymer-Kensky, "Patriarchal Family Relationships and Near Eastern Law," 212.

[227] A Nuzi adoption tablet states (HSS V 7): "If a son of my own is born to me, he shall be the oldest, receiving two inheritance shares." Similarly according to the Code of Hammurabi § 170: "If a man's wife bore him children: if the father during his lifetime has ever said 'my children' to the children that the slave bore him, thus having counted them with the children of the first wife (then), after the father has gone to his fate the children of the slave shall share equally in the goods of the paternal estate, with the first-born, the son of the prime wife, receiving a preferential share." Cf. Frymer-Kensky, "Patriarchal Family Relationships and Near Eastern Law," 213.

[228] According to the Code of Hammurabi § 171: "If the father during his lifetime has never said 'my children' to the children that the slave bore him; after the father has gone to his fate the children of the slave may not share in the goods of the paternal estate along with the children of the prime wife. Freedom for the slave and her children shall be effected, with the children of the prime wife having no claim against the children of the slave for service." Cf. Frymer-Kensky, "Patriarchal Family Relationships and Near Eastern Law," 213.

thereby strip off her son's right so that Isaac could be the sole heir for the inheritance.[229] So, Sarah is purely motivated by her concern for her son's future.[230] In short, Sarah's demand to Abraham is "to disinherit Ishmael so that he will never share in the inheritance."[231]

At this demand Abraham is very much upset because Sarah called Ishmael as the "son of this slave woman," because Ishmael is not only the son of Hagar but he is also his own son. The narrator makes this evident when he uses the phrase "his son" (v.11). Therefore, Abraham is very much distressed at Sarah's attitude towards Ishmael and with her demand. Wenham comments, "This brief sentence gives a glimpse of Abraham's strong paternal affection and particularly his deep love for Ishmael." [232] Westermann comments, "Die Forderung ist grausam für alle Betroffenen, den Vater, die Mutter und das Kind. Sie führt zu einem schweren Konflikt; eine erträgliche Lösung ist nicht in Sicht."[233]

Abraham's reaction to Sarah's cruel demand not only suggests his affection for Ishmael, his son, but also his affection for Hagar. Therefore, he is not ready to yield to her demand. But God intervenes and tells Abraham to listen to Sarah. God intervenes because it is the divine plan that Isaac should be the sole heir to the covenant (Gen 17).[234] Hamilton comments, "In one point Sarah is correct, but for the wrong reason: Ishmael will not share the inheritance with Isaac, but that is not because of Sarah's pettiness, or jealousy, or skulduggery. It is because God has decreed that Abraham's line of promise will be continued through Isaac. Here is an instance of God using the wrath of a human being to accomplish his purposes."[235]

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[229] The verb גָּרַשׁ is also used for the driving out of the indigenous nations of Canaan. So the implication is that Sarah wants Abraham to banish Ishmael from having a part in the possession of the Promised Land. Cf. Okoye, "Sarah and Hagar: Genesis 16 and 21," 171.
[230] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 415.
[231] Waltke, *Genesis*, 294.
[232] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 83.
[233] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 415.
[234] Schneider is of the view that Abraham is not fully convinced of God's choice of Isaac. Therefore, it was necessary that God intervenes and reminds Abraham who would be his heir. Cf. Terence E. Fretheim, *Abraham: Trials of Family and Faith* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 100. Breuggemann also shares somewhat similar view. He says, "Ishmael is a temptation for Abraham to trust in the fruit of his own work rather than in the promise (cf. 17:18). Thus, Ishmael is a testing which complicates the narrative. Paul has transformed the Hagar-Ishmael into a sign of the law that is excessively imaginative (Gal 4). Yet Paul has seen correctly that even in the Ishmael story itself, Hagar and Ishmael function as an alternative to the promise." Cf. Breuggermann, *Genesis*, 152.
[235] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 81.

It is surprising that even God refers Ishmael as נַּעַר (lad), and refers Hagar as אֲמָתְךָ ("your slave woman"), a description that resembles Sarah's reference to Hagar (Gen 21:10). So Tribel comments, "If Abraham neglected Hagar, God belittles her."[236] However, through His intervention God reminds Abraham that it is through Isaac that his descendants shall be named for him.[237] But with regards to Ishmael God also promises Abraham that He will make Ishmael into a nation, because of Ishmael's relation to Abraham (v.13). Thus, Ishmael loses the promise of the covenant, but gains a promise of a great nation. At this divine assurance Abraham sends away Hagar and Ishmael from his household. But the shocking thing about Abraham is the mere provision of bread and a skin of water that he gives to Hagar as he sends off the mother and the boy. Is it because Ishmael has no share from the inheritance or because Abraham acts as demanded by Sarah, is not clear. However, Abraham does not "cast out" (גָּרַשׁ) Hagar and Ishmael, as Sarah demanded, but he sends them out (שָׁלַח).

Thus, Hagar leaves the house of Abraham as a poor woman of non-stature. She is the first slave in the Scripture to be freed, and the first woman to be divorced as wife.[238] The provision of mere bread and a skin of water suggests "a precarious future for mother and child."[239] The text states, "She wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba." This statement suggests her uncertainty, lack of direction and even destination. In the earlier episode Hagar knew where she was heading to (Gen 16:7), but now she is not certain about her future. Her wandering in the wilderness connotes her pain of displacement and disorientation. Tribel comments, "Departing her land of bondage, Hagar knows no exodus but exile."[240]

1.4.3. Hagar's Second Encounter with the Deity in the Wilderness (vv.14b-19):

Hagar's suffering continues. Earlier in Gen 16:7 the angel of the Lord found her at the spring of water, but now she finds no water; and even the water she had is gone. She has no more water to quench the thirst of her child, therefore, she puts her child under a

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[236] Tribel, Text of Terror, 22.
[237] Fretheim, *Abraham*, 100.
[238] Trieble, "Ominous Beginnings of a Promise of Blessin," 46.
[239] Trieble, "Ominous Beginnings of a Promise of Blessin," 46.
[240] Tribel, *Text of Terror*, 23.

shrub, and she sits about a bowshot away, for she can not see the child dying (vv.15-16). The narrator uses for Ishmael the term "the child" (הַיֶּלֶד) here, though he is around 17 years old. The reason for the use of the term "the child" is to emphasise the bond between the son and the mother. It is strange that the verb שָׁלַך ("to throw" or "to cast") is used for Hagar's act of placing the child under the shade of the shrub. The verb שָׁלַך is usually used for casting dead bodies (Josh 8:29). Comparing this verse with Jer 38:6, 9, M. Cogan interprets Hagar's action as abandoning the child to die. This suggests Hagar's despair at the anticipation of her son's imminent death.[241] "The mother is powerless to stop the march of death,"[242] therefore, she sits at a distance and sobs. However, she does not cry unto God or anyone for help, she simply sobs at the fate of her son and her own fate – "A Madonna alone with her dying child, Hagar weeps."[243]

Though the child is dying, the narrative is focused on the mother – her action, her thoughts, her words, and her emotions. The mother cries, but God hears the cry of the boy, and the angel of God says to Hagar, "Fear not; for God has heard the voice of the lad" (v.17). With the divine intervention, the focus is shifted from the mother to the boy. A change in vocabulary from 'the child' (הַיֶּלֶד) to 'the lad" (הַנַּעַר) also indicates this transition. The fact, that God hears the lad's crying rather than Hagar's sobbing highlights Ishmael's central role in the narrative.[244] Then the divine voice from heaven announces to Hagar a promise of a great nation for her son, a promise, which is already assured to Abraham about Ishmael (v.13). Sarah Schetman writes, "On the verge of perishing in the desert, this revelation of her son's fate will strengthen her to preserve him. The fact that the same promise, with strikingly similar phrasing, is delivered first to Abraham indicates that it belongs to the promise to the patriarchs."[245]

The message from above is one of consolation for Hagar. The God, who spoke to her to strengthen her, now opens her eyes, and she spots a well of water, and she immediately fills the skin, and gives the lad a drink and saves his life. The concluding

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[241] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 85.
[242] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 83.
[243] Phyllis Trible, "The Other Woman: A Literary and Theological Study of the Hagar Narratives," *Understanding the Word: Essays in Honour of Bernhard W. Anderson* (ed. James T. Butler, Edgar W. Conrad and Ben C. Ollenburger, JSOT; Sheffield: The University of Sheffield, 1985), 235.
[244] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 85.
[245] Sarah Schetman, *Women in the Pentateuch: A Faminist and Source-critical Analysis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 60.

verses of the episode (vv. 20-21) summarise the life-style of Ishmael: he prospers, and wilderness becomes his home, and wilderness provides him work. Thus, God's promise concerning Ishmael (Gen 16:10; 17:20; 21:13, 18) gradually becomes reality, and the divine promise about Ishmael finds its fulfilment later in Gen 25:12-18, as the narrator reports the twelve descendants of Ishmael. These twelve descendants of Ishmael parallel the twelve tribes of Israel.

1.4.4. Parallels to Hagar-Ishmael's Stories in Exodus:

The account of Hagar in Genesis speaks not only about Hagar and her fate, but it also tells about Ishmael, her son, and his descendants, the Ishmaelites. In both the episodes (Gen 16 and 21:8-22) it is evident that the focus shifts from the main character, Hagar, to her son, Ishmael. Gen 16 begins with the plights of Hagar and moves to the annunciation of Ishmael's birth, prediction about his future, and finally the episode concludes with the report on the birth of Ishmael. Similarly, Gen 21:8-21 begins with the casting out of Hagar and her son from Abraham's house, and the focus shifts slowly from Hagar to Ishmael – the threat to Ishmael's life, divine rescue of the boy, and finally the episode concludes with a description of Ishmael's life-style and the divine protection of the boy. Though Hagar is present throughout the episodes, the focus shifts from the mother to the son. In fact, in the mother's story the story of the son is narrated.[246] Thus, the story about Hagar is also the story about Ishmael – a story about the origin and the future of Ishmael and the Ishmaelites, his descendants.

A comparison of the Hagar-Ishmael story in Gen 16 and 21:8-22 with the story of Moses and Israel in the book of Exodus would show that there are a number of resemblances between both the narratives with regards to the use of key terminologies, theme, plots, and the experiences of the main characters. What happens to Hagar and to her son, Ishmael, in the house of Abraham and in the wilderness seems to happen also to Moses and the Israelites in Egypt and on their way through the wilderness. Therefore, Trible is of the view that Hagar prefigures the experiences of Israel in Exodus, and

[246] The pre-Priestly source focuses on Hagar, while the Priestly source shifts the focus from Hagar to Ishmael. Cf. Dozeman, "The Wilderness and Salvation History," 25.

Sarah foreshadows Egypt's role in the slavery of Israel.[247] Some of the main parallels that the Hagar-Ishmael story has with the stories of Moses and Israel are as follows:[248]

First, some key Hebrew terms, used both in Hagar's story in Genesis and Israel's story in Exodus, are similar. For instance, the author uses the Hebrew word עָנָה ("to oppress") to describe Sarah's oppression against Hagar (Gen 16:6). The same term, עָנָה, is used in Exodus to describe Pharaoh's oppression against Israel (Ex 1:11, 12). Another key Hebrew term is גָּרַשׁ ("to cast out" or "to drive out"). Sarah demands Abraham to "cast out" (גָּרַשׁ) Hagar and Ishmael from the family (Gen 21:10). Similarly, in Exodus the Israelites are "driven out" of Egypt by Pharaoh (Ex 12:39). The similar Hebrew word גָּרַשׁ is used in both the books for the casting out or the driving out of the opponents. Another important Hebrew term found in both the stories is בָּרַח (flee). The same term is used to narrate Hagar's flight from Sarai (Gen 16:6) and Israel's flight from Egypt (Ex 14:5). All these three Hebrew terms are very important terms used to convey the important incidents in the life of Hagar, and to convey the important events in Israel's history. The use of these similar key Hebrew terms, thus, shows a connection between both the stories.

Second, there is a connection between both the stories with regards to their theme – the theme on slavery and liberation. Hagar and Ishmael are liberated from the oppression of Sarah when they were cast out from the house of their slavery. Similarly, the Exodus story is the story about Israel's liberation from the slavery of the Pharaoh and the Egyptians. However, there is a contrast between both the stories – in Hagar's case it is Sarai, a Hebrew woman that oppresses an Egyptian daughter, but in the case of Israel it is Egypt/the Pharaoh that oppresses the children of the Hebrews.

Third, both Hagar and her son, Ishmael, and Moses and Israel have wilderness experiences, and they also undergo transformation in the wilderness. Hagar undergoes a process of transformation in the wilderness; in the wilderness Hagar becomes a person/subject from a slave. Similarly, Israel undergoes a transformation in the

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[247] Tribel, *Text and Terror*, 13.

[248] Most of these parallels are the summery taken from the article "The Wilderness and Salvation History in the Hagar Story" by T.B. Dozeman.

wilderness – in the wilderness Israel is being formed into God's people. In both the stories the transformation happens to the concerned parties in the wilderness.

Fourth, and the most obvious parallel is the resemblance of experiences of the main characters - Hagar in Genesis, and Moses in Exodus. Both of them assume two roles in their respective stories, though contrasted with each other – Hagar changes from a maidservant to a surrogate wife to Abraham; similarly, Moses becomes a Hebrew slave from Egyptian prince, but later he becomes the liberator of the Hebrews from their slavery. The change of their roles or status arouses hostility in their counterparts – Sarah is hostile towards Hagar because of her elevated status from maidservant to surrogate wife to Abraham; similarly, the Pharaoh turns hostile towards Moses for his identification with the Hebrew slaves, and for being liberator of the Hebrews. To escape from the oppressors both flee (בָּרַח) into the wilderness (Gen 16:6; Ex 2:15). In the wilderness both encounter Deity (Gen 16:7; Ex 3:2), who commands them to return to their places of oppression. Hagar is commanded to return and submit herself under Sarah's authority, and Moses is commissioned to return to Pharaoh (Gen16:9; Ex 3:10) to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites free. Both receive divine promise (Gen 16:11-12; 21:18 Ex 3:12). At their encounter with the Deity there is also the naming or the revelation of the name of the Deity – Hagar names the Deity *El Roi* (16:13), but to Moses the Lord Himself reveals his name, *YHWH* (Ex 3:13-15). Hagar's second encounter with God is near a bush שִׂיחַ (Gen 21:15); Moses's first encounter with God is near a bush סְנֶה (Ex 3:2). Hagar and Moses go to the wilderness twice, and in both cases on their second journey to the wilderness others accompany them – Ishmael goes with Hagar, and Moses leads Israel. Hagar is driven out or cast out (גָּרַשׁ) with her son (Gen 21:10); similarly, Pharaoh drives out (גָּרַשׁ) Moses with the people of Israel (Ex 10:11; 12:39). In both cases it is God who orchestrates the expulsions (Gen 21:12-13; Ex 11:1), and in both instances expulsion becomes an act of liberation from slavery. Unlike their first flight into wilderness, their second flight/journey into the wilderness becomes threatening – absence of water threatens the life of Hagar's child (Gen 21:15-16), and absence of drinkable water threatens Israel (Ex 15:22-26), and their desperate cry is responded by God and they were provided with water – God hears the cry of the

lad (Gen 21:16-17), and the Lord hears Moses's cry (Ex 15:25a) and provides them with drinkable water.[249]

Fifth, we find some similarity in the itinerary of Israel and the Hagar-Ishmael stories in the wilderness. According to Gen 16:7b Hagar flees and finds herself at a well on the road to Shur. Interestingly, the wilderness of Shur is the first itinerary stop of Israel after the defeat of the Pharaoh and his army at the Red Sea (Ex 15:22). Hagar's aetiology concerning the Beer-lahai-roi in Gen 16:14a are given a new location in Gen 16:14b as taking place between Kadesh and Bered. Kadesh is the location of where Israel spied out the Promised Land (Num 13-14). Thus, Gen 16 provides another point of similarity between Hagar and Israel. Similarly, the mention of Ishmael living in the desert of Paran (Gen 21:21) is a later Priestly addition to the pre-Priestly story of Hagar. Interestingly, the Priestly writers change the location of Kadesh to Paran in the spy story (Num 13:3, 26), just as they had relocated Ishmael's permanent life in the wilderness to Paran in Gen 21:21. These changes are perhaps intentionally done to connect Hagar or Ishmaelite's story with the wilderness itinerary story of Israel.[250]

All these similarities do not seem to be accidental but rather intentional. They are perhaps intended to connect the Hagar-Ishmael story with the Moses-Israel story in Exodus. The Hagar-Ishmael story serves in one sense as a prototype of the Moses-Israel story in Egypt and in the wilderness. The insertion of the information about the annunciation of Ishmael's birth, the prediction about his future and the report of his life in the desert is perhaps intended to show "the interrelationship between Ishmael and Israel"[251] on the basis of their origin and common experiences. Therefore, Terence E. Fretheim writes, "For Israel to tell and retell the stories of Hagar and Ishmael serves to remind the chosen people again and again that Israel's God plays an important role in the life of an 'unchosen' person. Such 'outsiders' have experienced God, even if they have not realized that it was God."[252] Dozeman notes, "When read from the perspective of Israel, Ishmael represents an expansion of election beyond the boundaries of Israel, and as such Ishmael models the proselyte who undergoes circumcision."[253] Therefore, it

[249] Dozeman, "The Wilderness and Salvation History," 25-32.
[250] Dozeman, "The Wilderness and Salvation History," 37f.
[251] Dozeman, "The Wilderness and Salvation History," 42.
[252] Fretheim, *Abraham: Trials of Family and Faith,* 106.
[253] Dozeman, „The Wilderness and Salvation History," 42.

is fitting to conclude that Hagar's episode is about the Ishmael story, which tells how Ishmael is related to Abraham. Ishmael's relation to Abraham and the inclusion of Ishmael's story in the Abraham's cycle might have been intended to tell the Israelite audience that Israelites and Ishmaelites are genealogically related; moreover, their common experience of slavery and liberation, and their common experience in the wilderness connects the Ishmaelite's history with the history of Israel. Therefore Israel needs to keep a friendly and peaceful relation with the Ishmaelites, for they are related to each other on the basis of their origin and experience.

Conclusion:

After a detail study on Abraham's interaction with the patriarchs or the heads of other nations it becomes evident that the episodes on Abraham's interaction with different peoples narrate not only about his interaction or relation with certain individuals, rather they narrate Israel's relation and interaction with her surrounding nations. Abraham as the patriarch of Israel represents the nation Israel; and in the same way the Pharaoh, Lot, Abimelech, Hagar (Ishmael), etc. represent their nations and their people respectively. Therefore, it would be right to conclude that these episodes in the book of Genesis explain not only Abraham's interaction with different people but they also report about Israel's interaction and relationship with other nations such as Egypt, Philistine, Moab, Ammon, Ishmaelites (Median and Arab nations).

While telling Israel's relations with its surrounding nations through the story of her patriarch, these narratives also serve as a guideline for Israel, how she should deal with these nations. These episodes present Abraham as the role model for Israel's interaction with other people and nations. Israel should learn the lesson both from the failures and the successes of her patriarch and matriarch. The highlighting of their failures serves as a warning to Israel that she should not do anything that would cause hostility with other nations, and the highlighting of their successes serves as examples for Israel to encourage and to maintain peaceful relationships with her neighbouring nations. In short, politically the message of these narratives is that Israel keeps good relationship with other nations. As the chosen nation she shares the mission of her patriarch, i.e. to be the channel of divine blessing to the nations, reconciling and uniting the nations under the blessing of the Lord (Gen 12:3).

CHAPTER II

Conflict and Reconciliation in the Jacob Narrative

After Abraham, the most important figure among the patriarchs is Jacob. The Jacob narrative is found in Gen 25-36. Though Isaac is the second patriarch after Abraham, he does not get as much attention in the book of Genesis as Abraham and Jacob do. Isaac's story is, in fact, spread over the life stories of Abraham and Jacob. The Jacob narrative begins with the struggle between Jacob and Esau in their mother's womb itself, and their struggle continues as they grow up, but finally concludes with a dramatic reconciliation between the twin brothers. The Jacob cycle contains stories within the story because between the conflict and reconciliation stories of Jacob and Esau the stories of conflict and reconciliation between Jacob and Laban is inserted, and within Jacob-Laban stories the conflict stories between Rachel and Leah, and the birth stories of the sons of Jacob are inserted. Thus, Jacob's cycle contains stories within a story like wheels within a wheel.

The Jacob narrative explains Jacob succeeding the patriarchy after his father, Isaac. In spite of Isaac's wish to anoint his elder son, Esau, as his successor, Jacob becomes the successor because God has chosen him as the bearer of His covenant. However, when one goes through Jacob's life story it becomes evident that his life-story is not edifying; rather it is full of deceit, treachery and disintegration of families – a story muddled with sin and confusion. This is evident even before his birth because Jacob and his brother Esau struggled for the primacy, even in their mother's womb (Gen.25: 22). It appears, at times, as if God has washed His hands of Jacob; but as the story unfolds, one cannot be more wrong. Shakespeare has a line in *Hamlet*: "There is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will" (*Hamlet Act V*). This line perhaps may be an excellent description for Jacob's life; for the shaping hands of God is, in fact, working in the life of this man, correcting him and moulding him into a person worthy of bearing the divine covenant. Jacob's story is, in fact, a wonderful

illustration of how God deals with His covenant people. The election of the crafty Jacob as the bearer of the divine covenant reveals that the divine election is not on the basis of human worthiness; rather it is purely a divine choice. Moreover, the story conveys that reconciliation is primarily not the work of man but the work of God.[254]

This chapter is divided into two main sections: first, Jacob's interaction with Esau (Gen 25; 27 and 32-33); and second, Jacob's interaction with Laban (Gen 29-31). What is evident all through the narrative is that the main characters do not stand for themselves alone; rather they represent their respective group/nation. Jacob represents Israel, Esau represents Edom and Laban represents Aram. Therefore the narrative is not merely a story about individuals but about Israel's relation with Edom and Aram. The narrative is filled with events of conflicts between the characters, however the silver lining in the narrative is that their conflicts finally conclude in resolution of their conflict or in Reconciliation and peace between the concerned parties with the help of divine intervention. The narrative conveys some relevant instructions for maintaining relationship between individuals, and between nations, i.e., how Israel should relate with Edom and Aram. It encourages the nations to live in harmony with their neighbouring nations because they are related to one another.

2.1. Interaction between Jacob and Esau, and Israel and Edom:

The people of Israel and Edom have a long history of hatred and hostility. David is reported to have slaughtered 12,000 or 18,000 Edomites, and Joab liquidated all the male inhabitants of Edom.[255] In retaliation to Judah, Edom is reported to have supported the Babylonian invasion in Jerusalem, and the destruction of the holy city and the temple. Moreover, with Judah's exile to Babylon, the Edomites migrate to Judah and occupy it. Edom is even reported to have considered herself as the alternative to Israel when Israel is taken in exile. Therefore, the prophetic literatures condemn Edom bitterly (Ps 137; Is 63). Eventually Edom becomes the symbolic name for all the inimical and destructive worldly powers in the Bible. These anti-Edomite texts in the prophetic literatures suggest the depth and the intensity of the hostility between both the nations.

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[254] Sahaya Thatheus Thomas, *Wrestling with God: Jacob's Repentance and Reconciliation* (Diplomarbeit; Wien: Universität Wien, 2013), 1.
[255] Cf. Ps 60:2; 2 Sam 8:13; 1 Chr 18:12, and1 Kgs 11:15-16.

However, the Jacob-Esau tale in Genesis, while narrating the conflict between Jacob and Esau, the patriarchs of Israel and Edom, emphasises the dramatic scene of reconciliation between both the patriarchs. By concluding the Jacob-Esau narrative with the story of reconciliation between the respective patriarchs, the narrator tries to tell the respective nations to renounce the path of dominion and domination, and to adopt and walk on the path of reconciliation and brotherhood.

The Jacob-Esau narrative can be structured under two headings: first, the development of the conflict between Jacob and Esau; second, the process of reconciliation and the reunion of both the brothers.

2.1.1. Development of Conflict between Jacob and Esau (25:19-34; 27):

The Jacob-Esau episode is marked with conflicts between the twin brothers. Their hostility and their ambiguous relationship are predicted even before their birth. The narrator begins the conflict story as he reports the struggle between their foetuses in their mother's womb, and the divine oracle that predicts the children's ambiguous future relationship. The narrator further develops the conflict theme as he reports their birth and their buying and selling of the firstborn birthright. Their conflict reaches its climax when Jacob deceives Esau for the second time as he steals the father's blessing, which Isaac has reserved for his elder son, Esau. Disappointed by the loss of the blessing, Esau loses his composure and begins to weep, imploring his father to bless him as well. Finding himself helpless to revoke the imparted blessing, Isaac finally gives a subordinate blessing to Esau in order to comfort his beloved son. Having been deceived for the second time by Jacob, Esau vows to kill Jacob. To escape from Esau Jacob flees from the Promised Land to the land of the east. The conflict between Jacob and Esau, thus, comes to a point, where Esau seeks to murder his brother.

2.1.1.1 The Birth of Two Nations in the Birth of Two Sons (25:19-27):

The Jacob narrative begins straightforward with the conflict theme as the narrator reports, at the very beginning of the narrative, the struggle between the foetuses in their mother's womb, and the divine oracle that hints the future struggle between the two sons of Isaac. Rebekah, their mother, is barren like many matriarchs in the Bible; so

Isaac prays to God for her. The Hebrew verb used to describe Isaac's praying is עָתַר, the same verb used in Judg 13:8 to describe Manoah's supplication before the Lord to alleviate his wife's barrenness. Pharaoh uses the same term in Exodus to plead Moses to make supplication to the Lord that the Lord may remove plague from Egypt (Ex 8:8). So the term עָתַר is often understood in the Old Testament as human supplication before God to remove a curse or an unpleasant situation.[256] Thus, the term here in Gen 25:21 suggests Isaac's passionate prayer for Rebekah.

Finally, God answers his prayer, and Rebekah conceives. But the foetuses in Rebekah's womb struggle against each other. The Hebrew term used for "struggle" is רֹצֲצוּ֣ בְנָ֑הּ, which is the Hithpalel of the verb רָצַץ, which means "to smash or to crush." The Hithpalel use of the verb means that the children struggle against each other repeatedly. So Coats remarks, the womb of the mother becomes the "first battlefield"[257] for the twins. And these prenatal struggles between the twins set the tone for their future relationship.[258] Their struggle in Rebekah's womb causes her acute pain and deep anxiety, so she inquires an explanation from the Lord. And as a reply Rebekah is given a prophecy about her children in the form of an oracle: *Two nations are within your womb, and two peoples, born of you, shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger*" (v. 23). The oracle stresses basically three points: birth of two nations, one nation stronger than the other, and the elder will serve the younger. Clifford comments, "The stories are not allegories with a one-to-one correspondence of individual and nation. The human actors, however, are ancestors who somehow include and prefigure their descendants."[259] Coats says that the oracle carries the "stamp of strife"[260] between both the nations. The oracle, thus, predicts the origin of two nations and their ambiguous relationship.

Rebekah, finally, gives birth to two sons as it was predicted. And the narrator continues to develop the conflict theme between the twins as he describes their

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[256] Cf. Ex 8:9, 28, 29, 30; 9:28; 10:17, 18; 2 Sam 24:25; 1 Chr 5:20; 2 Chr 33:13; 33:19; Ezra 8:23; Job 22:27; 33:26; Is 19:22.
[257] Jan Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analyis* (Assen: Van Gorcum: 1975), 88.
[258] Terence E. Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis," *NIB* 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 521.
[259] Richard J. Clifford, "Genesis 25:19-34," *Int* 45 (1991), 398.
[260] Coats, *Genesis*, 185.

contrasting physical features, their life style and their parental affection for different sons. The elder son is named Esau. Though etymologically his name has no connection to Edom, he is identified with Edom on the basis of his appearance – he is "red" (אַדְמוֹנִי) and "hairy" (כֻּלּוֹ כְּאַדֶּרֶת שֵׂעָר). The narrator identifies Esau with Edom as he describes him with the term אַדְמוֹנִ ("red"), a term derived from the same root as the name אֱדוֹם (Edom). Similarly, the Hebrew term for "hair," (שֵׂעָר), alludes to Mount Seir (*har seir*), which is characterised by its red Nubian sandstone and thick shrub forest, a region south of the Dead Sea and the east of the Arabah, which was the location of the ancient Edom.[261]

The second son comes into the world, holding the "heel" (עִקְּבֵי) of his brother, so they named him "Jacob" (Gen 25:26). But originally the name "Jacob" was considered to be an abbreviation for עִקְּבֵי-אֵל, "May God protect." Thus, the name "Jacob" was originally "a plea for divine protection of the newly born."[262] However, by using only the abbreviated form of the name, the narrative associates his name with heel to highlight the conflict between both the brothers. "By grasping Esau's heel, Jacob is apparently attempting to pull his brother back and thereby he prevents him from attaining the status of the first-born son, who was entitled to the greatest share of the father's inheritance (Deut 21:15-17)."[263] The narrator continues again to develop the conflict theme as he highlights their contrasting occupation and the parental preferences for different sons. Esau is a "skilful hunter," who spends much of his time in the field, while Jacob is a "quiet man" (תָּם), who prefers to stay in the tent. Isaac loves Esau because he eats from Esau's wild game, whereas Rebekah loves Jacob. Coats comments, "The contrast is already enough to place Jacob and Esau in competition. V. 28 increases the force of the tension by showing parental preferences; indeed, it suggests that the competition involves a point of tension not only between Jacob and Esau, but also between Isaac and Rebekah."[264] Thus, the Jacob-Esau episode is

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[261] Y. Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography* (Transl. A. F. Rainey, Revised and enlarged edition; Philadelphia: Westminister, 1979), 40.
[262] Sarna, *Genesis*, 180.
[263] Martin A. Sweeney, "Puns, Politics, and Perushim in the Jacob Cycle: A Case Study in Teaching the English Hebrew Bible," *Shofar*, 9 (1991), 107.
[264] Coats, *Genesis*, 186.

introduced with the conflict theme between the patriarchs of two nations, Israel and Edom.

2.1.1.2 The Selling of the Birthright (vv. 29-34):

The narrator develops the conflict theme further as he reports the buying and the selling of the birthright between Jacob and Esau. Esau returns after an unsuccessful hunt, famished and empty handed, and he sees Jacob preparing stew. So Esau requests some of the red stuff (דֹּמְהָא) from Jacob, Jacob indeed agrees to share it but with the condition that he exchanges his birthright for the stew. Esau agrees and sells his birth right by swearing it to Jacob just for a pottage of lentils.

This short episode mainly characterizes Jacob and Esau, especially Esau. Coats considers Esau's return home, empty handed without game, as a sly comment on Esau, for in spite of being a skilful hunter he returns home empty handed without any game.[265] His request, "Let me eat (הַלְעִיטֵנִי) of that red pottage," portrays him as an impulsive man, slave to his temporary pleasure. Because the root לָעַט was in the rabbinic period widely used for feeding an animal, particularly, pouring food down a camel's throat.[266] B. Jacob thinks that Esau is presented here as a crude animal.[267] Speiser is of the view that Esau is portrayed here as an "uncouth glutton."[268] Shockingly, Esau easily gives into Jacob's demand, and sells his birthright just for a pottage of lentils. Even more shocking is his remark: "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" Therefore, the New Testament writer criticizes Esau's attitude towards his birthright (Heb 12:15-17). Moreover the scene ends with the remark, "he ate and drank, and rose and went his way," as if he does not value his birthright. Turner concludes, "Esau's agreement to Jacob's demand to sell him his birthright before he can eat the stew reveals a person governed by the needs of the moment rather than long-term considerations. The quick succession of the verbs, 'he ate and drank, and rose and went his way' (25:34), completes the picture of an unsophisticated, unthinking (and

[265] Goats, *Genesis*, 187.
[266] Sarna, *Genesis*, 182.
[267] Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Tora*, 545.
[268] Speiser, *Genesis*, 195.

vulnerable?) oaf."[269] Interestingly, the narrator concludes the scene by making a plain judgement on Esau, "Thus Esau despised his birthright." So from the narrator's perspective, Esau is not worthy of the firstborn birthright. Not because he is simply a victim in the story, rather because he does not love his birthright. He despises his birthright, therefore, he does not deserve the inheritance to the Promised Land.

Though Esau is portrayed negatively, there are some positive signs about Esau in the narrative. Esau does not demand of Jacob, rather he requests from Jacob, and not the whole pottage of lentils but only some of it. Moreover, he uses the polite form of requesting (נָא) unlike Jacob's harsh demand – "First sell me your birthright." Prouser is of the view though Esau's "actions in Genesis 25 may show Esau to be a morally short-sighted spiritual diminutive, his words are eminently polite and – perhaps uncharacteristically – elegant."[270] In contrast to Esau, Jacob not only demands for the birthright, but he also asks him to swear it then and there. This raises suspicion about Jacob if he is consciously and presumptuously cooking lentil at that particular moment, expecting Esau's hunger on returning home, empty handed. So that he can manipulate Esau's impulse and weaknesses. White comments, "The strategy that Jacob has used here upon Esau is a mirror image of the technique by which Esau himself related to his father. Just as Esau gets what he wants from Isaac through the preparation of a desired dish of venison, so now Jacob uses a pot of lentils to gain what he wants from Esau. Unlike Esau, however, for whom such action is a natural part of his character, for Jacob it is a conscious, premeditated plot."[271] Therefore, Jacob's offence is a grave one.

The narrative, thus, portrays both the characters negatively. Walton concludes, though the narrator portrays Esau very negatively, the "passage remains open-ended and refuses any black and white judgements in favour of one or the other of the brothers."[272]

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[269] Turner, *Genesis*, 107.
[270] Joseph H. Prouser, "Seeing Red: On translating Esau's Request for Soup," *CJ* 56 (2004), 14.
[271] White, *Narration and Discourse in the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge: Neukirchener Verlag, 1986), 213.
[272] Kevin Walton, *Thou Traveller Unknown: The Presence and Absence of God in the Jacob Narrative* (PBM; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003), 21.

2.1.1.3 Jacob Denies Esau the Patriarch's Blessing (Gen 27):

The conflict theme in the Jacob-Esau episode reaches its climax when Jacob tricks his father, Isaac, and gets the blessing, which Isaac secured for his favourite son, Esau. Though Esau proves to be unworthy of the blessing as he despised his birthright and sold it to Jacob, and then he went against the family tradition by marrying two Hittite Women, who eventually make the life of Isaac and Rebekah bitter (Gen 26:34-35), Isaac is determined to bless Esau. Parental favouritism plays a major role here when Isaac tells Esau to prepare for him a dish of wild game before he blesses him. Rebekah, who has overheard Isaac's decision, concocts a plan to trick the blind Isaac, and she sends her favourite son, Jacob, disguised as Esau, to obtain the blessing. Jacob executes very shrewdly the plan and receives the blessing by deception. As soon as Jacob is off the stage, Esau enters with the meal in hand, but only to learn that Jacob has stolen the blessing, which his father had secured for him. Consequently, Esau vows to kill Jacob. But coming to know of Esau's murderous intention, Rebekah complains about the Hittite women to Isaac, and convinces him to send Jacob away to Paddan-Aram so that he finds a wife from her people.

All four of the characters are portrayed very negatively in this section of the tale. Isaac is portrayed as going against the divine choice of election. Because, first, he must have heard about the divine oracle that predicted, "The elder shall serve the younger," i.e. God has chosen the younger son as the successor to Isaac. Second, Esau has already manifested his unworthiness when he sold his birthright just for a pottage of lentils (however it is not certain if Isaac is aware of it), and violated the familial tradition by marrying two Hittite women. In spite of knowing all these things, Isaac is determined to bless Esau, only because he enjoys Esau's wild game. Isaac seems to value his appetite more than his family tradition and the divine will. Therefore Wenham remarks, "Isaac and Esau are both alike in putting appetite before principle, self-indulgence before justice, immediate satisfaction before long-term spiritual values."[273] Thus, Isaac stands as one, who is more concerned about his self-gratification than about the family values and the divine will.

[273] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 215.

Rebekah is portrayed as lacking faith, as she does not seem to trust the divine prophecy given to her. In spite of receiving the divine oracle that "the elder shall serve the younger" (25:23) she compels Jacob to acquire the blessing by deception. She also hides the primary reason from Isaac why Jacob should be sent to Haran. Commenting on Rebekah, Wenham writes, "Rebekah, when we first met her in chap. 24, appeared to be the perfect wife for Isaac – beautiful, energetic, and, like Abraham, willing to leave home and family for the land of promise. Her energy complemented her husband's retiring nature. But just as his love of the quiet life led him to neglect his paternal duties, and indifference to ancient propriety, so her dominating nature led her to overstep the bounds of moral behaviour."[274] She hopes to see Jacob after a while, but unfortunately she meets her beloved son never again.

Jacob is portrayed most negatively than any other characters in this episode – he is cunning, deceptive, and blasphemous. True, Jacob objects his mother's scheme in the first instance; however, his objection is not because he is in a moral dilemma; rather he fears the consequences if he is discovered (27:11-12). Wenham remarks, "Earlier he had no compunctions about exploiting Esau's hunger for his own gain. So it seems likely that he did inwardly support his mother's aims here, even though he had doubts about their success."[275] And once Jacob has undertaken the scheme, he executes it very shrewdly as a professional liar. For instance, when Isaac asks him, "How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?" he replies very spontaneously, "Because the Lord your God granted me success." It is surely a blasphemy, for he lies in the name of the Lord. Gunkel says, "Jakob lügt, indem er Gottes Namen gebraucht; das könnte uns beinahe blasphemish klingen."[276] He continues to lie to his blind old father till he obtains the blessing. Commenting on Jacob's conduct Werner Berg remarks, "Jakob redet fromm und handelt gottlos."[277]

Though Isaac has initially doubted the authenticity of the son from his sense of hearing, he is deceived by his sense of touch and smell because Jacob is wearing the garment of Esau, and his hands and his smooth part of neck are covered with the skins of the kids. So taking him to be Esau, Isaac blesses Jacob: *May God give you of the dew*

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[274] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 215.
[275] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 216.
[276] Gunkel, *Genesis*, (transl. D.W. Nowack), 311.
[277] Werner Berg, *Urgeschichte des Glaubens*, 149.

of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. Let people serve you, and nations bow down to you, be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be every one who curses you, and blessed be every one who blesses you" (27:28-29). It is, however, not clear if Isaac imparts the blessing given to Abraham as in Gen 12:1-3 because the words that Isaac uses here does not seem to have the content of the blessing given to Abraham in Gen 12:1-3. Fretheim distinguishes two types of blessing in Genesis: first, the divine blessing or the divine promises to Abraham (land, descendants, nationhood); and second, a general blessing such as fertility i.e. various forms of prosperity and success in life.[278] The blessing in Gen 27:28-29 seems to be the general blessing. However, Isaac's second blessing on Jacob, the blessing that he at Jacob's departure to Haran imparts, is actually the Abrahamic blessing because the second blessing contains the elements of the promises given to Abraham – *God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you that you may become a company of peoples. May he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your descendants with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojourning, which God gave to Abraham* (28:3-4). It is, in fact, this blessing, which will eventually be confirmed by God at Bethel (cf. 28:13-15).[279] So the blessing that Jacob obtains by deception is only an ordinary/general blessing that a father blesses his children; and this ordinary/general blessing, Jacob will return to Esau as a "gift" later (cf. Gen 33). MacKenow writes, "The blessing that Jacob and his mother value so highly and obtain so deviously is irrelevant to Jacob's life, and yet it cost them dearly since they would never see each other again."[280] Fretheim comments, "Even if the deception had not been attempted and Isaac had actually blessed Esau, that act would not have foreclosed what God did in chapter 28."[281] But in spite of Jacob's treachery Isaac blesses Jacob with the Abrahamic blessing later in Gen 28:3-4. Similarly, God blesses Jacob in Gen 28:13-15 in spite of his crookedness and deception. However, Jacob does not escape the consequences of his misdeeds. As the result of his deception

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[278] Terence E. Fretheim, "Which Blessing does Isaac give Jacob?" *Jews, Christians and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures* (ed. A. Ogden Bellis and J.S. Kaminsky; Atlanta, Georgia, USA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 281.
[279] Fretheim, "Which Blessing does Isaac give Jacob?" 281-82.
[280] MacKenow, *Genesis*, 137.
[281] Fretheim, "Which Blessing does Isaac give Jacob?" 290.

he has to flee as fugitive to a foreign land, where he will pay the price for his misdeeds, when his uncle, Laban, deceives him and forces him to serve him for twenty long years.

In contrast to Jacob, Esau is portrayed in this section as a poor guy. The text evokes some sympathy for Esau as he finds himself deceived and disappointed. Isaac's desperate utterance to his beloved son, – "Behold, I have made him your lord, and all his brothers I have given him for servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you my son?" (27:37). These words of Isaac make him all the more disappointed and down-cast. Having been deeply wounded and completely disappointed, Esau breaks down. In spite of being a tough man and a skilful hunter, he begs his father, weeping, "Bless me, even me also, O my father." This scene will surely evoke sympathy for Esau.

Finding himself in a helpless situation to revoke the already imparted blessing on Jacob, and being saddened at the fate of his beloved son, Isaac utters the following words upon Esau to console him, "*Behold, away from the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be, and away from the dew of heaven on high. By your sword you shall live and you shall serve your brother; but when you break loose you shall break his yoke from your neck*" (27:39-40). According to these words Edom shall subsist not from pastoral or agricultural pursuits but from violence and pillage, raiding its neighbours and plundering the caravans that pass through its land.[282] Historically, Edom was, for a long time, a vassal of Israel, but later it eventually freed itself from Israel/Judah's domination. King David made Edom, for the first time, vassals to Israel (2 Sam 8:13-14). Edom resisted Israel during Solomon's reign (1 Kgs 11:14-22), but in the time of Jehoshaphat (873-849 BCE) it was made as a province of Judah (1 Kgs 22:47; 2 Kgs 3:9-12). But Edom broke away from Judah during the reign of the Judean king, Jehoram (849-842 BCE); but following Amaziah's (800-783 BCE) victory at Sela (2 Kgs 14:7) it came again under Judah. But in the reign of Ahaz (735-715 BCE) Edom reasserted itself during the Syro-Ephraimitic war (2 Kgs 16:6) and finally became independent from Judah.[283] Thus, there are historical evidences that Edom was subservient to Judah at different periods of time, but it continued to resist Judah's domination, and finally it got liberated from Judah's subjugation.

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[282] Sarna, *Genesis*, 194.
[283] Sweeney, "Puns, Politics, and Perushim in the Jacob Cycle," 109.

There are differences of opinions among the scholars regarding to Isaac's blessing on Esau, if it is a blessing or a curse. The pre-modern Jewish and Christian interpretative traditions assume it as a blessing on Esau, but a blessing that is inferior in character to the one given to Jacob (27:27-29). However, the modern scholars are divided in their opinion about it – some think it is a curse upon Esau, while others are silent about it, still others agree with the pre-modern Jewish and Christian interpretation.[284] From examining the sibling Blessing in the Ancestral narrative, Anderson proves that Isaac's utterance upon Esau is, indeed, a blessing because the election of the one does not mean the curse of the other.[285] Moreover, the narrative will later unfold that Esau has also become rich as Esau will say to Jacob, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself" (Gen 33:9).

The sympathy for Esau vanishes as one learns of Esau's vow to kill Jacob: "Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, 'The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob'" (27:41). As a skilful hunter and as a man led by his physical impulses, it is difficult for Esau to digest Jacob's deception. So he bounds back from grief to revenge. So the sympathy that the narrative evoked in the reader's mind suddenly vanishes as the reader anxiously waits to see what is going to happen next.

