Bar-Ilan University

Jacob's "Fight and Flight" –
Recurring Patterns in the Jacob Cycle (Genesis 25:19-35:29) and its Significance

Hannah Lai

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Prof. Elie Assis

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Bar-Ilan University

Contents

Abstract (English)

This thesis explores the structure of the main plotline of the Jacob Cycle (Gen 25:19-35:29), and the meaning that consequently emerges. The heterogeneity of the text in question leads to the identification of various traditions, and the position of Jacob as the third patriarch and the eponymous father of Israel allows the story to be read in diverse ways. This thesis focuses on the main stages of development in the life of the protagonist, and identifies a noticeable and noteworthy variation in the outworking of his three central goals in the story – wealth, progeny, and return to the land. Different levels of divine involvement and reticence lead to the emergence of a four-staged cyclic pattern of "fight and flight" in Jacob's journeys and encounters, which involves the interplay of several recurrent elements. This four-part cyclic structure constitutes the four major steps in the establishment of Jacob's household, which is the ultimate goal of the main storyline of the Jacob Cycle.

This research employs the synchronic method, treating the text as an integral whole. Based on the principle of rhetorical criticism, the author's intent and meaning are considered to be expressed in the form and structure. This lies in the boundaries of a literary unit, its overall shape, design, sequence and movement, and also the relationship between individual subunits. According to the principles of narrative criticism, dramatic criteria (change in time, subject, venue) are employed as the chief determining factors in narrative division and analysis of the main plot, while stylistic criteria (headings, subscripts, summaries, formulae, repeated literary patterns) are applied as an adjunct. The omniscient and omnipresent narrator is determinative in expressing the perspective of the divine and conveying the story's ideological message. He also brings about the principle of dual causality – coexistence of divine interference and human effort – in the story's interpretation. In view of the heterogeneity of the text and its wider context – its position in the patriarchal narratives, the book of Genesis, the Pentateuch, and the Tanakh, the principle of the implied reader is also taken into consideration. He is recognized as a descendent of Israel, to whom the establishment of the house of Israel (Jacob) would be important.

Review of previous studies focuses on two areas: the structure of the whole Jacob Cycle, and the main themes identified. The former involves looking at the narrative's boundaries, division, and shape. As the patriarchal stories do not have clear-cut and indisputable delimitations, various boundaries have been identified, according to dramatic criteria (births and deaths, arrivals and departures, protagonists and characters involved) or stylistic elements (genealogies, lists and *toledot* formulas). Division of the Jacob Cycle is frequently carried out according to subject matter, themes and motifs (conflict and resolution, blessing and birthright). A longer narrative recounts Jacob's two-way journey to Haran (25:19-34, 26:34-35, 27:1-33:17), which involves Jacob's dealings with Esau and Laban. The episode of Isaac at Gerar, from which Jacob is completely absent (26:1-33), is usually treated separately. So is the episode of Dinah (34:1), which mainly features Jacob's children. The series of events after the second trip to Bethel (35:1-15) – the death of Deborah and Rachel, the birth of Benjamin, the defilement of Bilhah, and the death and burial of Isaac (35:16-29) are often considered miscellaneous reports dealing with deaths and closures. In addition, there are sanctuary narratives, etiological notes, and enumerative texts. A general circular or chiastic structure is well recognized by many, and the major themes are discussed in various combinations. Some examples include: the promised land of Canaan, the family line in Haran, election and rejection, primogeniture, conflict and relationships, the fugitive or national hero, divine theophanies, wealth, patriarch and foreign powers, exile and return from a foreign land, deception and trickery, the trickster figure, irony and retribution, the Abrahamic promise, and implications for future Israel.

This research identifies the boundaries of the Jacob Cycle as Gen 25:19-35:29, and recognizes the presence of four sections (25:19-28:22, 29:1-32:1, 32:2-33:17, 33:18-35:29). The episode of Isaac in Gerar (26:1-33) is not included, for it is more disconnected from the rest of the Jacob Cycle according to the dramatic criteria. Its relationship with the Jacob Cycle can be the topic for further research, as the major themes identified in the Jacob stories are also present in this particular episode. A cyclic pattern is identified in the whole Cycle, which divides the whole narrative into four subcycles. In this study, the term "subcycle" is employed. It denotes a "subunit of a

cycle", a smaller cycle within a larger one that presents similar plotlines and recurrent themes compared to other subcycles. Each subcycle consists of a "fight and flight" pattern. Jacob arrives a new location, encounters and interacts with a new group of people, engages with a certain level of strife, and flees or departs. With every subcycle, Jacob makes significant progress in his stages of life, and the four subcycles make up Jacob's four-part journey from birth to being an established patriarch with his own household.

Six themes recurrently appear in the four subcycles: geographical movement, fight and flight, divine intervention, issue of fertility and acquisition of wealth, involvement of female characters, transaction and deception. The interplay of these repetitive themes contributes to the cyclic structure.

Interpretation of the Jacob narrative as four subcycles offers three unique vantage points. First, Jacob's progression in stages of life is emphasized, which highlights the establishment of his household, a significant component in his election and becoming the third patriarch. Second, more attention can be given to Jacob's acquisition of wealth and the role of his female family members, which significantly contribute to his prosperity and rise in power and status. The role of female characters in Jacob's conflicts and the structure of the Jacob Cycle and has drawn less attention in previous studies. Third, concentration on selective divine intervention and reticence illuminates the dual causality dynamic in the story of Jacob.

The first subcycle (25:19-28:22) takes place in Canaan. It begins in Beersheba, the house of the father, where Jacob interacts with Isaac, Rebekah and Esau. It ends in Bethel, the house of God, where Jacob is alone and receives his first theophany and divine assurance of his journey. Jacob goes through several stages of fighting with Esau – intrauterine struggle, birth scene, birthright transaction, and the deception of Isaac. Jacob gains an overriding victory in the fight, which involves transaction and deception, and which includes various objectives: birthright, blessing, marriage arrangement, and parental acknowledgement. The prominent female character is Rebekah, who assumes a central role in the issue of fertility and family line. Isaac's blessing of abundance brings out the notion of wealth, and is the central object of contention for Esau and Jacob.

The second subcycle (29:1-32:1) (EV 29:1-31:55) concerns the creation of Jacob's household. It takes place in Mesopotamia, beginning with the well in the field of Haran as Jacob arrives alone, and ending with the heap of stones in Gilead, where Jacob and his family officially separates from Laban, his uncle, patron and father-in-law. There are two major waves of conflict. The first consists of meeting at the well and warm welcome into Laban's home for a month's stay, the bride-switch and fourteen years of service, and the wives' rivalry, which is a continuation of the previous conflict. The second wave of conflict includes the first and failed attempt to leave Laban which leads to another flock-rearing agreement that gives Jacob abundant wealth, the second and successful attempt to leave Haran in secret, the actual flight and Laban's pursuit, and the final confrontation in Gilead. Three significant issues are involved in Jacob's flight – return to Canaan (land), ownership of his own household (progeny) and his deserved wages (wealth). Divine intervention occurs with the two former issues. The predominant female characters are Jacob's wives, Rachel and Leah. Fertility and wealth are the goals and results of the conflicts, in which various extents of transaction, deception and trickery are involved.