Thus, all the characters in Gen 27 stand accused of some or other offences. The family is divided on the basis of favouritism and selfishness, and one group acts against the interest of the other. Fokkelman writes, "Rebekah and Jacob carry out her plan and win; Isaac and Esau are beaten. But again the winning party is the moral loser. What price is paid here for his guile! The family is torn apart, the latent contrasts come to light completely."[286] To prevent further damage to the family and to prevent a loss of life in the family Jacob must escape; therefore Rebekah intervenes to protect her favourite son from the wrath of Esau. To pave the way for Jacob's flight she complaints

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[284] Those who think that Isaac's utterance on Esau was a curse upon Esau are Gunkel, Blum, von Rad, Dicou, Syren, Turner, Westermann and Zobel; and the scholars who are neutral about Isaac's utterance on Esau are Sarna, Speiser, Wenham and Heard; and the list of those who understand Isaac's words to be a blessing include Alter, Levenson, Spina, Brueggemann, Fretheim and B. Jacob. Cf. Bradford A. Anderson, *Brotherhood and Inheritance: A Canonical Reading of the Esau and Edom Traditions* (New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 57-65.
[285] Anderson, *Brotherhood and Inheritance*, 66-78.
[286] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 100.

to Isaac about the Hittite women, and she convinces him to send Jacob away to find a wife from Rebekah's people. In this way Jacob flees to Paddan-Aram to the house of Laban, the brother of Rebekah.

2.1.1.4 The Causes for the Conflict between Jacob and Esau:

The main cause for the conflict between Jacob and Esau is human disregard for the divine choice. The divine oracle has already made it clear that the younger son will succeed the patriarch; even then Isaac is determined to anoint his favourite son, Esau, as his successor. Isaac is not only impeded from physical vision here, but also from spiritual vision as he decides to bless Esau in spite of Esau's defiance of the family tradition and his unworthiness. Isaac is, in fact, influenced by his favouritism; therefore he is determined to bless Esau. It is often a common experience that favouritism in a family or in a society would divide its members, and would often result in conflict between individuals and groups. Isaac disregards the divine choice because of his favouritism towards Esau; and this brings conflict in the family.

Another cause for the conflict in Isaac's family is the lack of faith in the divine prophecy. Lack of faith is one of the prime ingredients of fear; and when one is overpowered by fear he/she will often start to think and act in panic without reasoning the future consequences of the action. When Rebekah concocts a plan to deceive her man, she not only manifests her lack of faith in the divine word, but she is also anxious for her favourite son; and she goes to the extent of accepting a curse upon herself for the sake of her beloved son, Jacob – "upon me your curse." True, Rebekah is not cursed, but her scheme has deepened the division and the tension in the family, and as the result of it she has to undergo the pain of being separated from her favourite son, never to see him again.

Esau has already disqualified himself by squandering his birthright, and by disregarding the family tradition when he married the Hittite women. In spite of his disqualification he seeks to be the successor of the family. How can the one who does not even respect the family value system be the head of the family? It will be a disaster for the family if such a person becomes the successor. And any move to make such a person the successor of the family will surely cause dissension and rivalry in the family.

If Isaac's desire to bless Esau contradicts divine choice, Jacob's attempts to grab the blessing by hook or by crook manifest his self-centredness, his impatience and his lack of faith. However, Jacob will gradually learn from his experience that blessing is freely given and graciously received. In the course of time Jacob will realise that the blessing that he has received by deception is neither fully effective nor is it the intended Abrahamic blessing.[287] Jacob receives the Abrahamic blessing only when Isaac blesses him at his departure to Haran (28:3-4), and that blessing is later confirmed by God at Bethel (28:13-15). The stolen blessing brings only division and conflict between the brothers. And because of his deception he has to flee to Paddan-Aram, where he suffers deception at the hand of Laban, his uncle. In Paddan-Aram Jacob must serve und Laban Laban for twenty long years.

Thus the main causes for the conflict between Jacob and Esau is the contradiction of human choice with the divine choice, and the lack of faith in the divine prophecy, which consequently led into the acts of favouritism, deception and enmity.

2.1.2 The Reconciliation between Jacob and Esau (Gen 32-33):

Jacob flees from the Land of Promise to the land of the east in order to save his life from Esau's murderous wrath. On his way he spends the a night in Bethel where he encounters God in a dream and receives the divine promise – I am the God of your fathers, I am with you, I will protect you, I will bring you back to this land and give it to you and to your descendants, and I will not leave you until I have fulfilled my promise (Gen 28:13-15). This divine promise is, in fact, the central point that sets the themes of the following chapters. Holding on to the divine promise Jacob comes to Paddan-Aram, where Jacob meets his match, Laban, his uncle, who deceives and makes him work for him for twenty long years. These twenty long years are not only a period of penance, but also a period of transformation for Jacob, as well as a gradual fulfilment of the divine promise. Kinder describes, "In Laban Jacob met his match and his means of discipline. Twenty years (Gen 31:41) of drudgery and friction were to weather his

[287] Concerning the blessing received by deception Frank Crüsemann says that the blessing received by deception was effective only with regards to wealth and fertility of the land but not with regards to his lordship over Esau, because later, on his return to the Promised Land, Jacob would address Esau as *lord* and acknowledge himself as *servant* (cf. Gen 32-33). Cf. Frank Crüssemann, "Dominion, Guilt, and Reconciliation: The Contribution of the Jacob Narrative in Genesis to Political Ethics," *Semeia,* 66 (1994), 75.

character."[288] After twenty years of servitude Jacob sets out for his homeland in obedience to the divine command (Gen 31:3). But returning to his homeland means confronting Esau, who had vowed to kill him. But now Jacob does not know if Esau has forgiven him and forgotten Jacob's deceptions. Genesis 32-33 reports Jacob's return, and the resolution of the conflict and the reconciliation between Jacob and Esau. The narrative is filled with tensions such as uncertainty about the motives of the characters, literary sophistication and wordplays. The episode can be summarised as "the fear of meeting Esau, the need of meeting God and the result of meeting God."[289]

2.1.2.1 Jacob's Fear and his Preparation to Meet Esau (3-21 [4-22][290]):

Jacob flees from Canaan in order to escape from Esau, and now, after twenty long years, he returns. But he is not certain if Esau has forgiven him. However, being encouraged by the angelic presence at Mahanaim, he prepares to meet Esau. Though the purpose of the angelic encounter is not very clear, it hints a deeper theological dimension of reconciliation i.e. God's assistance and presence in the human reconciliation process. Encouraged by the divine presence, Jacob prepares meticulously to meet Esau. His preparation has three stages: first, he sends messengers to Esau to tell him about his returning; second, he prays to God for deliverance; and third, he sends gift to appease Esau.

a) The First Phase of Preparation: Sending Messengers vv. 3-8 [4-9]:

After twenty years Jacob returns home; but he does not know if Esau has forgiven him. The ambiguity about Esau's disposition towards him, and the thought about his own deceptions haunt him. Von Rad says, "Jacob clearly feels that the matter has not improved at all during his twenty years absence."[291] Therefore, to find out Esau's state of mind Jacob sends messengers to Esau. The description about the destination of the messengers, as "to Esau his brother in the land of Se´ir, the country of Edom," reminds

[288] Kinder, *Genesis*, 159.
[289] Thoms, *Wrestling with God*, 1f.
[290] The verse ordering in the Hebrew and English editions of Gen 32 are slightly different. The present work uses the ordering according to the English version of the RSV Bible.
[291] Rad, *Genesis*, 317.

the reader about the "tension between the brothers – birth, birth right, and blessing."[292] Moreover, v. 3 implies that Esau had already moved out of the Promised Land and settled in Edom. Calvin, therefore, concludes that by settling down at Mount Seir, Esau had abandoned the land of promise. That would imply that the land now remains open to Jacob and to his descendants for possession.[293] Referring to the main theme of Gen 32-33 Kinder says, "Geographically, the call to Beth-el would take him nowhere near Esau, ensconced in the far south at Mount Seir; spiritually, he could reach Beth-el no other way. God has promised him the land (28:13, 14), and its borders must march one day with Esau's; besides, to meet God he must 'first be reconciled' with his brother."[294]

The method that Jacob adopts to contact Esau resembles God's way of contacting Jacob (cf. vv. 1-2) – as God sent his angels (מַלְאָכִים) to Jacob before His wrestling with Jacob, so also Jacob sends now his messengers (מַלְאָכִים) to Esau before his encounter with him. The content of the message is very brief; but its purpose is to "find favour" in Esau's sight,[295] "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: thus says your servant Jacob, 'I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed until now; and I have oxen, asses, flocks, menservants, and maidservants; and I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favour in your sight'" (vv. 4-5). Here Jacob identifies himself as Esau's *servant* (עֶבֶד), and addresses Esau as his *lord* (אָדוֹן). By acknowledging himself as servant and Esau as lord he tries to tell Esau that he does not consider himself superior to Esau. The additional information about his wealth within the message itself is meant to tell Esau that he does not want to make claim over the family inheritance. He concludes his message, finally, with the following words – "that I may find favour in your sight," which is the central message and purpose of sending messengers to Esau because it is "the only possible thing left to restore the relationship"[296] By using the expression "that

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[292] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 320.
[293] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses called Genesis*, vol. 2. (transl. John King; Edinburg: Calvin Translation Society, 1850), 186.
[294] Kinder, *Genesis*, 167.
[295] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 618.
[296] J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis:Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Assen:Van Corcum, 1975), 201.

I may find favour in your sight" (לִמְצֹא־חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ) Jacob is appealing to Esau for his generosity and good will, so that the rift between them might be healed.[297]

Jacob's flight to Paddan-Aram was only a temporary solution to their conflict, but the circumstances now demand an adequate solution; therefore, as the first step for the solution Jacob surrenders his lordship by acknowledging himself as *thy servant*, and Esau as *my lord*. However, the deceit itself cannot be retrieved just by the acknowledgement therefore he requests the favour (חֵן) from the offended. So the message that Jacob sends through his emissary is one of such a request, asking Esau indirectly for his favour.

The tension intensifies as the messengers return with no word from Esau, except just a report that Esau is coming with four hundred men to meet him. Wenham says, "The messengers' return is eerie, for they bring no reply from esau but simply reply that he is on his way with four hundred men."[298] Abraham assembled 318 men for a rescue mission to chase down the kings of the East (Gen 14:14). David's army consisted of only four to six hundred confederates (1 Sam. 22:2; 25:13; 27:2; 30:9). Therefore, Jacob is all the more terrified. Kinder comments, "Nothing could be more ominous than Esau's silence and his rapid approach."[299] But the question is if Esau's real intension is to attack Jacob, why did he leave his messengers unharmed? He could have killed them first, and made a surprising attack on Jacob, which would make Jacob even more vulnerable.[300] Fokkelman thinks since Esau is a skilful hunter he might be creating "a cat-and-mouse-situation via the messengers."[301] Therefore Jacob is horrified for he anticipates an ethnic cleansing from Esau. Jacob's inner fear is emphasised with the sequences of verbs: "Jacob was greatly afraid … distressed … divided" (v.7). In panic Jacob divides his crew into two camps, thinking if one camp is attacked at least he could save another camp. It is, of course, an "emergency dressing" and a "poor stratagem"[302] that one group could be rescued while other abandoned to be massacred. Commenting on this Hamilton writes, "In splitting his family into two camps Jacob creates cleavage

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[297] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 321; Mathew, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, 549.
[298] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 290.
[299] Kinder, *Genesis*, 168.
[300] Waltke *Genesis*, 442.
[301] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 201.
[302] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 201.

among his own for the second time. For Jacob's family has already been divided into two camps: one represented by Esau and Isaac, and the other by Lea and Rachel."[303]

Esau's silence keeps Jacob in the dark about his intention. By not revealing Esau's intention the narrator tries to intensify the suspense of the story in order to evoke the curiosity of the readers and to highlight the most important event that is going to take place in Jacob's life.

b) The Second Phase of Preparation: The Prayer of Jacob vv.9-12 [10-13]:

Terrified by the report on the approaching of Esau with four hundred men, Jacob finds himself in an extremely vulnerable situation. Instantly he realises that the idea of dividing his family and belongings in two camps is not a good idea. But finding no other way he turns to God, whose constant protection he has been experiencing since Bethel experience. Jacob's turning to God is an important moment in his life because up to now it was God who had been taking the initiative to contact Jacob; but here, for the first time, Jacob takes the initiative to contact God. For this reason and for its theological significance these four verses are the most important in his preparation to meet Esau.[304] Westermann regards this moment as the climax of Genesis 31-33.[305] From the Yahwistic perspective this move of Jacob is a sign of transformation in Jacob.[306] His prayer is essentially a prayer for deliverance. Coats sub-divides Jacob's prayer into the following four components: 1) Invocation; 2) Self-abasement; 3) Petition; and 4) Reason.[307]

First, Jacob begins his prayer by invoking the God of his fathers. His prayer is deeply rooted on the foundation of Yahweh's covenant, command and promise.[308] By addressing God as the God of his fathers he expresses the historical and covenantal relationship that he has with God by virtue of his fathers;[309] and because of this

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[303] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 322.
[304] Josef Schreiner, "Das Gebet Jakobs (Gen 32, 10-13)," *Die Väter Israels* (ed. Manfred Görg; Stuttgart: Kath. Bibelwerk, 1989), 287f; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 620.
[305] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 290.
[306] Rad, *Genesis*, 318. Jacob's prayer is a later development of Yahwist's story. Westermann thinks that it is late insertion into the story and the original text of the prayer is v. 11 [12] only; and verses vv. 9-10, 12 [10-11, 13] are expansion. Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 12-50*, 619.
[307] Coats, *Genesis*, 224.
[308] Kidner, *Genesis*, 168.
[309] Kenneth Mathew A, *Genesis 11:27-50:26* (Nasville: Broadmann & Holmann, 2005), 551.

covenantal relationship he believes that he deserves God's protection.[310] He also reminds God that the present crisis is because of his obedience to the divine command – "Return to the Land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you" (31:3). Therefore, it is Yahweh's duty to bring him and his family safely into the Promised Land. And finally, he reminds God of His promise that he received at Bethel according to which God would protect and bring him safe into his homeland (28:15; 31:3).[311]

Second, Jacob acknowledges his unworthiness as against the steadfast love and faithfulness of God. Jacob acknowledges himself as קָטַן (small/insignificant) as against the "kindness" (חֶסֶד) and the "faithfulness" (אֱמֶת) of God.[312] Saul, David and Solomon expressed the same sentiment of unworthiness at their selection as kings by God.[313] This is also a self-description of Israel as the chosen nation (cf. Amos. 7:2, 5).[314] By admitting himself before God as "thy servant," he submits himself before God as Abraham (Gen. 18:3, 5), Moses (Ex. 4:10) and David (2 Sam. 7:19, 25). Thus, the author presents Jacob as a model for Israel, as the servant of Yahweh.[315] When Jacob says, "I am not worthy of all the steadfast love and faithfulness which thou hast shown," he acknowledges that he could have accomplished nothing if God was not by his side. Thus, his statement expresses not only his total acknowledgement of God's goodness to him, but also his sincere humility.

Third, Jacob makes a petition for the divine intervention to deliver him. The Hebrew verb used for deliver is נָצַל. The verb נָצַל is used elsewhere for snatching someone desperately from the fire (Amos. 4:11; Zech. 3:2) or to snatch someone from the paw of a lion (1 Sam. 17:37). The same verb is also used in 31:9, 16 to describe

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[310] Augustine Pagolu, *The Religion of the Patriarchs* (Sheffield: Mansion House, 1998), 114.

[311] Jacob changes here the wording of the divine promise – "I will be with you" (28:15; 31:3) into "I will do you good" (vv. 9 and 12 [10 and 13]). This has raised different interpretations by scholars on the motive of his prayer: some commentators suggest that Jacob, despite his dire situation, continues to manipulate God whenever he can. Cf. Samuel E. Balentine, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of Divine-Human Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), 69. But many other eminent scholars such as Westermann, Wenham, etc. hold that in his prayer Jacob has only paraphrased the promise of God; and there is no intention of manipulating God by Jacob. Cf. Westermann, *Am Anfang*, 328.

[312] The concepts "kindness" (חֶסֶד) and "faithfulness" (אֱמֶת) often occur together in the Bible; and often, when they occur together, they stand for a strong relational commitment between God and man, or among human beings. Cf. Ex. 34:6; Josh. 2:14; 2 Sam. 2:6; Ps 115:1; Prov. 3:3.

[313] Cf. 1 Sam. 9:21; 15:17; 2 Sam. 7:19; 1 Kgs. 3:7.

[314] Mathew, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, 551.

[315] Shreiner, "Das Gebet Jakobs," 300.

God's action of taking from what is Laban's and giving it to Jacob. Jacob's cry also resembles psalmists' laments.[316] And the repetition of the phrase "from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau," reinforces that he is being held firmly in the grip of Esau. Therefore, it implies that only God can deliver him from his adversary.[317] Thus, his prayer emphasises the urgency and desperation of the situation.[318]

Fourth, Jacob reminds God once again of the divine promise as the reason for his prayer. By mentioning the divine promise once again at the conclusion of his prayer, the narrator intends to inform the readers that it is not merely a promise of personal salvation, but rather the whole progeny of Jacob. By reminding God of his promise once again (v.12 [13]) Jacob places his confidence upon God's word. Maly says that in this prayer the narrator has beautifully woven the general patriarchal promise into the particular incident.[319]

The prayer of Jacob (vv. 9-12 [10-13]) is one of the important moments in Jacob's life, because it gives a good insight into his faith journey. His previous attitude was one of self-reliance and shrewdness but his prayer now demonstrates his changed attitude – the self-centred and self-relined Jacob becomes God-centred and God-dependent. Thus, Jacob's prayer contains both theological and practical implications to Israel and to others, what they must do in such helpless and desperate situations.

c) The Third Phase of Preparation: Sending a Gift to Esau vv.13-21 [14-22]:

Jacob has prayed for divine deliverance from the immanent crisis, but receiving no reply, he decides to address the crisis in his own way. Commenting on Jacob's initiative R.R. Reno writes, "The future of the covenant rests in God's hands, but this does not excuse us from undertaking our own efforts. Reconciliation depends upon God's providence, but the divine plan calls for us to play an active role, rather than to sit

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[316] Cf. Ps. 7:2; 25:20; 31:3,16; 39:9; 51:2-3; 69:15; 109:21; 119:170; 142:7; 143:9; 144:7,9. cf. Schreiner, "Das Gebet Jakobs," 301.

[317] מִיַּדִּי (from the hand) similar phrase is used for the deliverance of Israel from the hand of Egyptians (Ex 3:8; 18:9f.). Cf. Rupper, *Genesis*, 347.

[318] Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 143.

[319] Eugene H. Maly, "Genesis," *JBC* (ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roand E. Murphy; Wimbledon: Geoffrey Champman, 1968), 33.

on the side-line of the divine project as passive spectators."[320] So, as a next step, Jacob decides to send gifts to Esau to appease him.[321] His devise consists of the following elements: sending a gift to Esau, and the specific instruction to the servants and the message to be delivered to Esau.

Jacob is, by his character, a very dynamic and innovative person. Since he received no divine assurance after his sincere prayer, he decides to send a "gift" to Esau (מִנְחָה)[322] to appease him. His gift consists of the following: "two hundred she-goats and twenty he-goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milk camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty she-asses and ten he-asses" (v.14 [15]). Jacob's gift is a valuable stock that will increase Esau's prosperity, since most of the animals are female. Commenting on the gift, G. Fischer says that it is indeed an attempt to pay back in a way for the loss and hurts caused to Esau in the past.[323]

Jacob organizes the procession with great care and decency. First, he separates the gift into their respective herds, and instructs the servants to "go ahead of him (לְפָנַי). "By arranging the cattle in successive droves following at considerable intervals, Jacob hopes to wear out Esau's resentment by a series of surprises."[324] Then he instructs the servants what they are supposed to say, and how they are to deliver the message to Esau: "They belong to *your servant Jacob* (לְעַבְדְּךָ); they are a present sent to *my lord Esau* (לַאדֹנִי לְעֵשָׂו); and moreover, *he is behind us* (הִוּא אַחֲרֵינוּ)." The message is intended to tell Esau that Jacob has relinquished his first position - the one who always

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[320] R.R. Reno, *Genesis,* (London: SCM Press, 2010), 245.

[321] Gen 32:13b-22 is attributed to the Elohist tradition as parallel to the Yahwist account of 32:3-5. According to the Elohist tradition Jacob, instead of dividing his company into two camps, plans to present to Esau gift to appease him. Cf. N. Mac Donald, Mark W. Elliott and Grant Macaskill, *Genesis and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 11. However, Yoreh holds that vv. 13-21 [14-22] are also from the Yahwist tradition. According to his argument 32:1-2a and 32:24-30 belongs to Elohist tradition and the intervening verses come from the Yahwist tradition. Cf. Yoreh L. Tzemah, *The First Book of God* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 105.

[322] The Hebrew word for "present" is מִנְחָה, which (ca. 211x in Heb. and 2x in Aram.) is used both in the cultic and non-cultic context. In the Old Testament it is often used in the cultic or in the religious context. In the cultic context it means "offering" (Gen. 4:3-5). In the non-cultic context it is understood as "gift" or "tribute" owed to a superior (Judg. 3:15, 17, 18). Cf. Richard E. Averbeck, "מִנְחָה" *DOTTE* vol.2, (ed. William A. VanGemeren; Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1997), 979f.

[323] Georg Fischer, *Der Jakobsweg der Bibel: Gott suchen und finden* (Stuttgart: Kath. Bibelwerk, 2010), 68.

[324] Skinner, *Genesis,* 407.

sought to be "before" (לְפָנַי) others, now retreats to arrive behind (אַחֲרִינוּאַ).[325] The Hebrew word פָּנִים (face) is used several times in the narrative. In v. 21 [22] itself the word is used five times. According to Hamilton, the repeated use of the different forms of this term "face" in the text highlights a Jacob, who would rather die than face his brother; secondly it prepares the reader for the following event (vv.22-32), in which Jacob names the place פְּנִיאֵל (face of God), where he will have a mysterious encounter with the mysterious man.[326] Therefore, Thomas W. Mann thinks, it is necessary for Jacob to encounter the mysterious "man" first, before he encounters Esau.[327]

The purpose of the gift is to appease Esau: "For he thought, 'I may appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterwards I shall see his face; perhaps he will accept me'" (v.20 [21]). Jacob's aim is to *propitiate* Esau. Hamilton observes that it is the only time in the Old Testament that פָּנִים, "face" is a direct object of כָּפַר (lit. "cover"). The Hebrew verb כָּפַר means "to atone," "to cover," "to appease," or "to bribe." Often the verb כָּפַר is used in the Old Testament in a cultic context, particularly in ritual passages.[328] Therefore, the intention of Jacob seems to make atonement for his offences and then get reconciled with Esau. Rad also believes that the purpose of his gift is "reconciliation".[329] Wenham suggests that the cultic terms Jacob uses including "gift" (מִנְחָה, cereal offering), "atonement" (כָּפַר), *and "*accepted*"* (רָצָה 33:10) implys that Jacob makes peace with God by reconciling with Esau.[330]

Anderson lists three reasons for giving gifts in the ancient world: first, it was the social customs of the day that an inferior presents gift to his superior (cf. 1 Sam 17:18; 25:27; 2 Kgs 5:18); second, to put the recipient in debt to the giver; and third, to give

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[325] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 206.
[326] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 326.
[327] Thomas Mann, *The Book of the Torah: The Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch* (Atlanty: John Knox, 1988), 60.
[328] The verb כָּפַר occurs 102 times in the Old Testament, mostly in the priestly ritual sections of Exodus – Numbers (ca 73 x) and in most other ritual passages in the Old Testament. Cf. Richard E. Averbeck, "כָּפַר," *DOTTE* vol.2 (ed. William A. VanGemeren; Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1997), 690. Jacob's language here resembles religious sacrifice. Cf. Waltker, *Genesis*, 444.
[329] Rad, Genesis, 319.
[330] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 292. The Hebrew term כָּפַר is often used in the Old Testament for expiation of sin, especially in Leviticus. Therefore it would be right to conclude that the intention of Jacob is Reconciliation. Cf. Maly, "Genesis," 34.

gift for cultic purposes. Anderson believes that all these interpretations have some validity. Therefore, in these verses there is "a combination of all three of these ideas: Jacob sends gift ahead to a superior of whom he is afraid, as is the custom of his day. He does this knowing that it might give him the upper hand upon their meeting. And he trusts that, in some way, this (sacrificial?) gift will appease his brother."[331]

Though there have been differences of opinion on the morality of Jacob's method of pleasing Esau, the narrative makes the point clear that Jacob is determined to settle the conflict with Esau once and for all, and therefore he is ready to take all the measures and risks possible to obtain it.

2.1.2.2 Jacob's Reconciliation with God (Gen 32:22-32 [23-33])

Gen 32:22-32 [32:23-33] is one of the most enigmatic texts in the Old Testament. It reports about the central and the most climax event in the life of Jacob,[332] in which Jacob faces the most difficult conflict of his life as he wrestles with God at Peniel. It is the most important event in his life because he must firstly settle his case with God before he settles his conflict with Esau. The Peniel event is also a flashback on Jacob's past, and a moment of confession of his controversial past, and a moment of contrition as well as a moment of blessing. From this moment onwards a new chapter begins in Jacob's life. Therefore, to understand the Peniel event it is important to know the life story of Jacob, and the history of Israel since Jacob's story is also a story about his descendants, Israel. The narrative in Gen 32:22-32 [32:23-33] can be sub-divided into four parts: Jacob's isolation, wrestling with the mysterious man, dialogue with his opponent and Jacob's own interpretation of the event.

a) Jacob's Isolation vv.22-25 [23-26]:

Jacob cannot be at peace in spite of his best efforts to appease Esau because the mystery about Esau's intention continues to haunt him, and as a result he is unable to sleep, therefore, he presses on with different moves to get Esau's appeasement. He now sends his family and all his belongings to the other side of the river Jabbok, at midnight.

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[331] Anderson, *Brotherhood and Inheritance*, 99f.

[332] The scene of Jacob's encounter with God at Peniel actually recalls Jacob's past, and points to his future role as a model for the nation Israel.

One could wonder why he is sending his whole family and his possession across the river in the middle of the night, and that, too, to a place where they would be all the more exposed to Esau's attack? Even if it is compelling, it would be sensible to do it by day, and not in the middle of the night. Wenham says, "It may be that his irrational actions represent his disturbed state of mind: he was too worried to sleep, so he just decided to press on."[333] But Fokkelman thinks that by sending his whole family and possessions to the other side of the river he is abandoning his defensive plan (מַחֲנֶה) – "he makes the Jabbok a serious obstacle, not for Esau, but for himself, should he want to flee."[334]

After helping his whole family and possessions to cross the river, Jabbok, he remains behind, alone on the other side of the Jabbok, in isolation from his family and his possessions. No reason is given why he did not accompany his family. Is it because he is too frightened? Or does he want to use his family as a human shield from the foreseen threat? Nothing is clear. One reason can be that he remained back to make sure that everything is safely across the river. Another reason can be that he intends to spend the night in prayer before meeting Esau. Whatever the reason may be, one thing is evident that the narrative goes to great lengths to isolate Jacob from his family and possession. Here, according to the narrator, the question of his plans is irrelevant, but the important point here in the story is that he is alone.[335] According to Douglas MacMillian, Jacob has done all he can and still feels deep inside there is something more to be done and that is why he decides to be alone for a moment, for there is a darkness inside him that troubles him more than the darkness around him.[336]

This solitary moment is, therefore, very important for Jacob. This new move of Jacob means *let go* of all, and prepare to face the crisis all-alone.[337] According to Andrew Mayes, solitude is an essential element in a spirituality of struggle. For the Desert Fathers of the fourth century, solitude meant entering a state of spiritual

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[333] Wenham, *Genesis*, 292.
[334] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 212f.
[335] Allen Ross, "Study in the Life of Jacob Part 2: Jacob at the Jabbok, Israel at Peniel," BSac 142 (1985), 343; According to Fokkelman there are two possibilities for Jacob being alone: either for self-reflection, or to avoid Esau. Cf. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 212.
[336] J. Douglas MacMillan, *Wrestling with God: Lessons from the life of Jacob* (Bryntirion: Evangelical Press of Wales, 1991), 82.
[337] Andrew D. Mayes, *Spirituality of Struggle: Pathways to Growth* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2002), 7.

nakedness before God where masks drop off and there is no place to hide. To enter into solitude is to come to a place of vulnerability and utter openness to God.[338] Commenting on this verse, MacMillan states: "The introductory phrase, 'Jacob was left alone' (v.25), is an immediate and graphic reminder that there are places and areas in the history of personal, spiritual experiences of God's grace where we have to be brought into solitude."[339]

However, there are two kinds of loneliness or solitude: Loneliness caused by sin and Solitude caused by God. Here, in Jacob's case both are at work. The loneliness caused by sin is very much evident from Jacob's history. His personal history, at every single turn, demonstrates this separation - He has been alienated from his twin brother, his parents, his homeland, his relatives, Laban and his sons, and now from his own family.[340] Surprisingly, this division is also spreading among those related to him. Moreover, there is a deeper inner division in terms of personal peace. Jacob is not at peace with himself in spite of all his genius and cleaver efforts to win the favour of Esau. Professor John Murray says that 'the entail of sin', indwelling sin, causes tensions, and inward, spiritual strife even in the Christian believer. The story of Jacob wrestling at Peniel reflects those spiritual realities.[341] As per solitude caused by God, Jacob is separated from his brother by divine election. In a sense, the isolation of grace has been evident in Jacob from the moment of his conception (Gen 25:23). MacMillian writes, "We have the distinguishing, sovereign, electing, covenant love of God, finding perfect illustration in the life of this man. It brings strains and tensions into his experience, but in the midst of them all, this great truth stands out. God's covenant grace has been setting him apart from blessing even from the womb."[342] Commenting on the importance of solitude in spiritual life Henri Nouwen says: "Solitude is thus the place of purification and transformation, the place of the great struggle and the great encounter. Solitude… is the place of salvation."[343] Mayes surmises, "Solitude is above all, the place where we can learn to receive from God. All his life, Jacob was used to making it on his own, and striving by his own schemes to get his way with God. In his

[338] Mayes, *Spirituality of Struggle*, 7f.
[339] MacMillan, *Wrestling with God*, 47.
[340] MacMillan, *Wrestling with God*, 48f.
[341] MacMillan, *Wrestling with God*, 50.
[342] MacMillan, *Wrestling with God* ,55.
[343] Mayes, *Spirituality of Struggle*, 8.

experience of solitude at the Jabbok, Jacob would discover that blessing comes from God, not by his own efforts, but by clinging to God in the silence."[344]

b) The Wrestling with the Mysterious Man (32: 24b-25 [25b-26]):

As Jacob is now alone, separated from his family and possessions, a man (אִישׁ) suddenly wrestles with him. The scene is full of ambiguities and mysteries, raising questions in the reader's mind – Who is this mysterious man? Is it a moral, psychological, physical or a spiritual wrestling? Why does the man take recourse to a magical touch? And why does the man want to leave before sunrise? Etc. Interestingly, in spite of all these ambiguities, the narrative will gradually unfold the purpose of their wrestling.

At first the text identifies the antagonist simply as *a man* (אִישׁ). Who is this mysterious man? There are many speculations about the identity of the man. The Jewish tradition holds that the mysterious man is Esau or Esau's guardian angel.[345] Gunkel, Von Rad, and Westermann are among those, who hold that Jacob wrestles with a Canaanite river god, because the man desires to depart before dawn, which is a regular feature of many folk tales. B. Jacob and Spina think that Jacob's opponent is his past guilt. So the unnamed man can be understood as a kind of "everyman" with whom Jacob has struggled throughout his life.[346] But most other scholars, such as Eissfeldt and Sarna, identify the opponent as God in the form of man.[347] Sarna argues, since the mysterious man blesses Jacob at the end of the wrestling he cannot be demon.[348] Furthermore, at the end of the episode, Jacob himself identifies his opponent as God. "I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved" (v.30 [31]). Kinder says,

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[344] Mayes, *Spirituality of Struggle*, 8.
[345] Anderson, *Brotherhood and inheritance*, 102f.
[346] Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Tora*, 643. Frank Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider: Exclusion and Inclusion in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 24.
[347] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 295. Cf. Ex. 4:24-26, Num 22:22-25; Josh 5:13-16.
[348] Camilla Helena von Heijne, *The Messenger of the Lord in Early Jewish Interpretations of Genesis* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 81. Ronald Hendel says, "Jacob's adversary is neither a night demon nor a river-god; Jacob names him in v.31 as Elohim. Nonetheless there are thematic continuities in the Peniel encounter with traditional images of other conflicts and other gods." Ronald S. Hendel, *The Epic of the Patriarch* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 105; Mark D. Wessner, "Towards a Literary understanding of Face to Face in Genesis 32:23-32," *RQ* 42 (2000), 175.

"When God appears as *a man* in the Old Testament He is usually called the angel of the Lord, a title interchangeable with 'God' or 'the Lord.'"[349]

The timing of the wrestling match is also significant. The wrestling takes place at night, in the pitched darkness – the darkness of the night, the darkness of the soul and the darkness caused by fear of the uncertainty. The darkness conceals the identity of the antagonist from Jacob. According to Fokkelman the concealment of Jacob's antagonist is needed because, if Jacob had perceived whom he was going to fight, he would never have fought.[350] MacMillan says, "Darkness should conceal the identity of the Angel, helping the process of teaching and moulding Jacob by encouraging him to struggle on his own strength until the moment was ripe for the Angel to reveal exactly who he was. Jacob was to be brought to the very end of his own resources."[351]

According to the narrative the wrestling is long and violent, characterising Jacob's enormous commitment.[352] "When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched (וַיִּגַּע)[353] the hollow of his thigh; and Jacob's thigh was put out of joint as he wrestled with him" (v.26).[354] With a simple "touch" he dislocates Jacob's hip, the place of a wrestler's strength. In Is 6:7 the seraphim touched Isaiah's lips, indicting just a touch of the finger rather than a fist.[355] The mild touch that dislocates Jacob's hip is an indication to Jacob that the opponent has supernatural power. So eventually Jacob perceives that he is not wrestling with any ordinary man. For "the blow was revealing to

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[349] Kinder, *Genesis*, 170. Hos. 12:5 [4] identifies him as an angel. The narrator's use of the term אִישׁ here illustrates the inability of the mortals to recognise the divinity until the divine performs a wonder. As in Gen 18-19, where the three men were standing before Abraham; and as in Judg. 6, where Yahweh's angel sat under an oak tree and engaged in conversation with Gideon; and Judg. 13, where Manoah and his wife took Yahweh's angel to be a man of God. Thus, it is not unusual in the Old Testament for supernatural beings to assume human form. Cf. Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 330.

[350] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 213; Ross, "Study in the Life of Jacob Part 2: Jacob at the Jabbok, Israel at Peniel," *BSac* 142 (1985), 344.

[351] MacMillan, *Wrestling with God*, 81.

[352] The strength of Jacob was demonstrated earlier in 29:1-14, when he had rolled away the stone from the well, which was possible only for a group of men.

[353] It is impossible to determine if the word נָגַע should be translated here as "struck" or "touched". It can be understood either as a violent stroke (cf. Job 1:11; 2:5; 1:19; Josh 9:19 and 1 Sam 6:9) or a gentle touch (Gen. 3:3; Is. 6:7; Jer. 1.9). cf. Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 330.

[354] The Hebrew word for thigh (יָרֵךְ) occurs only in two other passages in Genesis: 24:2 and 47:29. In both these occasions the act is related to oath. Cf. Stephen Molen, "The Identity of Jacob's Opponent: Wrestling with Ambiguity in Genesis 32:22-32," *Dialogue* 26 (1993), 191. Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 331.

[355] Ross, "Jacob at the Jabbok, Israel at Peniel," 344.

Jacob."[356] MacMillan comments, "At that point, something died in Jacob – the pride of self. His self-confidence and self-reliance took a bad tumble."[357] Therefore, Jacob holds onto the man asking for his blessing in spite of being wounded seriously at the pivotal part of a wrestler's strength.

Summarising the wrestling scene between Jacob and the man, Skinner writes, "In its fundamental conception the struggle at Peniel is not a dream or vision like that which came to Jacob at Bethel; nor is it an allegory of the spiritual life, symbolising the inward travail of a soul helpless before some overhanging crisis of its destiny. It is a real physical encounter which is described, in which Jacob measures his strength and skill against a divine antagonist, and 'prevails,' though at the cost of a bodily injury."[358]

c) The Dialogue between Jacob and the "Man" (vv. 26-29 [27-30]):

The dialogue between Jacob and the mysterious antagonist is the central part of the scene in 32:23-33 because it is here that Jacob receives the new name *Israel* after he has confessed his past to his antagonist. It is the central moment of transformation in Jacob's life. Moreover, the passage unveils that it is not merely a story about Jacob but it is also a story about the nation Israel.

With the dislocation of his hip the story takes a new turn – a physical wrestling turns into a verbal discourse. The discourse is initiated with the request of Jacob's antagonist, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob refuses to let him go unless he blesses him. Why does Jacob want a blessing when he already has one from his father? Waltke answers, since Jacob received the patriarchal blessing by deception, he has been unfit to experience it. Therefore, he is in need of a new blessing to face the ordeal of the next day.[359] Taking into consideration Jacob's restless situation, G. Fischer comments, "Es geht ihm nicht um irgendwelche äußeren Dinge, sondern allein um eine Zusage von Lebensfülle, wie sie von Gott her ihren Ursprung hat und in einer Atmosphäre menschlichen Wohlwollens gegeben wird."[360] Thus, one can assume that the demand for the blessing is not a demand, rather a prayer for forgiveness from God.

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[356] Ross, "Jacob at the Jabbok, Israel at Peniel," 345.
[357] MacMillan, *Wrestling with God*, 72.
[358] Skinner, *Genesis*, 411.
[359] Waltke, *Genesis*, 446.
[360] G. Fischer, *Der Jakobsweg der Bibel*, 71.

Jacob demands a blessing but the man asks him, “What is your name?” With this question the discourse is directed to a moral/spiritual wrestling - “Jacob’s identity is now the issue.”[361] This question is asked not by accident, but to remind Jacob of his past and to remind him of Isaac’s question, “Who are you, my son?” (27:19). Then Jacob told Isaac, his father, a lie, and stole the blessing but now he must speak the truth in order to receive the blessing. Therefore, Jacob speaks the truth– I am “Jacob,” a cheat, twister, liar, deceiver, etc. By telling his true name to the man, Jacob discloses his true character; for in the Bible a name stands for the person's personality and nature. In Jacob’s context it could be understood as confession of his guilt, thereby he remains open to receive the divine blessing. Hamilton says, “The acknowledgement of the old name, and its unfortunate suitability, paves the way for a new name.”[362] Karl Elliger says, "Nicht der gläubige oder der bußfertige, sondern der nackte Mensch im letzten Stadium wird hier gerettet. Allerdings eins darf nicht übersehen werden: dieser Mensch kennt Gott von Jugend auf und hat die Verbindung nie bewusst zerschnitten. Es ist also der nackte Mensch Gottes, dem alle Masken vom Gesicht gerissen sind und an dem dennoch das Wunder geschieht."[363]

As the result of his confession Jacob now receives a new name, *Israel*. The interpretation given to his new name is, “you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.” So now on “the patriarch ‘strives’ rather than ‘supplants.’”[364] Regarding the etymology of the name, *Israel*, there are different views. According to Coote the name comes from the verbal stem *s´ry* or *ys´r* meaning “to govern by rendering judgement by decree,” so *Israel* could mean “El judges.”[365] So Elliger thinks the name could be understood as God’s justice for Jacob; it is just as a kind of salvation. “Der neue Name ist Gericht, aber er ist in einzigartiger Weise Heil zu gleich. Gott richtet Jakob, aber er richtet ihn nicht zugrunde, sondern richtet ihn auf, rettet ihn aus dem Gericht. Auf welcher Basis das geschieht, zeigt die Erteilung des neuen Namens durch Gott selbst. An die Stelle der alten Wirklichkeit tritt damit die neue (Name ist ja nicht Schall und Rauch!): aus Jakob, dem Sünder, wird Israel, zwar auch Sünder, aber

[361] Molen, “The Identity of Jacob’s Opponent,” 193.
[362] Hamilotn, *Genesis 18-50*, 333.
[363] Karl Elliger, “Der Jakobskampf am Jabbok: Gen 32:32ff. als hermeneutisches Problem,” *ZThK* 48 (1951), 29.
[364] Molen, “The Identity of Jacob’s Opponent,” 193.
[365] Robert B. Coote, “The Meaning of the name *Israel*,” *HTR* 65 (1972), 140.

durch Gottes Erklärung gerechtfertigter Sünder, der leben darf! Diese Wirkung ist der Namengebung absolut immanent. Die Rettung ist ein einseitiger Akt Gottes."[366]

The mysterious man has honoured Jacob with a new name, so Jacob wants to know the name of the name-giver. So he asks him, "Tell me your name, please." Instead of revealing his name the man concludes the dialogue by asking Jacob a rhetorical question, "Why is it that you ask my name?" Traditionally, it was believed that knowing the name of the deity gives power over the deity therefore the man refused to give out his name.[367] But it is not the case with Jacob. Bernard Och is of the view that by refusing to reveal the name "God remains God; His transcendence remains intact."[368] A similar request is turned down to Manoah, "Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?" (Judg. 13:17-18). Therefore, the rhetorical question of the man is another way of telling him, "Jacob, do you not ask for the sake of asking? (Think and you will know the answer!)" [369] Fischer says, "Jakob muss annehmen, Schlüsselerfahrungen seines Lebens nur begrenzt und bruchstückhaft begreifen zu können."[370] MacMillen concludes beautifully, "Jacob would not have been capable of understanding all that the name implied of the divine person in whose hand he was held, but what Jacob could not absorb with his mind he could experience in his heart."[371] Finally, the man blesses Jacob and disappears. Elliger interprets this blessing as the legitimizing of the patriarchal blessing and the confirmation of the fulfilment of the promise made at Bethel.[372] Thus, Jacob's adversary is none other than God.

d) Jacob's Interpretation of the Event: *Panim El Panim* (v. 30 [31]):

Jacob gradually realizes that the mysterious man is none other than God, therefore he names the place פְּנִיאֵל (*Peniel*) as a testimony to his transformation and to commemorate the wonderful encounter. Etymologically the Hebrew word פְּנִיאֵל

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[366] Elliger, "Der Jakobskampf am Jabbok," 27f.
[367] Cf. Gunkel, *Genesis,* 350; Wenhem, *Genesis16-50,* 297; Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50,* 336.
[368] Bernard Och, "Jacob at Bethel and Penuel: the Polarity of Divine Encounter," *Judaism,* 42 (1993), 174.
[369] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis,* 217.
[370] G. Fischer, *Der Jakobsweg der Bibel,* 72.
[371] MacMillan, *Wrestling with God,* 117.
[372] "Das bedeutet im großen Zusammenhang, dass er den erschlichenen Segen Isaaks legitimiert und die Verheißung von Bethel bestätigt, damit auch der Gebetsbitte Erhörung zusagt." Cf. Elliger, "Der Jakobskampf am Jabbok," 26.

(peniel) means "Face of God," and it is an abbreviated form of "I have seen God face to face" (רָאִיתִי אֱלֹהִים פָּנִים אֶל־ פָּנִים).[373] This statement, "I have seen God face to face," refers to a "direct, non-mediated" encounter with God. Since Jacob survived in spite of encountering God face-to-face, he can now confidently face Esau, his brother. He also understands now that he has been all through fighting, not merely against Esau, Isaac or Laban but also against God. Yet God has dealt kindly with him and lifted up his face upon him therefore he can now meet his brother Esau without fear.

With this experience a new chapter begins in his life. The narrator paints this new beginning with the beautiful expression: "the sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel." The sun that set earlier in Gen 28:11 now rises in Gen 32:31, indicating Jacob's transformation and the dawn of a new era in his life. So Wenham says that the rising of the sun marks the dawn of a new era in Jacob's life. However, the rising of the sun is contrasted with the limping of the wounded Jacob. Jacob now has a new name and a new limp. "The new name will forever remind Jacob of his new destiny. The new limp will forever remind him that in Elohim Jacob met for the first time one who can overpower him."[374] And it is to remember this significant event every Israelite observe the dietary restriction.

2.1.2.3 Jacob's Peaceful Departure from Esau (Gen 33):

The divine-human reconciliation is immediately followed by the reunion between the two divided brothers. It would be therefore right to conclude that the Reconciliation with God now paves the way for the reconciliation between the brothers. The narrator co-relates these two dimensions in Gen 33:1-18 when he states, "for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God, with such favour have you received me" (v. 10). Annelise Butterweck-Bensberg describes Gen 33:1-18 as an impressive

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[373] Cf. Waltke, *Genesis,* 447. The Hebrew phrase אֶל־ פָּנִים occurs five times in the Hebrew Bible; and all five times it is used within the context of the divine-human encounter and self-revelation (cf. Gen. 32:31; Ex 33:11; Deut. 34:10; Judg. 6:22; Ezek. 20:35). Such encounters have usually the following four features: divine initiation, profound intimacy, intentional solitude, and supernatural verification. All these four features are clearly evident in Gen 32:23-33. For example, firstly, the wrestling was divinely initiated; secondly, Jacob was in a deep solitude, preparing for the encounter with Esau for the next day; thirdly, the encounter was not only physically but also spiritually intimate; and fourthly, the limping of Jacob serves as a God-sent physical "sign" to verify and legitimize the primary. Cf. Mark D. Wessner, "Towards a Literary understanding of Face to Face in Genesis 32:23-32," 170ff.

[374] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50,* 337.

Versöhnungsgeschichte in the Hebrew bible.[375] Gen 33 could be structured under two sections: a dramatic reunion, and a peaceful departure to their respective destinations.

a) The Dramatic Reunion of the Twin Brothers (33:1-11):

Meeting Esau is a spiritual necessity for Jacob in order to enter the Promised Land; therefore, soon after reconciling with God, Jacob proceeds to meet Esau. But the striking thing here is the change of attitude in Jacob's approach – courage replaces his fear, and humility replaces his craftiness. As soon as Jacob sees Esau, he prepares his family for a formal meeting with Esau. He arranges his family in three groups to introduce them to Esau – first, his concubines with their children; second, Leah and her children; and third, Rachel with her son, Joseph; and Jacob himself goes ahead and leads them. Earlier in 32:8 Jacob divided his family out of fear in two camps; but now he organizes his family in groups, according to the position that they have in their relation with Jacob in the family, so that he could introduce them orderly to Esau.

As Jacob approaches Esau, he bows seven times to Esau. Jacob's gesture is not merely a sign of the moral change in him but is also an expression of his humility and his reverence for Esau. Some even interpret Jacob's gesture as confession of his guilt.[376] His seven-fold bowing reflects the custom of the Ancient Near East court ritual. For when a subject approaches the monarch, he/she bows seven times before the monarch as a sign of respect and reverence.[377] Thus, Jacob treats Esau with great honour and respect. Here again a reversal of Isaac's blessing is evident. Ljubljana remarks that Jacob fought all his life not to bow down before Esau, but now he does not stop bowing before him.[378] Jacob's attitude is marked here with a genuine spirit of humility and a

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[375] Annelise Butterweck-Bensberg, "Die Begegnung zwischen Esau und Jakob (Gen 33:1-18) im Spiegel rabinischer Ausdeutungen," *BN* 116 (2003), 15.

[376] Alfred Agyenta, "When Reconciliation Means More than the 'Re-Membering' of Former Enemies: The Problem of the Conclusion to the Jacob Esau Story from a Narrative Perspective (Gen 33, 1-17)," *ETL* 83 (2007), 128.

[377] G. Fischer, *Der Jakobsweg der Bibel*, 74. One of the ways by which a person showed respect for a superior in the ancient world was by bowing before him to the ground; and to magnify the honour this gesture could be repeated seven times. Some Egyptian texts from El Amarna (14th century BC) portray vassals bowing seven times before Pharaoh as they approach him. Cf. John H. Walton and Victor H. Mathew, *The Ivp Bible Background commentary: Genesis – Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 66. Cf. Sarna, *Genesis*, 229; Skinner, *Genesis*, 413.

[378] Stanko Gerjoli Ljubljana, "Education for Reconciliation on the Example of Conflict between Esau and Jacob," *Reconciliation: The Way of Healing and Growth* (ed. Janez Juhant and Bojan Zalec; Mpnster: LIT Verlag, 1912), 47.

genuine respect for his brother, Esau.[379] Humility and respect towards the other party are an important components in any reconciliation process. If these elements are missing in a reconciliation process, then the whole approach towards reconciliation might go to waste. Jacob has learned this lesson in his night struggle at the Jabbok river by clinging on to his antagonist and confessing his true identity and humbly pleading for the divine blessing. Consequently, he receives the divine blessing. He repeats the same act of humility before Esau; and eventually wins the favour of Esau and gets reconciled with him.

Esau's response to Jacob is all the more amazing; instead of taking revenge he embraces and kisses his deceiver: "But Esau ran (וַיָּרָץ) to meet him, and embraced him (וַיְחַבְּקֵהוּ), and fell on his neck (וַיִּפֹּל עַל־ צַוָּארָו), and kissed him (וַיְשַׁקֵּהוּ), and they wept (וַיִּבְכּוּ)" (v. 4). The sequences of the verbs demonstrate their reconciliation, and there is no disagreement among scholars on that.[380] For example, Saran says, "the story of their final reconciliation is correspondingly described through a unique concentration of five amplified verbs." [381]

Interestingly, all these five verbs/actions are echoing their past. While the acts of their past contributed to the conflict and hostility between them, the present gesture undoes the offences that they had previously committed.[382] Esau's running towards Jacob reminds the reader of Rebekah's instruction to Jacob to hurry up and fetch two kids from the flock (27:8ff) so that she could prepare savoury food for Isaac to obtain his blessing for her beloved son, Jacob, by deception. The Hebrew verb used for their embrace (חָבַק) has phonetic similarity with Jacob's tight holding (אָבַק) of the mysterious man at Jabbok for the blessing. Jacob expected one more physical encounter similar to the wrestling at Jabbok; but instead he receives an unexpected and magnanimous embrace of forgiveness from Esau.[383] Another Hebrew verb that reminds

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[379] Erwin W. Lutzer, *When you've been Wronged: Moving from Bitterness to Forgiveness* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1995), 24.
[380] Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 12-36,* 639; Hamilton, *Genesis 12-50,* 344; Wenhem, *Genesis 16-50,* 298; Fischer, *Der Jakobsweg der Bibel,* 74; Waltke, *Genesis,* 454. The sequence of quick verbal forms in the narrative introduces Esau, similar to his presentation in the lentil stew scene: "and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way." Cf. Hendel, *The Epic of the Patriarch,* 130.
[381] Sarna, *Genesis,* 229.
[382] Anderson, *Brotherhood and Inheritance*, 112.
[383] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50,* 343.

the reader of Jacob's past deception to obtain the patriarchal blessing is the verb נָשַׁק ("kiss"). Jacob tricked his father by a kiss (27:27) and stole the blessing that Issac had reserved for Esau. Earlier Jacob kissed his father to deceive him, but Esau, on the contrary, kisses his brother to resolve their longstanding conflict and enmity. V. 4 ends with the clause "they wept (וַיִּבְכּוּ)." This reminds the reader again of the blessing scene when Esau wept at the loss of his blessing, " 'bless me, even me also, O my father.' And Esau lifted up his voice and wept (וַיִּבְכּוּ)" (27:38). Esau wept earlier out of disappointment mixed with anger and hatred, but now he weeps out of joy for meeting his brother after twenty long years.[384] Hamilton comments, "Esau's actions toward Jacob on his homecoming are also similar to those of the father toward his homecoming son in the parable of Jesus (Lk. 15:11-32). Both Esau and the father fell on the neck and kissed their brother/son. On both the occasions the kiss is possibly not just a display of joyous feelings but an experience of forgiveness (cf. 2 Sam. 14:33)."[385] Thus, the scene of reconciliation and reunion between both the brothers could be understood as the undoing of all the past misdeeds, and healing of their past hurts.

Hendel says, "Jacob is taken aback by Esau's affection,"[386] so too the reader. But what has changed Esau's mind? Is it Jacob's gift? Or is Esau already a changed person? Or God has changed Esau's disposition towards Jacob? According to the common Jewish tradition Jacob's ploy in Gen 32 has influenced Esau; others think that Esau has become a changed person now; but the Christian tradition believes that God has softened Esau's heart.[387] One can also combine all these acts and draw a conclusion, assuming that all these factors combined have influenced Esau to be gracious towards Jacob. Because change in life often happens due to multiple factors, and very seldom change occurs in life due to any one particular factor. However, from the perspective of the narrative, though the text does not mention, it is the divine intervention that could have influenced Esau to be kind towards his brother. Allen P. Ross says, "Jakobs lang erwartetes Treffen mit Esau war ein wunderbares Ereignis. Gott wandelte das Herz

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[384] Anderson, *Brotherhood and Inheritance*, 111f.
[385] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 344.
[386] Hendel, *The Epic of the Patriarch*, 130.
[387] Anderson, *Brotherhood and Inheritance*, 113f.

Esaus so um, dass er darauf aus war, sich mit seinem Bruder zu versöhnen."[388] Cohen assumes that it was the Divine-human wrestling on the previous night that has enabled them to be reconciled with each other.[389] Coats also concludes that the text highlights the central role of divine intervention.[390]

The reconciliation of the divided brothers enables the reconciliation of their families, for the reconciliation between heads of the families/nations also involves the families/nations. Jacob's children and wives also genuflect before Esau as Jacob did. The arrangement of Jacob's family according to the matriarchs could also be understood as the importance of the different tribes in Israel. So the reconciliation of both the patriarchs (of Israel and Edom respectively) can also be understood as reconciliation of the two nations, Israel and Edom. When Esau inquires Jacob about them he replies, "the children whom God has graciously given your servant." Jacob perhaps intentionally introduces to Esau only his children, and avoids introducing to him his wives. Jacob describes them as God's favour (חָנַן) instead of God's blessing (בְּרָכָה). By this Jacob tries to avoid reminding Esau of his stealth of the patriarchal blessing and the reason for his flight.[391] Just as Jacob genuflected, his family members genuflect themselves before Esau. Israel, which consisted of twelve tribes, is symbolically represented here by the arrangement of the sons of Jacob in the order of the matriarchs of the tribes of Israel. Similarly, Esau and his four hundred men represent Edom. Thus, the reconciliation story is not merely the reconciliation between two individuals but also the reconciliation between two families and two nations.

Both the brothers and their families are now reunited but there is one more thing to be done to complete the reconciliation i.e. restitution. Adequate restitution must be made for the loss, in order to complete the reconciliation. Because true reconciliation demands justice i.e. restoring the loss. Therefore, when Esau asks Jacob about the

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[388] Allen P. Ross, "1. Mose," *Das Alte Testament erklärt und ausgelegt,* vol. 1 (edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy F. Zuck; Stuttgart: Hänssler-Verlag, 1990), 89. Cf. William M. Templeton, *Understanding Genesis* (USA: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2010), 409.
[389] Cf. Norman J. Cohen, *Self, Struggle & Change: Family Conflict Stories in Genesis and their Healing Insights for our Lives* (Vermont: Jewish Lights Pub., 2006), 118.
[390] George W. Coats, "Strife without Reconciliation a Narrative: Theme in the Jacob Traditions," *Werden und Wirken des Alten Testaments: Festschrift für Claus Westermann zum 70. Geburstag* (Göttingen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1980), 106.
[391] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36,* 640.

"companies" (מַחֲנֶה) that he met, Jacob replies that they are meant "to find favour in the sight of my lord." It should be noted that Jacob's earlier intention was not to make amendments or restitution rather to bribe or to placate Esau in order to win his favour. But after his Peniel encounter his motive has changed. He now wants to make amendment for the loss he has caused to Esau. But Esau refuses to accept his gift, saying he has "enough" (רָב). Even without receiving the patriarchal blessing, Esau now has enough (רָב). Westermann interprets that by refusing to accept, Esau seems to say that even without the firstborn blessing he has become rich. "Esau hat offenbar der Verlust des Erstgeburtssegens nichts ausgemacht. Er ist auch ohne ihn groß und mächtig geworden, so sehr, dass er sehr das beträchtliche, ein Vermögen darstellende Geschenk Jakobs nicht haben will."[392] Cohen says, "His gift is meant not only to propitiate his brother, but more importantly to atone for his sinful actions."[393]

Jacob persuades Esau to accept his gift, because without the acceptance of his gift the reconciliation would be incomplete – it would then be a half-hearted one.[394] His persuasion resembles somewhat his plea for the blessing before the mysterious man at Peniel, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me" becomes now: I will not let you go, unless you accept my gift.[395] Jacob, therefore, insists Esau "I pray you, if I have found favour (חֵן) in your sight, then accept my present (מִנְחָה) from my hand; for truly to see your face (פָּנִים) is like seeing the face of God (פְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים), with such favour (חֵן) you received me. Accept, I pray you, my gift (בִּרְכָתִי) that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me (חַנַּנִי) and because I have enough" (vv. 10-11). Jacob has been referring to his gift throughout the narrative with the noun מִנְחָה (gift), but he abruptly switches the terminology in v. 11 and refers to the gift as בְּרָכָה (blessing). And it is only after he has revised his intention behind his gift that Esau accepts his gift. In other words, it is only when Jacob has changed the word 'gift' into 'blessing' that Esau concedes to Jacob's persuasion. Thus, Jacob's offer could be understood as restitution,

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[392] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 640.
[393] Cohen, *Self, Struggle & Change*, 120.
[394] Cf. Ljubjana, "Education for Reconciliation on the Example of Conflict between Esau and Jacob," 48.
[395] Cf. Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 346.

in that Jacob returns the blessing that he stole from Esau by deception. The term חֵן is used more than once here because restitution alone will not solve the issue. Esau needs to forgive Jacob. His acceptance of Jacob's restitution (here בְּרָכָה) is, on the one hand, a symbolic act of forgiveness, and on the other hand, it ratifies the act of reconciliation between them and their families.

As Jacob persuades Esau to accept his gift, he conveys another biblical teaching about reconciliation i.e. the human and the divine dimensions in a genuine reconciliation. When Jacob says, "for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God, with such favour have you received me" (v. 10), he implies that a genuine reconciliation consists of both the vertical and horizontal dimensions. Reconciliation that lacks any one of these dimensions is not a complete reconciliation, for human and divine dimensions are interrelated with each other. The "'Peni-el' (face of God) has been followed by 'Peni-Esau' (face of Esau),"[396] "in the holy God, there is something of the estranged brother. And in the forgiving brother, there is something of the blessing God. … The forgiving face of Esau and the blessing face of God have an affinity."[397] So G. Fischer says, "Ein Bruder, der über Schuld hinwegsieht, ist Abbild des versöhnlichen Gottes, der in gleicher Weise Menschen trotz ihrer Vergehen leben lässt."[398] The reunion scene reveals that the reconciliation between man and man, and the reconciliation between human and divine are interrelated. Clare Amos says, "The wordplays make the connection crystal clear. 'Truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God – since you have received me with such favour' (33:10). The text implies that it is only if we are prepared to continue our struggle with God that we can see our 'brothers' in their true light, as God sees them. Conversely it is when we wrestle for a more authentic relationship with our brothers and sisters we discover that we are given God's blessing."[399]

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[396] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 346. Cf. M. Fishbane, "Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle (Gen. 25-35:22)," *JJS*, 26 (1975), 28. Alter, *Genesis*, 186; Sarna, *Genesis*, 230; Hendel, *Epic of the Patriarch*, 130; Spina, *Faith*, 26.
[397] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 272f.
[398] Fischer, *Der Jakobsweg der Bibel*, 75.
[399] Clare Amos, "The Genesis of Reconciliation: The Reconciliation of Genesis," *MS* 23 (2006), 20f.

b) A Peaceful Parting to their Respective Destinations (33:12-20):

One may expect that after the dramatic scene of reconciliation the brothers would march together to start a new beginning. But to the reader's astonishment they part from each other, heading in different directions. This questions the authenticity of their reconciliation. So Coats describes this scene as an "anti-climax"[400] to the exciting meeting between Jacob and Esau.

This scene is also filled with ambiguities because after their reconciliation Esau expresses his desire to accompany Jacob (33:12), but Jacob gently turns down the offer by giving excuses about his young kids and milking animals of his flocks. Esau then volunteers to leave some of his men with Jacob, but Jacob again declines the offer gently (33:15). At the end, Esau takes the road back to Seir, while Jacob makes his way towards Succoth. Secondly, throughout the narrative Esau addresses Jacob *my brother* (אָחִי), but Jacob addresses Esau *my lord* (אֲדֹנִי cf. vv. 13, 14, 15) and he acknowledges himself as עֶבֶד (*servant* v. 14). Coats, therefore, assumes that no reconciliation has taken place here. According to Coats "reconciliation cannot occur if the reconciled parties continue to live apart."[401] However, Westermann and many other scholars do not agree with Coats' point of view because reconciliation is more a matter of attitudinal change (*metanoia*) [402] than the living together of the concerned parties. "Eine Versöhnung zwischen Brüdern braucht nicht in jedem Fall ein Zusammenleben zu bedingen; sie kann sich auch darin auswirken, dass sich beide in Frieden trennen und jeder in seiner Welt und auf seine Weise lebt."[403] According to Blum "while it is true vv. 12-17 are ambiguous; the reconciliation (Versöhnung) between the brothers is no longer in question. From the perspective of national dimension of the Jacob-Esau story, he argues that the separation of the brothers in Gen 33:12-17 has to be understood in the light of the need to preserve the identity of Israel, which is only possible by means of territorial separation from others." [404] Crüsemann supports this opinion that their separation does not demonstrate the lack of reconciliation; rather it tells that both the

[400] Coats, "Strife without Reconciliation," 103.
[401] Turner, *Announcement of Plot in Genesis,* 130.
[402] Agyenta, "When Reconciliation Means More than the 'Re-Membering' of Former Enemies," 132.
[403] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36,* 642. This view is substantiated by two other later events, where both the brothers come together: at the burial of their father (35:29); and their prosperity as the reason of their separation (36:6-8) cf. Turner, *Announcement of Plot in Genesis,* 131.
[404] Cf. Agyenta, "When Reconciliation Means More than the 'Re-Membering' of Former Enemies," 126.

nations (Edom and Israel) are living in peace and freedom with each other.[405] Schmid is of the opinion that the separation of the brothers is important because it is only in separate dwelling that people can co-exist peacefully.[406] In other words, the story has to be understood here in the light of the history of Israel – her survival and her distinct identity among the nations.[407]

Agyenta, in his article *When Reconciliation Means More than the 'Re-Membering' of Former Enemies,* tries to establish the genuineness of their reconciliation. He lists some reasons for the need for their separation. First, Jacob's excuse, not to accompany Esau, has nothing to do with their past conflict; rather more to do with the way and the manner that their new relationship should be managed. While Esau proposes physical union, Jacob prefers to keep a healthy distance.[408] Second, Jacob and Esau have, by nature an extremely opposed character-trait. Esau has a naïve and uncritical behaviour, while Jacob is diplomatic and persuasive. It would not be practically easy for people with such extreme opposed character-traits to live together for long.[409] Third, it would be also unrealistic to think that Jacob, who feared Esau for twenty long years, could all of a sudden come to term with the fear and live with his perceived antagonist hail and happy.[410] Fourth, in their dialogue with each other Jacob refers a number of times to God (vv. 5, 10, 11), on the contrary, Esau doesn't even mention Him once. Thus, from the perspective of faith it is not feasible for them to live together because Jacob's way and destiny is different from Esau's. Therefore, the separation between both the brothers is a need. Kamiskey summerises, "Reconciliation neither signals a return to the *status quo ante,* nor does it magically erase the character flaws that people have exhibited all along. Rather, when reconciliation occurs in the bible, usually the characters have matured, but they remain partially flawed."[411] Moreover, Gen 35:29 reports again the coming together of both the brothers for the

[405] Crüsemann, "Dominon, Guilt and Reconciliation," 72.
[406] Agyenta, "When Reconciliation Means More than the 'Re-Membering' of Former Enemies," 126.
[407] Agyenta, "When Reconciliation Means More than the 'Re-Membering' of Former Enemies," 126.
[408] Agyenta, "When Reconciliation Means More than the 'Re-Membering' of Former Enemies," 128ff.
[409] Agyenta, "When Reconciliation Means More than the 'Re-Membering' of Former Enemies,"129ff.
[410] Agyenta, "When Reconciliation Means More than the 'Re-Membering' of Former Enemies,"131f.
[411] Joel S. Kaminsky, *Yet I loved Jacob: Reclaiming the biblical concept of election,* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 56.

burial of Isaac, their father. Therefore, it is plausible to conclude that the Jacob-Esau story concludes with a genuine reconciliation.

2.1.3 Edom as Enemy to Israel in the Prophetic Literatures:

The Jacob-Esau episode in Genesis is loud and clear that the narrative is not merely about the relation between two individuals, Jacob and Esau, but also about the relation between two nations, Edom and Israel. If one compares Esau's character with Jacob's as portrayed in the book of Genesis, Esau, in spite of his fierce hostility against Jacob, is portrayed as a genuine person in contrast to Jacob, who is crafty and diplomatic. However, in the prophetic literatures Edom is portrayed very negatively even to the extent of using the name Edom as the symbolic name for all the inimical and destructive worldly powers. This raises the question, if the Jacob-Esau episode in Genesis concludes with peaceful and dramatic reconciliation between the twin brothers, why is it that the prophetic literatures are very hostile towards Edom?[412] Why do the prophetical literatures portray Edom as the symbol of Israel's enemy nations? To find answer to these questions it is necessary to understand the teaching of Deuteronomy regarding land. According to the book of Deuteronomy the nations are related to each other, and Yahweh is personally involved in allotting land to different nations.[413] In the book of Deuteronomy there are two references concerning Edom, which instruct Israel to deal graciously with the descendants of Esau because they are brothers.[414] Therefore Israel should not abhor (תָּעַב Deut 23:7 [8]) or frighten Edom or occupy her territory (Deut 2:4f.). She should respect the territorial integrity of Edom because it is Yahweh who has given the land of Seir to the descendants of Esau to possess (cf. Deut 2:1-8; Josh 24:4) just as Yahweh will give (or has given) Canaan to the descendants of Jacob to possess as their own land. These texts connote, if Israel is obliged to respect Edom's right for her land, then Edom is also equally obliged to respect Israel's right for her land (Canaan). One of the reasons why Edom is condemned by the prophetic literatures is that Edom did not respect this divine ordinance that is implied in the book of

[412] Cf. Is 21:11-12; 34; 63:1-6; Jer 49:7-22; Ez 25:12-14; 35; Joel 3:19-21; Amos 1:11-12; Obad 1; Mal 1:1-5; Pss 60; 137; Lam 4:21-22
[413] Anderson, *Brotherhood and Inheritance*, 156.
[414] Cf. Deut 2:1-8; 23:7-8 (8-9).

Deuteronomy. Moreover, Edom also disregarded the divine selection of Israel. Therefore the prophetic literatures are very contemptuous of Edom.[415]

A review on the biblical account of the relationship between Edom and Israel reveals that most of the biblical sources, which have hostile attitude towards Edom, originated from the time when Babylonians invaded Judah and destroyed Jerusalem and its temple in the year 587 BCE.[416] The traditional accusations laid against Edom and supported by the biblical texts are the following. First, Edom sided with Babylon at the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. For instance, Edom delivered the Israelites fugitives to the Babylonians and rejoiced at the fall of Judah. This act of Edom is an act of betrayal against his brother, Judah.[417] Second, once Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed, and the people were taken in exile, the Edomites began to colonize in Judah, and they began to take possession of the land of Judah.[418] This is a direct violation of the divine inheritance to Judah because it is Yahweh who had promised and given Canaan as inheritance to Israel, and Edom has no right to occupy the land of Judah. Anderson writes, "not only was Edom considered to have violated a special relationship of brotherhood, but they were considered to have encroached on Israel's inheritance, their land. This encroachment was a dishonouring of YHWH's divine appointment of the land of Judah, as well as a disrespecting of Edom's own inheritance from YHWH."[419]

Elie Assis adds another important theological reason; or rather, he gives the main reason for the anti-Edomite prophecies in the Bible. He contends it is neither the

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[415] Anderson, *Brotherhood and Inheritance*, 156-76.

[416] Cf. Is 34; 63; Jer 49:7-22; Ez 35-36; Joel 3:19-21; Amos 9:12; Obad; Mal 1:1-5; Ps 137; Lam 4:21-22.

[417] cf. Obad vv. 8-15; Ez 35:5-6; 25:12: Joel 3:19 [4:19]; Amos 1:11-12; Ps 137:7; Lam 4:21. However, historically there is no credible evidence that Edom actively participated in the destruction of Jerusalem, or in the destruction of the temple. Scholars are divided on the role of Edom in Judah's downfall. Many scholars are of the view that the reason for the negative attitude towards Edom in the prophetic literatures could be that Edom was the only country that was not destroyed by the Babylonians (cf. Lam 4:21), or Edom had behaved in an unbrotherly fashion by not helping Judah at the crisis. Cf. Horacio Simian, *Die Theologische Nachgeschichte der Prophetie Ezechiels: Form und traditionskritische Untersuchung zu Ez 6; 35; 36* (FZB; Würzburg, 1974), 313ff.

[418] Cf. Obadiah vv. 17, 19; Ez 35:10; 36:5. It has been believed that many Edomites had already started to live in the Judean territories in the eighth century BCE. Recent archaeological discoveries prove that Edomite migration was taking place in the Negev of Judah in the seventh and in the early sixth centuries BCE, and their migration might have increased with the fall of Judah. Cf. Bert Dicou, *Edom, Israel's Brother and Antagonist: The Role of Edom in Biblical Prophecy and Story* (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 141ff.

[419] Anderson, "*Brotherhood and Inheritance,"* 229.

participation of Edom in the fall of Judah nor Edom's occupation of the Negev of Judah are the main causes for the anti-Edomite prophecies. For it was not only Edom but also other neighbouring nations such as Ammon, Moab and Philistia that had also played a role in the fall of Judah (cf. Ez 25). With regards to the occupation of Judah by Edom, it should be noted that Edom was not the only nation to occupy Judah. There were also other peoples such as Philistines (Obad v. 19) and Samaritans that colonized in Judah after her fall. If historical facts prove that Edom alone is not responsible for the fall of Judah, why is it that only Edom is singled out and condemned vehemently by the prophets more than the other nations? Some scholars are of the opinion that the main reason for such negative texts against Edom is theological rather than historical.[420]

E. Assis argues that Edom's participation in the downfall of Judah and the Edomite infiltration into Judah are not satisfactory. Referring to the Jacob-Esau conflict for the patriarchal inheritance in Genesis, Assis proves that after Judah's fall it was the common feeling, both in Israel and in the surrounding nations, that God had abandoned Israel and casted her out, to be taken in exile because of their iniquities (cf. Lev 18:27-30). This made them assume that the Lord had abandoned Israel (Lam 3:6, 8, 18; Ez 37), and had chosen Edom instead.[421] And it was to erase this false assumption from their memory that the prophets targeted Edom with anti-Edomite prophecies. Through these anti-Edomite texts the prophets continued to remind the people that Israel still remained His beloved and chosen people and God would restore Israel back again.[422] Assis writes, "The multitude of anti-Edomite prophecies after the destruction, and the severity of the punishment for Edom are not a result of the Edomite participation in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, or their colonization of the land of Judah. The

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[420] B. C. Cresson and H. Simian are of the view that the oracles contain more theology than history, for these oracles function to establish a theological point. Cf. Dicou, *Edom, Israel's Brother and Antagonist*, 187f.

[421] It was, in fact, not difficult for the people to come to this conclusion for the following reasons: first, Edom's brotherhood to Israel was a literary theme in the bible and it was not much older than some of the late pre-exilic times (cf. Num 20:14-20; Deut 2:1-18; 23:8-9); second, the migration of many Edomites into Judaen territory had already started in the eighth century BCE, and after the fall of Jerusalem the migration increased quickly; third, other than the literary construction for the brotherhood of Edom to Israel there was also a common Yahweh-cult both in Edom and Israel. Edom's deity Qos resembles Israel's deity Yahweh, for both were considered as Syrian-Arabic weather gods (cf. Deut 33:2; Hab 3:3). These factors might have contributed to the misunderstanding of the fall of Jerusalem that Yahweh replaced Israel with Edom. Cf. Dicou, *Edom, Israel's Brother and Antagonist,* 141-81; E. A. Knauf, "Yahwe," *VT* 34 (1984), 467-72; Israel Finkelstein and Thomas Römer, "Comments on the Historical Background of the Jacob Narrative in Genesis," *ZAW* 126 (2014), 331f.

[422] cf. Is 40; 41:8ff; 43; Mal 1:2-5; etc.

attitude to Edom derives principally from the interpretation that the people in Judah gave to these events. The many and severe prophecies of divine punishment of Edom were designed to extirpate from the people's consciousness the view that God has abandoned them and had chosen another people in their place. The prophecies of divine punishment were meant not only to comfort the people and to announce a better future and the future restoring of the area colonized by Edom, but also, and primarily, to contend with the deep frustration and the despair felt by Judah. … The object of the anti-Edomite prophecies was to contend with the loss of the national identity of Judah, the people chosen by God"[423] Thus, the anti-Edomite texts in the prophetic literatures are not mainly because of Edom's role in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple; rather to convince Israel and to convince other nations of Israel's special place in the salvation history.

2.1.4 Some Guidelines for Reconciliation from the Jacob-Esau Episode:

Reconciliation is a complex and multidimensional process, which requires a great amount of courage, commitment and conscious efforts with an attitude of humility. Reconciliation between individuals, between groups, and between human and the divine is realizable if one peruses the process of reconciliation with total commitment, with sincere heart, and with respect for the other party, and of course, in trusting the divine assistance. The Jacob-Esau episode encourages the reader that in spite of bitter hostility between the individuals it is possible to realise reconciliation between the conflicting parties. One can draw a number of guidelines or principles from the Jacob-Esau episode for a genuine reconciliation process.

First, the reconciliation process demands an elaborate and minute preparation, and a great sense of perseverance. Jacob undertakes a number of steps to win Esau's favour – he first sends messengers to Esau, he prays for God's assistance, he sends gift, etc. He takes detailed and minute care about the message and about the manner the message and the gifts are to be presented to his antagonist. The detailed and minute preparation is aimed at winning over the favour/kindness of his opponent. In spite of the doubts and the mystery about Esau's state of mind towards him, Jacob peruses with various

[423] Elie Assis, "Why Edom? On the Hostility Towards Jacob's Brother in Prophetic Sources," *VT* 56 (2006), 16f.

methods to win Esau's good will. Thus, reconciliation requires an elaborate and minute preparation and a sincere and deep commitment.

Second, one of the most important components of a reconciliation process is an attitude of humility in one's approach. Reconciliation cannot be realised by dominion or power or by war; rather by an attitude of humility and respect towards the opponent. Although the divine oracle and the fatherly blessing state that "the older shall serve the younger" (cf. 25:23; 27:29a, 40a), the patriarch's second blessing to Jacob in Gen 28:3-4 and the divine promise of blessing at Bethel (Gen 28:13-15) do not refer to any dominion of one brother over the other or one nation over the other. In fact, it is only when Jacob renounces his attitude of dominion, he is able to win the goodwill of Esau and realise forgiveness and reconciliation.[424] The Peniel scene and the reunion scene of the two brothers emphasise this component in a genuine reconciliation process.

Third, true reconciliation requires sincerity of intention. Jacob's initial motive was to placate Esau through diplomatic means, for instance, his motive behind the gift. However, it is only when he has revised his motive behind his gift that Esau accepts his gift. And with Esau's acceptance of Jacob's gift the reconciliation between the brothers is sealed.

Fifth, reconciliation requires that the concerned parties face the truth. One must confront his past history with openness and sincerity of heart. Because "confronting history and coming to terms with the truth is an essential component of any reconciliation effort."[425] Jacob had to confront his dark and dubious past, and accept and own up to it in order to come to the light of day. However, the phase of confronting one's dubious past is not an easy phase. The Jacob narrative emphasises this fact in a dramatic scene of wrestling. The Peniel event is one of such moments when Jacob accepts his past transgressions as he confesses his true identity before the Angel of God. It is only then Jacob is able to confront Esau with sincere heart the next day.

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[424] The prophecy of the two sons of Isaac and Rebekah and the first blessing of Isaac to Jacob, which predict the dominion of the younger brother over the elder brother, is reversed at the Bethel promise. The divine promise of Jacob at Bethel does not promise Jacob dominion over his brother. The story conveys that in the end neither of them has dominion over the other. Cf. Crüsemann, "Dominion, Guilt, and Reconciliation," 69ff.

[425] Herbert C. Kelman, "Reconciliation as Identity Change: A Social-Psychological Perspective," *From Conflict Resolution to* Reconciliation (ed. Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov; NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 123.

Sixth, true reconciliation demands justice, for reconciliation is possible only after justice has been attained. Miroslav Volf says that the struggle for justice is the pursuit for reconciliation whose ultimate goal is a community of love.[426] Jacob insists Esau accept his gift as restitution for the loss or hurt caused upon Esau by his deceptions. Jacob insists because without Esau's acceptance of his restitution the reconciliation between them will remain half done. Therefore Jacob persuades and insists that Esau accepts his gift (as his restitution); and he does not give up till Esau accepts his restitution.

Seventh, the most important theological principle for a true reconciliation is the divine or the vertical dimension of reconciliation, for every conflict is a consequence of human sin; and the Bible sees sin as conflict between man and God. By his sin man breaks his relationship with God. "Der Bruch geht vom Sünder aus, so dass Gott der 'Angegriffene' ist. Er ist jedoch gleichzeitig der Mächtigere, dem der Sünder unterlegen ist."[427] So Colin E. Cunton states, "reconciliation belongs first to the transcendental realm, involving the priority of divine action in time, and what happens between people as consequence."[428] Therefore, it is necessary for Jacob to encounter God alone before he encounters Esau; for it is only when Jacob has reconciled with God that his reconciliation with his brother is made easy. Jacob acknowledges this fact when he says, "truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God" (33:10). For reconciliation with the divine facilitates the reconciliation between human beings. The narrative indicates that in human reconciliation God is always present, orchestrating the process of reconciliation towards a peaceful resolution of their conflict. Thus, in a genuine reconciliation both the vertical and horizontal dimensions i.e. divine and human dimensions are simultaneously at work because every offence against a fellow being is an offence against the Creator.

Eighth, reconciliation between individuals should also involve the concerned communities, for reconciliation requires the support of the society, and only then can peace be stable and lasting. "A peace that is not supported by society as a whole will

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[426] Miroslav Volf, "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation," *Int* 54 (April 2000), 163.
[427] Adirian Schenker, "Sühne statt Strafe und Strafe statt Sühne! Zum biblischen Sühnebegriff," *Sühne und Versöhnung* (ed. Josef Blank und Jürgen Werbick; Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1986) 13.
[428] Cunton, *The Theology of Reconciliation*, 1.

always be at risk of breaking down."[429] Jacob's genuflexion before Esau, and the imitation of his action by his family is also the involvement of his family in the process of reconciliation between the heads of the two families. For in the reconciliation between Esau and Jacob there is not only the reconciliation between two individuals but also the reconciliation between two families and two nations, Edom and Israel.

Ninth, sometimes it is necessary that the reconciled parties separate in peace from each other in order to avoid any future conflict, especially when there are ideological and cultural differences between the parties. Jacob and his company need to separate from Esau and his men because they represent two nations; and as nations they need to enjoy their territorial integrity without being interfered by the other parties. Second, Israel as the chosen nation needs to preserve and promote her racial purity. Third, they have different beliefs – Jacob and his descendants are the believers in Yahweh, whereas Esau and his descendants are mixed groups since Esau had married Hittite and Ishmaelite women.

The Jacob-Esau episode in Genesis and the anti-Edomite prophetic literatures in the Bible demonstrate that the main cause for their conflict is one of domination, each trying to dominate over the other. The Genesis narrative tells the reader that it is only when they have renounced their desire to dominate each other and accept each other as equals that the reconciliation between them is made possible. Moreover, Edom needs to acknowledge the divine election of Israel and her territorial integrity; similarly, Israel should respect Edom's territorial integrity and give up the attitude of dominating her brother Edom.

2.2. Interaction between Jacob and Laban – Israel and Aram (Gen 29-31):

The Jacob-Laban episode begins with the arrival of Jacob at Haran, the land of the East. Although the narrative begins with a positive, warm and cordial reception of Jacob by his uncle, Laban, in his house, the atmosphere soon takes a U-turn with Laban's deception of Jacob. The starting point for the conflict between Jacob and Laban is Laban's deception. The narrator develops the conflict theme as he unfolds the events in

[429] Daniel Bar-Tal and Gemma H. Bennink, "The Nature of Reconciliation as an outcome and as process," *From Conflict to Reconciliation* (ed. Daniel Bar-Tal; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 12.

the Jacob-Laban relationship. The hostility and the conflict between Laban and Jacob reach their climax when Laban with a group of men, pursues to attack Jacob and his camp. But with the divine intervention the intended damage is prevented, and the conflict is turned into a non-aggression treaty between Jacob and Laban, and between their groups.

A careful reading of the text would reveal that the story, which started with two individuals, gradually develops into a story of two families, and concludes with the covenant agreement between two peoples. In the episode both the main characters represent their respective nations – Jacob represents Israel, while Laban represents Aram. The name "Laban," which means "white," is etymologically associated with the people, who worshiped the moon god "Sin". Geographically the name "Laban" refers to the Lebanon Mountains, whose ranges are covered with snow most of the year. Since the Lebanon range defines the western borders of Aram, "Laban" could be understood as eponymous Arameans.[430] Moreover, Laban's ambiguous relationship with Jacob resembles Aram's hostile relationship with Israel, especially, in the ninth and in the eighth century BCE. The fact that the Jacob-Laban episode concludes with a peace treaty between both the parties it could be understood that the purpose of the Jacob-Laban tale is to encourage reconciliation and peace between both the nations, Israel and Aram.

2.2.1 Jacob's Arrival in the Land of the East (29:1-14):

Fleeing from the Promised Land, Jacob comes to "the land of the people of the east." Jacob's arrival to the land of the east is for the following two reasons: first, to escape from Esau; and, second, to find a wife for himself from his mother's relatives (Gen 27:41- 28:5). The narrator's description about the region as בְּנֵי־ אַרְצָה קֶדֶם׃ ("the land of the people of the east" 29:1), in the very first verse of the episode itself, suggests

[430] The name "Laban" means "white," closely associated with the moon god Sin, the patron deity of Haran. The term is also associated to the name Lebanon (*lebanon*), apparently due to the snow-covered mountains of the region. According to Josh 11:17; 13:5 Lebanon is the northern border to Israel, known as Lebo-Hamath. In Thut-Mose III's inscription Lebo-Hamath is known as *lbn*, which corresponds to the spelling *labana* in the El Amarna tablets. The land beyond Lebo-Hamath would, therefore, be Aram. Cf. Sweeney, "Puns, Politics, and Perushim in the Jacob Cycle, 110f.

that the episode is not merely about two individuals or families but also about two nations, Israel and Aram.

The first scene (Gen 29:1-14) alludes to what would be Jacob's fate in Paddan-Aram, and what would be his future relationship with Laban. Jacob's first action, watering the sheep of his future father-in-law, indicates that he would be taking care of the sheep of his father-in-law as Moses did (Ex 3:1) – "Mit dem Tränken der Herde beginnt er bereits, ihre Aufgabe zu übernehmen."[431] His emotional outbreak before Rachel (v. 11) is an expression of relief in finding the right person at the right moment. G. Fischer comments, "Er ist überwältigt vom Geschenk des Endes seiner Flucht und der ersten Begegnung mit seiner Verwandten."[432] The warm reception that he receives from his uncle is, on the one hand, the Near Eastern expression of family connection; but, on the other hand, it also implies Laban's expectation from the visitor. Because Laban's overreaction suggests that he expects some material gain as he had earlier benefited from the visit of Abraham's servant (Gen 24). However, Laban soon learns that it is Jacob, who is at his mercy. Therefore he comforts Jacob by saying, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh,"[433] an expression of blood ties of kinsman. But from the wider perspective of the story his statement hints at his double-dealing with Jacob.[434] On the one hand, Laban comforts Jacob with his soothing words of acceptance; but, on the other hand, he plans to use his service. Thus, Laban is not only celebrating here his bond with his nephew but he also thinks that he would be the master over Jacob.[435] Gen 29:1-14, thus, introduces the future ambiguous relationship between Laban and Jacob.

2.2.2 Jacob's Deal with Laban for Rachel (29: 15-20):

Jacob spends his first month in Laban's house, voluntarily taking care of Laban's flock. Laban observes closely Jacob's movements and his service, and he is very much impressed with Jacob's service and skill. He also takes note of Jacob's attachment to Rachel. Calculating in his mind the benefit of retaining Jacob's service, he asks Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me,

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[431] I. Fischer, *Gottesstreiterinnen*, (Pub. 2), 100.
[432] G. Fischer, *Der Jakobsweg der Bibel*, 37.
[433] Cf. Gen 2:23; Judg. 9:2; 2 Sam 19:13.
[434] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 231.
[435] David Daube and Reuven Yaron, "Jacob's Reception by Laban," *JSS* 1 (1956), 60-62.

what shall your wages be?" (29:15). Laban seems to be very much concerned about Jacob but in reality, as the narrative will unfold, he is not concerned about Jacob at all; rather he is concerned only about his own profit. Wenham comments, " Laban is canny; he has learned Jacob's motives for coming (29:13) and in the last few weeks he observed his attachment to Rachel, which he is willing to exploit by inviting Jacob to make an offer."[436]

Trusting his words, Jacob commits to serve[437] Laban seven years for Rachel. His commitment, in fact, amounts to a great value. It shows that Jacob is not after money, but after the hand of Rachel in marriage. For it is one of the reasons, why he came to Paddan-Aram. Commenting on Jacob's commitment, G. Fischer says, "Dieser Vorschlag für einen 'Brautpreis' ist sehr hoch angesetzt und zeigt am großen Gegenwert die tiefe Liebe, die Jakob für Rahel empfindt."[438] Snatching the opportunity, Laban accepts the deal immediately by saying, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me" (29:19). Laban's last statement, "stay with me," hints about his hidden motive that Jacob should serves him forever. Commenting on this Gibson says, "Jacob had, in effect, fallen into the same kind of trap he had laid for his brother, Esau, when he was after his birthright. He had let it be known that he would pay any price to gain the girl he loved."[439] Laban thinks that Jacob will stay with him forever, but Jacob understands his seven years commitment to Laban as the pride-price (מֹהַר) for Rachel's hand in marriage because Jacob has nothing to pay for the מֹהַר except his service; therefore, he offers his seven years service as מֹהַר for Rachel's hand in marriage. Thus, Jacob begins to work seven years for Laban for Rachel.

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[436] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 234f.

[437] The verb עָבַד (serve) appears 7 times in the narrative (Gen 29:15, 18, 20, 25, 27 [2], 30), describing Jacob's servitude under Laban. However according to the patriarchal blessing peoples and nations are to serve and bow down before Jacob (cf. 27:20). Here, on the contrary, Jacob commits to serve Laban, the Aramean.

[438] G. Fischer, *Der Jakobsweg der Bibel*, 39.

[439] John C. L. Gibson, *Genesis*, vol. 2 (Westminister: John Knox Press, 1982), 177.