The third subcycle (32:2-33:17) takes place in the Transjordan. This section involves Jacob fighting for the "favor in Esau's eyes", first to forego revenge, and second to let them part ways, which can be considered Jacob's "flight". Jacob undertakes several actions to appease Esau, and several others to prepare to flee from him and minimize his own loss. The former includes sending messengers with a word, sending at least four droves of gifts, prostrating to Esau, and pushing Esau to accept the gifts. The latter includes division of his entourage into two camps, praying for deliverance lest Esau strikes, dividing his family into three while approaching Esau, and convincing Esau to let them travel separately. Female characters do not assume any active roles, but are Jacob's possessions to be protected from harm. There are no instances of blatant deception, although negotiations are present. Divine theophanies do not direct or confirm Jacob's itinerary, but impart thematic significance. Jacob's destination Succoth reverberates with Mahanaim and Jabbok as places that are named by Jacob, or according to his activities.

The fourth subcycle (33:18-35:29) takes places in Canaan – in Shechem, Bethel, Ephrath, Migdal Eder, and Mamre. The family is confronted with a dilemma: assimilation but enjoying peace, or preservation of purity and identity but risking hostility. Jacob freezes, and his sons undertake the fighting on his behalf, employing deceit in the process, and gaining vast amounts of wealth. The fighting is undertaken for the sake of their sister, Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, the active female character. The divine once again directs Jacob's itinerary, and Jacob's household embarks on a journey to Bethel, which can be consider the "flight". Participation and consecration of the family is a significant emphasis of the narrative. The exit of several characters from the older generation and the dominance of Jacob's children mark the shift in generation.

Recurrent themes in the four subcycles of "fight and flight" work together to create a four-staged journey in the establishment of Jacob's household – "בית אב". The different levels of divine intervention and reticence regarding the three goals – land, progeny, and wealth – allow human initiative to assume a more dominant role in shaping the course of events. This leads to the "fight and flight" pattern and Jacob's geographical movements, and the prevalence of transactions and deceptions, as human characters fight for wealth and fertility. Female characters also enter the spotlight as a result, as influential characters, and also as contributors to the issue of fertility, ancestry, and shift in generation. As the third patriarch and heir to the Abrahamic promise, and the eponymous father of Israel, the establishment of Jacob's "בית אב" is significant. This research presents an interpretation of the Jacob Cycle that highlights the formation of the household of Israel (Jacob).

Introduction

The Jacob Cycle (Gen 25:19-35:29) occupies a significant portion of the patriarchal narratives (Gen 12-50). It recounts the events from the birth of Jacob till his succession as the third patriarch, and the formation of the family that later becomes Israel. Jacob the protagonist goes through various journeys and encounters, which assume a cyclic pattern of "fight and flight", and through which he acquires wealth, produces offspring, and settles in Canaan. These three goals are highly reminiscent of the three principal elements in the Abrahamic blessing of land, blessing, and progeny. Employing the principles of rhetorical and narrative criticism, this research will explore how a four-staged cyclic pattern emerges in the Jacob Cycle, and how repetitive elements and the principle of dual causality operate in the unfolding of the plot. Through this four-staged "fight and flight" process, Jacob establishes his household, which is a significant achievement in his succession as the third patriarch and his position as the eponymous father of Israel.

Methodology

This research employs the synchronic approach, engaging with the text in its present form as a coherent unit. Diachronic questions regarding antecedent traditions, preliminary stages of composition, or original forms and layers embedded in the text are not the chief concerns of this study. The Jacob Cycle will nonetheless be recognized as a heterogeneous composition, the product of a complex process of writing and redaction that draws material from various sources. Attention is paid to the structure of the final form of the text and its meaning, according to the principles of rhetorical criticism and narrative criticism.

The focus on structure is based on the methodology of rhetorical criticism first put forward by Muilenburg, who points out the value of treating the text as an integral whole, stating that "the literary unit is in any event an indissoluble whole, an artistic and creative unity, a unique formulation" and "the passage must be read and heard precisely spoken", for the form and content express the author's intent and meaning.[1] This approach is later explicated by Trible, who also adheres to the principle that meaning is derived from the proper articulation of form and content: first, the text is viewed as an integral whole; second, close reading analyzes the content, structure, style, and relationship between individual units; third, attention to the rhetoric and expressive orientations of the text uncovers authorial intent.[2] Trible draws attention to devices such as climax, inclusion, chiasm, internal breaks, terminal boundaries, and final resolution of major motifs introduced in the beginning, and also the shape, design, and movement of the structure, and the interrelationship between individual units.[3]

Two common features – inclusio and chiasmus – are frequently identified in rhetorical criticism in biblical studies and classic literature.[4] Instead of engaging with these two classical features, however, this research will employ the principles of

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[1] James Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88, no. 1 (1969): 5, 9.
[2] Phyllis Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 26–27.
[3] Trible, 27–28.
[4] John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 201.

narrative criticism, focusing on elements such as plot, scenes, characters, the narrator, point of view and narrative actions. These criteria also shed light on the structure of the Jacob Cycle – namely its delineation, subdivision, and shape.

This study firstly employs narrative criticism in the delimitation of narrative units. As Ska proposes, identification of subdivisions in a piece of text, namely the macro-units (longer narratives) and micro-units (smaller subdivisions) of a narrative, is an essential starting point of a literary analysis, and it is predominantly based on a combination of dramatic criteria – change of place, time, characters, or action, while stylistic criteria such as repetitions, inclusions, and shifts in vocabularies are helpful adjuncts.[5]

Baker identifies several methods of textual division: syntactic indications include change in time (day, year, age of characters), subject (characters involved), or venue (itinerary, departure, settlement, arrival); structural indications are formal literary structures that constitute the framework of the text (headings, subscripts, summaries, formulae, repeated literary patterns); rhetorical devices (repetition, inclusio, chiasm, palistrophe) render a unit self-contained and distinct; references (questions and answers, commands and obedience, promises and fulfilment) are supplementary features that enhance the unity of a narrative.[6]

This research chiefly employs Ska's "dramatic criteria", which Baker terms "syntactic indications" in the internal division of the Jacob Cycle. Ska's "stylistic criteria", which Baker classifies as "structural indications" and "rhetorical devices", and other features Baker calls "references", all serve as adjuncts, and are particularly useful in delineating the external boundaries of the whole Cycle.

Various terminologies are employed for the micro-units of a longer narrative, such as "scene", "sequence", "tableau", "act" and "episode", all of which lack precise definition.[7] Bar-Efrat names the smallest narrative unit an "incident" and the largest

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[5] Jean Louis Ska, *Our Fathers Have Told Us: Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 2000), 1–2.
[6] David W. Baker, "Diversity and Unity in the Literary Structure of Genesis," in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*, ed. Donald J. Wiseman and Allan R. Millard (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 197–215.
[7] Ska, *Our Fathers Have Told Us*, 1.

combination of narratives "an extensive block".[8] A "cycle" or "epic cycle" can also be employed to describe a group of originally separate stories united by a central theme, which "gradually formed a more or less homogeneous unit".[9] Within the Jacob Cycle, Towner employs the term "mini cycle" to describe Isaac's prominence in Gen 24-27.[10] In this research, "subcycle" denotes the "subunit of a cycle", a smaller cycle within a larger one. The terms "Jacob Cycle" and "subcycle" are employed without particular reference to the text's diverse origins or history of composition and redaction. Regarding subdivisions of a larger narrative, Ska's terminologies will be adhered to – an episode being the largest subunit, with its own complete micro-plot within the macro-plot, and further subdivision of an episode create scenes, which are identified by change of time, locale, characters, and narrative action.[11] The change of one or more characters marks the end of one scene and the beginning of another.[12]