2.2.3 Laban Deceives Jacob (29:21-30):

After completing seven years service, Jacob demands Rachel from Laban. His demand has a tone of impatience and anger. Probably, Jacob's impatience or anger hints his "sexual impatience,"[440] or it could also be that Laban delays purposely in fulfilling his promise. Jacob's impatience is evident from the way he demands from Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed" (29:21). But Laban, instead of responding directly to Jacob, gathers all the men of the place for a nuptial meal. Laban's silence and his arrangement of a nuptial meal seem mysterious and raise suspicion in the reader's mind on his motive and his next move. Jacob gets himself lost in the celebration and becomes drunk. Taking advantage of Jacob's drunken status and the darkness of the night, Laban sends his elder daughter, Leah, to Jacob's bedroom, instead of Rachel. Assuming her to be his beloved Rachel, Jacob goes in to her. But only in the morning does he come to know that it was not his beloved Rachel, but Leah, with whom he had slept the night.[441] Jacob, who took advantage of the blindness of his father, now gets deceived in the darkness of the night and in the drunkenness of the wine - he is deceived in the same measure as he did to others. Being deceived and shattered by Laban's craftiness, Jacob accuses him, "What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?" These interrogations resembles those in Gen 12:18; 20:10; 26:10, which refer to the questions asked by Pharaoh and Abimelech of his grandfather, Abraham, and of his father, Isaac, when they were found deceiving the kings. So, what his grandfather and father had done to others, seems to be done squarely to their descendent, Jacob.

In defence to his accusations Laban cites the local custom, "It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the first-born" (v. 26). By citing the local custom, Laban not only defends or justifies his act but also accuses Jacob squarely of what he had done to his father, Isaac and to his brother, Esau. Moreover, Laban tries to assert the superiority of his culture and takes a dig at Israel's culture that in our Mediterranean culture older persons should be respected and the first-born children

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[440] Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, 155.

[441] S.R. Driver attributes the success of Laban's plan to the custom of veiling the bride, where as Josephus, M. Buber and F. Rosenzweig attribute Laban's success to Jacob's drunkenness. Being "deluded by wine" Jacob could not distinguish his bedmate in the night. And it is only in the morning when he was freed from the intoxication, he learns, who his conjugal partner war. Cf. J.A. Diamond, "The Deception of Jacob: A New Perspective on an Ancient Solution to the Problem," *VT* 34 (Apr., 1984), 212.

within their own gender has the prior claim over the younger within a kinship group.[442] Alter says, "Laban is an instrument of dramatic irony: his perfectly natural reference to 'our place' has the effect of touching a nerve of guilty consciousness in Jacob, who in *his* place acted to put the younger before the firstborn. This effect is reinforced by Laban's referring to Leah not as the elder but as the firstborn (*bekhirah*)."[443] Lucie Panzer says, "Jakob ist entsetzt, als er den Betrug bemerkt, kann sich aber nicht wehren. Er muss diesmal die Sitten seines Gastlandes anerkennen und sich ihnen beugen."[444] Thus, Laban justifies his act by using the local custom as his defence, and thereby, condemning indirectly Jacob's own offence, he makes Jacob quiet.

Confronted by his own mischief, Jacob finds himself in a tight spot now because at the face of Laban's counter accusation, Jacob has nothing else to rebut but to suffer the injustice. Jacob experiences here the bitterness of deception that he himself had done against his brother and his father (Gen 27) – "his mischief returns upon his own head, and on his own pate his violence descends" (Ps. 7:16). Earlier in Gen 27 Rebecca sent her younger son, Jacob, to steal the patriarchal blessing by taking advantage of the blindness of Isaac, his father. Similarly, here Laban, the father, sends his first-born daughter, Leah, to deceive Jacob by taking advantage of the darkness of the night and the drunkenness of Jacob. Earlier the younger brother denied the patriarchal blessing to his elder brother, but here the elder sister denies her younger sister her beloved. K. Koch describes this as "*sichksalwirkende Tat*,"[445] for "he who is perverse in his way will fall into a pit" (Prov. 28:18). Renate A. Klein summarises the scene as "Revanche für den Segensbetrug."[446]

It has been Laban's hidden motive to retain the service of Jacob and make the maximum out of it; therefore, he asks Jacob to renew the contract once again for Rachel. Laban knows Jacob will oblige to his terms and conditions because Jacob is very much attached to Rachel. Therefore Laban tells Jacob straightforward, "complete

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[442] Bruce J. Malina, *Windows on the World of Jesus: Time Travel to Ancient Judah* (Kentucky: Westminister/John Knox Press, 1993), 143.
[443] Albert, *The Five Books of Moses,* 155.
[444] Lucie Panzer, "Zwischenräume entdecken: Jakobs Frauen und Kinder," *ÖB* 45 (2009-10), 31.
[445] Ruper, *Genesis: Ein kritischer und theologischer Kommentar 25,19-36,43,* vol. 3 (Würzburg: Echter, 2005), 230.
[446] Renante A. Klein, *Jakob: Wie Gott auf Krummen Linen gerade schreibt* (Leipzing: Evangelsiche Verlagsanstalt, 2007), 73.

the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years" (v 27). Jacob is so attached to Rachel that he has no other option but to comply with Laban's terms and conditions. So after completing the marriage week, he serves Laban for another seven years. Though some scholars are of the view that Jacob gets Rachel as his wife after the completion of the second seven years of his service, the narrative seems to suggest that Laban gave Rachel to be wife to Jacob after the completion of his marriage week with Leah ("complete the week of this one"). Because the very next verse states, "Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to wife … So Jacob went into Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years" (v. 28-30). So it is fitting to conclude that Laban gave Jacob his daughter, Rachel, to be his wife not after the completion of his second seven years of Jacob's service, but after the end of his marriage week with Leah; and Jacob worked for Laban another seven years for Rachel.[447]

Laban's tactic has, of course, silenced Jacob, but has not resolved the conflict between the two; rather it has only deepened the trust deficit between Jacob and Laban, and has widened the gap between Jacob and Laban. Moreover, Laban's deception has divided his daughters, setting one against the other, and finally it has also separated the daughters from their father. Thus, conflict has a circling effect like a contagious disease, spreading from one level of relationship to the other.

2.2.4 Conflict between Leah and Rachel (29:31-30:24):

The deceiving of Jacob by Laban, and Leah's participation in it, has not only affected Jacob's relationship with Laban, but it has also fractured the relationship between both the sisters. One can imagine what Rachel might have gone through on the night, when, instead of her, Leah was led to Jacob's bedroom. She might have suffered

[447] As per the narrative, Jacob works under Laban twenty years. For the first seven years he works for Rachel but is deceived by Laban; and the second seven years he works again for Rachel. So altogether Jacob works for Laban's two daughters for fourteen years. And when Rachel has born Joseph, Jacob asks Laban to release him to return to his homeland with his wives and children (Gen 30:25), but Laban persuades Jacob to stay with him and serve him under a new contract. Then Jacob serves six more years for Laban, and he becomes very rich. Jacob, finally, outwits Laban and flees secretly for Canaan with all his belongings. Therefore, it is fitting to conclude that Laban gives Rachel to Jacob, once Jacob has completed his marriage week with Leah.

deep grief mixed with despair, deprivation, anger, hatred, helplessness, etc. So, it is highly expected that both the sisters would fight against each other for one or other reason. This is why the Bible prohibits two sisters marrying the same man (ref. Lev 18:18) in order to prevent conflicts within the family circle, and to protect the family ties.

Gen 29:31-30:24 narrates the conflict between both the women in which "the wives vie for the affection of the husband through bearing children."[448] Rachel is the favoured wife of Jacob, while Leah is the disliked wife. The Hebrew term used to convey Jacob's relationship with Leah is שָׂנֵא (hate).[449] Jacob loves Rachel but he hates Leah. Since Leah is the unloved wife, she receives her compensation from God – Leah is fruitful, while Rachel remains barren. Leah solaces herself and tries to win Jacob's affection by bearing him children. But Rachel, because of her barrenness, tries to beget children from Jacob by giving him her maid Bilhah. The names, and the interpretation given to the names reveal their rivalry and their anguish for their husband. For example, Leah names her first son Reuben. The name 'Reuben' etymologically sounds, "see, a son!" Most likely Leah is trying to taunt Rachel, probably, intending to tell Rachel, though my husband loves you more than me yet I have a son from him. And her interpretation of the name, Reuben, expresses her deep longing for her husband's love, "the Lord has looked upon my affliction; surely now my husband will love me" (v. 32). Similarly, Leah's interpretation on her second son's name expresses her anguish after her husband's affection. She names the second son Simeon, saying, "Because the Lord has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also" (v. 33). The third son she names Levi, saying, "Now this time my husband will be joined to me because I have borne him three sons" (v. 34). But the fourth son she names Judah, saying, "This time I will praise the Lord" (v. 35). Here she does not express her anguish; rather she acknowledges God's kindness to her.

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[448] Thomas L. Thompson, "Conflict Themes in the Jacob Narratives," *Semeia* 15 (1979), 19.

[449] The Hebrew verb שָׂנֵא, in its stronger sense, means, "to hate." But in its lighter sense it may be used for "aversion" towards one wife as against the other (Deut 21:15, 17). In Jacob's context the term is used to describe Jacob's preference for Rachel and his tolerance or even rejection to Leah. Cf. A. H. Konkel, "שָׂנֵא,"*NIDOTE,* vol. 3 (ed. Willem VanGemeren; UK: Paternoster Press, 1996), 1256-1260.

In spite of getting four sons through Leah, Jacob is still attached to the barren Rachel. Since Rachel cannot bear any child for Jacob, she gives him her maidservant Bilhah to go into her. When Bilhah bears Dan, Rachel says, "God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son" (30:6). The second son she names Naphatali saying, "With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and have prevailed" (30:8). Likewise, Leah gives her maid-servant, Zilpah, to Jacob to go into her, and she gives birth to a son, and Leah names him Gad, saying, "good fortune" (30:11). When Asher is born to Zilpah, Leah says, "Happy am I! For the women will call me happy" (30:12). At Issachar's birth Leah says, "God has given me my hire because I gave my maid to my husband" (30:18). And when Zebulon is born to Leah, she says, "God has endowed me with a good dowry; now my husband will honour me, because I have born him six sons" (30:20). Finally, when Rachel bears Joseph, she exclaims "God has taken away my reproach," and she names him Joseph saying, "May the Lord add to me another son!" (30:24), expressing her desire for more children. What is interesting to notice in these birth stories of Jacob's sons is the conflict and grudge between both the sisters. Thus, the narrator tells about the conflict between both the women, while narrating the birth stories of Jacob's sons.

It is also interesting to note in these birth stories that even in the midst of narrating the fierce conflict between both the women, the narrator tries to convey an important theological message and also presents some political facts about the tribes of Israel. First, though both the women are in conflict with each other, they acknowledge that children are gifts from God. In their interpretation about the names of most of their children (except Levi, Gad, Asher and Diana) there is always a reference to God. Second, the names given to all the sons of Jacob are the names of the different tribes of Israel, and the geo-political significance of each of these tribes is based on its matriarch's closeness to Jacob.[450] Third, in spite of the hostile situation that Jacob faces

[450] For example, Rachel, who gives birth to Joseph and Benjamin, is the favoured wife of Jacob. Ephraim, the son of Joseph, becomes the leading tribe of the northern kingdom of Israel. Benjamin likewise is the royal tribe of Israel since the first king of Israel, Saul, comes from the Benjamin tribes. Bilhah and Zilpah, as maidservants hold the low status with regards to their relationship with Jacob, are the matriarchs of those tribes whose territories lay on the border of Israel; and they are often subjected to conquest or occupation by foreign powers. The remaining tribes, whose matriarch is Leah, form the central body of Israel that are neither distinguished like Ephraim or Benjamin nor exposed to foreign attacks like Gad, Asher, Dan and Naphtali. Cf. Sweeney, "Puns, Politics, and Perushim in the Jacob Cycle," 112f.

with Laban and within his own family, between his two wives, there is a silver lining i.e., the birth of a new nation, which is a partial fulfilment of God's promise to Jacob (Gen 28:13ff).

2.2.5 Jacob Outwits Laban, the Aramean (30:25-31:20):

As both the women, Rachel and Leah, wrestle with each other to win their husband's affection, another conflict develops between Laban and Jacob. In his first contract with Jacob Laban had outwitted Jacob, but in his second contract with Jacob, it will be Jacob, who will not only outwit Laban but will also impoverish Laban; and in the process Jacob will become very rich. And finally, Jacob will secretly leave Paddan-Aram, and will return to Canaan with his wives, children and with all his belongings.

Jacob worked under Laban for his two daughters for fourteen years and suffered deception and exploitation at Laban's hand. Now, Jacob remembers his homeland and asks Laban to let him go to his homeland with his wives and children. His desire to break away from Laban has two main reasons: firstly, it has been too long since he now has been away from home, and his memory of home drives him to return; secondly, he has now a large family to provide for, and if he continues to work under Laban he can save hardly anything to provide for his family in the future, therefore he wants to be financially independent. Filled with the memory of home coupled with the responsibility to provide for his large family, Jacob asks Laban to let him return to his home country. The verbal form that Jacob uses, שַׁלְּחֵנִי וְאֵלֵכָה (send me away), has a restless tone. It is Jacob's "aggressive first move,"[451] suggesting his anger and distress at Laban's exploitation. "Seine Bitte um ein Ausscheiden aus Labans Dienst wird durch das Verb 'loslassen/freilassen' aussgedurückt, das auch im Zusammenhang mit der Freilassung von Sklaven bzw. Abhängigen auftaucht."[452] Thus, his demand gives the expression that Jacob has been held in slavery, and he wants to break away from the situation of servitude.

But knowing how costly it would be to lose Jacob's service, Laban persuades Jacob to stay with him. Laban is a very shrewd tradesman; he knows how to handle the

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[451] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 254.
[452] Barbara Schlenke und Sabine Sprinkmeier, "Handeln auf Gottes Zusage hin: Jakob kommt zu Reichtum," *ÖB* 45 (2009-10), 31.

emotion of an angry employee. He mellows down Jacob's anger with his polite statement, בְּעֵינֶיךָ חֵן מָצָאתִי ("if I have found favour in your eyes"). This Hebrew clause is a polite form of expression used to make a request. And he continues to persuade him, "I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you; name your wages, and I will give it" (30:27f). By this statement Laban not only acknowledges Jacob's faithful service, but also acknowledges how God has blessed him through Jacob. Breuggemann comments, "Yahweh is the giver of prosperity. And it is given through the person of Jacob. Laban is dependent on Jacob for the gift of God's blessing."[453] Finally, they come to an agreement, according to which Jacob will get all the speckled and spotted and brown sheep from the flock of sheep, and the spotted and speckled goats from the flock of goats that he shepherds. It is indeed a poor and foolish deal on the part of Jacob, for the deal seems completely in favour of Laban, because in the Near Eastern world the sheep are normally white and the goats are black; and only a minority of sheep may have dark patches, and similarly goats with white markings are very rare. Thinking he has nothing to lose, Laban seals the deal at once. And on the same day Laban separates the irregular animals from the flock and puts them in charge of his sons, and he sets a distance of three days journey between him and Jacob, so that Jacob does not take claim over them, and that the irregular bread of the flocks do not help to produce irregular flocks for Jacob. Thereby he tries to limit Jacob's chances of prospering.

Laban thought that by removing all the irregular animals he has limited Jacob's chances of prospering. But on the contrary, this has worked in Jacob's favour. This has allowed Jacob to carry out his experiments of crossbreeding privately without being spied on by either Laban or his men.[454] Rashbam says, "When the white sheep mated they did so looking at Laban's dark goats. This produced dark lamb, just as mating the goats in front of the stripped branches produced spotted and speckled goats. It may be recalled that Laban had left a flock of black goats and white sheep for Jacob to care for. So Jacob found a means not just of making black goats produce spotted kids but of inducing white sheep to give birth to dark lamb."[455] And as a result Jacob produced

[453] Breuggerman, *Genesis*, 259.
[454] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 283.
[455] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 257.

more and more healthy speckled and spotted and brown sheep and spotted and speckled goats. But on the other side, Laban's choice of the regular white sheep and black goats became fewer and fewer, and they became feebler too. Thus, Jacob "grew exceedingly rich, and had large flocks, maidservants and menservants, and camels and asses" (30:43). Wenham comments, "Having been outwitted by Laban in the previous story, Jacob now sets out a plot in which he outwits Laban, pretending to work for almost nothing (v. 25ff) in doing this, Jacob becomes rich at Laban's expense through trickery."[456] No doubt that some of his success came from selective breeding (vv. 40-42), but by itself this would have worked very slowly without God's intervention (31:9-12).[457] "Eine göttliche Intervention wird hier an keiner Stelle erwähnt – im Gegensatz zu 31,10-13, wo Jakob sich ausdrücklich auf ein Versprechen Gottes beruft und die Geburt der Tiere als Ergebnis des Befreiungshandelns Gottes deutet."[458]

However, here Jacob does not rob the sheep or the goats of Laban, rather he uses the methods known or perhaps revealed to him (cf. 31:10-13). Therefore, G. Fischer says that in this section of the narrative we meet a transformed Jacob, who does not take away anything that belongs to others, but by using the proper methods and available things he increases his fortune.[459] Jacob's actions here could be justified from the words of a prayer of blessing which states, "Gott schenke dir die Freiheit, dein Leben in die Hand zu nehmen. Gott schenke dir den Mut, dich für deine Freiheit und für die Freiheit deines Nächsten einzusetzen."[460] Jacob uses this method for his own advantage that which he learned from his work-experience, and from the dream (cf. 31:10-13).

2.2.5.1 Jacob's Flight from Laban:

There is always a limit to endurance of deception, misunderstanding, exploitation or hostility. In spite of Laban's deception and exploitation Jacob has served Laban for twenty long years; but he can now no longer live in such a hostile atmosphere, therefore he decides to set himself free from Laban. He had already expressed his desire to return home (30:25); but Laban would not let him go. Jacob also could not free himself from

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[456] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 258.
[457] Kinder, *Genesis*, 163.
[458] Schlenke und Sprinkmeier, "Handeln auf Gottes Zusage hin," 36.
[459] G. Fischer, *Der Jakobsweg der Bibel*, 49.
[460] Schlenke und Sprinkmeier, "Handeln auf Gottes Zusage hin," 38.

Laban for reasons untold. It is also true that sometime in real life we are held back from taking crucial decisions for some or another reason. However, the time will come when we must break up all the barriers to set us free from the things that hold us back; but it will be the toughest move and moment in life because it can change the course of our life completely. G. Fischer writes rightly, "Der *Weg in die Freiheit* ist zuallererst ein geistiges Abenteuer. Er verlangt Auseinandersetzung mit dem Bisherigen, Offenheit und Sich einlassen auf Ungewohntes, Risikobereitschaft und starke Motivationen. Ohne entsprechende innere Kräfte oder äußere Momente der Anziehung ist kein Aufbruch zu bewältigen."[461]

Jacob thought that the hostile situation would change with the passage of time, but the situation does not change; rather it has gone from bad to worse. Therefore, he asks Laban to let him go with his wives and children to his homeland. But Laban persuades him to stay with him by offering a new contract. So, Jacob demands his independence from Laban, thinking it would free him of his dependency upon Laban. The new deal certainly makes Jacob rich; but, with his progress, new challenges also appear. Laban's sons begin to resent Jacob's success, and Laban himself begins to grudge Jacob's progress. "Jacob looks at his father-in-law's face and sees in it a new and disquieting expression of hostility and suspicion."[462] "Jacob erfährt hier, dass enge Angehörige ihn verleumden (v1) und zudem auf ihre Stimmung kein Verlass ist."[463] Amidst this tensed situation Jacob hears God's call, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you" (31:3).[464] But before he leaves Paddan-Aram he needs to convince his two wives, Leah and Rachel, who are already in conflict with each other. So in order to convince them Jacob explains to them how Laban has been exploiting him. Gen 31:4-13 is actually an apologia of Jacob before his wives, in which he tells them that in spite of his faithfulness Laban has treated him badly. Jacob concludes his apologia with the divine message that he received through a dream, "… Now arise, go forth from this land, and return to the land of your birth" (31:13). The reason why Jacob

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[461] G. Fischer, *Der Jakobsweg der Bibel*, 52.
[462] Alter, *The five books of Moses*, 166.
[463] G. Fischer, *Der Jakobsweg der Bibel*, 53.
[464] Jacob receives the call somewhat like his grandfather Abraham's, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you" (31:3). The call is an imperative followed by a final clause, and the terms used within it too are similar: "Go… from your *country*, your *clan* and *your father's* house to the *country* that I shall show you." Cf. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 268

concludes his apologia with the message of God is to persuade his two wives to leave their father and to join him on his return to his homeland.[465]

It is a fact of life that people, who are subjected to similar discrimination, suffering or injustice can, even if they are bitter enemies, come together for the common cause to fight against the injustice. That is also true of most political and social revolutions; for suffering has the power to unite people to stand up against injustice and corrupt systems. This is also the case with Leah and Rachel as they realise the injustice done to them by their own father. So, in one voice they accuse their father, "Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has been using up the money given for us." (31:14-15). These are, in fact, serious charges against a father by his own daughters. Because according to the Near Eastern marriage custom the daughters are entitled to the bride price as their inheritance or their share of the family estate.[466] But Laban has taken them for himself, and now that his sons have replaced his daughters they feel that they can hardly expect any inheritance from their father. Therefore, they decide to leave with Jacob, and they say to Jacob in one voice, "now then, whatever God has said to you, do" (31:16). It is, in fact, interesting to note that the decision that they take is in agreement with God's word.

So Jacob sets out with his wives, children and with all his belongings to Canaan on the day, when Laban has gone to shear his sheep.[467] And Rachel, his beloved wife, steals her father's family gods (תְּרָפִים). Why did Rachel steal the *teraphim*? In the Near East the *teraphim* (family gods) was believed to be the bringer of good fortune, and the

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[465] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 156-57.

[466] The bride is entitled to a share of the bride price, which is supposed to be passed onto the groom once they get married; but Laban has held their share back for himself by not passing it onto Jacob. So their assumption is that by denying their share Laban has not treated them as the members of his family; and since Laban's sons have now replaced them they expect nothing from him. Cf. Martha A. Morrison, "The Jacob and Laban Narrative in Light of Near Eastern Sources," *BA* 46 (1983), 160f. Dussaud adds one more reason for their accusation. Other than a portion of the מֹהַר the daughter is also entitled to receive a parting gift from her father, known as שִׁלּוּחִים, when she leaves the father's house (cf. 1 Kgs 9:16; Mic 1:14). The term שִׁלּוּחִים, comes from the Heb. verb שָׁלַח (to send away). Dussaud says that by not sending them away from his house Laban tries to evade their parting gift. Therefore, the daughters accuse their father of selling them. Cf. Millar Burrows, "The Complaint of Laban's Daughters," *JAOS* 57 (1937), 275.

[467] Because during the shearing season Laban and his men will be busy with work and celebration. (cf. 1 Sam 25:1ff; 2 Sam 13:23ff).

one who possesses it holds also the authority as the head of the house.[468] A. Schenker believes that the reason why Rachel stole the teraphim is to prevent Laban from finding Jacob and his crew.[469] Or presumably she regards the idols as protection for her family. Whatever may be her intention the point is that Laban the Aramean is outwitted by Jacob and his family.[470]

2.2.5.2 The Non-aggression Treaty between Jacob and Laban (31:21-32:3):

Laban had earlier tried to limit Jacob's chances of progress by setting a distance of three days between his flocks and Jacob's flocks (30:36). But this has not only helped Jacob to herd the flock for his own advantage but has also made it easy for him to flee from Laban without his knowledge. But as soon as Laban hears about Jacob's flight, he takes his men and hunts Jacob. The language describing Laban's reaction has the tone of military pursuits – "took his kinsmen," "pursued him," "followed closely after him," "overtook Jacob" and "pitched his tent." But God warns Laban in a dream not to harm Jacob.

Laban, finally, overtakes Jacob and his crew after seven days of search, and he accuses Jacob with two main charges: first, he has taken his daughters as captives of the sword (31:26); second, he has stolen Laban's family gods (31:30). His first accusation is completely false because his daughters are not carried away as captives; rather they have come on their own free choice. Still Jacob acknowledges the illegality of his act because by not getting Laban's permission he has disregarded Laban's position in the family as *paterfamilias.*[471] Jacob knows that by breaking the family custom he has offended Laban. However, God has restrained Laban from exercising his power over Jacob as *paterfamilias*. Commenting on Laban's speech, Vawter says, "His speech is "a mixture of bluster, of just grievance over the violation of certain rights of his, and of frustration at being unable to use his superior force against Jacob in view of the divine

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[468] Moririson, "The Jacob and Laban Narrative in Light of Near Eastern Sources," 161.

[469] In the Near Eastern families there were household gods, whom people approached in times of difficulties to find out the reason for their misfortune or for the revelation of some secrecy or for prosperity. Cf. Rupper, *Genesis 3*, 307-08.

[470] Although the text states that Jacob outwitted Laban, there is no mentioning of Yahweh disapproving Jacob's moves because his moves are in accordance with divine command (31:3).

[471] Charles Mabee, "Jacob and Laban: The Structure of Judicial Proceedings (Genesis XXXI 25-42)," *VT* 30 (1980), 196ff.

prohibition he has received."[472] Mabee says, "God is the single force which stands above the judicial authority of the *paterfamilias*. From the stand point of the narrator, Yahweh has taken mitigating action because he has promised to superintend a safe return journey home."[473] Moreover, Laban knows the reason why Jacob has fled (31:30); therefore all his questions, except the question about the stealing of his *teraphim*, are rhetorical questions to show off his authority before others and to accuse Jacob.

Though Jacob admits his guilt of disregarding the *paterfamilias* status of Laban, he tries to justify himself indirectly by referring to Laban's untrustworthiness, "Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force" (31:31). However, regarding the theft of his *teraphim* Jacob has no knowledge, and moreover, he could never imagine that anyone from his family could be guilty of the theft, therefore, he asks Laban to produce the evidence, and if proved then the perpetrator will be liable to the death penalty. Thereby Jacob acknowledges that the stealing of the *teraphim* is the offence of a highest order.[474] Because according to the Code of Hammurabi No. 6 if any one is found guilty of stealing the property or the household gods, he shall be put to death, and whoever receives the stolen goods, he will also be subjected to such penalty.[475]

So Laban starts his search first in Jacob's tent and then in Leah's and the two maidservants' tents and finally in Rachel's tent.[476] But Rachel, who had stolen the *teraphim* hid them in the camel's saddle and sat upon it and deceived Laban. Therefore, Laban could not find them and so he could not substantiate his charge with evidence. Since Laban has failed to prove his charges against Jacob, Jacob confronts Laban accusing him with evidences of all the injustice that he has suffered under Laban. Jacob's monologue in 31:38-41 is, in fact, a review or the summery of his twenty years servitude under Laban. His accusation serves two purposes, on the one hand, it charges

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[472] B. Vawter, "Genesis," *NCCHS* (ed. Bernard Orchard; London: Nelson, 1953), 28.
[473] Mabee, "Jacob and Laban: The Structure of Judicial Proceedings," 199.
[474] In Gen 44:9 there is a similar declaration to produce the evidence and the similar penalty for the culprit.
[475] A.H. Godbey, "Shylock in the Old Testament: The Story of Laban viewed in the Light of the Code Hammurabi," *The Monist* 15 (1905), 357.
[476] The word used for "searched" is מָצָא. The same word was used earlier in 27:21-22 for Isaac's search. Isaac tried to verify the authenticity of the son by his sense of touch when Jacob claimed that he was Esau, for Jacob disguised himself as Esau and presented himself as Esau before his blind father.

Laban with deception, mistreatment and exploitation; and on the other hand, it justifies his flight since Laban had exploited him.[477] Wilson says, "Jacob has turned Laban's accusations back upon his own head, and has accused Laban of mistreating him in violation of the law."[478] As Laban had earlier redirected Jacob's accusation against him (Gen 29:26), now Jacob redirects Laban's charges against Laban. Jacob concludes his defence referring to the divine mitigation – "If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked you last night" (31:42). By this statement Jacob tries to justify his flight with which he has broken the family custom because of Laban's previous unfaithfulness. God is aware of this and has intervened to help him. "Woe to the earthly judicial authority that will not now adjudicate fairly, in spite of traditional family custom."[479] In summary Jacob's monologue moves from present (31:36-37) to the past (31:38-41), and then back to the present (31:42).[480]

To Jacob's accusation Laban has no defence therefore he makes just an empty assertion of his claim over his daughters and Jacob's belongings,[481] "The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine" (31:43). By his assertion over Jacob's belongings Laban unconsciously confirms Jacob's accusation, because it shows that Laban has been all through regarding Jacob as his slave. But the fact of the matter is that Laban neither bought Jacob nor did he give his daughters freely to Jacob. On the contrary, it is Laban, who has profited from Jacob's service; therefore, his demand is completely illegal. Moreover, Laban could do nothing about his daughters because they are now attached to Jacob, and they had already disowned their father when they accused him of selling them as slaves.

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[477] Mabee, "Jacob and Laban: The Structure of Judicial Proceedings," 204.
[478] Mabee, "Jacob and Laban: The Structure of Judicial Proceedings," 204.
[479] Mabee, "Jacob and Laban: The Structure of Judicial Proceedings," 204.
[480] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 306.
[481] C. Carmichael presents the conflict between Jacob and Laban as the conflict between the Covenant Codes and the Deuteronomic Codes. According to the Covenant Codes the slave receives no payment when his master frees him on the seventh year of his servitude; and if the master has given him wife, and if his children are born during the time of his servitude then he cannot take with him his wife and children (Ex 21:2ff). Whereas the Deuteronomic Codes ensure that the master must let him go free on the seventh year with his wife and with his children and the master must also reward the servant generously (Deut 15:12ff). By his claim over Jacob's wives, children and his belonging Laban is trying to apply the Covenant Code with Jacob. Cf. C. Carmichael, "The Three Laws on the Release of Slaves (Ex 21:1-11; Deut 15:12-18; Lev 25:39-46)," *ZAW* 112 (2000), 509-525.

Secondly, Laban fears to use his force against Jacob because he is under divine warning. So finding no credible reason to justify his charges, Laban invites Jacob to enter into a covenant with him as a face-saving measure. Wenham comments, "Laban now feels he must protect himself from the power and blessing that evidently rest on Jacob; hence, he asks for a covenant."[482] The essence of their covenant is basically one of non-aggression that Jacob will not mistreat Laban's daughters or take additional wives, and that they will not cross their borders to harm each other. The pillars of stones that they erect as witness to their covenant serve not only as witness but also serve as the border between both the countries. Laban calls them *Jegar Sahadutha* in Aramaic, and Jacob calls them *Galeed* in Hebrew; and both the terms have the same meaning, "heap of witness." The naming of the pillars in two different languages shows the international character of their treaty. Then they take vow in the name of their respective Deities and conclude the treaty with a sacrifice and meal, which is the sign of the ratification of the treaty.[483]

The covenant between Jacob and Laban clearly suggest that the covenant between Jacob and Laban is not merely a covenant between two individuals but between two nations. The participation of kinsmen from both the groups in the making of the covenant, and the language used in the treaty suggest that it is not a deal between two individuals but two nations i.e. Israel and Aram. Thus, the long conflict of twenty years between Jacob and Laban finally concludes in a peace treaty, which makes both the parties be duty bound in respecting their territorial integrity and to observe a policy of non-aggression towards each other in the future.

On the following day Laban gives his parting kiss and his parting blessing to his daughters and his grandchildren (cf. 31:28; cf. 24:14; 28:1), and returns to Paddan-Aram. And Jacob continues with his journey towards the Promised Land with his family and with his possessions. With this Jacob's sojourn in the land of the East finally comes to an end.

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[482] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 279.

[483] The covenant scene is a combination of two separate versions – the Yahwist and the Elohist versions. The Yahwist version reports the non-aggression pact between Aram and Israel, while the Elohist version reports the boundary agreement between Aram and Israel. Cf. Pauline A. Vivano, "Genesis," *The Collegeville Bible Commentary Based on the New American Bible: Old Testament*, (ed. Dianne Bergant and Robert J. Karris; Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 1992), 68.

2.2.6 Jacob's Servitude Foreshadows Israel's Slavery in Egypt:

A comparative study on the Jacob-Laban episode with the Exodus Story reveals that Jacob's servitude in the land of the East parallels Israel's slavery in Egypt because the experience of the patriarch in a foreign land resembles Israel's experience in Egypt. Moreover, there are some linguistic similarities between the Genesis narrative and the Exodus narrative. Therefore, it is fitting to conclude that the Jacob's story is also a story about Israel. Some of the thematic and linguistic parallels are the following:

First, when Jacob escapes from Esau and comes to Paddan-Aram, he is warmly received in his uncle's house (Gen 29:13f.). Similarly, when Israel leaves Canaan to escape from the deadly draught and come to Egypt, Pharaoh receives them warmly and permits them to settle down on the region of Goshen (Gen 46).

Second, in the book of Genesis Jacob's servitude under Laban is portrayed as his slavery in Paddan-Aram – Jacob is deceived and is exploited by Laban for twenty long years (Gen 31:4-16; 36-42). Similarly, after Joseph's death Israel is made to work as slaves for the Egyptians and Israel is exploited and is oppressed by the Egyptian taskmasters (Ex 1:8-21) for four hundred and thirty long years (Ex 12:40).

Third, after twenty long years of sojourning in Paddan-Aram, Jacob is called by God to return to his homeland, " '…for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you …Now arise, go forth from this land, and return to the land of your birth.' " (Gen 31:12-13). Jacob communicates the message of God to Rachel and Leah to persuade them to leave Paddan-Aram and go with him to the Promised Land (31:10-13). Similarly, when Moses is called by the Lord he is first commissioned to tell and to persuade Israel to leave Egypt and return to the Promised Land, "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, …" (Ex 3:7ff). Moses and Aaron go to the people of Israel and communicate the message of the Lord and persuade and prepare Israel to leave Egypt and return to the Promised Land.

Fourth, when Jacob flees from Paddan-Aram, he outwits Laban; and Jacob leaves Padan-Aram as a rich man, with a big family, flocks and with great possessions (Gen 31:8). In the similar way, when Israel leaves Egypt they plunder the Egyptians and leave rich, with silver and gold, and with very many flocks and herds (Ex 12:35-39; Ps 105:37). There is also linguistic similarity in both the narratives. For instance, when

Jacob persuades Rachel and Leah he tells them, "God has taken away (וַיַּצֵּל) the cattle of your father, and given them to me," (Gen 31:9). A similar expression we find in Exodus, "and the Lord had given the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they despoiled (וְיְנַצְּלוּ) the Egyptians" (Ex 12:36).[484]

Fifth, as soon as Laban hears about Jacob's flight on the third day, he pursues him and overtakes Jacob and his crew; and as a result Jacob and his company come under great danger. Similarly, when Pharaoh is told about the flight of Israel, he pursues them with all his army, and the people of Israel come under a great fear. The language describing the way that Laban hunted after Jacob foreshadows Pharaoh's chase after Israel. Genesis states, "When it was told (וַיֻּגַּד) Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled (בָּרַח)" (Gen 31:22). The Exodus account states, "When the king of Egypt was told (וַיֻּגַּד) that the people had fled (בָּרַח)" (Ex 14:5). Similarly, Gen 31:23, 25 states, "he took his kinsmen with him and pursued him (וַיִּרְדֹּף) for seven days … And Laban over took (וַיַּשֵּׂג) Jacob." These main Hebrew terminologies resemble Ex 15:9, "the enemy said, 'I will pursue (אֶרְדֹּף), I will overtake (אַשִּׂיג)." [485]

Sixth, God warns Laban in a dream. So Laban says to Jacob, "It is in my power to do you harm; but the God of your father spoke to me last night (אֶמֶשׁ), saying, 'Take heed (הִשָּׁמֶר) that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad'" (Gen 31:29). In a somewhat similar way, Pharaoh and his army were prevented from harming Israel: "And in the morning watch (בְּאַשְׁמֹרֶת) the Lord in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down upon the host of the Egyptians, and discomfited the host of the Egyptians, clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily" (Ex 14:24f). Both these Hebrew terms אֶמֶשׁ, 'the last night' and הִשָּׁמֶר, 'take heed or guard yourself' resonate with the word בְּאַשְׁמֹרֶת 'at the watch'.[486]

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[484] Gershon Hepner, "Jacob's Servitude with Laban Reflects conflict between Biblical Codes," *ZAW* 115 (2003), 189.
[485] Hepner, "Jacob's Servitude with Laban Reflects conflict between Biblical Codes," 189-90.
[486] Hepner, "Jacob's Servitude with Laban Reflects conflict between Biblical Codes," 190.

Seventh, once Laban and his men have overtaken Jacob and his camp a court scene follows with charges and counter charges from both sides – a type of fight in words; but God restrained Laban from hurting Jacob by warning Laban in advance. In a somewhat similar way the Lord fights on behalf of Israel – "the Egyptians said 'Let us flee from before Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians" (Ex 14:24f). Both the narratives convey the point that God has decided to fight for his chosen (Jacob and Israel).

Eighth, after the peace treaty between Laban's camp and Jacob's camp Jacob continues with his journey towards the Promised Land; similarly, after the defeat/destruction of Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, Israel proceeds on her way towards the Promised Land.

Ninth, the term 'stone" (אֶבֶן) appears in both the narratives. In Gen 31 it appears three times: "So Jacob took a stone (אֶבֶן), and set it up as a pillar. And Jacob said to his kinsmen, 'Gather stones' (אֲבָנִים), and they took stones (אֲבָנִים), and made a heap" (Gen 31:45f). In Ex 15 the word 'stone' appears twice: "The floods cover them; they went down into the depths like a stone (אֶבֶן) (Ex 15:5) and "Terror and dread fall upon them; because of the greatness of thy arm, they are as still as a stone (כָּאֶבֶן)" (Ex 15:16). The Hebrew term אֶבֶן plays an important role in the Jacob story as a symbol of non-aggression and peace treaty between Laban and Jacob (resp. Aram and Israel). And the fact that the victory song uses the term twice for the literary effect indicates the importance of the event of their freedom.[487]

Tenth, the term גַּל (mound) is used seven times in the covenant scene between Laban and Jacob.[488] The most common meaning of the word גַּל is "wave."[489] Ex 15 uses the term נֵד for heap of water or mountain of water: "At the blast of thy nostrils the

[487] Hepner, "Jacob's Servitude with Laban Reflects conflict between Biblical Codes," 190.
[488] Cf. Gen 31: 46 [2], 48, 51, 52 [3].
[489] A meaning for the word גַּל is a pile of rocks (Job 8:17); a second meaning of the term is waves or a pile of water (waves). "Jahweh alone causes and stills wave's activity." cf. Is 48:18; 51,15; Jer 5:22; 31:35; Ez 26:3; Ps 65:8; 89:10; 107:25, 29. Cf. Allan M. Harman and Michael A. Grisanti, "גַּל" *NIDOTTE*, vol. 1 (ed. Willem A. VanGemeren; UK: Paternoster Press, 1997), 858-59.

waters piled up, the floods stood up in a heap (נֵד); the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea" (Ex 15:8).[490]

Eleventh, another common Hebrew term found twice in both the narratives is עָבַר (cross). "This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass over (אֶעֱבֹר) this heap to you, and you will not pass over (תַּעֲבֹר) this heap and this pillar to me, for harm" (Gen 31:52). Similarly, in Exodus 15 we find the same term used: "… till thy people, O Lord, pass by (יַעֲבֹר), till the people pass (יַעֲבֹר) by whom thou hast purchased" (Ex 15:16).[491] The term in the Genesis story designates an international border, and the sense in Exodus that it is the Lord who prevents nations from harming Israel. In both cases the term עָבַר conveys non-aggression.

Twelfth, one more common Hebrew term found in both the texts is פַּחַד (dread or terror). Jacob swears to Laban "by the Fear (בְּפַחַד) of his father Isaac" (Gen 31:53). Alter interprets that in the God of his father, Isaac, he senses something numinous, awesome, frightening.[492] Hepner is of the view that the expression בְּפַחַד links the flight of Jacob from Laban to Jacob's struggle with the angel. The word also links Jacob's departure from Laban to the (פַּחַד) of the nations as the victory song says,[493] "Terror and dread (וָפַחַד) fall upon them (Ex 15:16).

It is evident from these parallels that the Jacob-Laban episode is not only a story about the patriarch but also a story about Israel. Through the Patriarch's story the narrator tells the story of his descendants. Therefore, it is right to conclude that the Jacob-Laban narrative narrates the salvation history of God's chosen people. Rupper summarises the Jacob-Laban episode in the following words: "In diesem Teil der Jakobgeschichte wird gleichsam buchstabiert, wie der Gott der Offenbarung in der Geschichte an seinen Erwählten (bzw. Seinem Volk) handelt, als der *geleitende, führende, bewahrende und rettende Gott, der menschliche Schuld* keinenswegs einfach

[490] Hepner, "Jacob's Servitude with Laban Reflects conflict between Biblical Codes," 191.
[491] Hepner, "Jacob's Servitude with Laban Reflects conflict between Biblical Codes," 191.
[492] Alter, *The five Books of Moses*, 175.
[493] Hepner, "Jacob's Servitude with Laban Reflects conflict between Biblical Codes," 191.

übersieht, sie aber denen *zum Heil ausschalagen last*, die an ihm festhalten und seiner Führung *vertrauen*."[494]

2.2.7 Israel's Relationship with Aram:

Historically Israel's relationship with Aram was hostile in spite of their connection with regards to their origin, language, and tradition. The Jacob-Laban episode testifies to it. In the Jacob-Laban episode Jacob stands for Israel[495] and Laban stands for the people of Aram.[496] The conflicts between Laban and Jacob as narrated in the book of Genesis, therefore, can be a literary depiction on Israel's relationship with Aram, and also an appeal to the Israelite audience to maintain a peaceful relationship with Aram.

According to the oldest genealogical accounts in the bible the Aramean tribe is the descendant from Aram, the grandson of Nahor, the brother of Abraham (Gen 22:20-24). Similarly, Israel is the descendant of Jacob, the grand son of Abraham, the brother of Nahor. However, in the Jacob narrative Laban is depicted as the eponym of Aramean tribe since the name Laban is connected to Lebanon. It was especially in the eleventh century BCE that the Aramean tribe grew into a nation. For in the eleventh century BCE the mighty empires such as the Hittites, the Egyptian, the Babylonian and the Assyrian began to decline. As they began to decline the west-Semetic nations, the Arameans, the Israelites, and the Phoenicians became powerful. Towards the end of the eleventh and the beginning of the tenth century Aram-Zobah, an Aramean kingdom in southern Syria, established a federation of Aramean and non-Aramean kingdoms in Syria and the northern Transjordan. Their confederation controlled the main commercial route leading to Mesopotamia (2 Sam 8:3; 10:16; 1 Chron 19:10), and they also tried to control the route of international commerce that led from Damascus along eastern Transjordan to Elath and Arabia; but the young kingdom of Israel frustrated Aram-Zobah's ambition.

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[494] Rupper, *Genesis 3*, 329.

[495] There are a number of references in the Old and the New Testament, where the name Jacob is an eponymous to the nation Israel. Moreover, Jacob receives a new name *Israel* from the angel of God (Gen 32:28). So Jacob represents the nation, Israel, in the narrative.

[496] The term Laban means "white" referring to the Lebanon Mountains, which is usually covered with snow most of the year. In the narrative Laban stands for the people living around the mounts of Lebanon. Israel also traditionally ascribes to Laban the position of eponym for the Aramean tribes, who were called *Bene Yedem* (people of the East). Cf. Benjamin Mazar, "The Aramean Empire and its Relations with Israel," *BA* 25 (1962), 99.

Israel not only defeated the Arameans but also subjugated their confederacy and their satellites up to the border of the Hittite kingdom, Hamath, and established a friendly relationship with Hamath (2 Sam 8:3-11; 2 Chr 18:9-11). Moreover, David, the king of Israel, appointed governors in the Aramean states and took tributes from them. (2 Sam 10:19).[497]

However, at the end of Solomon's reign when the kingdom of Israel was divided and disintegrated, the Aramaen tribes took advantage of Israel's internal conflicts and became independent, and Aram even began to interfere and exercise influence on Israel's internal matters. Asa, the king of Judah called on Ben-Hadad, the king of Aram, for help against Baasha, the king of Israel (1Kgs 15:16-21); and gradually Ben-Hadad started to invade Israel and annexed some parts of Israel's territory (1 Chr 2:23).[498]

Another historical event that took place during the reign of Ahab (873-852) resembles an event in the Jacob-Laban episode very much. It is the scene in which Laban along with his men hunts Jacob and his kinsmen; and at overtaking Jacob and his company Laban makes his claim over Jacob's wives, children and his belongings (cf. 31:43). This scene resembles Aram's siege over Samaria (cf. 1 Kgs 20). 1 Kgs 20 reports the siege of Samaria, the capital of Israel, by Ben-Hadad and his confederation of thirty-two kings, however, the Arameans lost the battle to Israel. But before the siege Ben-Hadad made a claim over Israel. The text states, "Ben-Hadad the king of Syria gathered all his army together; thirty-two kings were with him, and horses and chariots; and he went up and besieged Samaria, and fought against it. And he sent messengers into the city of Ahab king of Israel, and said to him, 'Thus says Ben-Hadad: *your silver and your gold are mine; your fairest wives and children also are mine*'" (cf. 1 Kgs 20:1-3). This particular text resembles more or less Gen 31:22-23, 43, according to which Laban along with his kinsmen pursues Jacob and his crew to attack; but warned by God, Laban makes a pact with Jacob. However, before he makes this pact with Jacob he reveals his intention of the pursuit as he claims Jacob's wives, children and his belongings: "The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine" (Gen 31:43).

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[497] Mazar, "The Aramean Empire and its Relations with Israel," 102-104.
[498] Ziva Shavitsky, *The Mystery of the Ten Lost Tribes: Critical survey of Historical and Archaeological Records relating to the People of Israel in Eile in Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia up to ca. 300 BCE* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 13.

In spite of his humiliating defeat in Samaria, Ben-Hadad made a renewed attack on Israel but again he was defeated at Aphek by Israel (1 Kgs 20:23-34). However, in 853 BC both Aram and Israel became partners in a collation of twelve nations to counter the threat of the Assyrian in the battle of Qarqar. But their coalition did not last long because the coalition was made only out of necessity i.e. to meet the crisis of the Assyrian attack. Aram again renewed and intensified its attack on Israel first under Ben-Hadad and then under Hazael. By his frequent attacks and besieges Hazael had weakened and shrinked the area and the army of Israel (2 Kgs 13:7).[499] However, after the death of Ben-Hadad and Hazael Israel redeemed her lost territories from Arameans (2 Kgs 14:25) during Jeroboam II, the king of Israel (788-747). The regaining of the lost territory from Aram could be associated with the border treaty between Jacob and Laban in Gen 31:43ff.

A comparative study on the Jacob-Laban episode with the Israel's relation with Aram during the ninth and eighth century BCE reveals that Jacob's relationship with Laban resembles Israel's relationship with Aram. Jacob's servitude under Laban in Paddan-Aram for twenty long years and their conflict with each other is a portrayal of Aram's continuous hostility with Israel. Moreover, Jacob and Laban's judicial proceeding in Gen 31:25-42 and their covenant at Gilead (Gen 31:43ff) reflect the historical event in 1 Kgs 20 and the restoration of Israel's boarder during the time of Jeroboam (2 Kgs 14:25). Thus, the Jacob-Laban story in Genesis is not merely about two individuals but a story about Israel's relationship with Aram. And the purpose of the Jacob-Laban episode is to encourage the two nations to put an end to their conflict and hostility, and to enter into a peaceful relation with each other as Jacob and Laban entered into a peace treaty after their long hostility.

2.2.8 A Thematic Perspective of Jacob-Laban Episode:

It is evident from the Jacob-Laban story that other than Laban's deception and exploitation another main cause for the conflict between Jacob and Laban is Laban's attitude towards Jacob. Laban has considered Jacob as his slave all through the story (cf. 31:43) in spite of the fact that Jacob has neither sold himself to Laban nor is he indebted

[499] Mazar, "The Aramean Empire in ist Relations with Israel," 114.

to him. Therefore, in order to resolve their conflict Laban must first acknowledge Jacob's free status and consider him as his equal. Some of the conditions for a true reconciliation are "legitimization, personalization, humanization and equalization of the rivals."[500] It is only when Laban legitimizes Jacob as an equal that the process for reconciliation (covenant) between them begins. Laban says, "Come now, let us make a covenant, you and I; and let it be a witness between you and me" (31:44). By this statement Laban regards Jacob for the first time as an equal partner. The second condition for reconciliation is an attitude of openness to face the truth. Both the parties should confront the truth with openness, courage and humility because a true "reconciliation is based on truth telling about the harm done by both the parties."[501] They must openly address the painful past without fear in order to begin and build a normal peace process.[502] The accusations and the counter accusations between Jacob and Laban enable them to achieve a realistic, non-distorted, and balanced view about the truth and about what went wrong. Once the defects are identified and the truth is discovered, then the third stage of reconciliation follows i.e. "restructuring of the relations."[503] The term and conditions that Jacob and Laban agree upon, and the oath that they take in the names of their respective Deities, and the sacrifice they offer and the meal they share make up the process of restructuring their relation. Jacob is no more a slave or an inferior before Laban; and they need to respect each other as equals. Finally, the most important factor in any true reconciliation processes is the divine intervention. Had God not intervened on time, the story would have ended in bloodshed. It is the divine intervention that has compelled and persuaded both the parties to come to term with each other and work for the peaceful treaty of non-aggression. Throughout the episode there are a number of references to God, who works behind the human story, leading the human beings towards reconciliation through persuasion and sometimes even by admonishion.

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[500] Daniel Bar-Tal, "Introduction: Conflicts and Social Psychology," *Intergroup Conflicts and their Resolution: A Social Psychological Perspective* (ed. Danial Bar-Tal; New York: Pschology Press Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), 24.
[501] Bar-Tal, "Introduction: Conflicts and Social Psychology," 25.
[502] Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, "Why Reconciliation," *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation* (ed. Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 5.
[503] Bar-Tal, "Introduction: Conflicts and Social Psychology," 26.

The Jacob-Laban story in Genesis conveys another two important theological messages. First, it tries to present Israel as a separate nation, independent of Aram. Abraham, the father of faith, is referred in the Bible as Aramean: "A wandering Aramean was my father" (26:5). Jacob's parting from his kinsmen, Laban, the Aramean; and the new name, *Israel* that was given to Jacob by the Angel of God at the river, Jabbok (32:28) are to present Israel as a separate nation, independent of Aram. Irsigler writes, "Israel finds its identity and vocation very often in the Hebrew Bible when overcoming conflicts with inner or foreign rivals."[504] Second, the conclusion of their conflict story in a peaceful covenant of non-aggression encourages the Israelite audience that, in spite of their hostile past with Aram they can live in peace with Aramaen. The divine intervention in the midst of their fierce hostility is not only a sign of God's protection for His chosen one, but it is also God's revelation of his divine will that Israel lives in peace with Aram.

Conclusion:

The Jacob-Esau episode and the Jacob-Laban episode convey that the characters in these narratives are historically related to their respective nations, and the main characters of these tales are considered to be the heroes of their respective nations. Therefore, the interactions between the heroes/heads of these nations need to be understood as the interaction between their nations. Reading these stories from the Jacob/Israel's perspective they mean Israel's relation with Edom and Aram. Since these stories deal with conflict and reconciliation between the characters, the message or the purpose of these stories to their audience is how Israel should deal with Edom and Aram. Through the life story of Jacob the narrator not only tries to portray the ambiguous characteristics of Israel as a nation but he also instructs Israel what she should learn from her patriarch – her attitude towards these nations, her dealing with these nations, especially when she is in conflict with them, in order to make peace with them, and live in harmony with them.

The main causes for conflict between Jacob and Esau is the contradiction of the human choice against the divine choice, and human designs and efforts to grab the

[504] Theodor Seidl, "Conflict and Conflict Resolution: inner controversies and tensions and places of Israel's self-conception in the patriarchal tradition of Genesis," *OTE* 26 (2013), 841.

divine blessing. Jacob gradually learns that it is neither his ingenuity nor his effort that would win the divine blessing; rather it is purely the divine choice that decides who will be the bearer of the divine covenant. Similarly, Edom has to come to term with the fact that she cannot claim herself as the alternative choice to Israel because God has chosen Israel in spite of her unworthiness. However, this divine choice is not to exercise dominion over the other but to be the model for others. When Israel fails in her mission, she becomes subject to foreign invasion and exile. But in spite of her fall and the ridicule of other nations, she remains as the chosen nation to the Lord because the Lord is faithful to her in spite of her unfaithfulness. However, to reclaim her position as the divinely chosen nation, Israel needs to return to the Lord and get reconciled with her God. Jacob's story illustrates this theological truth when Jacob held on to the Angel and pleaded for His blessing. In this way Jacob stands as a model to Israel. In his prayer Jacob, while acknowledging his unworthiness, acknowledges his chosen status and intercedes for the divine deliverance. In his wrestling with God at Peniel Jacob not only confesses and acknowledges his offences but also clings to God for his forgiveness and blessing and eventually he is reconciled with God. The anti-Edomite prophecies in the prophetic literatures not only convince the other nations about Israel's special status in the salvation history but they also remind and convince Israel of her status as God's chosen nation. The prophetic literatures also maintain that both Edom and Israel should comply with the divine plan, which is that both the nations should be satisfied with their territories as allotted to them by God; and they should respect the territorial integrity of each other in order to avoid conflict, and live in peace and harmony.

The main cause for the conflict between Jacob and Laban is Laban's attitude towards Jacob. Though Jacob is not indebted to Laban in any way, Laban treats him as if he is his slave. Therefore to resolve the conflict between them Laban must first change his attitude towards Jacob, and he must treat Jacob as his equal partner. It is only then that the peace treaty between both of them takes place. Laban had to recognize Jacob's independency and respect his rights as his equal, else he and his men could have met the same fate that Pharaoh and his army met when they pursued Israel to destroy her. Historically, the hostility and the conflict between Israel and Aram are due to their violation of their territorial integrity. The peace treaty between Jacob and Laban shows a way to both of the nations how they can live in peace and harmony with each other.

The Jacob narrative emphasises that, in spite of the bitter and long conflict and hostility it is possible to arrive at a point of reconciliation with the former rivals. These narratives also demonstrate very vividly the steps undertaken to arrive at the final moment of reconciliation. While demonstrating human dimension involved in the reconciliation process, the narrative also underlines the importance of divine dimension in a genuine reconciliation. In his prayer and in his encounter with the mysterious man at Jabbok, Jacob acknowledges that reconciliation is the work of God. The twenty years servitude under Laban in Paddan-Aram is a period of chastening and preparing Jacob for the two critical encounters – the one with God and the other with Esau. The crucial role that God plays in the reconciliation process is very vivid in the narratives. God elects Jacob; He promises him that he will bring him back to the Promised Land. God makes Jacob prosperous, in spite of the deception and the manipulation that Jacob had to endure under Laban. It is God who prevents Laban from harming Jacob and his household. It is God who strikes as well as blesses Jacob. Jacob acknowledges God's role when he exclaims at his dramatic meeting with Esau, "For truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God, with such favour have you received me." Jacob's statement underlines the divine and the human dimension in the reconciliation process. For there can be no true reconciliation, which is not grounded on God, and at the same time, reconciliation with God is meaningless if it is not lived by the human being.

CHAPTER III

The Joseph Narrative as a Modell for Reconciliation

Genesis 37-50 is another remarkable story of Conflict and Reconciliation. Though traditionally it is understood as the Joseph narrative, a close reading of the text reveals Joseph "is not the *whole* concern of 37-50."[505] The starting verses of the narrative report on Jacob's settlement in the Promised Land and on his genealogy (vv. 1-2a). Gen 37:1-2a, thus, transits the patriarchal story to the story of the descendants - the twelve sons of Jacob (the twelve tribes of Israel).[506] So Brueggemann comments, "Through this one verse the narrator moves the ancestral history to a new generation."[507] Although Jacob is not the main character in the narrative, there are often references to him. So the central discussion in Gen 37-50 is not so much concerned about Joseph as much as Jacob's descendants.[508] Westermann comments: "Sie handelt nicht von einzelnen Menschen, die von Gott wunderbar geführt werden, sie handelt … von einer Gemeinschaft von der Familie des Jakob. Sie setzt damit ein, dass der Friede in dieser Familie zerbricht, und findet ihr Ziel darin, dass der Friede dieser Familie wieder geheilt wird."[509] L. Rupper shares the same view, "nicht um einen einzigen Sohn Jakobs, um Josef, geht es, sondern um die *Großfamilie Jakobs.*"[510] Donald B. Redford tells us that the editor of Genesis takes the Joseph's story, which already existed, and inserts it in the

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[505] Although Joseph plays a dominant role in the narrative, there are parts where he is not the main figure at all; for instance in Gen 38 and 49. Cf. Robert E. Longacre, *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence: a text theoretical and text linguistic analysis of Genesis 37 and 29-40* (2nd ed.; Eisenbrauns: Winona Lake, Ind., 2003), 21.
[506] Jürgen Ebach, *Genesis 37-50* (Freiburg; Wien: Herder, 2007), 54.
[507] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 229.
[508] Although Jacob and the brothers do not appear in all the episode of the narrative, there are allusions to them (cf. 41:51, 57) in spite of their absence from the scene. Moreover, the *toledot* section includes the genealogical table of all twelve sons (46:8-27) and the blessing section includes all twelve sons/tribes of Israel (49:1-28). Cf. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, 666.
[509] Claus Westermann, Genesis 37-50, vol. 3 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verl., 1982), 7.
[510] Lothar Rupper, *Genesis: ein kiritischer und theologischer Kommentar 37,1-50,26* (Würzburg: Echter: 2008), 100.

larger story of Jacob's family.[511] Therefore, it would be fitting to conclude that Gen 37-50 is a story about Jacob's descendants.

The whole narrative is mainly concerned about the conflict and reconciliation in Jacob's family. Like the Jacob narrative, the Joseph narrative is marked with bitter conflict between the brothers. While the Jacob narrative historically relates to Israel's ambiguous relationship with Edom and Aram, Gen 37-50 relates to the conflict between the two kingdoms of the chosen people, the northern and the southern kingdoms – Israel and Judah. The two prominent figures in the narrative, Joseph and Judah, represent the two kingdoms respectively – Joseph represents the northern kingdom, while Judah represents the southern kingdom. An interesting discovery in Gen 37-50 is that the narrative has many parallels with some of the stories in the historical books of the Old Testament. A comparative study of the Genesis account with the historical books suggests that the final version of Gen 37-50 seems to have been written after the division of the United Monarchy, with the view of exhorting both the kingdoms to overcome their conflicts and to get united as one strong nation for their own good. The striking message of the account is: *United we stand, divided we fall*. This is also true in the history of both kingdoms. As long as they remained united as one monarchy they were powerful and could resist the foreign invasions and flourish in trade, culture and politics. But from the time they divided from each other and became hostile against each other, they became weak and vulnerable to the foreign powers, and finally became subjected to foreign invasions. The northern kingdom disappeared from the annals of history with her deportation to Assyria in 722 BCE, and the southern kingdom was taken in exile by Babylon, but somehow the southern kingdom survived because of the divine promise to the Patriarchs and to David.

Gen 37-50, while dramatizing the conflict theme at its very beginning, gradually develops the reconciliation theme. The narrative first reports the development of conflict among Jacob's descendants, then it gradually reports how the characters undergo transformation, especially Judah and Joseph, and the narrative finally concludes with the dramatic scene of reconciliation and reunion of the family. Like the Jacob narrative it also emphasises the divine and the human dimensions in

[511] Donald B. Redford, *A Study of the biblical Story of Joseph: (Genesis 37-50)* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 15f.

reconciliation. The amazing thing about the narrative is that it connects very beautifully the theme of reconciliation with the general theme of Genesis i.e. life and the preservation of life. So A. Schenker considers Reconciliation as the central theme in Gen 37-50.[512] G. Fischer describes the narrative as a model for reconciliation.[513] This chapter is structured under the headings: development of conflict among Jacob's sons, Reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers, the relationship between Israel and Judah, and reconciliation as a process.

3.1 The Development of Conflict among Jacob's Sons (Gen 37):

The conflict between Joseph and his brothers can be traced back, in one sense, to the past rivalry between the two matriarchs – Leah and Rachel (cf. Gen 30). For Rachel was Jacob's favourite wife, and after her death, it seems that Jacob has transmitted his love for his beloved Rachel on her son, Joseph. The narrator develops the conflict theme further as he highlights Joseph's talebearing behaviour against his brothers, Jacob's favouritism towards Joseph, and Joseph's attitude of bragging about his special status and his fantasy about his dreams. The conflict reaches its climax as the brothers decide to kill Joseph; however, at Judah's intervention they sell him to a foreign caravan, and get rid of him (or they think that they have got rid of him).

3.1.1 Joseph's Negative Report about His Brothers (v. 2b):

Joseph is introduced at the beginning of the narrative as *lad* (נַעַר), assisting his brothers in tending their father's flock. In his working relationship with his brothers he is a *lad*, נַעַר, who plays the role of an assistant – "eines untergeordneten, schutzbefohlenen Burschen."[514] On the one hand, he assists his brothers in herding their father's sheep, but on the other hand, he also brings ill reports concerning his brothers. However, it is not clear if Joseph's reporting is true or fabricated. Given the previous records of some of the brothers (cf. Gen 34 & 35), it is most likely that they might have committed some serious offences, and Joseph seems to have distanced himself from

[512] Adrian Schenker, *Versöhnung und Sühne: Wege gewaltfreier Konflicktlösung im Alten Testament mit einem Ausblick auf das Neue Testament* (Freiburg: SKB, 1981), 15-40.
[513] G Fischer, "Die Josefsgeschichte als Modell für Versöhnung," 243-271.
[514] Ebach, *Genesis 37-50*, 57.

them.[515] And the reason for reporting them to his father could be that Joseph feels that he is obliged to bring the matter to his father (Lev. 5:1) since his first loyalty was to his father.[516]

The Hebrew word for Joseph's reporting is דִּבָּתָם. This term is used elsewhere in a negative sense. It could mean the whispering of hostile people,[517] or telling a bad report.[518] Therefore, the text implies that "Joseph sought to ingratiate himself with his father by telling tales about his brothers' real or alleged (we never know) bad behaviour."[519] Moreover, the Hebrew phrase דִּבָּתָם רָעָה suggests Joseph brings ill report against all the ten brothers since the term דִּבָּתָם applies to all the ten brothers.[520] Though it is not clear if his reports concerning his brothers are fabricated or authentic, Jacob believes them to be true; therefore his brothers hate him.

3.1.2 Jacob's Special Love for Joseph (vv. 3-4):

The narrator continues to develop the conflict theme as he highlights Jacob's special love for Joseph: "Now Israel[521] loved Joseph more than other sons because he was the son of his old age" (v. 3a). Israel's preferential love for Joseph seems to be based on his preferential love for his late wife, Rachel. However, the text states that Jacob loves Joseph more "because he was the son of his old age." But in reality the son of his old age is Benjamin who is also a son from his beloved wife Rachel. Hamilton says that the reason for Jacob's preferential love for Joseph is that in Joseph's birth

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[515] Waltke, *Genesis*, 499.
[516] Kinder, *Genesis*, 180.
[517] Cf. Ps. 31:14; Jer. 20:10; Ezek. 36:3.
[518] Cf. Num. 13:32; 14:36, 37.
[519] Aaron Wildavsky, *Assimilation versus Separation: Joseph the Administrator and the Politics of Religion in Biblical Israel* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publication, 2002), 72.
[520] E. I. Lowenthal, *The Joseph Narrative in Genesis* (New York: Ktav, 1973), 16.
[521] In the Joseph story the name Jacob and Israel are used for the patriarch side by side. Wherever the name Joseph is present, the name Israel seems to be preferred (37:3,13; 46:29,30; 48:2,8,11,14, 20,21; 50:2). Another reason could be that these texts are from the Elohist source. According to Wenham the choice of one name for another is not always clear. However, within the Joseph story certain preferences are observable. First, Jacob is used more frequently (31x) than Israel (20x). In the prose Jacob always refers to the historical individual, Israel sometime refers to the people (46:8; 47:27; 48:20). But when the name Israel is used for an individual, it often seems to allude to his position as clan head (43:6,8,11; 46:1; 48:2), whereas Jacob seems to be used where his human weakness is most obvious (cf. 37:34; 42:4, 36; 47:9). Cf. Waltke, *Genesis*, 499.

Jacob gained a son, but in Benjamin's birth he lost his beloved wife.[522] Moreover, Joseph was born to Rachel after many years of waiting and expectation. These could be the possible reasons why Jacob has preferential love for Joseph. Another view is that Jacob noticed in Joseph leadership qualities.[523] Some commentators understand the term "old age" as synonymous to wisdom because the Hebrew phrase בֶּן־ זְקֻנִים (*the son of his old age*) was idiomatically understood as "son of wisdom."[524] Bush says that Joseph was wiser than all the other brothers and so Jacob considered Joseph as the best one suited to keep his family together.[525] Furthermore, the first century Bible (called Targum) of Onkelos in Aramaic reads in translation, "And Jacob loved Joseph more than all his sons, *for he was a wise son to him.*"[526] Similar views are also found in the works of historians, such as Philo and Josephus. Philo says, "Thus his father, observing in him a noble mind greater than the usual, marvelled at him and admired him, and he loved him more than his other sons" (Philo, *On Joseph 4*). Historian Josephus says, "When Jacob had begotten Joseph by Rachel, he loved him more than the other sons, both because of the beauty of his body and the virtue of his mind, for he excelled in intelligence." (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquties* 2:9).[527] But according to the narrative after the disappearance of Joseph, Jacob diverts his preferential love towards Benjamin, Rachel's youngest son. This proves that Jacob loves Joseph more because of his love for his beloved wife, Rachel.[528]

The other sons have been fully aware of this fact since their childhood. They have been noticing Jacob's attitude towards their mothers and towards them. In fact, Jacob's preference for Rachel's sons and indifference towards the others has been dividing the family and gradually building up tension among the sons. This tension becomes deeper when Jacob publicly demonstrates his love for Joseph by giving him a special robe. But why has the robe become such an instigating object that leads them even to conspire to

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[522] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 407.
[523] Longacre, *Joseph*, 304.
[524] Marin Sicker, *Jacob and His Sons: The End of the patriarchal Era* (Lincoln: iUniverse, 2007), 8.
[525] Wildavsky, *Assimilation versus Separation*, 73.
[526] Wildavsky, *Assimilation versus Separation*, 74.
[527] James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as it was at the start of the Common Era* (USA: Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data, 2009), 439.
[528] But at the same times one cannot also ignore Joseph's wisdom (*ben zakunim*) as a factor for winning the patriarch's preferential love. His wisdom is revealed later in the narrative: how he wisely handled the crisis – the temptation (Gen 39), the drought situation in Egypt (Gen 41), and the reconciliation process (Gen 42-46).

kill Joseph? That is because, in the ancient world, clothing was a symbol of honour and dignity. Clothing served as a means of visual communication of some social status. When it is laid over another person, it designates legal responsibility (cf. Ruth 3:9; Ezek. 16:8); symbolically, demonstrating the assignment of succession (cf. 1 Kgs. 19:19). [529]

The Hebrew terms used for the robe is כְּתֹנֶת פַּסִּים,[530] which is a special long robe, with sleeves extending from the palms to the soles. In 2 Sam 13:18-19 it is identified as a princely robe and has something to do with royalty.[531] Westermann comments, "Dieses Kleid ist dann nicht nur ein schönes Geschenk des Vaters für seinen von ihm geliebten Sohn, sondern es hebt Joseph über seine Brüder hinaus."[532] The brothers are quick in understanding the event as the public investiture upon Joseph; therefore "they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him" (vs. 4). The Hebrew word שָׂנֵא (hate) does not merely mean in the sense of a hostile state of mind, but also refers to a hostile act. Westermann comments, "Das Warfen des Hasses ist wie das Spannen eines Bogens; es muss die Auslösung der Spannung in einer Tat folgen."[533] So they alienate him from their company and would not even "speak peaceably to him." Their reactions are actually the signs of their disapproval to Joseph's succession. Thus, Joseph becomes an isolated figure in their circle. Wenham comments that the remark, "They hated him, and they could not speak peaceably to him," foreshadows the loss of peace between the members in the family. [534] White summarises this text in the following words: "Jacob is hopelessly attached to this son of his old age, and this inevitably intrudes into Joseph's relations with his brothers, their response of hatred is also to be expected. This system of emotions then constitutes the motivating force behind most of the actions which follow in chapter 37, leading to the near murder and expulsion of Joseph by his brothers."[535]

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[529] Victor H. Matthews, "The Anthropology of Clothing in the Joseph Narrative," *JSOT* 65 (1995), 25ff.
[530] In the LXX it is translated as *chitona poikilon* (a multi-coloured frock) and in the Vulg. it is also translated as *tunicam polymitam* (a multi-coloured robe). Cf. Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50,* 407.
[531] Waltke, *Genesis,* 500.
[532] Westermann, *Genesis 37-50,* 27.
[533] Westermann, *Genesis 37-50,* 28.
[534] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50,* 351.
[535] Hugh C. White, "The Joseph Story: A Narrative which 'consumes' its Content," *Semeia* 31 (1985), 61.

3.1.3 Joseph's Dreams (vv. 5-11):

The narrator develops the conflict theme further when he narrates Joseph's report of his dreams. In spite of being isolated by his brothers, Joseph takes courage to narrate his dreams to them. This shows his resilient spirit to his brothers' reactions. Therefore, they are all the more infuriated, and hate him all the more. The intensity of their hate is emphasised by the repetition of the Hebrew word שָׂנֵא (hate). Earlier they hated and avoided Joseph on account of his talebearing attitude and their father's favouritism; and now by narrating his dreams to them, Joseph consciously or unconsciously contributes to the building up of the tension. His dreams, [536] not only project him as lord over them, but they also reveal his ambition to rule over his brothers. In both the cases he consciously or unconsciously provokes their anger.

Both the dreams are easy and simple to understand, for they are so self evident that they do not require further interpretation. Therefore, his brothers sarcastically question, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to have dominion over us?" (v. 8). If one analyses both the dreams, it is very clear that they have a parallel pattern and have the same contents. The contents of the dreams are: Joseph is going to be raised to a status of master, and his brothers will be paying homage to him by bowing before him. Since the messages of both the dreams are related they could be considered as one dream (cf. 41:25).[537] Pirson holds that both the dreams have the same message. He says that Jacob's interpretation of the second dream "Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?" is not a correct understanding of the dream. Because the sun, the moon and the stars stand

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[536] Modern historical criticism defines two types of dreams: message-dreams and allegorical or symbolic dreams. Message-dreams are characterized by the sudden appearance of a divine or a human figure to communicate a message; and the contents of such dreams are easily intelligible to the dreamer. Allegorical or symbolic dreams also transmit a message from the gods, but by means of a coded language made up of images, pictures and events, whose significance often escapes the dreamer. Such dreams need the help of a dream-interpreter. Cf. Jean-Marie Husser, *Dreams and Dream Narratives in the Biblical World* (Chicago: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 23f.

[537] However, there are differences in the way they are narrated. First, the second dream is less dynamic than the first. Second, the first dream has the formula of "I have dreamt" but the second dream has the formula "I dreamt another dream." Third, the character operating in the dreams: in the first dream, we see both Joseph and his brothers acting, but in the second dream, there is only Joseph. Fourth, there is no instance of Jacob bowing before Joseph, as indicated in the second dream; on the contrary, it is Joseph, who bows before Jacob (48:12). R. Pirson, "The Sun, the Moon, and Eleven Stars: An Interpretation of Joseph's Second Dream," *Studies in the Book of Genesis* (ed. A. Wenin; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001), 562.

not only for giving light, but also stand for the seasons, days and years (Gen. 1:14-18). Therefore, according to Pirson's view the second dream conveys that, after a period of time, his first dream will come to its fulfilment.[538]

An analysis of Joseph's first dream reveals three distinct elements. First, it conveys Joseph's eventual ascendancy to power. Second, Joseph's sheaf arising and standing upright without any assistance symbolise its ability to withstand opposing forces that might try to topple it. Third, the political implication of the dreams is that the brothers will eventually be subordinated.[539] Therefore the brothers become infuriated; they are all the more infuriated and angry because Joseph is so excited about his dreams that he describes them "in rhythmic and choreographic language, regulated by verbs and with a recurrent וְהִנֵּה." [540] Westermann observes that Joseph is full of his dream, that it compels him to convey it to the brothers. [541] So the brothers resent openly with the rhetoric questions: "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to have dominion over us?" And inwardly they hate him all the more; therefore, Wenham comments, "each time Joseph relates a dream, he stirs up opposition." [542]

But this time even his father is so annoyed with his dream that he rebukes (גָּעַר) him saying, "…Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before your?" The Heb. word גָּעַר is an uncommon word. It most often refers to God's reaction to the nations, the wicked, or the seas. It is often said with anger and authority (cf. Pss. 9:6(5); 106:9; 119:21). [543] Jacob, however, does not rule out the possibility of his dream completely, because in the Ancient Near East,

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[538] They indicate the passing of time. The sun, the moon, and eleven stars add up to the number thirteen. Thirteen means thirteen years, the exact number of years Joseph spends in Egypt before he becomes Egypt's second in command. In 41:46 Joseph is said to be thirty years old, whereas in 37:2 Joseph was seventeen (17+13=30). And another way of looking at this is, if the sun and the moon are counted as number 2. Then by multiplying 2 with 11 stars, we get the number twenty-two. And this is again exactly the number of years that have passed before Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers. In two ways the second dream may refer to a span of years. That may also be the reason why Joseph is the only one present in the second dream, and during those twenty-two years he will not be in the company of his family. Therefore, the message of the second dream is not that Jacob will bow down before Joseph; rather it conveys the period of time (i.e. after 22 years) when his first dream will be fulfilled. The second dream also confirms the certainty of the first dream. Cf. Pirson, "The Sun, the Moon, and Eleven Stars," 565f.
[539] Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*,10.
[540] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50,* 352.
[541] Westermann, *Genesis 37-50,* 29.
[542] Wenham, *Genesisn 16-50,* 352.
[543] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50,* 352.

dreams were considered as means of divine communication and prediction. [544] So Jacob pondered over Joseph's dream. Joseph's brothers, on the contrary, reacted with jealousy (קָנָא). Wenhem interprets it, "In context, this seems to be stronger and deeper passion than 'hatred' (vv 5, 8). Indeed, in various passages it is a feeling that is liable to spill over into violent action (e.g., Num 25: 11, 13; Ex. 20:5)."[545]

Given the ten brothers' hatred towards Joseph and the exclusion of Joseph from their company, one could ask, what was the need for Joseph to narrate his dreams to them? There are a variety of opinions regarding this question. One group of scholars suggests that he did it out of naiveté. He knew how they feel about the special status accorded to him by his father, and by narrating his dream to his brothers he tries to mitigate their irritation by assuring them that it is not only his father's choice but also divine choice that he becomes their leader. But another group of scholars thinks that he deliberately wanted to taunt them so he went ahead telling his dream to them. Still others are of the view that a vision or a dream was very important for the ancient people, and to keep it secrete to oneself would not be easy, therefore, he is driven by an inner compulsion to relate it to his brothers, knowing that it may further inflame their hatred.[546] Since Joseph's intention to narrate his dream to his brothers is ambiguous, they hint the ambiguity of Joseph's character.[547] But one thing is clear i.e. his courage and his resilience in the face of his brothers' hatred alienation. Brueggemann summarises: "Already (v. 4), the love of the father has evoked the hatred of the brothers. Now the dream causes them to 'hate him more' (v. 5). And 'yet more' (v. 8). After the second dream (v. 9), the tension is escalated to *jealousy* (v. 11). At that moment, the thought of murder is surely born. The brothers are not political theorists. But they know the threat of hope."[548]

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[544] Waltke, *Genesis*, 500.
[545] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 352.
[546] Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 12.
[547] Earle Hilgert in his article "The duel Image of Joseph in Hebrew and Early Jewish Literature" portrays the duel image of Joseph. "One the one hand, he is a hero figure, a paragon of virtue lauded for his probity and uprightness, his saving of his family and thus ultimately the nation. On the other hand, he also appears as a wily, ambitious and vain politician, ruled by passions and attachment to the things of this world, and is even presented as the cause of his nation's fall." Because of his ambiguous character traits Joseph has a little impact on other books of the Old Testament, especially the prophets (Josh 17:14; Amos 5:6, 15; Ps. 78:9f., 67). Cf. Earle Hilgert, "The Dual Image of Joseph in Hebrew and Early Jewish Literature," *BR* 30 (1985), 5.
[548] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 302.

3.1.4 Israel's Commission to Joseph (12-17):

Jacob, of course, has favoured Joseph, but that does not mean that he has no concern for his other sons (cf. vv. 12-14). That is the reason why he commissions Joseph to undertake a long journey, about 50 miles (80 km) from Hebron to Shechem, to find out the wellbeing of his other sons and his flock. Not only is the journey long, but potentially a dangerous one, because earlier Jacob had to flee from Shechem on account of the violence against the Shechamites by Jacob's sons Semion and Levi (cf. Gen 34). Moreover, The brothers' hatred against Joseph has by now welled up to jealousy after they heard his dreams.

Under this circumstance it is baffling to learn that Israel sends his young and beloved son all alone to a far distance and to a potentially dangerous place to find out the wellbeing of his other sons and his flocks. In all likelihood neither Jacob nor Joseph might have foreseen any danger from the ten. Jacob is worried about the wellbeing of his sons and his flocks, given the Shechemite's hostility. According to P. Weimar Jacob is concerned about both, the safety of his sons and flocks, and peace (שָׁלוֹם) in the family, therefore, he sends Joseph to interact with them. This could be the reason why the narrator also prefers to use the name *Israel* here (instead of the name *Jacob*).[549]

In obedience to his father, Joseph undertakes a long and tiring journey to Shechem, about 50 miles. Unable to find his brothers at Shechem, he "wandered" in the fields. At this time a stranger finds him and asks him, 'what are you seeking?' (v.15). Now, why did Joseph not take the initiative to enquire about his brothers, rather the stranger askes him, "What are you seeking?" May be Joseph is confused if he should return home or continue the search. White says, "Joseph is suspended between the two worlds of his father and his brothers, not wishing to seek his brothers and not willing to return home. He was thus 'found wandering in the field.'"[550] And the man tells him that he had overheard his brothers, saying, "Let us go to Dothan" (v. 17). So Joseph continued his journey towards Dothan.

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[549] Peter Weimer, "Die Josefsgeschicte als theologische Komposition. Zu Aufbau und Struktur von Gen 37," *BZ* 48 (2004), 203.
[550] White, "The Joseph's Story," 62.

3.1.5 The Brother's Murderous Plot against Joseph (18-24):

As he is approaching Dothan, the brothers identify him from a distance, and they plott to kill him, saying, "Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill and throw him into one of the pits" (v. 19). The term נָכַל (to plot or to conspire) is a rare Hebrew term. It is always used in a negative sense (cf. Ps 105: 25; Mal. 1:14). [551] Though the phrase הַחֲלֹמוֹת בַּעַל (“lord of dreams”) is sarcastically said, it expresses their intent to disprove and destroy his dreams by destroying the dreamer. For they fear his dreams because according to the Ancient Near Eastern views dreams are believed as prediction of future events. Therefore, they plot to destroy the dreams by destroying the dreamer.[552] Wenham notes, “Their animosity against Joseph emerges not merely in their sentiments but in their choice of words.” [553] For the jealousy and bitterness against Joseph is so strong in them that, when they got an opportunity, this jealousy and bitterness surface all of a sudden, “Come now, let us kill him and throw him (וְנַשְׁלִכֵהוּ) into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild beast has devoured him” (v. 20). Though the Hebrew verb שָׁלַך (vv. 20, 22,24) means to throw, it is often used for placing a dead body in a grave, especially, when the verb takes a person as its object.[554]

But Reuben changes his stands all of a sudden, and he prohibits them from shedding blood: “do not take his life (לֹא נַכֶּנּוּ נָפֶשׁ) and “shed no blood (תִּשְׁפְּכוּ־ דָם אַל־) cast him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand upon him” (v. 22). Now, why has he suddenly changed his position? And why does he not candidly speak? For, as the eldest brother, he has both the responsibility and authority to prevent the crime. Probably, he has an ulterior motive behind his actions. For Reuben has already lost his status in the family, as he was found committing incest with Bilha, one of the concubines of Jacob. By secretly planning to rescue and restore Joseph back to his father, he hopes to regain his lost status. Joel S. Kaminsky observes that Reuben’s intention initially seems to be genuine. But a closer look into the whole narrative reveals

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[551] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 415.
[552] John E. Hartley, *Genesis* (Massachsetts: Hendrickson Pub., 2000), 311.
[553] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 352. The choice of words used in this section, such as מוּת (v 18); הָרַג (v 20); נַכֶּנּוּ נָפֶשׁ (v 21); שָׁפַך דָם (v 22) foretell an action of killing. Cf. Ebach, *Genesis 37-50*, 93.
[554] Cf. 2 Sam. 18:17; 2 Kg. 13:21; Jer. 441:9.

he has a strong personal interest in trying to do this act of kindness. His incest with Bilhah (cf. 35:22) has dearly cost him his first born right. So, one can easily imagine that he hopes to regain his lost status by rescuing and restoring the boy back to his father alive. Reuben will try once more to regain his status later (cf. 42:37).[555] The narrator indirectly reveals his hidden motive as he mentions Reuben's anxiety at the disappearance of Joseph from the cistern: "the lad is gone; and I, where shall I go?" (37:30). Moreover, his silence on the issue at the inconsolable mourning of his father, Jacob, not only makes him a participant of the crime but also reveals his insincerity. Ebach comments, "Rubens Rettungsversuch leidet daran, dass er hinter dem Rücken der anderen Brüder handeln will."[556]

Being ignorant of Reuben's motive, they give into his idea. Moreover, it could also be possible that they are in a dilemma at Reuben's proposal. For they might have thought, if they kill Joseph without Reuben's cooperation, he might divulge it to their father. On the other hand, if Joseph survives he will bring another "bad report" against them to their father. So they concede to Reuben's proposal.[557]

The following two verses (vv. 23-24) describe the brutality of their assault upon Joseph. The succession of the verbs, "stripped, took, dumped, sat down," convey the speed and the brutality of their assault upon Joseph. Their act of stripping the robe could be understood as the reversal of the investiture ceremony, in which his father demonstrates his intent to make him his successor.[558] The verb used for "stripping" is פָּשַׁט, which is the Hebrew term commonly used for skinning of animals for offering (Lev 1: 6).[559] The Hebrew verb used for dumping Joseph into the pit is שָׁלַךְ, a term used especially for casting or laying a dead body in a grave (cf. Josh 8:29). Surprisingly, the narrator does not record Joseph's reaction to their brutality. Probably, Joseph was shocked to learn the degree of hatred and animosity that his brothers have against him that he is dumbfounded. Kent comments that in his simple innocence, Joseph seems to have been quite unaware of the hatred of the brothers. But now he is awoken to the dark

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[555] Joel S. Kaminsky, "Reclaiming a Theology of Election: Favouritism and the Joseph Story," *PRS* 31 (2004), 138.
[556] Ebach, *Genesis 37-50*, 96.
[557] White, "The Joseph's Story," 64.
[558] Matthews "Anthropology of Clothing in the Joseph Narrative," 31.
[559] Ebach, *Genesis 37-50*, 97.

reality of life.[560] It could also be possible that at this point of time the narrator leaves it open to the reader to imagine and draw his/her own conclusion on the agony undergone by Joseph. This could also be the narrator's style of emphasising the intensity of the brutality, for he has no word to describe the pain and the agony of Joseph. However, at a later stage the narrator will choose to reveal Joseph's reaction, but through the mouth of his own brothers when they acknowledge together: "… in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he besought us and we would not listen" (42:21).

After throwing him in the empty cistern, they sit down to enjoy their meal. This moment could be interpreted as a moment of their satisfaction that they have finally succeeded in avenging the dreamer and his dreams. However, in contrast to their treatment, Joseph will later give them a royal treatment – with royal garments and royal meal (cf. 43:31; 45:22).

Joseph's fate suddenly takes a new turn with the entrance of a caravan of Ishmaelites.[561] Seeing the Ishmaelites Judah proposes an alternative plan. He inserts very shrewdly the motive of "profit" (בֶּצַע)[562] as he suggests an alternative plan. His proposal not only convinces them with the motive of profit but it also offers a solution to their dilemma on Reuben's (suspicious) stand. Analysing Judah's proposal with Reuben's, Redfort says that Judah's proposal (vv. 26-27) shares the same pattern of Reuben's proposal or argument (cf. v. 22); but his argument is more wordy and appealing. For Reuben's argument is more of command – *shed no blood! … cast him into this pit! … lay no hand upon him!*, while Judah's argument is more persuasive and appealing – *what profit is it if we slay our brother and conceal his blood? Come let us sell … and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh*.[563] A.

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[560] Charles Foster Kent, "The Boyhood of Joseph," *BW* 10 (Dec., 1897), 419.

[561] Gen 37:27, 28 and 39:1 identify the caravan as "Ishmaelites," whereas Gen 37:28 & 36 identify them as "Midianites." Most commentators agree that the Ishmaelites and the Midianites are alternate designations for the same group of traders. (Judg 8: 22-28). The Midianites are the descendants of Midian, a son born to Abraham from Keturah, while the Ishmaeilites are the descendants of Ishmael, who was born to Abraham from Hagar; and later both these groups may have intermarried and used both the designation interchangeably. Cf. Waltke, *Genesis,* 503; Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50,* 423; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50,* 354f.

[562] The term בֶּצַע normally carries a negative connotation of greed or dishonest gain (cf. Ex. 18:21; Prov. 15: 27); and this motive of money will also become the basis for Joseph's test on Judah and his brothers later (cf. 42: 19-38; 44:1-34).

[563] Redfort states that the Judah's version an expansion of a pre-existent version in which Reuben was the sole protagonist. Cf. Redfort, *A Study of the biblical story of Joseph*,140f.

Schenker comments, "der Bruder kann eliminiert werden, ohne dass sich die Brüder selber die Hände schmutzig zu machen brauchen. Kein Blut schreit zum Himmel um Rache."[564] Thus, Judah very diplomatically convinces his brothers, and they happily consent to Judah's proposal to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites caravan.

Analysing the text from the perspective of the context, we can conclude that the dilemma created by Reuben's sudden change of the plan demanded a different proposal, which will have both the advantage of getting rid of Joseph once and for all, and at the same time, will find them on the safer side. Judah, taking advantage of the advent of the Ismaelites, proposes another plan that would not only meet their demand in addition to the profit, but also would be favourable for Judah in gaining the firstborn right in the family since his elder brothers Reuben, Simeon, and Levi were already disqualified on account of their offences and crimes. White comments, "Judah, then seeing the opportunity this caravan presents, offers his proposal to sell Joseph into slavery and avoids responsibility for his death, 'for,' he adds with more than a hint of cynicism, 'he is our brother, our flesh' (37:27). There was also a new factor, which had not been a part of the brother's thinking up until this point, i.e., silver. Not only would the sale of Joseph rid them of him bloodlessly, but would actually produce a 'profit' (*peza*)."[565] Kaminsky also shares a similar view when he says that Judah, like Reuben, has a self-interested motive for his actions. Judah sees Reuben disqualified because of his incest with Bilha (35:22); Simeon and Levi are also disqualified because of their violence against the Shechemites (ch. 34). So it is necessary to foil Reuben's plan to rescue Joseph in order to prevent him from regaining his lost right. So, "With the first three of Jacob's children out of the picture, Jacob might well opt to choose Joseph as his primary heir inasmuch as he is the firstborn child of his favoured wife, Rachel. Thus Judah needs to eliminate Joseph as well as earn the respect of the other brothers, which his plan accomplishes in one fell swoop."[566] Thus, Judah frustrates Reuben's plan in order to set himself as the potential heir for the patriarchy.