Second, this research focuses on the main plot of the narrative. Bar-Efrat identifies common beginnings and finishing points in a plot structure, such as birth and death, or task and fulfillment, between which the central plot develops along a certain pattern.[13] As Walsh comments, "prose narrative naturally expects linear reading, i.e., progressive reading from one subunit to the next as the story unfolds through the text."[14] Alter also remarks, as a protracted and sustained narrative about the fate and happenings of an individual from womb to grave, the Jacob narrative forms a coherent story, and has the purpose and power to capture the reader.[15] In this study, the whole Jacob Cycle will be treated as one unified but composite plot with smaller divisions exhibiting a unique pattern. Analysis of characters, whether the protagonist, antagonists or other foils and crowd actors, will also be subordinate to the principal concern – the main plot. As Ska

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[8] Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 93–94.
[9] John A. Cuddon, "Cycle," in *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (England: Penguin Books, 1991).
[10] W. Sibley Towner, *Genesis* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 193–94.
[11] Ska, *Our Fathers Have Told Us*, 33–36.
[12] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 96.
[13] Bar-Efrat, 93–94.
[14] Jerome T. Walsh, *Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2001), 17.
[15] Robert B. Alter, "Literature," in *Reading Genesis: Ten Methods*, ed. Ronald S. Hendel (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 26–27.

asserts, in biblical narrative, dramatic action is more central than the development of particular characters, whose psychology and personal transformation are less significant, and whose function is to serve the plot and narrative action.[16]

Thirdly, attention is given to the role of the narrator and the implied reader. The latter plays a part in determining the meaning of the text and its rhetorical structure. As Barton clarifies, "rhetorical criticism is not concerned with archetypal structures", but "shapes of arguments", and "concentrates on the way the reader is pulled along through the text rather than on the text in its own right".[17] Bar-Efrat similarly acknowledges, "Structure has rhetorical and expressive value: it is one of the factors governing the effect of the work on the reader and in addition it serves to express or accentuate meaning".[18]

The narrator assumes a critical role in communicating the text's meaning. The narrator in biblical narrative is omniscient and omnipresent, having knowledge of all motives and information.[19] He is "absolutely and straightforwardly reliable".[20] The narrator "assumes divine authority, since the narrator's omniscience is ultimately in symmetry with that of God".[21] He is extradiegetic and heterodiegetic, omniscient and reticent, usually invisible and undramatized, more covert in scenes than summaries, and occasionally intrudes into the narrative.[22]

In the Jacob narrative, the voice of the omniscient and reliable narrator is decisive in discerning the presence of divine approval, or the lack thereof. It crucially distinguishes issues that concern the divine from those that do not evoke any explicit divine endorsement or reprimand. It differentiates between the characters' own point of view and God's perspective. The coexistence of divine interference and human effort, and the intricate relationship between them, is central to the Jacob narrative. In other

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[16] Ska, *Our Fathers Have Told Us*, 17, 83.
[17] Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, 200.
[18] Shimon Bar-Efrat, "Some Observations on the Analysis of Structure in Biblical Narrative," *Vetus Testamentum* 30, no. 2 (1980): 172.
[19] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 17–18.
[20] Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Indiana Literary Biblical Series (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 51.
[21] David M. Gunn, "Reading Right. Reliable and Omniscient Narrator, Omniscient God, and Foolproof Composition in the Hebrew Bible," in *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield*, ed. David J. Clines, Stephen E. Fowl, and Stanley E. Porter (Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1990), 55.
[22] Ska, *Our Fathers Have Told Us*, 24, 31, 34, 44–46, 53–54.

words, the story operates according to these two forces in tension and cooperation. According to Amit, the "dual causality principle" describes a double initiative – divine intervention and human actions – that influences the course of events, and the balance between the two advances the plot.[23] The narrator of the Jacob Cycle plays a crucial role in the dual causality effect, which in turn communicates the story's ideological message.

As the final form of the Jacob Cycle is dominated by narratives, dramatic criteria are employed as the primary method in this research. Nevertheless, "enumerative texts" such as genealogies and "sanctuary narratives" that establish cultic observances are also noticeable components.[24] Genealogical data grants an individual more precise identification, and connects characters from different time periods, creating the "line of the elect" and the "founding of the people of Israel".[25] The ideological intent of the Jacob story, therefore, does not only lie in the main plot, but also in texts more tangential to it. Equally noteworthy is the Cycle's position within a wider corpus and context, namely the patriarchal narratives, the book of Genesis, the Pentateuch, and the whole Tanakh. They give the narrative its sociocultural context and ideological nuance. As Kugel remarks, biblical characters are characters, but also ancestors.[26] Hendel also comments on the importance of cultural memory of ancestral stories, which are "a blend of historical details and imaginative embellishments", in shaping the cultural and group identity of succeeding generations.[27] Kawashima observes two meanings in the patriarchal narratives: at a literal level Israel's "historical" past and national origin, and at a figural level personae that prefigure the nation itself.[28]

The meaning of the Jacob story is therefore tied to the "implied reader". The "implied reader" is "the audience presupposed by the narrative itself", to which the text

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[23] Yairah Amit, "The Dual Causality Principle and Its Effects on Biblical Literature," *Vetus Testamentum* 37, no. 4 (1987): 385–400.
[24] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1985), 406–9; Claus Westermann, *The Promise to the Fathers: Studies on the Patriarchal Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 84–85.
[25] Baker, "Diversity and Unity in the Literary Structure of Genesis," 204–5.
[26] James L. Kugel, "On the Bible and Literary Criticism," *Prooftexts* 1, no. 3 (1981): 230.
[27] Ronald S. Hendel, ed., *Reading Genesis: Ten Methods* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 28.
[28] Robert S. Kawashima, "Literary Analysis," in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr, and David L. Petersen (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012), 89–90.

can make no explicit reference, but who is nonetheless "immanent to a narrative".[29] He is a construct of the narrative world, the role of whom the real reader is invited to assume through the act of reading, in order to participate in the worldview proposed by the narrator and the implied author.[30] He is "the author's image of the recipient that is fixed and objectified in the text by specific indexical signs".[31] According to Matthews, the intended audience of the Jacob story would have "applauded Jacob's cleverness and duplicity" and interpreted the story "as a theological justification for their control of Canaan and its people".[32] The "implied reader" of the narrative is hereby recognized as a descendent of Israel, in the exilic or postexilic or subsequent periods, who looks back to the story of the eponymous father of Israel.

Based on the principles of rhetorical criticism and narrative criticism, this research adopts the technique of close reading and linear reading. A structure of the concerned texts will emerge – namely a cyclic plot pattern with major recurrent themes. The omniscient narrator illustrates the principle of dual causality, and significantly underscores the meaning of the cyclic structure, which is further illuminated by the identified implied reader and understanding of the text within the wider corpus.

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[29] Seymour B. Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, 1978), 150–51.
[30] Ska, *Our Fathers Have Told Us*, 41–43, 54.
[31] Wolf Schmid, "Implied Reader," in *Handbook of Narratology*, ed. Peter Hühn et al. (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), 301.
[32] Victor H. Matthews, "Jacob the Trickster and Heir of the Covenant: A Literary Interpretation," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 12, no. 3 (1985): 195.

Review of Previous Research

Structure of the Jacob Cycle

An analysis of the structure of the Jacob Cycle is indispensable to a discussion of its meaning. This section reviews how previous studies determine or analyze the boundaries, internal divisions, and overall shape of the Jacob Cycle.

Boundaries of the Cycle

The delimitation of textual boundaries in Genesis is complex, for they exhibit a natural fluidity, in which endings and beginnings overlap, and although they constitute part of a larger story of the promised land and nationhood, the demarcation of a particular story significantly affects its meaning.[1] The Jacob story is subject to such variation in the identification of its beginning and termination.