With Judah's proposal Joseph is sold to the Midianites (Ishmaelites) for "twenty shekels," which is the price for a male slave between the age of five and twenty (Lev.

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[564] Schenker, *Versöhnung und Sühne,* 21.
[565] White, "The Joseph Story," 64.
[566] Kaminsky, "Reclaiming a Theology of Election," 138.

27:5).[567] And the Midianites later sell Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard (v. 36). Wenham remarks, "By selling Joseph to Egypt, his brothers have apparently disposed of him for good, but unwittingly they have actually helped the fulfilment of his dreams."[568] Thus, Joseph finds himself in Egypt as the servant of Potiphar, and eventually he will become the governor of Egypt, the second highest post after Pharaoh.

3.1.6 Lies and Deception, and Jacob's Relinquishment to Mourning (vv. 32-35):

The narrator once again turns to the deception theme as he reports his sons' cold-hearted deception, which suggests their indifference to the fate of their father. The scene highlights, on the one hand, the inhumane, cruel and unsympathetic attitude of the ten sons towards their old and mourning father, but on the other hand, it also reminds the readers of Jacob deceiving his own old and blind father, Isaac, as the cloth motif plays a crucial role in both the events.

The robe motif emerges once more in the narrative. The robe, which was once the symbol of a father's love for his favourite son and a symbol of enthronement, is now used as evidence for the tragic death of the beloved son. It has now become a reminder to Jacob of the tragic and mysterious disappearance of his beloved son Joseph. Brueggemann comments, "The third scene (vv. 32-35) begins again with the long robe (v.32). First, it was used for *enthronement* (v. 3). Then it was an instrument of *dethronement* and symbolic death (v. 23). Now it is used as *evidence for the death* of the dream."[569] The deception scene also reminds the reader of Jacob's own deception of his blind and aging father (cf. 27: 9-17). Just as Jacob deceived his blind father with his brother's coat and the skin of a kid then, his own sons now deceive him with the robe/coat, dipped in the blood of a goat. Furthermore, the verb "to recognize" (נָכַר) is

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[567] It is evident from v 28 that the story is the combination of two traditions – Reuben's and Judah's tradition. According to Reuben's tradition, after throwing Joseph into the pit, the brothers have a meal, and they see Midianite traders passing by, but they pay no attention. Only later (v. 29) do they realize that Joseph is no longer in the pit. According to this tradition, the Midainites rescued him, and eventually sold him in Egypt (v. 36). The Judah tradition, on the other hand, tells the story of Ishmaelites who are journeying from Gilead to Egypt with spices to sell. Seeing them Judah presents the idea of selling Joseph. Skipping over 28a, the Judah tradition continues by narrating the details of the sale. The brothers take him out of the pit and sell him to the Ishmaelites, who take Joseph to Egypt (28b) and sell him there. Cf. Susan Brayford, *Genesis* (Bosten: Brill, 2007), 393f.

[568] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 356.

[569] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 305.

used in both the scenes. It is used negatively in 27:23 (*he did not recognize him*); but here in 37:33 it is used positively (*he recognized it*). Turner writes, "These details present a picture of sons who have inherited their father's guile, though lacking his naked ambition perhaps. The arch-deceiver, however, is more easily deceived than his senile and decrepit father had been all those years ago."[570] Isaac had at least asked some probing questions 27:18-19, but Jacob here, without making any probing attempt to find out the truth, draws his own conclusion that a wild beast has torn Joseph in pieces. Jacob's statement – "It is my son's robe; a wild beast has devoured him; Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces" (v. 33), tells us about his shock, restlessness and his bewilderment mixed with deep anguish and sorrow. Wenham comments, "Once again, Jacob is finding the sins of his youth being visited on himself in his old age. He told his father an outright lie, whereas his sons let him come to his own conclusion, 'A wild animal has eaten him,'"[571]

The following two verses record his mourning and lament: "Jacob tore his cloths, put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned his son many days. All his sons and daughters tried to console him but he refused to be consoled, saying, 'Oh, I will go down to my son in the underworld mourning,' thus did his father bewail him" (Gen. 37:34-35). One can observe that in these two verses half a dozen different activities of mourning are recorded, including his refusal to be consoled, thus underlining the intensity of his grief.[572] From this moment onwards Jacob remains as a dead man having no more interest to live: "I will go down to my son in Sheol mourning."[573] John Kaltner writes, from now on Jacob is depicted as "a tragic figure who is completely alone, mourning the death of a still living son and unable to be consoled by the children yet with him. In

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[570] Turner, *Genesis,* 165.
[571] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50,* 356.
[572] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Boos, Inc., 1981), 4.
[573] Jacob will again repeat this statement when he refuses to send Benjamin down to Egypt (42:38). And Judah will also echo Jacob's grief when he explains to Joseph the consequences if Benjamin does not return to his father (Gen. 44:29-31). In *the book of Jubilees* the mourning of Jacob is connected with the mourning on the Day of Atonement: "Therefore, it is ordained for the children of Israel that they should be distressed on the tenth (day) of the seventh month, on the day Jacob received the news of Joseph's death. Each year on this day, the sin-offering of atonement was to be a goat kid because they (Jacob's sons) transgressed with a kid, and thereby brought sorrow upon Jacob" (*Jubilees* 34:18). Cf. Marc Steven Bernstein, *Stories of Joseph: Narrative Migrations Between Judaism and Islam* (Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2006), 180.

the depth of his despair he wants to join his son in death and is unable to call upon divine assistance."[574]

3.1.7 Factors Contributing to the Conflict:

The dominating factor for the conflict and for the division in Jacob's family is his own favouritism. Jacob's favouritism can be traced back to his special love for Rachel and his dislike for Leah. Though his love for Rachel and his dislike for Leah can be understandable, given the role that Leah played together with her father in deceiving Jacob, it is hard for the ten sons to digest his special love for Joseph. True, Jacob does not hate his other sons but his prioritisation of one son over the other, especially the youngest son over the elder sons, is bound to cause friction in their interpersonal relationship. As parents, therefore, it is important to keep in mind that children are gifts from God; so they should cherish the importance of every child and provide the same opportunity to every child. When discrimination is done on the basis of likes and dislikes, harmony and peace among the children are bound to collapse, leading to bitter conflict in the family circle.

Another factor that contributes to the conflict is the inner struggle for the family inheritance. Joseph is not merely hated for the favouritism he enjoys, but he is also hated for fantasying and boasting over the special status he enjoys in his father's sight. His talebearing habit, his narration of his dreams, and his fantasying over his status in his father's eyes and his dreams provide some hints to his boasting and dominating tendencies. Reuben and Judah also seem to have involved themselves in the power struggle as they try to take advantage of the situation in their favour. Reuben never succeeds in winning the favour of his father, as he never seems to have changed his attitude. But Judah finally wins the goodwill and the special blessing from his father, but only after he had given up his desire for power and domination.

Thus, chapter 37 portrays the chosen family as a dysfunctional family; for almost all the members of the family seem morally flaw. Jacob, in spite of undergoing a phase of conflict and hardship with Esau due to parental favouritism, commits the same mistake with his sons. Jacob does not seem to have learned from his experience. Joseph

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[574] John Kaltner, *Inquiring of Joseph: Getting to know a biblical Character through the Quran* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003), 18.

boasts of the special privileges that he enjoys, in the sight of his father, as contrary to how his father treats his other brothers. The ten brothers, who have been observing the indifferences of their father towards them, find themselves unloved and unwanted. So they hate, avoid and envy Joseph, going to the extent of planning to kill Joseph; but with Judah's intervention they sell him to the Ishmaelites. Moreover, though they seem to act together, they are divided on the issue of patriarchal inheritance. Thus, the narrative portrays the chosen family as a dysfunctional family. But the silver lining in the story is that, in spite of the division, hatred and envy, the characters eventually undergo transformation. The proud and boasting Joseph undergoes a moral change through his experiences of cruelty, hardship, temptation, but with God's grace. He becomes morally pure (Gen 39), honourably loyal (Gen 40), spiritually discerning (Gen 41) and boldly loving (Gen 45). The insensitive and boasting Joseph is finally transformed as a saviour of his family. Similarly, Judah undergoes transformation as he learns from his own experience what it means to be deceived (Gen 38). The selfish and calculating Judah slowly and gradually becomes a person who acknowledges his mistakes and offers his life for the sake of his father and his youngest brother. In the same way Jacob undergoes a change in his old age. He imparts his final blessing to his sons, not on the merit of their mothers, but on each individual's moral disposition. The following chapters in the Joseph narrative are mainly concerned about the transformation of the characters and their eventual reconciliation and reunion.

3.2 The Development of Reconciliation among Jacob's Sons (Gen 42-50):

The family conflict that results in the selling of the potential heir slowly starts to take a new turn with the striking of a serious draught in the land. Divine providence finally, after twenty-two long years, brings the ten brothers face-to-face with Joseph; however, they do not recognise Joseph. Using their incognito, Joseph tests them in such a way that they attribute their suffering as divine punishment for their crime against him. He first charges them of spying, and then he throws them in prison, but later he releases nine of them to go back to Canaan and bring their youngest brother to prove

their innocence, leaving Simeon in the prison as a warranty.[575] But Jacob, having no other option, very reluctantly sends Benjamin to Egypt with them to get grain for the family. In Egypt Benjamin is caught in an act of alleged theft. To redeem Benjamin Judah substitutes himself for Benjamin for the sake of his father. Deeply moved by Judah's attitude and his transformation, Joseph, finally, reveals his identity and gets reconciled with his brothers, promising them his protection and care. Thus, the story concludes with the reunion of Jacob's family.

The scenes in the reconciliation episode shifts from one location to another – from the Promised Land to Egypt, Egypt to the Promised Land, and again from the Promised Land to Egypt, and finally the story concludes with the reunion of Jacob's family in Egypt. According to the locations of the scenes, the narrative could be structured as: in the Land (42:1-5), out of the Land (42:6-25), and again in the Land (42:26-43:15) and out of the Land (43:16-45:15).

3.2.1 In the Land: The First Trip to Egypt (42:1-5):

It has already been twenty-two years since Joseph disappeared from his family. But has Jacob come out of his mourning? Has the relationship between Jacob and his ten sons improved? Has Jacob changed his attitude towards his ten sons? Has Judah achieved the status in the family that he expected by getting rid of Joseph? The answer is an emphatic *no*. Their relationship has rather further deteriorated. This is evident in the very first verse of Gen 42 when Jacob asks them, "Why do you look at one another? … Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live, and not die" (42:1-2). The tone and the tenor of Jacob's language indicate that the relationship between Jacob and his ten sons continues to remain frayed.[576] Possibly, Jacob might have been annoyed with the lethargic and non-initiative attitude of his sons for not responding to the crisis. But unlike them, Jacob remains awake to the need of the family that they may *live*, and *not die*. Jacob's statement not

[575] Chapter 42-43 contains both the Elohistic and the Jahwistic versions of Joseph's story, as in Gen 37. Reuben features in the Elohistic verion (42:37f), while Judah features in the Jahwistic verion (43:3ff). Elohistic relates that Simeon is kept as a hostage for Benjamin (42:18ff), a detail that is lacking in the Jahwistic version. In the Elohist version the brothers find their money in their sacks only after returning to Canaan (42:35), while in the Jahwistic version the money is found on their way home (43:21). Chapter 42 is mainly the Elohistic version. Cf. B. Vawter, "Genesis," 202.
[576] Kaminsky, "*Reclaiming a Theology of Election*, 141.

only demonstrates his resilience in spite of his inconsolable sorrow and his desire to go down to Sheol, to his son, Joseph, at the news of his death (37:31-35), but it also shows his concern for the survival of his clans. Given Jacob's inconsolable mourning and broken-heartedness, one might expect that he might become lifeless and bitter; but ironically it is not he but his sons who seem to be half-dead. Thomas L. Bordie says, "Whatever his anguish, Jacob has not given up, has not stopped listening to what life has to offer. More than his children, he is receptive, aware. And he seeks life, 'that we may live and not die.'"[577] Commenting on Jacob's statement – "that we may live and not die." Ebach writes, "ein entscheidendes Thema der Josefsgeschichte, in der es nicht nur um Konflikt und Versöhnung, sondern auch um Not und Versorgung – und in beiderlei Hinsicht um Leben und Tod geht"[578] (cf. 45:7; 50:20).

Thus, Jacob sends them to Egypt to buy grain; but he does not send Benjamin, his youngest son from Rachel with them; for he fears misfortune (אָסוֹן). Scholars attribute different motives on Jacob's decision to hold Benjamin back with him. Scharbert understands that such a long journey in those days was considered to be very dangerous therefore Jacob was reluctant to send Benjamin with his brothers.[579] It is also possible that Jacob suspects his ten sons for the fate of his beloved Joseph since no further fact about Joseph's death has yet come to light. Kinder says, "Under a father's eye their actual crimes might be covered up, but not their character."[580] These starting verses also convey that Jacob continues to show favour to the sons born from his favourite wife, Rachel, because after Joseph's disappearance Jacob's attention shifts to Benjamin, his second son from Rachel; and neither Judah nor Reuben has succeeded in taking over Joseph's position. Kaminsky says, "the three-way relationship between Jacob, Benjamin, and the other brothers indicates Jacob and his ten older sons are either in the same state they were in at the end of chapter 37, or perhaps their relationship is even more fractured at this point in time."[581]

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[577] Thomas L. Brodie, *Genesis as dialogue: a literary, historical, and theological commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 376f.
[578] Ebach, *Genesis 37-50*, 276.
[579] Scharbert, Genesis 12-50, 261.
[580] Kinder, *Genesis*, 198. Cf. Turner, *Genesis*, 183.
[581] Kaminsky, "Reclaiming a Theology of Election," 141.

However, the narrator gradually shifts the focus from the conflict theme to reconciliation as he changes the designation of the ten of *his sons* (v. 1) to *Joseph's brother* (v. 3) – "so *ten of Joseph's brothers* went down to buy grain in Egypt" (v. 3). By this statement the narrator prepares the reader for the eventual meeting of the separated brothers. Moreover, there is a shift in the use of the name for the patriarch – from *Jacob* to *Israel* (Jacob in v. 1 and Israel in v. 5). "Thus the sons of *Israel* came to buy among the others" (v. 5). Longacre says, "Jacob is a name fitting to describe the measures taken by a man to obtain food for himself and his family… the reference to 'the sons of Israel' in v. 5 is a reminder of the dignity and historical importance of the one whose sons come to buy grain at this juncture in the nation's history."[582] But within the perspective of the theme, *Conflict and Reconciliation*, the change of the name from *his sons* (Jacob's son cf. v. 1) to *the sons of Israel* (v. 5) reminds the reader of the call and of the election of the chosen family, i.e. to be the people of reconciliation.

3.2.2 Out of the Land: The First Test from Joseph (6-25):

Finally, after twenty long years the brothers come face-to-face with Joseph but fail to recognise him. Joseph has now become the governor of Egypt, and he manages the whole food supply programme of the land, both for the citizens and for foreigners. These two high positions enjoyed by Joseph are expressed by two Hebrew words הַשַּׁלִּיט and הַמַּשְׁבִּיר. Connecting these two words with Joseph's dreams, Hamilton says that the word הַשַּׁלִּיט refers to the dream in which the sun, the moon, and eleven stars bowed before him (his position of authority), and the other word הַמַּשְׁבִּיר, refers to the first dream in which the brothers' sheaves bowed before his sheaf (his position as provider).[583] One could, however, argue how was it possible for a group of simple and common shepherds to come face-to-face in contact with the highest authority of Egypt after the Pharaoh. Sicker assumes it may be possible that the Egyptians could have been buying their rations from government storehouses, whereas foreigners must go to the competent authorities for permission to make any purchase. In this way Joseph could have been informed of the ten men from Canaan. Moreover, Joseph might have been

[582] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 516f.
[583] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 519.

expecting the arrival of his brothers since he knows that the whole neighbouring countries are also facing a similar crisis, therefore, he takes personal interest in meeting the men.[584]

The dream motif is brought to light once again as the brothers come and bows themselves before him with their faces to the ground. And when Joseph sees his brothers he recognises them (וַיַּכִּרֵם) at once; but they could not recognise him.[585] The word "recognise" (נָכַר) was earlier a key word in the sons' deception of their father (cf. 37:32-33); similarly, it is a crucial term for Joseph's test on his brothers. For "the scene is an interplay of 'knowing' and 'not knowing,' 'recognizing' and 'not recognizing'."[586] Surprisingly, Joseph treats his brothers as strangers, and he speaks to them harshly. His dealings with them, however, raises question about his intention: Is he taking revenge? Or is he trying to lead them to repentance? The narrator's silence about the motive of Joseph's move gives rise to conflicting or multidimensional opinions. Sternberger attributes four motives to Joseph's harsh treatment of them. They are punishment, test, teaching, and fulfilment of his dreams.[587] Skinner finds in his treatment both harshness and magnanimity.[588] According to Gunkel Joseph's treatment should be understood as revenge and punishment than as a move to lead them to repentance. He believes, "Der antike Erzähler denkt viel einfacher: Joseph will seine Brüder strafen; dies ist – denkt die Antike – nicht niedere 'Rachsucht', denn sie haben ja die Strafe verdient. Aber ein

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[584] Sicker lists the following reasons for Joseph's direct involvement in managing the grain both for the Egyptians and for the foreigners: firstly, to ensure the success of his program; secondly, for the political reasons. For it has to be done in a manner that it would not arouse serious criticism or revolt from the increasingly hard-pressed Egyptians; and that it should not open the country for spying from the foreign nationalities. And so to assure the security of the land he might have imposed a number of constraints on foreign sales: first of all, all such applications had to be funnelled through a single location to assure adequate control over sales transactions and the elimination of unnecessary interactions between foreign purchasers and the local population. Thirdly, to avoid middlemen, who would make a profit that did not accrue to Egypt. Cf. Sicker, *Jacob and his Sons*, 81.

[585] There could be a number of reasons why the brothers did not recognise him: first, they could have never thought that a slave could come up to such a high office; second, with his official costumes as the governor of Egypt Joseph now has a completely new look; third, he now has a new name and he speaks Egyptian, etc. cf. Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 519.

[586] Waltke, *Genesis*, 545.

[587] Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 286.

[588] Skinner, *Genesis*, 475.

Christ, der nach dem Gebot des Herrn das ihm angetane Unrecht ohne weiteres vergibt, is Joseph auch nicht gerade; und christliche Gedanken soll man hier nicht eintragen."[589]

Moreover, Joseph's remembrance of his dreams at the sight of his brothers' bowing before him to the ground contradicts his earlier intention to forget his affiliation with his past when he named one of his sons *Menasseh* ("God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house" 41:51).[590] So by remembering his dreams he still lives his past; and he understands all that he dreamt and thought about himself are true. According to R. Alter Joseph's remembrance of his dreams, "is one of those rare moments in the Bible when a narrator chooses not only to give us temporary access to the inward experience of a character but also to report the character's consciousness of his past. That unusual note is entirely apt here both because Joseph himself is struck by the way past dreams have turned into present fact, and because he will force his brothers into a confrontation with his own past."[591] Breuggermann is of the view when Joseph remembers his dreams he understands them only in the sense of his power and his dominion over his brothers and not in the sense of his vocation or fidelity for the chosen family.[592] In addition, he accuses them of being spies. It is a serious allegation against them because Ancient Egypt had often looked at the world, outside her borders, with suspicion and hostility. Moreover, Egypt's northeastern frontier facing Canaan was heavily fortified since it was subjected to attack by northern invaders.[593] Thus, given Egypt's political rivals, Joseph's charge against his brothers is a very serious charge. Therefore, Arnold says, "such an allegation was not unrealistic, since Egypt for many centuries had conflict with Semites from Syria-Palestine."[594] The idiom *to see the nakedness of the land* has also a sexual connotation (as in Gen. 9:22; Lev. 20:17). This suggests that the brothers could have done some kind of incestuous violence against him when they stripped his robe.[595] By this accusation he, on the one hand, reminds them of their offence against him, and on the other hand, he also accuses them of the same offence which they had accused him of whenever he brought report about them to

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[589] Gunkel, *Genesis*, (ed. D.W. Nowack), 389.
[590] Ebach, *Genesis 37-50*, 284; Waltke, *Genesis*, 547.
[591] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 163.
[592] Breuggermann, *Genesis*, 340.
[593] Robert Davidson, *Genesis 12-50* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 254.
[594] Arnold, *Genesis*, 353.
[595] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 520; Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 164.

their father (cf. 37:2). As earlier the brothers considered or charged him of being his father's spy (talebearer), so now he confronts them with a similar charge, even though he knows that they are not spies.

The brothers refute the charge; but Joseph repeatedly accuses them of the same crime (vv. 12, 14, 15, 20) in order to unnerve and to breakdown their resistance.[596] But in defence they give out more detail about their family to the apparent stranger. Wenham comments, "Joseph is more than a tough professional interrogator; he desperately wants to know about the absent members of his family. So, under pressure, his brothers continue to volunteer details about their family in an attempt to prove their honesty."[597] In fact, Joseph's repeated accusation of his brothers is intended to find out, if his full brother, Benjamin, is safe. For he suspects that his half-brothers also treat Benjamin in the same manner as they treated him. So he continues to bank on with the same accusation to get to know about Benjamin.[598]

But as soon as they mention their youngest brother, Joseph changes his strategy. He now demands them to bring Benjamin to him as proof for their claim. Matthew says, "Joseph's test actually sought to ensure that Benjamin would be brought to Egypt under his protective eye."[599] Therefore, he changes his strategy and demands the youngest brother in order to prove their innocence. Alter says that Joseph's demand for Benjamin not only demonstrates his eagerness to see his full brother, but also to protect him from them because he fears they might harm him as they had done to him.[600] But the irony is that, on the one hand, he commands one of them to go and bring the youngest brother, but on the other hand, he casts all of them into prison for three days (vv. 15-17). This act of Joseph suggests that he is angry with the ten and he wants them go through the hardship that he himself has undergone; but at the same time he also wants to be united with his full brother.[601] Joseph seems confused here about what he should do with his brothers.

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[596] Hamilton, *Genesis*, 520.
[597] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 407.
[598] Skinner, *Genesis*, 475.
[599] Mathew, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, 778.
[600] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 165.
[601] Hartley, *Genesis*, 332. According to Thomas Mann the most obvious motivation behind Joseph's actions is to take revenge on his perpetrators. So he wants his brothers to undergo some of the painful experience he himself had undergone. Cf. Mann, *The Book of Torah*, 70.

Joseph changes his plan again after three days. Is it because the brothers would not budge to his command that he changes his plan? Or does he think about the rest of his family in Canaan starving that it would be insensible to send one man with grains for so many people. Whatever the reason may be, he seems increasingly enigmatic. He had accused them earlier of being spies, and cast them into prison, but now he softens his stand and decides to keep just one of them in custody, and lets the others go back and bring the younger brother as a testimony of their claim. Commenting on the sudden change of his decision Redford says that his first plan to send one and to keep the rest in custody was a hasty and ill-conceived step, a step taken more in anger and retaliation than prudence.[602] Other scholars list the following reasons for the change of his plan: first, Joseph thinks that more persons can have a better appeal to persuade Jacob to release Benjamin; second, more persons can carry more food for the family; and third, any lengthy stay of more brothers in Egypt might increase the chance of identifying Joseph, which could hinder his plan to reach the intended result.[603] However G. Fischer offers a different perspective that by repeatedly demanding them to produce their youngest brother (vv.15-16, 20 & 34) Joseph indirectly demands his father to give up his favouritism for the sons of his beloved wife Rachel.[604] This different interpretation of Joseph's hidden motive behind the trial could be taken as his multiple reasons behind his trials – that he wants them to undergo some pain and anxiety that he himself had undergone, that he wants his father to give up his favouritism towards the sons of his beloved wife, Rachel, and that the brothers be enabled to come to a point of repentance and eventually get reconciled and reunited with him.

Though Joseph's intention seems enigmatic both to the reader and to other characters in the story, the brothers interpret the trial as God's judgement. They conclude that they are being punished for their crimes: "In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he besought us and we would not listen; therefore is this distress come upon us" (42:21). How are they brought to this initial step of repentance? Sternberg says, "The three days' interval gives

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[602] Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*, 149. Cf. Richard J. Clifford, "Genesis 37-50-Joseph Story or Jacob Story," *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 223.
[603] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 226.
[604] G. Fischer, *Der Jakobsweg der Bibel*, 110.

Joseph, as well as, his brothers the time necessary to adjust to a shattering experience and do some soul-searching. As it transpires, they repent openly their evil treatment of him – 'we are guilty concerning our brother'- and so does he, by implication, of his evil designs against them."[605] Alter says, "The psychological success of Joseph's stratagem is confirmed by the fact that the accusation and the hostage taking immediately trigger feelings of guilt over their behaviour toward Joseph."[606] A. Schenker writes, "Reue ist Einsicht in das eigene böse Tun, nachdem man es in anderer Form am eigenen Leib selbst erfahren hat. Leidenserfahrung und die Angst, willkürlicher Grausamkeit zum Opfer zu fallen, erinnern die Brüder an Josef und führen sie zur Einsicht in das Verbrecherische ihres damaligen Tuns."[607] He adds, "Erinnerung an das Getane, Einsicht und Einfühlung in das, was das Opfer erlitt: das sind die beiden ersten Stufen auf der Treppe der Umkehr, der Reue. Ohne diese Stufen gibt es keine Reue."[608] Rupper attributes their remembrance of their past offence to their present crisis as confession or acknowledgement of their crime, which is a *Schuldbekenntnis*.[609]

As Joseph hears their *Schuldbekenntnis* (confession/acknowledgement of their sins) he is deeply moved. So he turns away from them and weeps. One would expect, at this point, a dramatic scene of reunion between Joseph and his brothers; but, on the contrary, Joseph persists with his test. He decides to keep one of them in the prison and let the rest go back and bring their youngest brother as evidence of their innocence. To the reader's astonishment Joseph takes Simeon and binds him before their eyes and detains him.[610] Alter says, "Perhaps, we may faintly wonder, these tears are tears of self-pity or anger, and we are to assume that the harshness persists. But it seems far more likely that as Joseph hears his brother's expression of remorse, the first strong impulse of reconciliation takes place in his own feelings, though he cannot yet trust

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[605] Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 290.
[606] Alter, *The five books of Moses*, 242.
[607] Schenker, *Versöhunung und Sühne*, 27.
[608] Schenker, *Versöhunung und Sühne*, 26.
[609] Rupper, *Genesis 37,1-50,26*, 258.
[610] The possible reasons for the detainment of Simeon could be: first, as the second oldest in the family after Reuben it was his responsibility to safeguard his brother. If Reuben was absent from the sale of Joseph then it was Simeon who should take the prime responsibility for the crime. Second, one cannot rule out that Simeon might have been the architect for the conspiracy against Joseph in Gen 37, given his past cruelty against the Shechemites (cf. Gen 34).

them and so must go on with the test."[611] Thomas Mann says, "Apparently his brothers' words have met part of the larger test Joseph has in mind, but not all."[612] Therefore he continues with his test as he binds Simeon in front of the brothers. And then without their knowledge he orders his servants to put their money in their sacks with grain. "The return of the silver is also associated with the brother's guilt, for it repeats their receiving of silver from the Ishmaelite for the sale of Joseph as a slave." [613] Sternberg says, by this "he compels them to live not his past but their own, reproducing something like the old temptations to find out whether they will make the same criminal choice."[614]

Cressmann summarises Joseph's test as a way to test their integrity: first, the detention of Simeon tests their loyalty to one another; second, the return of the money tests their honesty; third, his demand to see Benjamin tests their present attitude towards the youngest brother; and (later) the fourth, the hiding of the cup in Benjamin's sack will test their loyalty and love towards their youngest brother and towards their elderly father.[615]

3.2.3 In the Land: Return and Second Trip to Egypt (42:26-43:14):

On their way back to Canaan one of them opens his grain sack to feed his donkey. But to his dismay he finds his money in the mouth of his sack.[616] At this all of them are troubled and startled saying, "what is this that God has done to us?" Davidson concludes, since the presence of money in the sack is a mystery to them, they can only attribute it to God.[617] For God has been using Joseph as His vehicle to bring them to face the reality.[618] Kinder notes that the sense of guilt was already aroused in them

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[611] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative,* 167. Turner says, "Joseph's behaviour induces their confession, but the fact that he continues as if nothing had happened, merely stepping aside for a while to weep (42:24), indicates that such a confession is not his aim. His private weeping is as enigmatic as his public speech and action. As 42:9 indicated, Joseph's behaviour is motivated by his dreams, not by concern for family welfare." Cf. Turner, *Genesis,* 187.
[612] Mann, *The Book of Torah,* 70.
[613] Alter, *The five books of Moses,* 243.
[614] Sternberger, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative,* 294.
[615] Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph,* 150.
[616] But in 43:21 they tell Joseph's steward that they discovered the money as they opened all their sacks in the inn.
[617] Davidson, *Genesis,* 256.
[618] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50,* 532.

(42:21) may have made them see the hand of God in the governor's action.[619] The discovery of money in the sack increases their fear because they fear that they will be accused with another charge of crime.

However, at their arrival they give a different report about their trip to their father; they hide the true facts from him.[620] For instance, they do not report their three days detention, the discovery of money in one of the sacks, and they also avoid reporting Jacob the anxiety and the pressure they had undergone. Now why do they hide these facts? They hide these facts because they know if they report everything that happened to them in Egypt, Jacob would never send Benjamin with them to redeem Simeon. The truth is that they want to convince Jacob to allow Benjamin go with them so that they can redeem Simeon.

But unfortunately, their plan gets shattered as they open their sacks, and each finds his money in his sack. This has not only shocked them but has also created suspicion in the mind of Jacob. Sternberg says, "Two strange disclosures having been sprung on him in quick succession – Simeon's disappearance and the money's (re)appearance – Jacob refuses to accept them as coincidences. A tight causal explanation, clearing up one mystery in terms of another, suggests itself to him: the brothers have sold Simeon into slavery and are now pretending to be dismayed only to cover their tracks and lay the ground for yet another coup."[621] Therefore, Jacob accuses them, "You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin; all this has come upon me" (42:36).

At this point Reuben, being the eldest son, steps forward to own up to the responsibility of bringing Benjamin back safe. He offers his two sons as surety that in case he fails to bring Benjamin back Jacob could kill his two sons. Reuben's offer is so absurd and poorly thought out. How could the killing of two of his own grandchildren console the loss of his beloved son? It would rather only jeopardize the existence of a

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[619] Kinder considers their reaction as good in comparison to Jacob's reaction. For they could attribute it to God, while Jacob could see nothing beyond the trouble (cf. 42:36). Cf. Kinder, *Genesis*, 200.

[620] Their report differs in several ways. They do not mention their imprisonment (v. 17), the binding and the casting of Simeon in prison (v. 24), the repeated accusation by *the man* (vv. 9, 12, 14, 16) or Joseph's threat (v 20). On the contrary, they invent the benefit that would come from returning with Benjamin (v 34). Cf. Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 534f.

[621] Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narratives*, 298.

family already perilously close to destruction.[622] So Jacob rejects out-rightly Reuben's proposal saying, "My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he only is left. If harm should befall him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to Sheol" (42:38). The irony of Jacob's attitude towards his ten sons is that he refers to Benjamin as *my son*, and refers to Joseph as *his brother* as against "your brother." Jacob unwittingly separates Rachel's sons from the sons born to Jacob's other wives. Thus, the scene concludes with a deep grief as in 37:35; and Jacob once again demonstrates his deep affection for the sons born by Rachel, disregarding the sons born to him from his other wives – Leah and his two concubines.

The famine continues to be severe and the family is running short of grains, but Jacob's sons are helpless because Jacob refuses to send Benjamin to go again down with them to Egypt, a demand set by the governor, should they appear before him. However, concerned about the survival of the family, Jacob tries again to persuade them to go without Benjamin. He knows that the situation has become more complex, and so he is confused. He has already lost two sons – Joseph is no more and he perceives that Simeon is being held hostage in Egypt. Therefore he fears some evil would also befall his beloved Benjamin. However, he has no other option, but he has to break the deadlock, else the whole family would die of hunger. Kinder comments, "Israel's querulously negative attitude is very true to life: his scolding was an escape from the decision he dreaded and a comfort to his self-esteem. But in clutching his advantage over those who had wronged him he was jeopardizing himself and them – including his beloved Benjamin, whom he must lose in order to save."[623] So, in spite of knowing the complexity of the matter, Jacob tries to persuade the brothers to go down to Egypt again for grain.

At this Judah steps forward as the spokesman for the rest, and he persuades Jacob to let Benjamin go down with them to Egypt, reminding Jacob of the condition set by *the man* (cf. 42:15ff), "you shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you"

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[622] However, Westermann interprets Reuben's offer as follows: "Reuben will seinem Vater sagen, er will mit allem, was er hat, sich dafür einsetzen, dass Benjamin heil zurückkommt." Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 121.
[623] Kinder, *Genesis*, 203.

(43:3).[624] Westermann says, "Der Vater weiß zwar nun, dass er nachgeben muss, aber er versucht, den Brüdern noch einmal zu entgegnen (v. 6-7); aber die Brüder erklären ihm, daß die Erwähnung Benjamins vor dem Mann unvermeidlich war."[625] Commenting on Judah's refusal to go down to Egypt without Benjamin, Waltke says, "Judah accedes to his father's direction but also lays down a definitive condition to match his father's refusal."[626] For "the man in Egypt is in control. The game will have to be played by his rules."[627] At this *Israel* rebukes his sons for giving out information about the family to a stranger and for being so forthright.[628] Consequently they begin to justify their innocence and put the liability on *the man* – "The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our kindred, saying, 'Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?' What we told him was in answer to these questions; could we in any way know that he would say, 'Bring your brother down'?" (43:7-8).[629]

Since Jacob persisted in holding back Benjamin with him, Judah pursues to break the deadlock, and he offers himself as surety for Benjamin: "Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. I will be surety for him; of my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever; for if we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice" (43:8-9). The transformation in Judah's character is evident from his pledge. Earlier he provokes his brothers to sell Joseph for money (37:26f); but now he pledges his whole life for Benjamin. This is, in

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[624] From here on Judah would be taking the leading role because Reuben had failed to convince Jacob. For Reuben had already lost his position by his incest with his father's concubine. Moreover, his absurd pledge and inability to convince Jacob are some of the evidences for his unworthiness to take up leadership. Simeon is imprisoned in Egypt, and Levi along with Simeon has lost his credibility by massacring the Shechemite (cf. Gen 34). Though Judah committed adultery with his daughter-in-law in his ignorance, he acknowledged his offence and learned a lesson from his fault. Thus, transformation has already been taking place in Judah.

[625] Westermann, *Genesis 37-50,* 424.

[626] Waltke, *Genesis,* 553.

[627] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50,* 540. Judah's words to Jacob presuppose a previous visit to Egypt by the brothers. So scholars attribute chapter 42 to the Elohist tradition and chapter 43 to the Jahwist tradition. The obvious reason for this is that in 43 Judah stays prominent and in 42 Reuben. Cf. Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50,* 540.

[628] Jacob is called here again *Israel*. P. Weimar states, "Er is hier mit dem Israel-Namen genannt. Das zeigt an, dass es um das Ganze der Familie geht." Cf. Ebach, *Genesis 37-50,* 328.

[629] Although in his query Joseph did not ask them: "Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?" On the contrary, it is they themselves who gave out the information about their family in order to defend their innocence (cf. 42:9-13).

fact, the "entscheidende Wendung Judas"[630] in the whole story. Interestingly, Judah repeats the very same words of Jacob, which he uttered when he sent the ten for the first time down to Egypt: "that we may live and not die". (42:2; 43:8). Commenting on this Rene says, "Judah speaks a greater truth than he knows. Not only does the clan need grain; it also needs to be restored to unity. The fate of Jacob's flesh and the future of the covenant are tied together. They cannot have grain without Benjamin. Jacob and the remaining brothers know this quite well. What they do not know is that the twelve brothers cannot be reconciled without Benjamin. Both are necessary for the realization of Judah's hope: that we may live and not die."[631] Rad comments, "Judah's solemn decision to be surety for the younger brother marks the turning point in this struggle. His offer is nothing less than a secularly formulated curse upon himself in the event that Benjamin did not return. Every reader will consider Judah's unconditional tie of his life to that of his brother as something magnanimous and uplifting. Actually this solidarity and willingness to give themselves for one another on the brother's part is a hidden desire result of the hard test to which Joseph had put them."[632] Thus, by pledging his life for Benjamin, Judah freely surrenders his family fortune and demonstrates his courage to take whatever penalty Jacob wishes to inflict on him for the rest of his life.

Persuaded by Judah's assurance and compelled by the deadly famine, Jacob changes his decision and consents at last heavy-heartedly to let Benjamin go with them. Jacob consents to send Benjamin with Judah because "Judah's argument is not only logically compelling … but also shows an understanding of, and empathy with, his father's fear."[633] Once Jacob made up his mind to send Benjamin he himself takes initiative for the preparation and for the strategizing of their journey, which is true to his character (cf. Gen 32-33). He tells them first to take with them gifts (מִנְחָה) for *the man* (choice fruits of the land, balm, honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds). Jacob appears to use the same method that he earlier used to win the favour of Esau. It had worked out well then in his favour; and so now he hopes it will also help his sons. The list of things named here interestingly reminds the reader of the Ishmaelite caravan that

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[630] Ebach, *Genesis 37-50*, 321.
[631] Russell R. Rene, *Genesis* (London: SCM; 2010), 277.
[632] Rad, *Genesis*, 387.
[633] Paul R. Noble, "Esau, Tamar, and Joseph: Criteria for Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions," *VT*, 52 (2002), 241.

brought Joseph to Egypt (cf. Gen 37:25-28). Second, he tells them to take double the money with them to compensate for the money found in their sacks. Hamilton says, "Jacob, formerly adept at taking something away from somebody by stealth, now insists that his sons keep nothing that is not legitimately theirs."[634] Third, he tells them also to take their brother Benjamin. Jacob is referring to Benjamin, as *your brother* instead of "my son" is noticeable here. For all through the story he has been referring to Benjamin as *my son*, but now he says *your brother*. And finally he concludes with the lament, "If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." His final statement conveys how difficult it was for Jacob to send Benjamin with them.

After instructing his sons all the things they are to take with them on the journey, Jacob prays invoking the holy name אֵל שַׁדַּי:[635] "may God Almighty (אֵל שַׁדַּי) grant you mercy before the man, that he may send back your other brother and Benjamin" (43:14). Now why did Jacob invoke this divine name instead of the more common names *Elohim*? The name אֵל שַׁדַּי appears in the earlier texts only three times: 1) when God appeared to Abraham and established His covenant with him (17:1), and promised that nations would emerge from his descendants; 2) when Isaac blessed Jacob: *God Almighty, bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of people* (28:3); and 3) when God appeared to Jacob and said: *Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee* (35:11). It appears that in each case the name אֵל שַׁדַּי is used when the issue is on the growth of the people. The use of the divine name (אֵל שַׁדַּי) by Jacob is here connected with the protection and the safe return of Benjamin, Simeon and all his sons.

Finally, he concludes his prayer with the lamentation, "if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." His concluding words in his prayer exposes his lack of faith in what he prays. But Von Rad understands his concluding melancholy to be a "sad resignation of a man who has long resisted but who no longer wants to set his will

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[634] Hamiliton, *Genesis 18-50*, 545.

[635] The name אֵל שַׁדַּי (Gen 17:1) is the most common and old name for God in the ancestral narratives after the name *Yahweh*. It always occurs in speech and not in narration. Thus, the use of the name אֵל שַׁדַּי suggests the oldest oral stage of the story. On two occasions the patriarch used this name in a prayer – for the safe return of his children about to go on a journey to a foreign land (cf. 28:3; 43:14) and for his protection. Cf. Hartley, *Genesis*, 55.

against the course of events, and who still cannot bring himself to any real assurance."[636] Connecting Jacob's present situation with his past, A. Schenker says, "Das Leiden Jakobs im Angesicht des drohenden Verlustes seines liebsten Kindes Benjamin erinnert jedoch auch an das Leiden seines Vaters Isaak, dessen Liebe zu seinem Erstgeborenen Esau er damals selbst rücksichtslos missachtet hatte, auf seinen Vorteil allein bedacht. Auch das ist eine Wiederholung einer gleichen Situation, aber mit umgekehrten Rollen: Jakob erfährt das Leiden an sich selbst, das er seinem Vater zugefügt hatte."[637] Referring to his melancholy Hamilton says, "It is a statement of resignation, of a willingness to accept the worst possible scenario. He does believe, however, that El Shaddai will be the one to make the final decision about the destiny of Benjamin. Neither Judah nor 'the man' has the authority."[638] Thus, Jacob finally surrenders the fate of his family to the providence of אֵל שַׁדַּי.

3.2.4 Out of the Land: the Second Test from Joseph (43:15-34):

Finally, they set out for Egypt for the second time. At this time they carry gifts and extra money, and Benjamin also accompanies them. But to their surprise they are received very cordially in Egypt in contradiction to their first visit. Why such a change? Is it because Benjamin, Joseph's full brother, is with them? Gunkel says, "Der Grund dieser besonderen Freudlichkeit ist, dass er seinen Vollbruder Benjamin unter ihnen sieht."[639] However, Joseph neither expresses excitement nor engages with them at first, rather he delegates his steward to engage with them. And to their astonishment the steward takes them directly to the governor's house. Given their first audience with the governor, they could expect nothing else from this move, but a trap. So they fear it is on account of the money that they found in their sacks. They think that they would be charged with theft, and could be forced into slavery, and their asses could be confiscated (v. 18). Skinner comments, "To the simple-minded peasants all this looks like an elaborate military stratagem."[640]

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[636] Von Rad, *Genesis,* 387.
[637] Schenker, *Versöhnung und Sühne,* 29f.
[638] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50,* 546.
[639] Gunkel, *Genesis,* (trasl. D.W. Nowack), 395.
[640] Skinner, *Genesis,* 481.

Fearing the worst, they tell the steward regarding the money that they found in the mouth of their sacks. Their report is exceedingly careful; for in comparison with 42:27-28 and 42:35 their account varies.[641] Why do they give a conflicting report? Are they so dishonest that they misrepresent the fact? Wenham says that there is no dishonesty because their concern is only to tell that they did not steal.[642] And they want to return the money, found mysteriously in their sacks. At this the steward tells them not to fear, saying, "your God and the God of your father must have put treasure in your sacks for you; I received your money" (43:23). After this he releases Simeon. Probably the steward's reassurance and the release of Simeon might have helped them to overcome their anxiety.