Narratively speaking, Isaac is a prominent character in the early episodes (25:19-28:9), and Jacob only becomes the sole protagonist three chapters later (28:10). Jacob does not disappear from the scene until his burial (50:14), fourteen chapters after Joseph has become the protagonist (37:1-50:26). They are considered "part 2" of the Jacob-Joseph story.[2] Stylistically, the "תּוֹלְדוֹת" formula introduces another concern. The heading *toledot* Isaac (25:19) is immediately followed by the marriage of Isaac and the conception of Esau and Jacob (25:20-22). The death of Isaac (35:27-29) directly precedes *toledot* Esau (36:1), which begins a chapter about Esau (Gen 36). Thereafter *toledot* Jacob (37:2) appears after an opening verse (37:1), which harks back to previous accounts (33:18-35:29).

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[1] David M. Gunn and Danna N. Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 111.

[2] Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50* (Nashville, TN.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 168. Wenham observes that the whole story is deliberately halved with *toledot* Esau (36:1–37:1) in between, so that the genealogies of the elect and non-elect alternate.

The boundaries of the Jacob Cycle are frequently identified as 25:19 to 35:29. This delineation concurs with an analysis of the narrative action. Agyenta proposes five determining literary factors – narrative tension, theme, principle character, time, and space – in the delimitation of the Jacob cycle (25:19 to 35:29): first, the main narrative action (excluding Gen 26 and 34) forms a "closed narrative unit", to which succeeding texts offer no substantial contribution; second, a general theme of "a flight and a return" with "conflict and reconciliation" underlies the story, and this tension is resolved in 35:29; third, Jacob is no longer a principal character after Genesis 35; fourth, the narrative time covers one generation, from the birth of the twins to the time they become the generation of patriarchs upon Isaac's death and burial; fifth, the text covers specific geographical territories, following the protagonist's itinerary from Canaan to Mesopotamia and back.[3] Stylistically, the *toledot* formulas serve as boundary markers. The "תּוֹלְדוֹת" statement in Genesis is especially noticeable and important in the patriarchal narratives, as an introductory formula that marks textual divisions and narrative boundaries.[4] Wenham refers to the *toledot* formulas (25:19, 36:1), which identify the father, the paterfamilias in the respective sections, as "editorial headings" that define textual limits.[5] Blum recognizes the mention of Isaac in the beginning (25:19), and then the account of his death at the end immediately before the *toledot* of Esau (36:1), followed by the *toledot* of Jacob (37:2).[6] Sarna observes that *toledot* Isaac (25:19) balances *toledot* Ishmael (25:12), and *toledot* Jacob (37:2) balances *toledot* Esau (36:1, 19).[7] The same delineation (25:19-35:29) is also observed by Von Rad, Fokkelman, and Terrino.[8]

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[3] Alfred Agyenta, "The Jacob Cycle Narratively Speaking: The Question of the Extent of the Jacob Cycle in the Book of Genesis," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 31, no. 1 (2005): 63–71.
[4] Sarah Schwartz, "Narrative Toledot Formulae in Genesis: The Case of Heaven and Earth, Noah, and Isaac," *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 16, no. 8 (2016): 1, 24.
[5] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 168–69.
[6] Erhard Blum, "The Jacob Tradition," in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, by Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr, and David L. Petersen (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012), 181.
[7] Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1989), 178.
[8] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 264, 339; Jan P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975), 86, 235; [8] Jonathan Terino, "A Text Linguistic Study of the Jacob Narrative," *Vox Evangelica* 18 (1988): 61–62.

The end of the Jacob Cycle is more contested. An earlier termination is identified by some. Fishbane closes the Cycle with "וַיִּהְיוּ בְּנֵי־יַעֲקֹב שְׁנֵים עָשָׂר" (35:22b), excluding the list of Jacob's sons (35:23-26) and report of Isaac's death (35:27-29).[9] Rendsburg affirms the same delineation.[10] Walsh identifies the Jacob cycle itself as 25:19-35:29, but also observes a wider chiastic structure (25:12-35:26), in which the descendent of Ishmael (25:12-18) and descendants of Jacob (35:23-26) bookend the whole Cycle.[11]

A later termination is also recognized. Hamilton refers to 25:19-36:43 as the "Isaac-Jacob Cycle".[12] Westermann considers 35:1-36:43 the conclusion, which resonates with the introduction (25:19-34).[13] Coats gives the Isaac saga even wider boundaries (25:19-37:2), although the main narrative only lasts till 35:15, and the rest (35:16–37:2) is "a looser collection of traditions".[14] Van Peursen puts forward linguistic-syntactical considerations and literary arguments for a major break after 37:1: first, the *wayyiqtol* form in (37:1) suggest continuity with what precedes; second, the *toledot* formula in 37:2 is asyndetic, and the following *qatal* verb indicates a new start; third, the reports of Esau's dwelling (36:8) and Jacob's (37:1) are literary ties.[15] Agyenta, on the other hand, regards 37:1 as the beginning of a new section, as the verse is simply a resumptive commentary on the final events of the Jacob Cycle (35:27-29).[16]

Divisions of the Cycle

[9] Michael A. Fishbane, "Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle (Gen. 25:19-35:22)," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 26, no. 1–2 (1975): 15–38; Michael A. Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (Oxford: One World, 1998), 40.
[10] Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1986), 53; Gary A. Rendsburg, "Chiasmus in the Book of Genesis," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (2020): 17.
[11] Walsh, *Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative*, 29–30.
[12] Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18-50* (Grand Rapids Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 173.
[13] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 409.
[14] George W. Coats, *Genesis: With an Introduction to Narrative Literature* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), 177–78.
[15] W.T. van Peursen, "Delimitation Markers, Chapter Division, Syntax and Literary Structure: The Case of Genesis 37:1–2," in *Textual Boundaries in the Bible: Their Impact on Interpretation*, ed. Marjo C. A. Korpel and Paul Sanders, 2017, 5–9, 14.
[16] Agyenta, "The Jacob Cycle Narratively Speaking: The Question of the Extent of the Jacob Cycle in the Book of Genesis," 69.

The Jacob Cycle has a composite nature. A longer narrative recounts Jacob's two-way journey to Haran (25:19-34, 26:34-35, 27:1-33:17), which involves Jacob, Esau and Laban. Jacob is completely absent in the episode of Gerar (26:1-33). The final episodes back in Canaan (33:18-35:29) appear to lack mutual causality or connection to previous stories, and some scenes may seem abrupt and unfinished. In addition, there are oracles (25:23), blessings (27:27-29, 39-40), lists (35:22b-26), and theophanies (28:10-22, 32:2-3, 32:23-33, 35:9-15), the contribution of which to the main plot can be obscure or debatable.

The most disjointed episode is Isaac at Gerar (26:1-33). It is chronologically dislocated, for Isaac and Rebekah are apparently childless, and its plot is independent from the story of Jacob.[17] Schwartz points out Isaac's heavy presence from 25:19–28:9, causing an overlap between the Isaac story and the Jacob story (25:19–35:29), the former addressing the issue of inheritance, the latter the struggle between Jacob and Esau.[18] As *toledot* Abraham is missing in Genesis, Isaac's story is incorporated into *toledot* Isaac, which is supposed to be about Esau and Jacob.[19] Jacob only fully assumes the role of the protagonist after Isaac retreats from the scene, and his own story officially begins in 28:10 when he embarks upon his journey, which lasts until 35:29 when the question of his return reaches complete resolution.[20]

Westermann arranges the structure "by subject matter", identifying a "large section" that contains exclusively narratives (25:21-33:16), and subsequent "journeys and genealogical notes" (33:17- 36:43).[21] Coats observes two major parts tied together in the form of an itinerary: a narrative with an overarching plot that leads to an explicit resolution (25:19–35:15), and a "looser collection of traditions about the patriarch's last days" (35:16–37:2).[22]

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[17] Blum, "The Jacob Tradition," 181.
[18] Schwartz, "Narrative Toledot Formulae in Genesis," 24–25.
[19] Jonathan Grossman, *Jacob - the Story of a Family [Heb]* (Yedioth Ahronoth Books and Chemed Books, 2019), 18–21.
[20] Eliyahu Assis, *Identity in Conflict: The Struggle between Esau and Jacob, Edom and Israel*, 2016, 42–57.
[21] Westermann, *The Promise to the Fathers: Studies on the Patriarchal Narratives*, 74–94.
[22] Coats, *Genesis*, 178–79.