Arriving at Joseph's house, they prepare to present the gift for the governor. As Joseph enters the scene, they bring the gifts and bow down before him. Commenting on this Waltke says that the author reserves the detail about their bowing down until Simeon is with them to show it as fulfilment of Joseph's first dream.[643] However, the gifts that they present finds no mentioning at all; instead Joseph inquires about the שָׁלוֹם (*peace/well being*) of their father. The word שָׁלוֹם, on the one hand, suggests that he is more interested in their family than in their gifts. After this he slowly turns his attention towards Benjamin. Given his earliest insistence to see his full brother Benjamin, it is surprising to learn that Joseph enquires first about their father. The reason why he pretends not to be noticing Benjamin at the first instance could be that earlier he was worried about the שָׁלוֹם of his full brother, given the cruelty he himself had undergone under his brothers. Now that he sees him hail and hearty, he is concerned about the שָׁלוֹם of their father. It is interesting to note that throughout the narrative Benjamin utters not a single word yet he plays a crucial role for the reconciliation to take place between them.[644] Then he blesses Benjamin to see if the others show any sign of resentment at Benjamin. But they show no sign of resentment or hatred against Benjamin. Could this be a reason why Joseph is emotionally moved and weeps in

[641] According to Gen 42:27-28 only one of them found the money at the lodging place. But according to Gen 42: 35 everyone opened his sack at home and found the money in his bag. But here they report that all of them discovered the money at the lodging place (cf. 43:20-22).
[642] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 422; Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 549f.
[643] Waltke, *Genesis*, 555.
[644] Hans Jochen Boecker, *Die Josephsgeschichte* (Berlin: Neukirchener Verlag, 2003), 64.

secrete? But the text states that he weeps because "his heart yearned for his brother (אָחִיו אֶל־ רַחֲמָיו)."[645] At this point the readers might expect Joseph would tear off his mask and reveal his identity; but on the contrary, he chooses to pursue his test. Commenting on this, some scholars are of the view that Joseph's brotherly feeling is not directed to all of his brothers; he is neither moved by their love for Benjamin nor by their transformation. Rather he is solely moved by his brotherly identification with Benjamin.[646] But Rene is of the view that "the future of the covenant requires the reconciliation of the brothers, not Joseph's personal happiness."[647] Therefore, he continues to test them. Robert Sack says, "The point of Joseph's trial is that repentance is only complete when one knows that if he were placed in the same position, he would not act in the same way he had acted before."[648] Therefore, Joseph's decision to hide his identity has a noble purpose behind it.

At the next level of the test they are brought into the governor's house to have a meal with him. According to biblical and Near Eastern understanding participation in a meal marks unity, friendship, trust and peace among the participants.[649] So it is a big surprise for the brothers that they are privileged to dine with the governor of Egypt. Moreover, three more surprises await them: first, the meal is served to three different groups; second, the seating order of them according to their seniority; and third, the special favour shown to Benjamin. First, the meal is served to three groups at three different tables. One table is for Joseph; the second table is for the brothers; and the third table is for the Egyptians. Joseph (presumably with his family) maybe at a separate table is a matter of his rank.[650] The Egyptians did not eat with foreigners because of their social and cultic taboos – a belief that foreigners defiled the food.[651] Second, the seating order of each brother is according to his seniority by birth that they start looking

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[645] The Hebrew word for compassion is רַחֲמִין, which is derived from רֶחֶם, meaning "womb". This would mean that Joseph is deeply moved because of his brotherly identification with Benjamin. Cf. Leon Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2003), 589.
[646] Buerggemann, *Genesis*, 340.
[647] Rene, 279.
[648] Abraham Kuruvilla, *Genesis: A Theological commentary for preaching* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 524.
[649] Boecker, *Die Josefsgeschichte*, 64.
[650] Spricer, *Genesis*, 328f.
[651] G. J. Spurrell, *Notes on the Text of the Book of Genesis* (2nd ed.; Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publisher, 2005), 344. The dietary taboo, like the Egyptian, was later practiced by the Jews (Dn. 1:8). Cf. Vawter, "Genesis," 203; Kinder, *Genesis*, 204.

at each other in amazement. Third, favouritism shown to Benjamin is being very much obvious – portions of food from Joseph's table are passed on to the brothers, but Benjamin gets five times more than his brothers. Joseph's preferential treatment towards Benjamin could be understood as re-enactment of the preferential treatment of Jacob towards Joseph. Thereby Joseph tries to test the reaction of the brothers,[652] but the brothers do not show any sign of grudge or envy against Benjamin at this. The chapter concludes with the statement, "So they drank and were merry with him."

3.2.4.1 The Final Test, Judah's Speech and the Reconciliation (44-45):

The brothers might have been excited about the fellowship meal with the governor, and might finally have got relieved from their distress and anxiety. But this excitement and the sense of relief soon turn into a tragedy as Joseph puts them on a severe trial. He now orders his steward to fill their sacks with food as much they could carry and to put each one's money in the mouth of his sack and to put his silver cup in the mouth of the youngest brother's sack.[653] At this point the reader cannot understand the purpose of the test. Does he want to retain Benjamin with him? Or is he creating a situation, thereby Jacob could accuse them not only of the loss of Benjamin, but also his own disappearance? Or by retaining Benjamin with him, is he forcing Jacob to come down to Egypt? Or is he taking revenge upon his brothers? Nothing is clear. His intention is mysterious even to the reader.

3.2.4.1.1 Joseph's Design to Retain Benjamin with Him (44:1-17):

The brothers might have been very happy about the successful completion of their journey: they now have grain, and Simeon is back with them, and Benjamin is also returning safely with them. But before they can get out of the city, Joseph's steward catches them with a fresh charge: "why have you returned evil for good? Why have you stolen my cup? Is it not from this that my lord drinks, and by this that he divinizes? You have done wrong in so doing" (44:4-5). The brothers are shocked by these charges

[652] Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 556f.

[653] The putting of each one's money in the mouth of his sack is believed to be a later addition from the account of the first journey (42:27, 35). Cf. Vawter, "Genesis," 203. Furthermore, according to the narrative the brothers are accused of stealing the silver cup and not on the account of the money found in their bags. Because the money does not resurface in the narrative, rather his silver cup takes the dominance in the narrative.

because they are too sure of their innocence; so they defend their innocence. First, they rebut, “Why does my lord speak such word as these?” Second, they almost take an oath that they would never do such an act, saying, “Far be it from your servants” (חָלִילָה). The term חָלִילָה is usually used to introduce an oath.[654] Thus, they completely deny the charges by almost taking an oath. Third, they take recourse to their previous conduct of returning the money that they had found in the mouth of their sacks. Thereby they try to convince him that they are not after money, silver or gold. Finally, they are so certain of their innocence that they themselves opt for capital punishment on the one found guilty of the charge, and in addition all vow to be slave for lifelong if they are proved wrong. The steward, however, by brushing aside their rush and emotional oath, proposes to enslave only the guilty. “It is ironic that the accused suggest a severer penalty and the accuser suggests a lighter penalty.”[655] By this it is evident that “Joseph’s whole purpose is to single out Benjamin to see whether his brothers will sacrifice him as they did to him. Hence, the steward insists that only the guilty will be taken into custardy; and the others will be ‘free’ (נְקִיִּם) of guilt and responsibility.”[656] Speiser concludes that Joseph’s choice of Benjamin is only to duplicate as closely as possible chapter 37 and to test the brothers if they would abandon Benjamin to be a slave as they did with him.[657]

Every one quickly lowers his sack and opens it, beginning with the eldest to the youngest. Behold, to their horror, the cup is found in the sack of Benjamin. One could imagine the intensity of their shock. Surely, their heartbeat might have stopped for a moment! Sternberg says that the circumstances are now reproduced to induce the ten against Benjamin. For Joseph had demonstrated his extraordinary favouritism for Benjamin before the eyes of the ten, but now with the discovery of the silver cup in Benjamin’s sack, how would they react to Benjamin? Will they abandon him or will they stand by him?[658] Brodie says, “To some degree the role of the silver is perplexing.

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[654] Most often the term חָלִילָה לִי is used in the first person (Gen. 44:17; Josh. 22:29; 24:16; 1 Sam. 2:30; 12:23; 14:45; 22:15; 26:11; 2 Sam. 20:20; 23:17; 1Chr. 11:19; Job 27:5). But in 44:7 and Job 34:10 it is used in the third person. So חָלִילָה לִי is an oath formula, here it is connected to an oath violation, referring to the violation of doing evil for good.
[655] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 563.
[656] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 424f.
[657] Speiser, *Genesis*, 335.
[658] Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 303.

The silver cup will play an important role in the subsequent story. … On the one hand the silver is the symbol of the still-unresolved betrayal."[659]

The brothers could hardly believe that Benjamin could commit such an offence, but the evidence proves otherwise; so they could utter not a word in his defence. How they will react at this discovery is nothing but a sense of deep remorse, shock and fear. Their reactions are expressed in the narrative in three consecutive verbs: they rent (וַיִּקְרְעוּ) their cloth, everyone loaded his ass (וַיַּעֲמֹס) and they returned to the city (וַיָּשֻׁבוּ). They do not abandon Benjamin and return to Canaan; instead, they choose to return to Egypt.

Now, for the third time they stand before Joseph (42:6; 43:26) and prostrate before him (וַיִּפְּלוּ). Taking advantage of the situation Joseph tries to produce psychological pressure on them by asking these rhetorical questions: "What is this you have done? Are you not aware that a man like myself practices divination?"[660] Surprisingly, these rhetorical questions are not directed at Benjamin but at the ten brothers because the pronoun "you" is here plural. Alter says that Joseph's accusation against his brothers "touches all the way back to their criminal act against him two decades past."[661] Commenting on Joseph's rhetorical questions and his reference to divination, Waltke says, "His words are not to be taken at face value any more than his feigned anger. Ironically, this divination cup does not discern Benjamin's innocence."[662] Hartley says, "The atmosphere was ripe for his discovering the true character of his brothers and the sincerity of their acceptance of Benjamin. Would they heap blame for

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[659] Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue,* 387. The motif of silver is ultimately linked with the brother's guilt towards Joseph. For it is an instrument purposely used by Joseph to trigger their conscience, because "for twenty shekels of silver" they had earlier sold Joseph to the Midianites (cf. Gen 37:28). Cf. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative,* 173.

[660] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50,* 565.

[661] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative,* 173.

[662] Waltke, *Genesis,* 561. Different type of divinations were used in the Ancient Near East by reading the movement of water in relation to the surface or the rim of the cup to predict peace and prosperity, or war and rebellion for the king; and for the common people such practices were used to predict progeny, success in business, the recovery of health and the right girl when a man is about to marry. Cf. A. Lange, "Becherorakel und Traumdeutung zu zwei Formen der Divination in der Josephsgeschichte," *Studies in the Book of Genesis: Literature, Redaction and History* (ed. A. Wenin; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001), 372f.

their present precarious fate on another son of Rachel? Or would they defend Benjamin, thereby giving convicting proof that they had changed?"[663]

At this critical situation, Judah steps forward to plead for the accused and to take up the accused place. Judah knows deep within his heart that Benjamin is innocent but the circumstantial evidence against him is so overwhelming; it is pointless to defend his innocence. So he confesses before Joseph, "How can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; behold we are my lord's slaves, both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been found" (v. 16). His statement does not actually refer to the silver cup but refers to their past crime, which is now being uncovered by God, who has their sin "ans Licht gebracht."[664]

One might expect at this point Joseph would trust the sincerity of their repentance, and get reconciled with them. But, on the contrary, Joseph tries to manipulate the situation further by asserting that *only* the one in whose sack the *cup* is found would be his slave, and then he tells them to go back to their country in peace. By this "he puts them in a situation that replicates their situation twenty-two years earlier as closely as possible."[665]

3.2.4.1.2 Judah's Passionate Plea and His Substitution (44:18-34):

In spite of the governor's refusal to accept Judah's request, Judah does not cease to appeal. He persists with his pleading, and he even offers himself as substitute for Benjamin. Judah's speech is the longest recorded speech in Genesis. The amount of space devoted to his speech (44:18-34) demonstrates its significance. Gunkel says that Judah's speech repeats practically everything that has transpired as far as Benjamin is concerned. By repeating or retelling all that had happened from their first audience with the governor to the present moment, the narrator is trying to illuminate the case from all sides.[666] By this art of reticence and repetition, the narrator not only develops the reconciliation theme but also portrays the characteristic of the main figures of the story,

[663] Hartley, *Genesis,* 338f.
[664] Scharbabert, *Genesis,* 271.
[665] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50,* 425.
[666] Gunkel, *Genesis,* (ed. D.W. Nowack), 434.

Joseph and Judah.[667] Alter describes Judah's speech as "a point to point undoing, morally and psychologically, of the brothers' earlier violation of fraternal and filial bonds."[668] Vawter says, "Judah's plea is a model of tact and eloquence which succeeds at last in breaking down the barriers which Joseph had erected against his emotions."[669] His speech witnesses a profound transformation that has taken place in them especially in Judah. In short, it is a passionate plea to accept him as slave and let Benjamin go free; for any misfortune to Benjamin would kill the old and already grieving father (44: 22, 29, 31, 33).

Judah's speech begins and concludes with ardent supplication (v 18; 32-34). His speech could be structured under five points: first, an initial supplication (v. 18); second, a recapitulation of their first audience with Joseph (19-23); third, a pathetic description of the father's reluctance to part with Benjamin, (24-29); fourth, a prediction of the consequence of Benjamin's absence (30-31); fifth, Judah's plea to accept his substitution for his younger brother, Benjamin (32-34).

a) Judah's Initial Supplication (v. 18):

In spite of being a simple and ordinary Hebrew shepherd, Judah takes courage in going up to the governor of Egypt to make his supplication. It is, in fact, a bold and dangerous move, for he violates protocol and dares to go closer to the governor of Egypt. By this, it is evident that he is determined to gamble his life for the sake of Benjamin and his father. His request consists basically of three elements: First, he requests to speak a "word" (דָּבַר). The Hebrew word דָּבַר also mean "event." Judah

[667] The art of reticence provides a significant clue for the characterisation of Joseph and the art of repetition cement it by enabling the reader to understand the text more closely and from a different perspective. The characters of most biblical figures often remain mysterious for readers. But biblical authors indirectly portray their characters often by using some literary forms such as "the art of reticence," which enables the reader to discover "an abiding mystery in the character as the biblical writers conceive it." Cf. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative,* 112ff. Another method used in the bible to portray a (esp. an ambiguous) character is particular types of repeating a story (e.g. Gen. 12:10-20; 20:1-18; 26: 6-11), by this method the biblical author is actually trying to portray the character more effectively – either to emphasise the negative or the positive side of the character. But one should note that this repetition is not often verbatim. "The difference between versions of a speech can subtly provide further insight into a character or give a character added depth and complexity." Cf. Mark A. O'Brien, "The Contribution of Judah's Speech, Genesis 44:18-38, tot he characterization of Joseph," *CBQ* 59. 3 (1997), 431.

[668] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative,* 217.

[669] Vawter, "Genesis," 203

requests the governor, first, to hear him out, hoping, if the governor hears what he has to say, a right solution could be found to the crisis. Second, Judah pleads the governor not to be angry at his word. It is a polite and a diplomatic request, so that his case could be heard out. The language that he uses here resembles Jacob's supplication to Esau at their reunion (cf. Gen. 33:5-15) – Judah addresses Joseph as *my lord* and acknowledges himself as *your slave*. By this polite form of address he tries to calm down Joseph's anger at the beginning of his speech itself because Judah's report has some unintended, but damaging evidence against Joseph, which could enrage Joseph.[670] For instance, Judah mentions in his speech that it is at his demand and order that they brought down Benjamin to Egypt; thus, he indirectly puts the ownership upon the governor for all that has happened. Therefore, he requests the governor not to be angry. Third, Judah displays his respect and humility when he says to Joseph "for you are like Pharaoh himself." It is not only a sign of obeisance to the governor, but is also an acknowledgement of Joseph's power to pardon.[671] Thus, his supplication is a carefully worded request. In summary his supplication is a humble clemency petition before the governor of Egypt.

b) A Recapitulation of Their First Audience with Joseph (vv. 19-23):

The first part of Judah's speech contains a brief report of the brothers' first audience with Joseph in Egypt. A close observation of the report would reveal that it neither matches their first encounter between Joseph and his brothers (cf. 42:6-20), nor does it match their own report to Jacob about their first trip (cf. 42:29-34); but it is closer to the version in 43:3-7.[672] But here Judah avoids mentioning Joseph's harsh treatments – the false charge, the imprisonment, and the detention of Simeon,[673] so that he does not provoke him against them. O'Brien says, since the brothers are in a

[670] O'Brien, "The Contribution of Judah's Speech," 434.
[671] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 426.
[672] Source critics have argued these discrepancies in the narrative are due to the Jahawist (Gen. 43-44) and the Elohist (Gen. 42) versions. Others advocate that a later editor revised the old version of the story by giving key role to Judah: the primary contribution of this redaction is Judah's speech in 44: 18-34. Cf. O'Brien, "The Contribution of Judah's Speech," 434.
[673] However, he adds something more that is not found in chapter 42 – that the brothers had told Joseph that his father loved Benjamin (v 20), that they had said that their father would die if he and Benjamin were parted (v 22), that Joseph had insisted that they bring their youngest brother down to Egypt despite their warning on its consequences to their old father (v 23).

vulnerable situation, and Benjamin's fate is the burning issue here, it would be unwise to remind him of his harsh treatment.[674] But the irony in the story is that earlier, it was the favouritism of the father, which triggered their hate towards Joseph but now it is the love and favouritism of the father for Benjamin, which compels Judah to risk his life.[675] This change of attitude manifests their transformation particularly in Judah. Earlier they were indifferent to the suffering of Jacob (cf. Gen 37), but now they are deeply concerned about their father's wellbeing.[676]

His speech, on the one hand, highlights their love and concern for their old father and young Benjamin, but on the other hand, it unwittingly accuses Joseph of making no effort to contact his family from the time of his disappearance. One can understand, as a slave, it was difficult, but, as the governor of Egypt, it could have been definitely possible for him. Moreover, in spite of their warning that the separation of Benjamin from their father will have serious consequences to Jacob, Joseph has insisted on them bringing their youngest brother. This raises the question, if Joseph cared about Jacob! In contrast to Joseph, Judah and his brothers are seriously concerned about the wellbeing of their father. Moreover, when Joseph saw his brothers prostrate before him the first thing that came to his mind is the memory of his dream (42:9). That suggests he is more aware of his elevated position than his mourning father. Thus, Joseph is "as much in need of transformation"[677] as his brothers were.

c) A Report on Jacob's Reluctance to Send Benjamin Away (vv. 24-29):

Vv. 24-29 are basically a report on Jacob's anxiety to let Benjamin go with them down to Egypt. But as Judah reports the event, he alters the sequence of Jacob's statements (cf. 42:36-38; 43:1ff) to suit his line of argument.[678] He changes the order of events in order to emphasize Jacob's fear and anxiety regarding Benjamin's future, and

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[674] O'Brien, "The Contribution of Judah's Speech," 435.
[675] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 426.
[676] The key word in 44:18-34 is *father*. The word *father* appears fourteen times in his speech. Judah in fact begins and ends his speech in reference to his father (44:19, 34). Cf. Waltke, *Genesis*, 561.
[677] O'Brien, "The Contribution of Judah's Speech," 440.
[678] In actuality Jacob refused to let Benjamin go down with them to Egypt prior (42:36, 38) to his request to his sons to go down to Egypt for the second time (43:2). But in his speech Judah says that Jacob asked them to go down to Egypt to buy grain first, and then they refused to budge his demand unless he sends Benjamin with them as they cannot face the man without Benjamin (cf. 43:4-5; 44:26), followed by Jacob's lamentation upon the loss of his beloved son Joseph, and his fear for any omen upon Rachel's second son, Benjamin.

to stress how Jacob's life is intimately connected with Benjamin.[679] To accentuate it he quotes Jacob's lament verbatim: "You know that my wife bore me two sons; one left me, and I said, surely he has been torn to pieces; and I have never seen him since. If you take this one also from me, and harm befalls him, you will bring down my grey hairs in sorrow to Sheol" (vv. 27). By citing his father's lamentation, he appeals the governor to show compassion.

When Judah says, "You know my wife bore me two sons …" he is fully aware what it meant (44:27). Here the language used by Judah echoes Jacob's special relationship to his two sons born from Rachel as against the sons born from his other wives. Kaminsky says, "Although Judah may think that Jacob's favouritism is unfair, he has come to recognize that it is a fact of life"[680] However, if one analyses Judah's speech, one would discover that the entire speech is motivated by Judah's empathy for his father. In spite of Jacob's persistent disregard towards him and his other brothers, Judah (and his brothers) is concerned about the welfare of his old father who shows no sign of acknowledgement of Leah's sons as his; it appears as if Jacob has almost disowned his other sons. In spite of Jacob's indifference towards them Judah still owns Jacob up as his father, and Benjamin as his brother. Here Judah outweighs Joseph in his love for his father and for his youngest brother.

In addition, Judah reveals more information that Joseph does not know yet, or did not bother to find out (41:51). It is for the first time that Joseph comes to know the trauma of his father at the news of his (Joseph's) own disappearance (v 28), and therefore, his father's anxiety for Benjamin (v 29). Joseph cannot doubt Judah's genuineness and sincerity; for Jacob's reaction matches the special affection Jacob had for Joseph in 37:3.[681] Joseph knows his father loves him above all; consequently, his sudden disappearance has surely broken his heart. This revelation about Jacob's mourning for Joseph might not have only deeply touched Joseph's heart but also made him red-faced, for all these years he had not thought or concerned himself about his father, who had loved him so dearly. Thus, Judah's speech opens a window to read the

[679] O'Brien, "*The Contribution of Judah's Speech,*" 440f.
[680] Kaminsky, "Reclaiming a Theology of Election," 144.
[681] O'Brien, "The Contribution of Judah's Speech," 441.

character of Joseph. Here Joseph stands short of love for his old father in comparison to his brothers, especially Judah.

d) Prediction on the Consequence of Benjamin's Misfortune (vv. 30-31):

After reporting Jacob's lament at the loss of his favourite son, and his anxiety about the potential loss of another beloved son, Judah predicts the consequences if any misfortune happens to Benjamin. Judah laments if Benjamin does not return home, his father will surely die. Here Judah again quotes his father's own words – "bring down your servant's grey head in sorrow to the grave" (cf. 42:38), because "his life is bound upon his" (v. 30). This statement underlines the bond of affection between Jacob and Benjamin. For "Jacob and Benjamin live, as it were, one life."[682] For, if any misfortune fall upon Benjamin, it is certain that Jacob will not survive. Thus, unwittingly Judah lays the ownership of the consequence upon Joseph because it is he who insisted that they produce Benjamin before him, and it is he himself who now refuses to let Benjamin free.[683] So, more than the brothers, it is Joseph who now comes under test. O'Brien comments, "besides being trapped, Joseph also stands accused by Judah, although unwittingly."[684]

e) Judah's Passionate Supplication to the Governor (vv. 32-34):

After explaining the situation in detail, Judah appeals to Joseph to keep him as his slave instead of Benjamin (v. 33). He gives additional reasons to the governor: first, because he has gone surety for Benjamin (v. 32), and second, because he fears misfortune upon his father (v. 34). When Judah says that he has gone surety for Benjamin, he indirectly conveys that he, too, had a plan, which he has now abandoned because he is under an oath to his father.[685] If Judah's statement is to be understood in the larger context of the narrative, it would mean that Judah has abandoned his plan of inheriting the first-born right, and is now committed to the relationship between

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[682] O'Brien, "The Contribution of Judah's Speech," 443.
[683] Judah's speech could backfire, because Judah is speaking to the Egyptian governor, breaking the protocol.
[684] O'Brien, "Contribution of Judah's Speech," 444.
[685] O'Brien, "Contribution of Judah's Speech," 444.

Benjamin and Jacob.[686] So Judah pleads Joseph to accept him as a slave in place of Benjamin.[687] Schenker comments, "Statt die freie Würde eines Bruders rücksichtslos zu zerstören, gibt Juda um der Freiheit eines Bruders willen seine eigene Freiheit hin. …Am Ende steht nicht die Ausbootung des Bruders sondern seine Bewahrung im Schosse der Seinen. Die wilde Selbstbehauptung bis zur Verachtung des Bruders ist der Achtung vor Bruder und Vater bis zu eigener Selbstmissachtung gewichen."[688]

One could, however, question Judah's substitution as involuntary since he is bound by his oath to Jacob. This argument can be countered from Judah's next statement: "I fear to see the evil that would come upon my father" (v. 34). This statement of Judah proves the sincerity of his substitution. It shows that he has a great concern for his father in spite of the latter who does not seem to count him and his brothers as his own (44: 27-29). By this Judah has proven that he has, indeed, matured enough to accept life's unfairness. Sternberg says, "Judah so feels for his father that he begs to sacrifice himself for a brother more loved than himself. Nothing could do more to establish the depth and genuineness of this feeling."[689] He pleads to replace Benjamin not only because of his oath to his father but also for his love for his father. He does not want to see his father suffer another severe blow and die in grief. Thereby he concludes his speech with a high emotional appeal onto Joseph. Alter summarises "His entire speech is motivated by the deepest empathy for his father, … Twenty-two years earlier, he stood with his brothers and silently watched when the bloodied tunic they had brought to Jacob sent their father into a fit of anguish; now he is willing to do anything in order not to have to see his father suffer that way again."[690]

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[686] According to G. W. Goats Judah's willingness to substitute Benjamin is not because of the change in Judah's character; rather Judah must be thinking it is better to remain slave in Egypt than to suffer the guilt of breaking an oath. Cf. Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50,* 570.

[687] Judah's offer to be the substitute for his brother, Benjamin, is the first act of Substitution in the bible, where one offers freely his life for the sake of another. "Hier begegnet uns zum erstenmal im AT der Gedanke von der stellvertretenden Sühne, der in Jes 53 seine klarste Ausformulierung erfährt und im NT in der Lehre vom stellvertetenden Sühnetod Jesu Christi aufgegriffen wird." Cf. Joseph Scharbert, *Ich bin Josef euer Bruder: die Erzählung von Josef und seinen Brüdern, wie sie nicht in der Bibel steht* (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1988), 59.

[688] Schenker, *Versöhnung und Sühne,* 36.

[689] Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative,* 308.

[690] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative,* 218.

3.2.5 Reconciliation as the Motive behind Joseph's Tests:

Judah's speech testifies his genuine transformation and his noble intention. It implies that Judah has abandoned his plan, and his and his family's future out of love for his father and his youngest brother. His deep love and concern for his father must now compel Joseph, the beloved son of Jacob, to abandon his plan, whatever it may be.[691] There have been differences of opinions on the motive of Joseph's tests on his brothers. Some scholars conclude that Joseph's intention was not to punish but to help his brothers in preparing them for repentance and reconciliation. While others are of the view that Joseph wanted them to undergo a similar hardship that he himself had undergone. But the text does not say why Joseph acted the way he did. Was Joseph trying to reunite the whole family or was he taking revenge on the ten brothers is not clear. True, in chapters 42-44 Joseph has recreated a similar situation as in chapter 37 to find out, if at all, any change has taken place in them. But in spite of knowing that his brothers have undergone a great amount of transformation, he continues with his tests, and conceals his identity from them.

However, Judah's heroic love for his father and his youngest brother finally breaks the ice. Joseph can, now, no longer control his emotion and hide his identity from them. O'Brien comments that Joseph could simply reject Judah's plea, but that would bring about the death of his father (44: 30-31). He could accede to Judah's request and release Benjamin that would mean the loss of his full brother, Benjamin.

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[691] According to Laurence A. Turner, James McKeown and Richard J. Clifford Joseph's initial plan was to redeem Benjamin and his father, Jacob, from his half-brothers. So Joseph thinks and plans if he detains Benjamin in Egypt, Jacob will come to Egypt in search of Benjamin, and then he could reveal himself to his father and get united with his father and his full brother. Therefore, he insists that only (the offender) Benjamin will remain as slave. The brothers, on the contrary, insist if they go back to Canaan without Benjamin, their father will die out of shock and grief; and they do not want to see their father dying out of grief and lamentation before their eyes. Therefore, they all initially accept being slaves. But at Joseph's insistence on Benjamin, Judah offers himself as a substitute for Benjamin because he has taken surety for Benjamin, and more than that, he fears that without Benjamin, Jacob will die. But from Joseph's perspective, he knows if he takes Judah as his slave and lets Benjamin free, Jacob will not come down to Egypt searching for Judah, because Jacob had not bothered to redeem Simeon. Therefore, Joseph thinks if he releases Benjamin, he will neither get united to Jacob nor to his full brother, Benjamin. Therefore Joseph insists on detaining Benjamin. But the new revelation from Judah puts Joseph in a dilemma if he continues to remain adamant with his plan, as he did in chapter 42, he would be causing serious damage to Jacob. Therefore, the test is now reversed onto Joseph. What will Joseph do now? Will he, now, abandon his original plan as Judah has done with his plan, or will he continue with his old plan disregarding the serious consequence that would befall his old father, Jacob? Cf. Turner, *Genesis*, 196; Clifford, "Genesis 37-50: Joseph Story or Jacob Story," 223ff.

Therefore, the only option left to Joseph is to reveal his own identity. But what reason will he give for not taking any effort to contact his father? For not only the ten are responsible for the life long grief of the old man, but Joseph is also partially or equally responsible. For after becoming the governor of Egypt he could have found out the fate of his old father; on the contrary, he has tried to forget his father's house (cf. 41:51). Therefore, it is Joseph, who is now under test. O'Brien says, "Judah's words effectively strip away any advantage Joseph thought he had in maintaining the secret of his identity."[692] He has to reveal himself now; otherwise there would be no hope for reunion.[693]

Though Joseph seems to be taking revenge upon the ten, his ultimate motive is getting united with his family. However, he too, like his brothers, needed to undergo a process of transformation to forgive his brothers. Judah's speech enables him to forgive them; and finally, he breaks down and reveals his identity, "I am Joseph; is my father still alive? … Come near to me, I pray you…" (cf. 45:2ff). "Judah's speech prompts Joseph not merely to reveal his identity, 'I am Joseph', which in itself would bring the charade to an end, but to continue, 'Is my father still alive?'"[694] Is Joseph's question "Is my father still alive?" his effort to justify his failures? This cannot be ruled out in any way because he already knows from the first audience that his father is still alive.

But what is amazing with Joseph is that he attributes this event of reconciliation and reunion to God. The Hebrew word שָׁלַח occurs here three times: "for God *sent* me before you to preserve life. … God *sent* me … to keep alive for you many survivors … it was not you who *sent* me here, but God" (45:5, 7, 8). His statements also reveal that the mission entrusted or expected of Joseph is one of "creation and maintenance of life,"[695] which is the central focus of Joseph's story and a main theme in Genesis. His statements acknowledge that it is God who has been using him to achieve His purpose. Though Joseph's motive behind the tests is not explicitly told, God's role in the process of reconciliation between adversaries is highlighted. From the perspective of the narrative it becomes evident that God is the author and the architect of human

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[692] O'Brien, "Contribution of Joseph's Speech," 446.
[693] O'Brien, "Contribution of Joseph's Speech," 445.
[694] Turner, *Genesis*, 196.
[695] Walter Brueggemann, "Life and Death in Tenth Century Israel," *AAR* 40 (1972), 102.

reconciliation, He can use both the evil and the good deeds of men to resolve human conflicts and lead adversaries to reconciliation and reunion. Human beings are His agents to facilitate and to make His plan happen as Joseph acknowledges his role in the larger plan of God. Another interesting observation in the Joseph's narrative is that before the reconciliation there was famine and estrangement, but after the reconciliation and reunion there is prosperity and wellbeing.[696] This means reconciliation, creation and maintenance of life are interrelated. For with out reconciliation and union among human beings and human communities there will be no creativity, growth, safety or preservation of human life and human society, but destruction. Thus, reconciliation is closely linked to the creation and maintenance of life. This would mean that God works in collaboration with the human being to preserve, maintain, and to advance his creative work; and the human being needs to cooperate with God's plan for his safety and advancement – be it as an individual or as a society as a whole.

Although reconciliation between the estranged brothers finally happens, as the narrative portrays it with the impressive and strong symbolic acts of kissing, embracing and weeping and with the eventual communication between Joseph and his brothers (after twenty-two long years cf. 37:4), the act of confession before Joseph does not take place at this point. Maybe, they are not given the chance to confess at this point. True, their gestures confirm that reconciliation has been effected; but they are much less satisfactory than the appearance.[697] For without confession the reconciliation is incomplete. That is why the brothers fear Joseph after the death of their father, thinking that Joseph would take revenge on them (Gen 50:15). So they inform him that Jacob has (allegedly) left instructions that Joseph should forgive them. But finally, they plead directly for his forgiveness for the trespass (פֶּשַׁע): "We pray you, forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." And they fell down before him, and said, "Behold, we are your servants" (Gen 50:15-19). It is, in fact, at this point that they confess and acknowledge their transgression openly before Joseph (the victim). In reply Joseph assures them of his protection, "Fear not, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today…" (Gen 50:19-21). Joseph's

[696] Breuggemann, "Life and Death in Tenth Century Israel," 101.
[697] Noble, "Esau, Tamar, and Joseph," 239.

statements convey that the human being has no right to take revenge on his offender, but God alone has this right (cf. Deut 32:35). Moreover, these statements help the reader to understand Joseph's tests in a positive light i.e. he tested them not to take revenge, but to prepare them for true repentance and reconciliation.

3.2.6 Joseph and Judah Represent the Two Kingdoms – Israel and Judah:

Gen 37-50 is generally understood as Joseph's narrative. But it is also evident that the story of Judah and his family is also narrated parallel to Joseph. Though Joseph is portrayed as a man of wisdom and nobility, it is Judah, who, in spite of his many misdeeds and failures, finally emerges as the true leader that Jacob blesses him with the messianic and royal blessing to be the leading figure/tribe of Israel (cf. Gen 49:8-12) – "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until he comes to whom it belongs; and to him shall be the obedience of the people" (49:10). An analysis or a comparison of the texts that refer to Judah and the texts that refer to Joseph would establish that there are many similarities between Judah and Joseph's story with regards to their structure, theme and plot. Therefore, it is important to highlight the parallels between the stories of Joseph and Judah in order to develop the theme that is under discussion, and to establish that these two dominant characters represent the two kingdoms i.e. Israel and Judah.

3.2.6.1 Parallels between Judah's and Joseph's Story:

The story about Judah is mainly narrated in Gen 38. The whole chapter is concentrated on Judah and his family. At surface Gen 38 appears to be disconnected to the Joseph story, but a close reading of Gen 38 and a comparative study of Gen 38 with the Joseph novella would establish a close parallelism between both the stories. According to J. Kruschwitz Genesis 38 functions "as a lens through which its audience might better understand the longer – but similar shaped and irony-filled – plot of the

Joseph novella."[698] Paul R. Nobel lists in his article, "Esau, Tamar, and Joseph," some of the parallels found in them under the following points:[699]

1. *Conflict in their relationship*: Judah suspects Tamar as the cause for the death of his two sons and so he deceives her by denying her the levirate by his youngest son Shelah (38:1-11). This pushes her to an extent of taking a retaliatory action against Judah by deception – "You refuse me the semen of your Shelah, I'll get yours!"[700] Similarly, the relationship between Joseph and his brothers ends up in hatred and envy because of Jacob's favouritism towards Joseph, Joseph's talebearing and boasting attitude, and his fantasy about his status and dreams. To get rid of Joseph, his brothers sell him into slavery. Joseph later takes retaliatory action against his brothers to give them a taste of the misfortune that he had undergone.
2. *Separation*: Tamar is separated from Judah's family and sent back to her father's house as widow with the intention of never being called back (38:11). Similarly, the brothers sell Joseph into slavery with the intention of never seeing him again.
3. *Need*: Judah wants to have sex since he has lost his wife (38:16). Similarly the brothers have another need i.e. the need for food for their family, since there was a severe famine in the land.
4. *Change in appearance*: Tamar disguises herself as a harlot so that Judah does not recognise her (38:15). Similarly, Joseph, as the governor of Egypt, has now a different appearance with his princely and Egyptian costumes that his brothers do not recognise him. Both Tamar and Joseph deceive their antagonists by taking advantage of their inability to recognise them.
5. *Payment refused*: Judah gives his signet, cord and his staff as pledge to pay her for the sex. But Tamar disappears with his pledge without taking the payment. Similarly, Joseph does not accept Judah's substitution for Benjamin.

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[698] Jonathan Kruschwitz, "The Type-Scene Connection between Genesis 38 and the Joseph Story," *JSOT*, 36 (2012), 409f.
[699] Nobel, "Esau, Tamr, and Joseph," 234. Cf. Kruschwitz, "The Type-Scene Connection between Genesis 38 and the Joseph Story," 394f.
[700] Graig Y.S. Ho, "The Stories of the Family Troubles of Judah and David: a Study of their Literary Links," *VT* 49 (1999), 528.

6. *Disclosure of identity*: Tamar, subsequently, discloses that it was for Judah that she offered sex. Similarly, Joseph discloses his identity to his brothers.
7. *Confession*: Judah acknowledges his fault and says, "She is more righteous than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah" (38:26), and he finally takes her back in his family again as his daughter-in-law, providing her his protection. Similarly, the brothers confess their offences before Joseph and entreat him to forgive their offences, and Joseph promises to provide and protect them (cf. 50:15-21).
8. *Foreign Wife*: Both take foreign women as their wives. Judah marries the daughter of Shua, a Canaanite woman; Joseph marries Asenath, an Egyptian woman.
9. *Two sons and the reversal of priority*: Judah has two sons from Tamar – Zerah and Perez. Similarly, Joseph has two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. It is the younger sons, who get the significant status in the history of Judah and Israel respectively.
10. *Reconciliation*: both the stories end with the positive message of reconciliation. Judah acknowledges his offence and accepts Tamar, and she conceives for him two sons, a symbol of reconciliation and bond between her and Judah's family. Similarly, Joseph's tests conclude with the reunion of Jacob's entire family in Egypt.
11. *Divine Providence*: by her son, Perez, Tamar provides a crucial link in the lineage of Judahite kings. In one sense, she plays an important role in the fulfilment of the divine promise to Abraham. Tamar's story provides a model of secret providence working through the marginal agency of a foreign woman. Joseph's story is also a model of divine providence for reconciliation, reunion and preservation of life.[701]

These parallels establish that the narrative in Gen 37-50 is not merely a novella about a noble and ideal character, Joseph, but it is also a literary work to deal with the theme of divine election and to narrate the relationship between the two kingdoms – Judah and Israel.

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[701] Mark G. Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity* (London, NY: Routledge, 2000), 115.

3.2.6.2 Divine Election in Joseph Narrative:

One of the prominent themes in the book of Genesis is about choice between brothers (and nations) – Abel, not Cain; Isaac, not Ishmael; Jacob, not Esau. This is also true in regards to Judah and Joseph. Though Jacob wanted Joseph to be his successor, it is Judah, so to say, who finally gets the double share of the patriarchal blessing (Gen 49:8-12), just as Jacob overrides Esau in spite of Isaac's decision to make Esau his successor. However, one might question: if so, then why so much space given to Joseph's story than to Judah's story in Genesis? Graeme Auld suggests that the writer or the editor of the later chapters of Genesis had a very different, and opposite purpose to convey to his audience. In order to achieve his purpose, firstly, he tries to digress the original story by pointing Joseph's story away from Joseph, and pointing or diverting the course of the narrative towards Judah.[702] Although Judah and his brothers bow down and pay their obeisance to Joseph, Joseph is not the successor of Jacob. For instance, in spite of receiving the patriarchal blessing of the lordship over Esau, it is Jacob, who with his family performs a prostration ceremony (cf. 33:1-8) before Esau. For in Genesis promises and expectations are not always what they seem.[703] Secondly, the writer allows more space for Joseph in order to demonstrate that Joseph was quite as legitimate as Judah,[704] both by his morality and by his birth, i.e. as first son born to Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel. However, the choice of election is not based on human choice but divine.

3.2.6.3 Gen 37-50 as an Interpretation on the Judah-Israel Relationship:

Adul says though Genesis is the first book of the Bible, "it is also [an] interpretation, or commentary on what went before."[705] The texts concerning Judah and his family in Genesis is a later addition to the original Joseph novella to draw Judah in Davidic colour because Gen 38, in particular, resembles in many aspects David and his family.[706] There are a number of parallels found between Judah's story in Genesis

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[702] Grame Auld, "Tamar between David, Judah and Joseph," *VT* 36 (1986), 104.
[703] Auld, "Tamar between David, Judah and Joseph," 104.
[704] Auld, "Tamar between David, Judah and Joseph," 105.
[705] Adul, "Tamar between David Judah and Joseph," 103.
[706] Benjamin Mazar concludes that "Genesis was given its original written form during the time when the Davidic empire was being established, and that the additions and supplements of later authors were only intended to help bridge the time gap for contemporary readers, and had no decisive effect on its contents

(especially Gen 38) and David's story in the historical books of the Old Testament. These parallels brought to light by Gary A. Rendsburg, Craig Y.S. Ho and Graeme Aduld as listed in their articles [707] are as follows:

1. Rendsburg points out that there are similarities of the names found in Gen 38 and in David's story (even if they are not exactly the same names, they are at least reverberate):
    a. The names of their friends: Hirah the Adullamite (Gen 38:1) = Adullam (1 Sam 22) חִירָם/ Hiram (2 Sam 5:11).
    b. The names of their wives: בַּת־שֻׁוּעַ / daughter of Shua (Gen 38:2) = שֶׁבַע בַּת־ / Bethsheba (2 Sam 11:3).
    c. The names of their sons: עֵר / Er (Gen 38:3) = נַעַר / "lad" (the firstborn 'lad' of David from Bathsheba 2 Sam 12:16); אוֹנָן (Onan Gen 38: 8) = אַמְנוֹן (Amnon 2 Sam 13); שֵׁלָה / Shelah (Gen 38:5) = שְׁלֹמֹה / Solomon (1 Chr 3:5).
    d. The names of Judah's daughter-in-law and David's daughter: תָּמָר / Tamar (Gen 38) = תָּמָר / Tamar (2 Sam 13).[708]
2. Judah and David commit adultery; but both later repent for their sins – "She is more righteous than I" (Gen 38:26); "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Sam 12:13). The women have foreign origin – Tamar is a Canaanite woman, Bathsheba is a Hittite woman. The women seduce the men for sex – Tamar dresses like a harlot (זָנָה), Bathsheba would rather be seen with nothing on (or rather Bathsheba exposes herself to be seen by the king naked).[709] Therefore, regarding Gen 38, Hamilton says, "In many ways the development of this story

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or its overall character." Cf. Benjamin Mazar, "The Historical Background of the Book of Genesis," *JNES* 28 (1969), 74.

[707] There are many more parallels that could be found between Judah's story in Genesis (Gen 38) and David's story in the historical books of the OT. But in this paper only a few of them are listed to prove that Judah's story in Genesis mirrors the story of David and the nation Judah. More parallels and details can be found in the articles of Gary A. Rendsburg's "David and his Circle in Genesis 38," Craig Y.S. Ho's "The Stories of the Family Troubles of Judah and David: a Study of their Literary Links," and Graeme Aduld's, "Tamar between David, Judah and Joseph."

[708] Gary A. Rendsburg's "David and his Circle in Genesis 38," *VT* 38 (1989), 441.

[709] Craig Y.S. Ho, "The Stories of the Family Troubles of Judah and David," 517.

is similar to the David-Bathsheba liaison (2 Sam 11). …"[710] Moreover, both the characters are the important women in the history of Judah.