A general tripartite division of the Jacob Cycle is well recognized. Cohn observes "three large blocks of narrative" concerning Jacob's conflicts with Esau (27-28; 32-33) and Laban (29-31).[23] Blum makes the same division, adding two scenes of unexpected divine encounters at crucial turning points: Jacob and Esau in Canaan (25B+27), theophany at Bethel (28:10–22), Jacob and Laban in Aram (29–32:1), theophanies at Mahanaim and Peniel (32:2-3, 23–33), and Jacob and Esau in Canaan (32–33).[24] Thompson considers this structure an achievement of "structural or chiastic balance".[25] Terrino similarly identifies two stories of "conflict, flight and reconciliation", the one between Jacob and Laban sandwiched between that between Jacob and Esau, while the three episodes of theophanies (Bethel, Peniel and Bethel) separate and conclude the three accounts.[26] Walsh extends the ending to 35:29 in his tripartite delimitation.[27] Westermann identifies three sets of conflicts or rivalry in the "narrative complex" of Jacob's flight and return (27:1-33:20) with a central arc of tension – between the brothers Jacob and Esau (27:41-45; 32; 33), within it between Jacob and Laban (29-31), and further inwards between Leah and Rachel (29:31-30:24) – to which the introduction (25:19-34), conclusion (chapters 35-36), and sanctuary narratives (28:10-22, 32:2-3, 32:23-33, 35:1-7, 35:14-15) are inserted.[28]

Overall Shape of the Cycle

The shape of the Jacob Cycle can be determined by its overriding main plot. Matthews recognizes a literary pattern that also appears in the Abraham and Joseph stories (Gen 12, 37-38, 40-46): "family introduced – problem arises – departure to a

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[23] Robert L. Cohn, "Narrative Structure and Canonical Perspective in Genesis," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 8, no. 25 (1983): 8.
[24] Blum, "The Jacob Tradition," 181–82. Roth also observes Bethel and Peniel standing between Jacob's conflicts with Esau and with Laban. Wolfgang M.W. Roth, "The Text Is the Medium: An Interpretation of the Jacob Stories in Genesis," in *Encounter with the Text: Form and History in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Martin J. Buss (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 106–7.
[25] Thomas L. Thompson, "The Conflict of Themes in the Jacob Narratives," *Perspectives on Old Testament Narrative*, 1979, 18, 21.
[26] Terino, "A Text Linguistic Study of the Jacob Narrative," 58.
[27] Walsh, *Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative*, 29–30.
[28] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 406–9.

foreign land – series or one primary deception – acquisition of wealth – return to Canaan – achievement of goals".[29] Niditch identifies "the pattern of the hero", which consists of five elements: 1) unusual birth, 2) family rivalry with conflict over status, 3) journey or adventures, 4) success in new environment, often including marriage, 5) resolution of rivalry or reunion. These patterns highlight the characterization of Jacob as a national hero.

A recurrent pattern can be identified. Grossman observes six literary units each with three scenes, with a scene of deception in the middle and a final scene of divine revelation in five out of six units: deception of Isaac, Laban and bride switch, flock multiplication, theft of the *teraphim*, the Shechem episode, and the account of Reuben and Bilhah.[30] This underscores the issues of deception, morality and divine reticence.

Wiseman identifies three concentric circles in the Jacob Cycle: an outer circle of Jacob's life, middle circle involving Jacob and Esau, and inner circle concerning Jacob and Laban.[31] Gammie also recognizes a concentric form, albeit with four stories of strife: Leah and Rachel in the center, outside of which Jacob and Laban, further outwards Jacob and Esau, and at the outermost circle Gerar and Shechem.[32]

An "X" pattern, with "two equal halves of matching segments" "presented thematically in exact reverse order",[33] is commonly observed in the Jacob Cycle. It is a clearer and more detailed articulation of the tripartite form. Various terminologies have been proposed for this "X" pattern: concentric,[34] chiastic or chiasmus,[35] palistrophic,[36]

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[29] Matthews, "Jacob the Trickster and Heir of the Covenant: A Literary Interpretation," 187–88.
[30] Grossman, *Jacob - the Story of a Family [Heb]*, 506–11.
[31] Zeev Weisman, *From Jacob to Israel: The Cycle of Stories about Jacob and his Integration into the History of the Patriarchs of the Nation [Heb]* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, the Hebrew University, 1986), 46.
[32] J.G. Gammie, "Theological Interpretation by Way of Literary and Tradition Analysis: Genesis 25-36," in *Encounter with the Text: Form and History in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Martin J. Buss (Philadelphia, Fortress ; Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press for the Society of Biblical Literature, 1979), 118, 121–22.
[33] Stanley D. Walters, "Jacob Narrrative," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David N. Freedman, vol. 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 599.
[34] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 93; Gammie, "Theological Interpretation by Way of Literary and Tradition Analysis: Genesis 25-36," 120.
[35] Fishbane, "Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle (Gen. 25:19-35:22)," 19; Rendsburg, "Chiasmus in the Book of Genesis."
[36] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 202.

"mirror-like arrangement",[37] "technique of symmetry",[38] "paired units",[39] "matching sequence of reverse order",[40] and "a form of reverse symmetry" in which "corresponding elements occur in reverse order on either side of the center of the structure".[41] Peleg differentiates between a chiastic and concentric structure, which significantly determines "reader focus and perspective": a chiastic structure places emphasis on "change" and "inverted relationships between structural elements", while a concentric structure focuses on "the central theme" through the "centrality of its apex".[42]

Fokkelman has identified chiastic structures in smaller units of texts, such as the Bethel scene (28:11-19), birth account (25:20-26b), and birthright transaction (25:29-34).[43] Fishbane, however, is the first to propose a general chiastic structure in the Jacob Cycle (A-B-C-D-E-F-E'-D'-C'-B'-A'): birth and birthright transaction A (25:19-34) mirrors the final return to Bethel and deaths and resolutions A' (35: 1-22); Gerar B (ch 26) and Shechem B' (ch 34) are "interludes" near the beginning and end of the cycle that involve deception and foreigners; the deception of Isaac, theft of "ברכה", fear of Esau and flight from the land (C, 27-28:9) corresponds with return of a "ברכה" to Esau and return to the land (C', ch 33); two "evening encounter with divine beings" near the border and involving blessings (D, 28:10-22; D', ch 32) frames the Haran section (E-F-E' ch 29-31), "the tale within a tale", which contains the "architectonic pivot of the Cycle" (30:25), where Jacob decides to return, and the themes and episodes begin to appear in reverse.[44]

For a text of considerable length and heterogeneity, the chiastic structure offers several advantages. First, as a center is created, attention is brought to a turning point in the plot, or a central theme, through which episodes in the outer circles can be interpreted. According to McKenzie, the chiasmus highlights the birth of the sons of

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[37] Gammie, "Theological Interpretation by Way of Literary and Tradition Analysis: Genesis 25-36," 120.
[38] Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts*, 42.
[39] Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis*, 3.
[40] Rendsburg, 68.
[41] Walsh, *Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative*, 13–14.
[42] Yitshak Peleg, *Going Up and Going Down: A Key to Interpreting Jacob's Dream (Genesis. 28:10-22)* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015), 82–83.
[43] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 71, 93, 95.
[44] Fishbane, "Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle (Gen. 25:19-35:22)," 21–32; Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts*, 40–62.