3. David's famous wife is Bathsheba (בַּת־שֶׁבַע).[711] Judah's wife's name is not given but she is identified as the daughter of Shua (בַּת־יוּעַשׁ).
4. Er (עֵר), the firstborn son of Judah, dies due to his own wickedness (Gen 38:7). The unnamed son (נַעַר) of David and Bathsheba dies due to the sin of his parents (2 Sam 12:15-19).
5. There are also parallels found between the Tamar of Genesis and the Tamar of 2 Sam 13: they have identical names; they are victims of sex related insult (one is denied semen, while the other is forced in) by a male family member (one by Onan and the other by Amnon respectively); both are forced to leave their ordinary residence and stay in another house (one in her father's house and the other in her brother's house), and both are vindicated at a sheep-shearing festival.
6. There are also linguistic parallels between both the stories such as "wicked in the sight of the Lord,"[712] and phrases connoting the sexual act such as "went into…" or "go into…" (בוֹא) are used six times in Gen 38 and six times in the David story,[713] and the statements such as "I am with child" – הֵרָה אָנֹכִי (Gen 38:25); הֵרָה אָנֹכִי (2 Sam 11:5).
7. There are also many more parallels that relate the Joseph narrative to the David story such as:
    a. The brothers' reaction to Joseph's first dream, תִּמְלֹךְ הֲמָלֹךְ ("Are you indeed to reign" Gen 37:8), resembles Saul's acknowledgement of

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[710] Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 448. Foreign women seduce both of them. Both women sent words about their pregnancy to the responsible persons. Tamar in Genesis and Bathsheba in 2 Samuel are the only women in the bible who say, "I am with child" – הֵרָה אָנֹכִי (Gen 38:25); הֵרָה אָנֹכִי (2 Sam 11:5). Judah's rush and harsh judgement, "Bring her out, and let her be burned" (Gen 38:24), resembles David's response to Nathan, "the man who has done this deserves to die" (2 Sam 12:5). The sons born from these two women became the successor of them – Perez from Tamar and Solomon from Bathsheba.

[711] But in 1 Chr. 3:5 Bathsheba is named בַּת־ שׁוּעַ.

[712] רַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה (Gen 38:7); וַיֵּרַע בְּעֵינֵי וַיֵּרַע (Gen 38:10); עֲשׂוֹת בְּעֵינוֹ הָרַע (2 Sam 12:9).

[713] Cf. Gen 38:2, 8, 9, 16a, 16b, and18b and 2 Sam 11:4; 12:24; 13:11, 14; 14:21, 22.

David's future success תִּמְלֹוךְ מָלֹךְ ("You shall surely be king" 1 Sam 24:20).

b. When Judah suggested to his brothers to sell Joseph, he uses the expression בְּשָׂרֵנוּ (he is "our own flesh" 37:27). A similar expression is used by the elders of Israel, when they ask David to be their king ("We are your bone and your flesh 2 Sam 5:1; 1 Chr 11:1). Israel's elders' invitation to David to be their king and David's acceptance corresponds to the brothers' submission to Joseph as his servants, and Joseph's assurance to provide for them (cf. Gen 50:15-20).

c. The use of the term *console* (נָחַם in piel) in Gen 37:35, one of the three uses in Genesis,[714] is also used thrice relating to David.[715]

8. The role of Benjamin in the Joseph narrative as the pre-condition for reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers corresponds to the role that the tribe of Benjamin played for connecting Israel with Judah. Though there was no reconciliation between the southern and northern kingdom, at the deportation of Israel to Assyria, many Israelites have found refuge in Judah because of the Benjaminites presence in Judah.

These parallels clearly suggest that Judah's story in Genesis is not merely a story about Judah and his family, but it is also a story about David and his family, and Judah as a nation. Therefore, it would be right to conclude that Judah's account in Genesis is an allegorical report on the history of Judah as a nation. One more important fact that should be taken into consideration is that the original Joseph story is from the Elohistic tradition, which is from the northern kingdom, whereas Judah's story is from the Yahvistic tradition, which belongs to the southern kingdom. Moreover, the Elohistic tradition does not recognize Judah as one of the sons of Jacob.[716] This would mean, all the texts concerning Judah in Genesis are a later addition in the already existing Elohistic version of the Joseph story [717] in order to link both the versions into one story.

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[714] Cf. Gen 5:29; 50:21

[715] Cf. 2 Sam 10:2,3// 1 Chr 19:2,3; and 2 Sam 12:24.

[716] Tzemah, *The First Book of God*, 123.

[717] The insertion of Judah's story within the original story of Joseph also serves another purpose, i.e. to prove David's Judahite and Israelite identity. Cf. Ho, "Family Troubles of Judah and David," 529.

This seems to be an effort to present a common history for both the kingdoms, encouraging reunion between both the kingdoms as one nation. If the Elohist did not recognize Judah as one of the sons of Jacob, and the final editor of the book, Genesis, presents Judah as Jacob's son, and concludes the story with the positive note of reconciliation and reunion of Jacob's family, it would be right to conclude that one of the primary motives of the final edition of the story is to exhort both the nations to give up their hostility and reunite as one strong nation.

3.2.7 Gen 37-50 and the Relationship between Israel and Judah:

The number of parallels listed above connects Gen 37-50 with the history of David and his kingdom. The main characters in Gen 37-50 are Joseph and Judah. These two characters do not stand for themselves alone; rather they represent the two kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Similarly, the conflict between Joseph and his brothers in Gen 37-50 is not only a conflict within Jacob's family; rather it represents the historical conflict between the two kingdoms of the chosen people. In order to understand the Joseph narrative in its historical context and to understand its purpose to its original audience it is very important to study the history and the relationship between the two kingdoms – the northern and the southern kingdoms. While telling the historical conflict between both the kingdoms in a family story, Gen 37-50 exhort both the kingdoms to forgive each other and to get reconciled and reunited as one strong nation. The historical message or warning of the Joseph narrative, especially to its original audience, is that it is only by abandoning their hostilities against each other and getting reunited as one nation that they will be able to withstand the attacks of other nations, else they would be destroyed.

Now, what are the history and the relationship of Israel and Judah? A brief history and the relationship between both the kingdoms are as follows. After Exodus Israel entered Canaan, conquered it, and eliminated its previous inhabitants, and settled in the land, spreading through out Canaan as tribal groups. Eventually they grew into independent kingdoms – *Israel* in the north, loosely associated tribes, dominated by Ephraim, and *Judah* in the south. But during David's reign they became one United

Monarchy in spite of holding on to their separate identities. [718] However, after the death of Solomon in 924 BCE the United Monarchy got divided, and they became hostile against each other for various reasons. Some of the reasons that led to Israel's separation from Judah are the followings. First, the dissent between the tribes was already apparent from Joshua's time on (cf. Num 2:3; 7:12; 34:19). The tribe of Judah felt itself, from that time on, as strong and superior to the other tribes (cf. Jos 4; Judg 1). It is evident from the book of Judges that Israel and Judah were fighting almost separately against the Canaanites – the Israelites, in the north and centre, and the Judeans in the south, each fighting its own battle alone. Second, in the allotment of tribal inheritance the Josephites (Ephraim and Manasseh) complained to Joshua that despite their large number, they received only a single allotment, and so Joshua advised them to expand (cf. Jos 16:6).[719] Third, before the union of both the kingdoms ,the Canaanite tribe of Jebus extended across the land of Canaan from east to west cutting off the Israelites of the north from Judah, their kinsmen of the south. Both the kingdoms also had environmental and cultural differences.[720] Fourth, the distinction between "Judah" and "Israel" had been there since the first time that the "men of Judah" joined forces with the Israelite Saul in his war against Amalekites (1 Sam 15:4). Because of these differences between both the kingdoms David adopted a favourite policy towards the

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[718] David was at first crowned by the elders of Judah (2 Sam 2:4), and later, after seeing David's military and diplomatic skills, the elders of the northern Israelites came to him at Hebron and crowned him as their king (2 Sam 5:3; 1 Chr 10-12), because at this point of time the northern kingdom was being weekend by the constant attacks from the Philistine. But David, the king of Judah, became stronger and stronger through his supreme military and diplomatic skills. Confronted with the danger from the Philistine, and finding in David a remedy for the threat, the northern Israelites turned to David and asked him to be their king. Because they were convinced that only David could deliver and protect them from the Philistine menaces. After becoming the king of both the kingdoms, David conquered Jerusalem and made it as his capital and religious centre for his united monarchy (2 Sam 6:17) since it was the central location to administer the both the kingdoms and no tribe, neither Judean nor Israelite, was previously affiliated with the city. Cf. Charles Foster Kent, "Jeroboam and the Disruption," *BW* 4 (1894), 39f. The theological factor that facilitates this union between both the kingdoms is worth mentioning that the people of both the kingdoms worshipped the same Deity.

[719] Kent, "Jeroboam and the Disputation," 38f.

[720] Israel Finkelstein summarises: "Israel and Judah were two distinct territorial, social-political and cultural phenomena. This dichotomy stemmed from their different environmental conditions and their contrasting history in the second millennium BCE. Israel was characterized by significant continuity in the Bronze Age cultural traits, by a heterogeneous population and by strong contacts with its neighbours. Judah was characterized by isolation and by local, Iron Age cultural features, as evidenced by the layout of its provincial administrative towns. Israel emerged as a full-blown state in the early 9th century BCE, together with Moab, Ammon and Aram Damascus, while Judah (and Edom) emerged about a century and a half later, in the second half of the 8th century." Cf. Nadav Na'aman, "The Israelite-Judahite Struggle for the Patrimony of Ancient Israel," *Bib* 91 (2010), 16-17.

northern tribes in order to win over their confidence and keep them calm, and thereby to maintain the unity of his monarchy. But Solomon reversed David's policy completely towards the northern tribes. Fifth, Solomon's enormous building enterprises in the city of Jerusalem, his foreign policies and his policy of Orientalism versus the pure worship of Yahweh were more concerned about his name and fame than the good of the people. Moreover, these measures of Solomon added unnecessary burdens upon the people in the north, such as forced labour and heavy taxations. Israel could clearly perceive that his policies made the interest of their region subservient to the king's personal interest and to Judah. For instance, Jeroboam's rebellion and Solomon's pursuit to kill Jeroboam, and the prophecy of Ahija regarding Jeroboam (that Jeroboam would be the king over the ten tribes of Israel cf. 1 Kgs 11:40) witness Solomon's oppressive policy and the (hostile) mood of the people in Israel towards Solomon and Judah, and their yearning to be independent from Judah, the southern kingdom. Sixth, the laws for determining the right of succession in Israel had not as yet been definitely established. The southern kingdom advocated the royal Zion theology of the Davidic dynasty, but the northern kingdom did not accept such theology. [721]

Thus, the hostility between both the kingdoms were simmering about for a long period of time. However, the immediate and the main reason that triggered the revolt and the division in the united monarchy was the foolishness and the arrogance of Rehoboam, who became king in Jerusalem after the death of his father, Solomon.[722] Rehoboam, after getting crowned as the king for the southern kingdom, went to Shechem to get the approval from the elders of Israel to be crowned for the northern kingdom also (1 Kgs 12).[723] At Shechem, in the Assembly of the elders of Israel, he was confronted with the demand, if he lightens the harsh policy adopted by his father towards the north, they would crown him as their king. But Rehoboam refused their demand; not only that, he went to the extent of threatening them with even more

[721] Kent, "Jeroboam and the Disputation," 39ff.

[722] Since the royal Zion theology in the south that advocated the eternal rule of the Davidic dynasty, Rehoboam, as he was from David's line, was accepted as the successor to Solomon in Judah.

[723] The reason why Rehoboam went to Shechem to be approved of his kingship in the north is that there were apparently pressing political reasons for Rehoboam to go to the north to negotiate the matter of his kingship. Probably the people of the north had already given a signal regarding their dissatisfaction with the Davidic dynasty. One clear signal is that Israel did not send representatives to Jerusalem to give their consent for the kingship to Rehoboam. Cf. J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1986), 229f.

repressive measures: "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions" (1 Kgs 12:14). At this, the Israelites rebelled against Rehoboam and Judah, saying, "What portion have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, David" (1 Kgs 12:16).[724] To suppress the revolt Rehoboam sent Adoram, but the Israelites stoned Adoram to death, and they crowned Jeroboam, the Ephraimite, as their king,[725] who earlier revolted against Solomon, and fled to Egypt because Solomon sought to kill him.

Surprisingly, the Benjaminite tribe, a tribe from the northern kingdom that was the traditional rival to the house of David, and had previously led at least two rebellions against the Judean king, David (2 Sam 16:5-8; 20:1-22), did not participate in the revolt against Judah (cf. 1 Kgs 12:21). Though the reason for their changed position towards Judah is not recorded in the Biblical text, one can assume that the main reason for their changed position could be: firstly, their association with Jerusalem – the political, financial and social ties that they would have developed with the adjacent royal capital Jerusalem over a period of time; secondly, it is also possible that Rehoboam might have

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[724] The Israelites were within their right to purpose their condition because prior to the crowning of David as king over the northern kingdom there was a negotiation between David and Abner, in which Abner said: "I will arise and go, and will gather all Israel to my lord the king, that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may reign over all that your heart desires" (2 Sam 3:21). And later it is recorded: "So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel" (2 Sam 5:3). Although the original agreement between David and the elders of Israel got lost, it is evident that Israel did not offer the crown absolutely free to David and his sons to rule over Israel forever. This suggests that Rehoboam's kingship over Judah does not automatically authorize his kingship over Israel just because he is a descendant of David. Therefore, it was within the rights of the Israelites to accept or reject any Judean crowned king. This could also be the main reason why David adopted a more liberal policy towards Israel that the people of Judah were not very happy about. For instance, in the case of Absolom some Judahite supported Absolom's rebellion against David, while half the people of Israel joined in the restoration of David to his throne. This is also evident from what the Judean supporters of Absalom said to the Israelites: "Have we eaten at all at the king's expense? …" (cf. 2 Sam 19:42:f). So it is evident that David dealt well with Israel in order to avoid any rebellion from the side of Israel, given the political and cultural complexity. But his successor Solomon and Rehoboam adopted a quite oppressive and suppressive policy toward Israel. The Israelites tolerated Solomon in spite of his suppressive policy for the sake of David, his father. But they wouldn't let Rehoboam rule them as Solomon did. So they revolted his kingship over them. Cf. L. W. Batten, "A Crisis in the History of Israel," *JBL* 49.1 (1930), 55ff.

[725] Jeroboam was one of Solomon's officials. He had fled to Egypt because Solomon sought to kill him on account of his opposition and rebellion to Solomon's forced-labour policies (cf. 1 Kgs 11:26ff.). However, Pharaoh Shisak gave him refuge in Egypt; and later Jeroboam married the sister-in-law of the pharaoh, who bore him a son, Abia. But after the death of Solomon he returned to Israel. It is also believed that Jeroboam took the lead in the revolt against Rehoboam. Cf. Miller, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 232f.

mustered all his influence and power to retain his control over the region of the Benjamin tribes, which abutted on his capital. Because winning over the confidence of the Benjamin tribe was very crucial for the survival of Judah, for the security of Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, and for the protection of Judah from the hostile northern kingdom. [726] The Benjaminite tribe's alliance with Judah and its readiness to fight for the house of Judah, notwithstanding their traditional affiliation to the house of Joseph, corresponds to Judah's readiness to risk his life for the sake of Benjamin against the powerful Joseph in Gen 37-50. Y. Levin writes, "in the face of continuing Benjaminite resentment of the Judahite occupation of southern Benjamin it was necessary to provide an explanation, in the tradition of the Patriarchal aetiologies, showing how Judah had, even in long-ago Egypt, taken 'little brother' Benjamin under his wing and protected him from the powerful Joseph, as part of his overall responsibility for the children of Israel. To the delight and pleasure of countless readers ever since, this was done by creating one of the most intricate and well-written stories of all time."[727]

The revolt of the northern kingdom and the crowning of Jeroboam, who was the former rebel of Solomon, generated constant hostilities and war-like situations between both the kingdoms. Though their hostilities were mainly concerned about the issues regarding the border on Benjamin terrain, it often led them into battle, which badly affected their international trade. And gradually both the kingdoms lost the glory and fame that they had enjoyed during the reign of David and Solomon, and gradually they

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[726] Yigal Levin, "Joseph, Judah and the ‚Benjamin Conundrum,'" *ZAW* 116 (2004), 226-229. Though it is widely believed that the Benjamin is the northern tribe, Na'aman contests that the land of Benjamin was part of Judah from the earlier time onwards. Cf. Nadav Na'aman, "Soul, Benjamin and the Emergence of 'Biblical Israel'" (Part I), *ZAW* 121 (2009), 216. However Israel Finkelstein disagrees with Na'aman's opinion. He holds that the territory of Benjamin changed hands at least once from the north to south in the second half of the 9th century BCE. 1 Kgs 12:21-24 serves as a proof for this claim. Cf. Israel Finkelstein, "Saul, Benjamin and the Emergence of 'Biblical Israel'" *ZAW* 123 (2011), 348-367.

[727] Levin, "Joseph, Judah and the 'Benjamin Conundrum,'" 240. But it is important to keep in mind that only the southern Benjaminites got integrated into the kingdom of Judah, while the northern Benjaminites retained their allegiance to the house of Joseph (Israel). However, they (southern and northern Benjaminites) remained connected with their brethren across the border. This kind of linkage can also be traced in Gen 37-50, in which Benjamin is the linking point or the agent of reconciliation among the sons of Jacob (Judah and Joseph). The southern Benjaminites allegiance to the house of Judah had also served for the migration of the northern Israel to Judah at the event of Assyrian conquest of Israel in 722 BCE. This has also reinforced their identity as "Benjaminites" for the next four centuries of Judahite domination. This identity was maintained throughout the time of the exile and their return to Judah and, presumably, by those Benjaminites who were not exiled, as well. Cf. I. Milevski, "Settlement Patterns in Northern Judah during the Achaemenid Period According to the Hill Country of Benjamin and Jerusalem Surveys," *BAIAS* 15 (1996-97), 7-29.

have became so politically, economically and militarily weak and vulnerable that they started to lose their territories to the surrounding kingdoms.[728]

The aftermath of the Shechem Assembly was rivalry and conflict between both the kingdoms. Returning to Jerusalem, Rehoboam assembled an army of Judeans and Benjaminites to wage war against Israel to reclaim it. However, at the advice of Shemaiah, "the man of God," Rehoboam abandoned his idea of attacking Israel because Pharaoh Shishak was already preparing to attack Judah, using the political turmoil in the house of David (1 Kgs 14:25-28; 2 Chr 12:1-12).[729] Thereafter the relationship between both the kingdoms became so hostile that Rehoboam undertook an extensive fortification work of the cities of Judah (2 Chr 11:5-12) to defend his cities from any attack from the northern kingdom. On the other side, to stop his people going to the house of David and to stop people-to-people contact, Jeroboam built two sanctuaries in his kingdom, one at Dan and the other at Bethel. He installed a golden calf in each place, and said: "Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt" (1 Kgs 12:28). Both the kings/kingdoms hostilities against each other are summarised in 1 Kgs 14:30 – "there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually."

The hostilities between both the kingdoms continued later between the successive kings of both sides. After Rehoboam Abijah became the ruler of Judah. During his brief rule there was a major battle between Abijah and Jeroboam (2 Chr 13), which Judah won. This battle is most probably concerned about a border skirmish around Bethel, Jeshanah, and Ephron.[730]

The successors of Abijah and Jeroboam, Asa of Judah and Baasha of Israel, also engaged in conflict with each other (1 Kgs 15:16-22; 2 Chr 16:1-6). The provocation for the conflict came from Baasha, when he fortified Ramah to prevent Israel going to Judah. Understanding his action as a threat to Judah's national security, Asa approached Ben-Hadad of Damascus with silver and gold from the temple and from his royal treasuries, requesting his help to tackle Baashar. Taking advantage of the situation, Ben-

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[728] Miller, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 237.
[729] Rehoboam offered surprisingly no ressistance to Shishak therfore the book of Chronical describes Shishak's invasion as divine punishment for Rehoboam's apostasy. Cf. Miller, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 245.
[730] Miller, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 246.

Hadad attacked Israel and took the cities of Ijon, Dan, Abel Beth Maacah, and much of Naphtali, including the Kinnereth region just west of the Sea of Kinnereth, or Galiliee. So Baasha abandoned his project at Ramah and retreated to his capital at Tirzah. Taking advantage of Baasha's retreat, Asa marched to Ramah and dismantled the unfinished work of Ramah and used the materials to build a wall of defence at Geba (Jeba') and Mizpah.[731]

A brief period of peace came in their relationship when Jehoshaphat of Judah and Ahab of Israel made a peace treaty with each other (1 Kgs 22:44). Jehoshaphat, the successor of Asa, gave his son Jehoram in marriage to Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, the king of Israel (2 Kgs 8:18, 27). With this treaty the trade routes that passed through Israelite and Judean territory Phoenician ports reopened. This facilitated their international trade with Phoenicia and to other countries. Thus, both the kingdoms benefitted economically and politically from the treaty. However, after the death of Ahab the relationship between both the countries became hostile again as Jehoshaphat refused Ahaziah's request to allow Israelite merchants to participate in a maritime expedition (1 Kgs 22:47-50).[732] From then onwards the rivalry between both the kingdoms never came to an end till the deportation of the people of the northern kingdom to Assyria in 722 BCE.

The last recorded conflict between Israel and Judah in the Bible is the conflict between Pekah and Ahaz. Pekah, the king of Israel, entered into an alliance with Rezin, the king of Aram (Syria) in an attempt to defend Assyrian aggression, and also to wage war against Judah. So in alliance with Syria, Pekah attacked Jerusalem. As the defensive measure Ahaz, the king of Judah, approached the Assyrians, requesting their help from the combined attack of Israel and Syria. At this Tiglath-pilester, the king of Assyria, marched against Damascus, and captured it, and carried its people captive to Kir, and he killed Rezin (2 Kgs 16: 5-10), and then he made Israel as vassal to Assyria. However, after the death of Tiglath-pileser, Hoshea, the king of Israel, made an unfortunate attempt to throw off the yoke of Assyria by asking Egypt for assistance. Taking Hoshea's move as treachery, Assyria attacked Israel, and captured its capital

[731] Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 350f.
[732] Miller, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 267-275.

Samaria, and deported its people to Assyria as captives.[733] With the deportation of Israel in Assyria in the year 722 BCE the history of the northern kingdom came to end.

The division and the conflict between both the kingdoms not only weakened their trade and development but also made them politically very vulnerable before the foreign powers. Due to their division, enmity and constant battle against each other they have lost the political power and the economic and religious development that they, as a United Monarchy, had achieved and cherished during the reign of David and Solomon. Weakened by mutual hostilities, they were easily conquered by the foreign powers – Israel was first captured and deported into Assyria in the year 722 BCE; and then in the year 586 BCE Judah was captured and led into exile into Babylon.

These historical facts about the southern and the northern kingdoms suggest that the Joseph narrative in Genesis was given its final form sometime after the split of the United Monarchy. It suggests that the purpose of the Joseph narrative, in its final form, was to exhort both the nations to get reconciled with each other and get united for their survival. One of the thrusts of Gen 37-50 is: *Untied we stand, divided we fall*. This is also the story of the ten lost tribes of Israel. By revolting against the house of David and engaging in hostility and conflict with her brother, Judah, the northern kingdom disappeared from history. Had she (northern kingdom) no relation with the kingdom of Judah at some point in time, she could never have found a place in history. So it is right to conclude that the Joseph narrative in Genesis is an allegory of the historical conflict between the southern and the northern kingdoms of the chosen people. And the purpose of the Joseph narrative is to exhort both the nations to get reconciled with each other and to get reunited as one nation (as the United Monarchy).

3.2.8 Reconciliation as a Process:

As social animals human beings are born with a fundamental need for a close and loving relationship with people, who will care and protect them, and promote their welfare, both physical and psychological. But when such needs are denied or violated, they may end up with a strong feeling of betrayal, hurt, anger and even enmity.[734] The

[733] Shimon Bakon, "Egypt: The Nemesis of Israel and Judah," *JBQ* 40 (2012), 10f.
[734] Julie Fitness, "Betrayal and Forgiveness in Couple Relationships," *Couples and Family Relationship* (ed. Patricia Noller and Gery C. Karantzas; West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2012), 259.

Joseph narrative reflects this aspect of human relationship. The sons of Jacob are divided due to the patriarch's favouritism and due to their inner struggle for power and inheritance. This results in selling the potential heir in slavery because the perpetrators have thought that by getting rid of the potential heir they would get the attention of the patriarch and the family inheritance. But to their misfortune the patriarch sets his blue eye upon the other son of his beloved wife, Rachel. Moreover, there is no sign of improvement in the relationship with their father, rather distrust and lack of peace, and their family situation is marked by mourning and grief. However, the situation begins to improve mysteriously through divine providence, which brings the perpetrators face-to-face with the victim, who by taking advantage of their inability to recognise him, tries them out with tests to go through similar suffering as he has undergone as a result of their crimes. The additional motive of Joseph, testing his brother, is to find out if they repent their sins, so that he can get reconciled with them and get reunited with his family. The brothers pass all his tests and show sincere signs of repentance and remorse for their past crimes against him and they, finally, get reconciled with Joseph.

Gen 42-50, which deals with the reconciliation and the reunion of Jacob's family, presents reconciliation as a complex process with different phases. Joseph does not jump all of a sudden to reveal his identity to his brother as he meets them after twenty-two long years; rather he hides his identity from them and tests them to make sure they are changed persons, or to enable them to change. The narrator dedicates more space in reporting the events that finally lead up to reconciliation in order to show that reconciliation is a long and complex process. Some of the important phases involved in the reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers are as follows:

a) Reconciliation Necessitates a Meaningful Dialogue Process:

Reconciliation is all about rebuilding and restoring the broken relationship, and it is not possible without a just and a meaningful dialogue. A meaningful dialogue requires "a reflective and reflexive process," [735] through which both the parties come to a consensus to arrive at new guidelines to reorder their relationship in a way that would

[735] B. S. Tint, "Dialogue, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation," *Forgiveness and Psychological Pathways to Conflict Transformation and Peace Building* (ed. Ani Kalayijan and Raycond F. Paloutzian; New York: Springer, 2009), 271.

eliminate the factors that previously led to the conflict. Joseph and his brothers could not have reconciled, had they not come face-to-face and engaged in a process of dialogue. Joseph's accusations, the brothers defence, and Judah's emotional speech are some of the steps/components of the dialogue process that helped them to remember and acknowledge one's sins and failures, and make contrition for it. The process of dialogue enables the parties to face the truth from another person's perspective and to acknowledge one's fault and come to a consensus, which is a crucial step towards reconciliation.

b) Inner Healing and Forgiveness:

A second or the most important step for reconciliation is forgiveness. The Greek term *aphesis*, which is widely used in the New Testament for forgiveness, means to release someone from bondage, debt, guilt or punishment. That means, when a person hurts another person, he/she owes something to the victim; and when the victim forgives the perpetrator, he/she releases the offender from the debt, guilt or punishment. In this sense, forgiveness goes beyond justice; for justice demands punishment or restitution, while forgiveness accepts the offender as a human being in spite of his terrible past – it redeems the offender from his guilt and from the painful past.[736] However, it is not always easy to forgive. Often a victim forgives his perpetrator only when he has gone through a process of inner healing. In the episode of Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers Joseph weeps more than once. In fact, every time the brothers show some sign of repentance or remorse for their past crime, or some sign of transformation Joseph weeps. His weeping alludes to his inner healing. Moreover, Judah's emotional speech and his changed attitude towards his father reveals how he has forgiven his unloving father, and it also heals Joseph's wound because Judah and his brothers have forgiven their father in spite of Jacob's indifference and disregard towards them. Their forgiveness of their uncaring father moves Joseph's heart and heals his wounds, for forgiveness is "healing in itself."[737] It is only at this point that Joseph

[736] Müller-Fahrenholz Geiko, *The Art of Forgiveness: theological reflections on healing and reconciliation* (Geneva: World Council of Churches; 1997). 4f.
[737] C. Ducommun-Nagy, "Forgiveness and Relational Ethics: The Perspective of the Contextual Therapist," *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: psychological pathways to conflict transformation and peace building* (ed. Ann Kalayijian and Raymond F. Paloutzian; Dordrecht: Springer; 2020), 53.

abandons his right to punish his brothers and forgives them and reveals of his identity and ensures them his protection.

c) Confession:

Confession is one of the courageous steps towards reconciliation. It is a courageous step because it demands disarmament of self-esteem from the perpetrator. Even the victim often wants to avoid returning to the moment of pain and embarrassment because it is easier to hide behind barricades of repression, anger and self-righteousness than to reopen the wounds.[738] But at the same time, confession is a great moment of relief both for the perpetrator and for the victim. It is basically acknowledging one's sin and apologizing to the victim for obtaining forgiveness. A sincere confession or apology "is two-way gift; we benefit both when we offer and when we receive apology."[739] It relieves the perpetrator from the burden of guilt and relieves the victim from the burden of hurt. It releases them from the gloom of withholding love while nursing their private hurt. Although the reunion of Joseph and his brothers is filled with images of reconciliation – kissing, embracing, weeping and eventual communication, there was something lacking in their reconciliation i.e. open and direct confession of their offence before the victim. Therefore, the brothers doubt if Joseph has really forgiven them. They fear that Joseph has forgiven only for the sake of their father. Therefore, they send words after the death of their father that their father had (allegedly) left instructions that Joseph should forgive his brothers. And, finally, they confess their sins and request his forgiveness, "We pray you, forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father" (Gen 50:15-19). This suggests that until they confess their crime before the victim and ask for forgiveness they are not completely relieved of their guilt in their conscience. It is only when they confess and obtain Joseph's assurance that they become completely free from their guilty conscience.

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[738] Geiko, *The Art of Forgiveness*, 25f.

[739] Paula Green, "Reconciliation and Forgiveness in Divided Societies: A Path of Courage, Compassion, and Commitment," *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: psychological pathways to conflict transformation and peace building* (ed. Ann Kalayijian and Raymond F. Paloutzian; Dordrecht: Springer; 2020), 263.

d) Divine Dimension in Reconciliation:

The most important factor in a genuine reconciliation process is the Divine role. As in the Jacob narrative, the Joseph narrative highlights this truth when Joseph attributes the final outcome of the story to God: "for God sent me before you to preserve life. … God sent me … to keep alive for you many survivors… it was not you who sent me here but God (Gen 45: 5, 7, 8). Moreover, Joseph's assurance to his brothers underlines the divine role as the main factor for their reconciliation: "Fear not, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today …" (Gen 50:19-20). Joseph's statement confirms that it was God's providence that he was sold into slavery to become the governor of Egypt; it was God's providence that the plague brought them face-to-face with Joseph; and it was God's providence that they finally got reunited. Thus, Joseph credits their reconciliation and reunion to God. Moreover, the Bible attributes reconciliation as God's supreme act (cf. 2 Cor. 5:7-21).

e) Reconciliation Presupposes Restructuring of Relationship:

Once two conflicting parties are reconciled, their relationship will not be as it was before. They need to redefine their relationship in order to remove the factors that had contributed to the friction in their relationship. A genuine reconciliation, therefore, would presuppose a "major restructuring of the relationship." [740] The main cause for the conflict among Jacob's sons was the patriarch's favouritism towards Joseph, the son from his beloved wife, Rachel. Therefore, avoidance of any further friction among them would presuppose that the patriarch changes his attitude towards his other sons. Jacob needs to treat his sons equally from now on, and provide each of them with the proper responsibility that he is eligible for. So Jacob's criteria of dealing with his sons should no longer be on the basis of his likes and dislikes, rather on the basis of each one's capability and worthiness. Jacob, finally, changes his attitude towards his sons, which is evident from the blessing scene. He does not part his blessing to any particular son as his father and grandfather did; rather he distributes his patriarchal blessing to each of his sons on the basis of his capability and moral credibility (cf. Gen 49).

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[740] Daniel Bar-Tal, *Intergroup Conflicts and their Resolution: A Social Psychological Perspective* (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), 26.

Conclusion:

The Joseph narrative explains how favouritism, and struggle for power and for inheritance could cause conflict and division in a family. Favouritism discriminates one child from the other, which negatively affects the interpersonal relationship between/among the children in the family or group or society. Struggle for power and for inheritance is also a big factor for division or conflict in a family/social circle. The narrator of Gen 37-50 brings out these and other factors of conflict very dramatically. However, the narrator does not conclude his story on a negative note, rather he explains to his audience that conflicts in a family can be overcome through a proper process of reconciliation.

As it is proved in this chapter that Gen 37-50 is related to the history of God's chosen people, Israel and Judah. The purpose of this narrative to its original audience is to instruct and to exhort them to reconcile with each other. The narrative emphasises that it is through reconciliation and reunion that they will be able to preserve their nationhood and grow and prosper. For united that they stand, divided they fall. Thus, the call of this narrative to the reader as individual and as a nation is forgiveness, reconciliation and reunion.

Conclusion

Reconciliation is one of the most important themes in the Bible. In fact, the purpose of the whole Scripture is a call for reconciliation with God for entering into a loving covenantal relationship with Him and with His children and with His entire creation. Since sin is the main cause for every form of conflict and alienation, God is the architect of reconciliation, for every sin is also an offence against God. It ruptures the unity of God's people and hurts the inner and the social harmony of men. So, Origin, the early church father, says, "Where there are sins, there are also divisions, schisms, heresies, and disputes" (CCC. 817).[741] Therefore, every reconciliation process involves two dimensions, vertical and horizontal. This aspect of reconciliation is clearly illustrated in the patriarchal narratives. While dramatizing the conflict stories between different characters and exposing the moral flaws in the characters, the patriarchal narratives emphasize the significance of reconciliation.

Conflict is a complex phenomenon, and it permeates in all areas of life – spiritual, interpersonal, intergroup, interorganizational, interethnic, international, etc. It is also evident in the patriarchal narratives that various factors contribute to a conflict, such as political, social, economical, cultural, psychological, emotional, etc. Since every conflict is complex and the factors contributing to a conflict differ from case to case it is difficult to define conflict under any particular theory. However, the Bible provides a simple, straightforward and general cause for a conflict, i.e., human sin. For sin alienates man not only from his Creator but also from his fellowmen, from the creation, and it even disintegrates the sinner from his self. This is evident in the patriarchal narratives as these narratives attribute the moral flaws of the human characters as the cause for every conflict – be it Abraham, the father of faith, or Jacob, who embodies the divinely given name, *Israel*, or Judah, from whose line the Messiah is born. All the human characters in these stories have some or other moral flaws, which divide and

[741] The Conference of the Catholic Bishops of India, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1994), 166.

disintegrate the family, and instigate conflict with one's own brothers, with the relatives, and with others (nations).

Interestingly, the main characters, involved in these narratives, represent the respective nations as these narratives relate to Israel's ambiguous relationship with these nations. If Abraham and Jacob represent Israel, their counterparts, Pharaoh, Lot, Abimelech, Hager (Ishmael), Esau and Laban represent the other nations – Egypt, Moab, Ammon, Philistines, Ishmaelites, Edom and Aram respectively. For the patriarchs conflicts with these patriarchs/heads of these nations have strong connections with Israel's conflict with these nations historically, since the patriarchs' conflicts with these men very much resemble with Israel's conflicts with these nations. The linguistic similarity of these texts and the sequence of events in these stories very much resemble the historical texts and the historical events of Israel with these nations. That would mean that the national story of Israel is narrated through the stories of the patriarchs of the nation. Thus, the patriarchs' conflicts with the head/patriarchs of the other nations are Israel's conflicts with these nations. The narrator of these stories choses the literary form of family-story-telling to narrate Israel's conflict with these neighbouring nations in order to connect Israel's history with her patriarchs and also to instruct Israel how she should relate herself with these nations. Since the patriarchs' conflicts with these individuals conclude either with a conflict settlement, a resolution or reconciliation, these narratives instruct Israel to foster and maintain a peaceful and a harmonious relationship with these nations.

If the Abraham and the Jacob narratives deal with Israel's interaction with the surrounding nations, the Joseph narrative deals with Israel's interaction with Judah. The Joseph narrative, while dramatizing the conflict among the sons of Jacob, fosters reconciliation and union among the sons of Jacob. Historically, the Joseph narrative narrates Israel's ambiguous relation with Judah. The fact that the Joseph narrative concludes in a dramatic reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers, it exhorts Israel and Judah to get reconciled and reunited as one united monarchy for their own survival and for the success of the divine mission, entrusted upon her i.e., to serve as a beacon and as a channel of reconciliation for the other nations. The two main characters in the Joseph narrative are Joseph and Judah. Joseph represents the northern kingdom, Israel, while Judah represents the southern kingdom, Judah. Thus, the purpose of the Joseph

narrative is to foster reconciliation and reunion between Judah and Israel, which disintegrated from each other after Solomon. Since Israel and Judah did not yield to the divine message they were subjected to foreign invasions and were finally deported to foreign nations: Israel to Assyria in 722 BCE and Judah to Babylon in 586 BCE.

Thus, the call of the patriarchal narratives is reconciliation and peaceful co-existence with other nations, and the reconciliation and the reunion of Israel and Judah as one monarchy. At the micro level these narratives foster reconciliation between individuals, and at the macro level they encourage peace and harmony between the nations.

Although these narratives foster reconciliation between human beings, the main architect of reconciliation is God. Since every conflict is caused by human sin, the Bible teaches that sin not only alienates the sinner from God but it also destroys the true fabric of human society by causing conflict and disharmony in the society. Genesis teaches that due to his sin, man has lost his intimacy with God and with his fellow human beings. However, the loving God does not abandon the human being in the state of sin, rather He reconciles the human being with Him by entering into a covenantal relationship with the fallen humanity, inviting man to renew his intimacy with the Creator. The divine interventions at critical moments of the patriarchs' conflicts with other powerful men are the concrete evidences of God's reconciliation with the patriarchs, in spite of their offences against Him. For instances, God striking Pharaoh and his house with plagues, the divine warning to Abimelech, the king of Gerar, God's intervention to settle the conflict between Sarah and Hagar, the divine warning to Laban, Jacob's wrestling with the mysterious man at Jabbok and Joseph's attribution of the reconciliation and the reunion of their family to God – "for God sent me before you to preserve life. …God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you and many survivors. …" (Gen 45:5, 7, 8), are the concrete evidences that it is God, who reconciles the patriarchs with Himself and initiates the process of reconciliation between the concerned human parties. Interestingly, it is only when God has reconcilied the patriarchs that the reconciliation between the patriarchs and their human opponents are made possible.

If God is the initiator and the architect of reconciliation, then what is the role of man in the process of reconciliation? Is he just a passive receiver of reconciliation?

Even if God has reconciled human beings with Himself, the reconciliation is incomplete without the acceptance and the cooperation of the human beings because reconciliation involves at least two persons. God's reconciliation with Jacob at Jabbok is portrayed in a wrestling match, in which, both, Jacob and his antagonist, the mysterious man, are actively involved. Even Jacob's plea for the blessing from the mysterious man is portrayed as Jacob clinging to the angel of God, refusing to let him go unless he blesses him. Thus, both God and Jacob are actively involved in the process of reconciliation. The reconciliation of Jacob with the mysterious man at Jabbok, Abraham's remembrance of the Lord and his calling on the Lord's name by building an altar for the Lord at the end of every conflict scene, and Joseph's attribution of the family reconciliation and reunion to God can be understood as the divine dimension of reconciliation. For it is God, who initiates the reconciliation process and leads it to its positive conclusion.

It is also evident in the patriarchal narratives that Reconciliation with God paves the way for the reconciliation with the human opponent. Jacob's reconciliation with God at Jabbok paves the way for his reconciliation with Esau, his brother. For a genuine reconciliation consists of both the vertical and horizontal dimensions. Reconciliation that lacks any one of these dimensions is not a complete reconciliation because human and divine dimension of reconciliation are interrelated with each other. Therefore, Jacob tells Esau, "truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God, with such favour have you received me" (Gen 33:10). In his reconciliation with Esau, Jacob remembers his reconciliation with God. Similarly, in his reconciliation with his brothers, Joseph sees the hidden hand of God that enables human characters to undergo a process of change to realise the reconciliation with their antagonist. Moreover, God works in collaboration with man. Therefore, in reconciliation there are, both human and divine dimensions present.

It is evident from the patriarchal narratives that reconciliation is not an event but a process with different stages, during which the perpetrator gradually undergo a process of change and undo all the wrongs or the hurts that he/she inflicted upon the victim/s. One can draw a number of lessons or steps from the patriarchal narratives for an authentic and genuine reconciliation. Some of the steps or principles that these narratives suggest are the following. First, a genuine reconciliation requires

transformation in the concerned conflicting parites. They must undergo a process of transformation. Jacob's twenty long years of servitude under Laban, Joseph's slavery in Egypt and the trials faced by Joseph's brothers in Egypt enable them to undergo a process of transformation. During this period they not only realize their offences but also feel sorry and repent for it. Second, a sincere and true process of reconciliation requires an elaborate and minute preparation and a great sense of perseverance. Jacob makes an elaborate and a minute preparation to win the favour of Esau, his brother. Similarly, Joseph prepares very tactically to enable his brothers to realise their crime and repent for it so that he can reconcile and reunite with them. Third, the parties involved in the reconciliation process should have an attitude of humility and respect towards each other. For instance, in order to make a peace treaty Abimelech and Laban needed to change their attitude towards their counterparts, Abraham and Jacob. Similarly, it is only when Jacob renounces his attitude of dominion, he is able to win the favour of Esau and get reconciled with Esau. Fourth, genuine reconciliation requires sincerity of intention. Jacob had been trying to placate Esau with his gift, but it is only when Jacob has revised his motive of his gift that Esau accepts his gift. Fifth, true reconciliation requires a process of a free and fare dialogue, in which the concerned parties can face the painful past without fear or prejudice so as to build a foundation for the normal peaceful relationship because without facing the truth there can be no relief from the wound. For those who want to go forward together need to walk through their histories together. Jacob had to own up to his sinful past to get reconciled with God. Joseph's brothers needed to be reminded of their sinful past to be led into the path of reconciliation. Sixth, true reconciliation demands justice. Therefore, Jacob insists that Esau accepts his gift as restitution. Seventh, reconciliation requires that the perpetrator confesses his offence before the victims and waits for pardon from the victim/s. For a true confession of one's guilt before the victim not only relieves the perpetrator from the burden of guilt but also relieves the victim from the burden of hurt. "There is something profoundly vicarious in a genuine act of confession; for it brings the unspoken – and unspeakable – words of all into the open."[742] Joseph's brothers were completely relieved of their guilt only when they confessed before Joseph and asked for

[742] Geiko, *The Art of Forgivness*, 29.

his forgiveness. Similarly, Jacob was relieved from his guilt when he confessed his true identity before the Angel of God and asked for His blessing. Eighth, the most important phase in the reconciliation process is forgiveness. Forgiveness means that the victim is prepared to accept the perpetrator, in spite of his terrible past, as another human being.[743] It is a process of healing; therefore, often a victim forgives his perpetrator only when he has gone through a process of inner healing. In forgiveness "a guilty and painful past is redeemed in order to establish reliable foundations for renewed fellowship in dignity and trust. Forgiveness frees the future from the haunting legacies of the past"[744] Ninth, sometimes it is necessary that the reconciled parties separate in peace from each other in order to avoid any further conflict, especially when there are ideological and cultural differences between the parties. For instance, Jacob needed to separte himself peacefully from Esau because of their ideological and culural contraditions. Tenth, once two conflicting parties are reconciled, their relationship will not be as it was before. They need to redefine their relationship in order to remove the factors that had originally contributed to the friction in their relationship. Thus, the patriarchal narratives teach a number of principles for a true and genuine reconciliation process.

It is, thus, evident that conflict and reconciliation is a dominant theme in Gen 12-50. While dramatizing the conflict themes, the patriarchal narratives emphasize reconciliation as a long and on-going process at two levels or dimensions – vertical and horizontal dimensions. During this process the concerned parties undergo a process of transformation. The patriarchal narratives not only narrate the conflict and reconciliation stories of the patriarchs with different individuals but they also bring to light Israel's external relationship with the surrounding nations, and Israel's internal relationship as tribes, namely, between Israel and Judah. Thus, one of the main messages of Gen 12-50 to its audience is fostering and maintaining a harmonious and peaceful relationship with one another and with people of other families, groups and nations.

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[743] Geiko, *The Art of Forgivness,* viii.
[744] Geiko, *The Art of Forgivness,* 4f.

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