Israel, and the Jacob Cycle is concerned with Israel's prevalence over Edom and Aram, and its control of the land.[45]

Second, the chiastic structure underscores thematic and verbal linkages between corresponding sections and adjacent sections, which significantly increases the Cycle's internal cohesion. More disjointed episodes, such as Gerar, the theophanies, and the death reports, can be thematically related to other episodes and the whole cycle. Linguistic connections and common motifs also enhance the narrative's artistry.

Furthermore, the chiastic structure brings out covert themes and grants meaning to the main plot. Gammie interprets adjacent sections as a chain of episodes of strive (between Esau and Jacob, Laban and Jacob, Leah and Rachel), the resolution of which appears in the second half of corresponding segments; the whole structure also demonstrates how the change in status of the protagonist, in terms of wealth or progeny, accompanies his two-way trip.[46]

The chiastic structure, however, also presents certain limitations. First, when a section of text is put into mirror image with another corresponding unit, certain keywords and key themes may receive unwarranted attention, while others can be overlooked. As Grossman comments, the title of the section within the chiasm is determined by the commentator.[47] In order to fit the chiasm, certain texts may be unduly divided or united, concealing themes and motifs that may be worthy of more attention. For example, connecting the Dinah episode (34:1-31) and homecomings scenes (35:1-22) with the Gerar episode (26:1-33) and the birthright transaction (25:19-34) removes the coherence in the episodes from Shechem to Mamre (33:18-35:29), and overlooks the significant issue of the identity and consecration of Jacob's household.

Second, the main theme of the whole Jacob story can be inflexibly dictated by the chiasmus. Fishbane's central section (30:1-24, 25-43), which begins after the birth of Judah and ends with the flock multiplication, identifies the birth of Joseph and Jacob's

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[45] Steven L. McKenzie, "You Have Prevailed: The Function of Jacob's Encounter at Peniel in the Jacob Cycle," *Restoration Quarterly* 23 (1980): 228–30.
[46] Gammie, "Theological Interpretation by Way of Literary and Tradition Analysis: Genesis 25-36," 119, 121–23.
[47] Grossman, *Jacob - the Story of a Family [Heb]*, 40.

decision to return home as the pivot of the cycle.[48] Another delineation by Walsh (29:21-30:24, 30:25-43),[49] which includes the birth of all children, draws attention to the growth of Jacob's people and wealth. Wenham's central section, "birth of Jacob's sons" (29:31-30:24), sandwiched between "Jacob's marriages" (29:15-30) and the "flock multiplication" (30:25-31:1),[50] implicitly contrasts Jacob's prosperity with the strife between Jacob and Laban. Without a dominating chiasmus, multiple equally significant themes can be identified in the Jacob Cycle.

Major Themes

The Jacob Cycle has been extensively studied through a vast array of approaches, and various themes have been identified and discussed in various combinations. The following are noteworthy with regard to this research.

Land of Canaan and Ancestry in Haran

Jacob's journey – marrying a wife from Haran and ultimate settlement in Canaan – is central to his election and establishment of his household. Assis observes that the eight chapters from Bethel to Mamre (ch 28-35) is "concerned with the question of Jacob's return" to his homeland and father's household, a gradual, complex and arduous process, for sojourning among the distant "people of the east" (29:1) may imply sliding backwards into "the role of rejected sons", losing the opportunity of returning to the promised land.[51] Hauge describes the east as "the land of the loser", a land associated with those who loses in the competition in the election of the chosen successor.[52]

Jacob's journey to Haran, however, is not negative. Grossman parallels Jacob's experience with that of Abraham's: not only do they both journey between Haran and

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[48] Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts*, 42.
[49] Walsh, *Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative*, 29–31.
[50] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 169.
[51] Assis, *Identity in Conflict: The Struggle between Esau and Jacob, Edom and Israel*, 39–42.
[52] Martin R. Hauge, "The Struggles of the Blessed in Estrangement I," *Studia Theologica - Nordic Journal of Theology* 29, no. 1 (January 1, 1975): 15.

Canaan, but also undertake a similar journey in Canaan – moving from Shechem to Bethel to Hebron, receiving a similar divine revelation at Bethel "וְנִבְרְכוּ בְךָ כֹּל מִשְׁפְּחֹת הָאֲדָמָה" (12:3, 28:14), a promise with a national dimension.[53] Assis also points out how Jacob's departure and Isaac's farewell blessing (28:1-5) resound with Abraham's instruction to his servant and concern about Isaac's continual settlement in Canaan (24:3), both of which emphasize the groom's connection to Canaan.[54]

According to Kennedy's analysis, Canaan is Jacob's home, location of destiny, belonging and memory because of his forefathers, although with regard to ethnic election, it is not Jacob's land of origin.[55] Steinmetz similarly draws attention to the intricate connection between land and family line: Esau imitates Isaac's marriage to a woman from his paternal line while remaining in the land, but Esau's marriage is not endorsed by his parents, and Ishmael's family has already been disqualified; Jacob, in contrast, reaches towards the maternal line and leaves the land, but the marriage is endorsed by both parents.[56] In a similar vein, Syrén contrasts Jacob's marriage to that of Esau's, who takes a wife from the women of the land and daughter of the expelled Ishmael, thus distancing himself from the true lineage in Haran.[57] Exum and Steinberg both comment on the importance of the Terahite lineage of the matriarchs, of maintaining a pure genealogical continuity in the line of descent for Israel and for inheriting the land of Canaan.[58] Thompson compares Jacob, the recipient of the promise who meets the qualifications in the three critical areas of family stock, spatial orientation and religious commitment, with three other characters: Laban does not share the same space or

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[53] Grossman, *Jacob - the Story of a Family [Heb]*, 23, 25–26.
[54] Assis, *Identity in Conflict: The Struggle between Esau and Jacob, Edom and Israel*, 33–36.
[55] Elisabeth R. Kennedy, *Seeking a Homeland. Sojourn and Ethnic Identity in the Ancestral Narratives of Genesis*, Biblical Interpretation Series 106 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 68–69, 71–72, 74.
[56] Devora Steinmetz, *From Father to Son: Kinship, Conflict, and Continuity in Genesis*, 1st ed, Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 100–102.
[57] Roger Syrén, *The Forsaken First-Born: A Study of a Recurrent Motif in the Patriarchal Narratives* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 2009), 121.
[58] J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)Versions of Biblical Narratives* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1993), 107; Naomi A. Steinberg, "Alliance or Descent? The Function of Marriage in Genesis," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 16, no. 51 (September 1, 1991): 45.

religion; Shechem does not possess the same genealogy or religion; Esau does not settle in the same location.[59]

Conflict and Fugitive Hero

In a narrative, "conflict" can occur between two characters, between the protagonist and the antagonist, between the protagonist and society or the environment, or within the protagonist as an internal conflict.[60] The first type is a widely recognized theme in the Jacob Cycle. Fokkelman describes the plot as being "developed through conflict and marked by conflict".[61] Turner comments that strife characterizes the relationship between most of the individuals in the story: Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Esau, Jacob and Laban, Rachel and Leah.[62] As Grossman observes, even Jacob the character admits, "few and evil are his days" (Gen 47:9), and the narrator refrains from positive phrases he has employed for Abraham (25:7) and Isaac (35:28-29) to describe Jacob's death (Gen 47:28, 49:33), characterizing Jacob's story as one of struggle and tension.[63]

Opinions vary in the analysis of the nature, objectives, and results of the conflicts. Gammie recognizes two levels of struggle: the personal struggle between Jacob and Esau, and Jacob's conflicts with Laban, through which he procures the means of heirship, specifically wives and property.[64] Coats considers "strife without reconciliation" a theme that unites the Jacob narrative, as strife leads to separation that is not healed by signs of

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[59] Leonard L. Thompson, *Introducing Biblical Literature: A More Fantastic Country* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 86–87.
[60] J. A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 2013, 152.
[61] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 88.
[62] Laurence A. Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis* (Sheffield: JSOT Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 129.
[63] Grossman, *Jacob - the Story of a Family [Heb]*, 16, 499.
[64] Gammie, "Theological Interpretation by Way of Literary and Tradition Analysis: Genesis 25-36," 118–20.

reconciliation.[65] Vrolijk, on the other hand, reckons a movement from "estrangement to reconciliation" in Jacob's conflicts with Esau, Laban and the mysterious man.[66]

Jacob's conflicts contribute to his characterization as a fugitive hero and the national hero. Hendel explains that Jacob's encounters, interactions, tensions and conflicts with his various adversaries, both human (primarily Esau and Laban) and divine (encounter at Penuel), establish his heroic identity, as a traditional hero of Israel, a founder of political and religious realities.[67] The divine adversary is especially significant, as the wrestle and new name justify Jacob's change of status and identity to being the eponymous father of a nation, and this "dimension of danger" between the divine and his "chosen hero" that shapes the hero is a feature of epic in Mesopotamia as in Israel.[68]

Greenstein establishes a narrative pattern, "the fugitive hero narrative pattern", which is specific and common to the ancient Near East stories: "1) the hero is a younger or youngest brother, 2) there occurs a political and/or personal crisis, 3) the hero flees or is exiled, 4) the hero enjoys the support of a female protector (sometimes a goddess), 5) the hero marries the daughter of his host in exile, 6) the hero assumes a position of responsibility in the host's household, 7) the hero has a divine encounter (often divination or revelation), 8) the hero is joined by kin, 9) there is a seven-year period (usually of exile), 10) The hero repels an attack (or attacks), 11) the hero takes spoil or plunders, 12) the hero returns home, 13) the hero is restored to a position of leadership and/or honor, 14) the hero establishes or renews a cult (often appointing an immediate relative as priest); this pattern is "an aboriginal part of the Israelite cultural heritage", that

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[65] George W. Coats, "Strife Without Reconciliation: A Narrative Theme in the Jacob Traditions," in *Werden Und Wirken Des Alten Testaments: Festschrift Für Claus Westermann Zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Claus Westermann and Rainer Albertz (Neukirchen-Vluyn Neukirchener Verlag Göttingen Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1980), 105–6.
[66] Paul D. Vrolijk, *Jacob's Wealth: An Examination into the Nature and Role of Material Possessions in the Jacob-Cycle (Gen 25:19–35:29)* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 58.
[67] Ronald S. Hendel, *The Epic of the Patriarch: The Jacob Cycle and the Narrative Traditions of Canaan and Israel* (Atlanta Georgia: Scholars Press, 1987), 99–101.
[68] Hendel, 101–3, 105, 109.

the hero cannot succeed by ordinary means, but manages to prosper and return home due to divine favor and assistance.[69]

Brenner identifies a paradigm of the "birth of the hero", a well-known and widely used model, which consists of pre-conception difficulties, divine revelation with varied response on the part of the recipients (the parents), difficult birth of the child, years of maturity of the hero, endeavors to mature, fulfilment of destiny despite threatening dangers, and a process of elimination in cases with more than one potential candidate.[70] When only one mother is featured, the competition between the two potential heroes is expressed through sibling rivalry between two blood brothers (preferably twins).[71]

Divine Theophanies and Reticence

The presence of theophanies in the Jacob Cycle is unmistakable. Divine appearances in the Jacob story are less frequent compared to those in the Abraham narrative, but occur at more crucial times: to Rebekah in the beginning, at Bethel at the end, and at Bethel and Jabbok in critical junctures.[72] Dramatic theophanies, especially in accordance with the theophany type scene, reinforces the reader's identification with the protagonist.

Savran identifies five essential components of the theophany type scene, which are expressed in Bethel and Peniel: 1) isolation of the protagonist from other characters for a solitary experience, increasing the sense of mystery, sanctity and surprise surrounding the encounter, 2) visual element of vision or a dream, or appearance of a divine emissary, which is an important initial experience, before a verbal or audio revelation and main message that offers a deeper communication, 3) unusual display of humility, fear or relief as a human response from the protagonist, a bipolar response to

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[69] Edward L. Greenstein, "The Fugitive Hero Narrative Pattern in Mesopotamia," in *Worship, Women, and War: Essays in Honor of Susan Niditch*, ed. John J. Collins, Tracy M. Lemos, and Saul M. Olyan (Providence (Rhode Island): Brown University, 2015), 24–25, 35.
[70] Athalya Brenner, "Female Social Behavior: Two Descriptive Patterns within the 'Birth of the Hero' Paradigm," in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, The Feminist Companion to the Bible (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 204–6.
[71] Brenner, 219.
[72] Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 97–98.

the numinous being both attractive and frightening, 4) distancing from the initial experience, expression of doubt or anxiety disbelief towards the given message or mission and the divine can also decline a request, 5) externalization of the experience as the protagonist returns to original societal context transformed, establishing a social role or a ritual structure.[73]

On the other hand, divine reticence in interfering with events or expressing judgements on moral matters is also well-recognized. As Walton comments, Jacob apparently controls his own fate, while unequivocal moral or theological evaluation is missing.[74] Grossman points out the narrator's reticence in endorsing or disapproving Jacob's actions, whether he is acting appropriately or provoking God's anger, and the tension between divine surveillance and human initiative, in which the latter assumes more predominance, enhances the ambiguity and mystery of the narrative.[75] Matthews posits that divine appearances articulate the theological perspective of the story, in which "Jacob appears to be acting on his own as the consummate trickster" otherwise.[76]

The combination of divine intervention and reticence is a fundamental factor in the outworking of Jacob's pursuit of progeny, wealth, and return to the land.

Household and Female Characters

Grossman points out the centrality of the building of Jacob's household, illustrated by the birth of Jacob in the beginning of the story, the birth of Jacob's sons in the middle, and the return to Bethel involving Jacob's whole family near the end.[77] Steinmetz connects Jacob's return to Canaan with the building of his family, for the birth of Joseph is a marker for Jacob's decision.[78] The focus on family brings female characters and the issue of fertility into the spotlight.

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[73] George W. Savran, "Theophany as Type Scene," *Prooftexts* 23, no. 2 (2003): 126–34.
[74] Kevin A. Walton, "The Presence and Absence of God in the Jacob Narrative" (University of Durham, 1998).
[75] Grossman, *Jacob - the Story of a Family [Heb]*, 15, 502, 509–11.
[76] Matthews, "Jacob the Trickster and Heir of the Covenant: A Literary Interpretation," 187–88.
[77] Grossman, *Jacob - the Story of a Family [Heb]*, 42, 43, 501.
[78] Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 105.

Female characters in the Bible in general undergo less character development, serve as foils to male characters, and have their appearances limited to marriage, childbearing, and impact on their sons' status.[79] In the seminomadic setting of the narrative, marriage of females is a means to increase a family's power and possessions.[80] The role of women is to maintain family structure, ensure survival, and serve the economic interest of the "בית אב".[81] The roles of the daughter, wife and mother all reflect such androcentric social structure and perspective. Fuchs analyzes the contrast between genders in the betrothal type-scene (24:16 and 29:17): for the groom, it is an initiation from a dependent or unreliable youth into "adult independence and autonomy", while for the bride, who assumes the role of a transferable and prized object, and whose worth is placed on virginity and good appearance, it is a transfer of custody from the father to the husband.[82]

Exum comprehensively analyses the "mother's place". The patriarchs die in honor, while the matriarchs, whose lives do not enjoy the narrator's attention, do not have death accounts with a harmonious closure.[83] The matriarchs are not "characters in their own right", but only wives and mothers who "bear the sons of the promise", so they are only allowed to shape the course of events when they significantly influence their sons, the future patriarchs, whether in terms of their election (becoming Israel) or increase in number (increasing Israel).[84] Whether engaging in a fertility contest, or cooperating with each other to side with Jacob against Laban, the wives Rachel and Leah are acting on behalf of their sons – in the former case numerous sons are born to Jacob

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[79] Ilana Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 75.
[80] John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 62.
[81] Naomi A. Steinberg, "The World of the Family in Genesis," in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, by Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr, and David L. Petersen (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012), 297–98.
[82] Athalya Brenner and Esther Fuchs, eds., "Structure, Ideology and Politics in the Biblical Betrothal Type-Scene," in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, The Feminist Companion to the Bible (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 273.
[83] Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 107.
[84] Exum, 103–4.

although neither woman enjoys complete victory or satisfaction, and in the latter case the family travels to Canaan so that the sons will inherit the land.[85]

Graetz examines the role of daughters: their value lies in their sexual purity and potential to marry and bear children, and they remain in a "temporary and dangerous status" before becoming a wife and mother, and violation of society's sexual code creates problem for the family.[86] Leeb similarly evaluates the precarious situation of a "נערה" (34:3, 12), a woman outside the safety of the home and the authority and protection of her fathers or brothers, usually found on roads, at wells, and in the countryside, and as a result are vulnerable or in danger, especially with regard to sexual matters, and in the narrative they are frequently objects of verbs, being 'brought', 'sought', 'found' and 'gathered'.[87]

The typical passive roles of mothers, wives and daughters in biblical narratives are found in the Jacob Cycle, but Jacob's female family members also act outside this stereotypical pattern.

Wealth

The notion of wealth is a feature in various episodes in the Jacob Cycle. Hauge notices the combination of the wife and wealth motifs in more than one stories in the patriarchal narratives, both being "objects to be liberated" that accompanies the protagonist's return from a foreign land (12:10-20, ch 20, 26:6-11, 29-32:1).[88] Vrolijk, on the other hand, considers relationships the overriding factor and the only appropriate interpretive lens through which the "nature and role of material possessions" in the Jacob-narrative is to be understood, for "material possessions can only be enjoyed if various relationships (both human and divine) are in order."[89] Hauge's observation is apt,

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[85] Exum, 121–22, 131.
[86] Naomi Graetz, "Dinah the Daughter," in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, ed. Athalya Brenner, The Feminist Companion to the Bible (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 306.
[87] Carolyn S. Leeb, *Away from the Father's House: The Social Location of the Na'ar and Na'arah in Ancient Israel* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 125, 150.
[88] Martin R. Hauge, "The Struggles of the Blessed in Estrangement II," *Studia Theologica - Nordic Journal of Theology* 29, no. 1 (January 1, 1975): 114–17.
[89] Vrolijk, *Jacob's Wealth*, 296.

for "family and wealth" is indeed a major objective in Jacob's various movements and conflicts.

Deception and Trickery

The prevalence of deception and elements of the trickster genre in the Jacob story is undeniable. Williams recognizes six episodes of deception in the Jacob Cycle that exhibit similarities: deception of Isaac (27:1-40) and bride-switch (29:15-30) both occur through disguise, illusion, and substitution; Laban's deception of Jacob's wages (31:4-9, 38-42) and the brothers' deception of the Shechemites (34:1-31) both consist of deceptive bargains; Jacob's escape (31:17-18, 20-29) and the *teraphim* theft (31:19, 30-35) take place in the same context.[90] Gammie identifies "deceit" as a "fairly prominent" motif in the Jacob Cycle, a tactic employed by multiple characters (Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Laban, Rachel, Jacob's sons).[91]

Farmer attributes the Jacob story to the folklore "trickster" genre, in which the trickster hero, a weak and disadvantaged person in his own society, who survives, prospers, and triumphs over more powerful opponents through wit, trickery, cleverness, and deceit rather than strength, assumes the role of the perpetrator but is also a victim of deception and other's tricks.[92] There is a chain of cheating in the narrative – "*le trompeur trompé*" – as Jacob and Laban the tricksters are both tricked in ways reminiscent of their deception of others.[93] The stories of deception can also be perceived as comic irony, in which Jacob triumphs through deception, but also receives ironic treatment, and this national story can allow later Israelites to laugh at themselves and their hostile neighbors.[94]

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[90] Michael J. Williams, *Deception in Genesis: An Investigation into the Morality of a Unique Biblical Phenomenon*, Studies in Biblical Literature, 2001, 18–24.
[91] Gammie, "Theological Interpretation by Way of Literary and Tradition Analysis: Genesis 25-36," 119.
[92] Kathleen A. Farmer, "The Trickster Genre in the Old Testament" (Ann Arbor, University Microfilms International, 1980).
[93] Blum, "The Jacob Tradition," 184.
[94] Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, 107.

Nicolas calls Jacob a “full-blown trickster figure”, as his entire narrative cycle is marked by the typical characteristics: deception, plotting and scheming, unfair exchanges, sexual prowess, shrewd manipulation of the outcome, clever trick to pacify a potential enemy, and successful trickery followed by departure with wealth.[95] McKenzie observes the merging of the themes of “blessing”, “fighting” and “deception” in Jacob’s name, as he is a "heel-grabber" and "supplanter" who fights and deceives for blessing.[96] Matthews considers the trickster figure, which is an effective, universal, and wide-ranged literary character ranging from the hero to the duped, an underlying older motif that connects disparate episodes, binding together various conflicts and characters, allowing Jacob the trickster and impetuous character to mature, and preparing him for covenantal heirship.[97]

Jackson defines the trickster as a powerless, marginal, and humorous figure, a survivor of minimal existence and status at the edge of society, who successfully employs alternative means such as deception or cunning to advance his position, crossing boundaries and disrupting the established order and status quo, but after the deception is revealed, returns to being the outsider with diminished status.[98]

Hendel provides another perspective of the trickster figure, which is not a marginalized figure but a cultured man: a highly regarded figure in ancient Near East traditions without “confusion and strife”; so when Jacob, “a man of culture *and* a trickster” (reminiscent of Hypsouranios, Gilgamesh, and Horus), a "smooth" man in terms of both appearance and personality, masquerades as Esau, the reckless and impulsive hairy hunter of nature (like Enkidu, Ousoos and Seth), he declares the victory of the craftiness of culture over the thoughtlessness of nature.[99]

Opinions also differ regarding the divine endorsement of deception. Vrolijk considers possessions obtained by trickery without hints of divine intervention, such as

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[95] Dean A. Nicholas, *The Trickster Revisited Deception as a Motif in the Pentateuch*, 2009, 52–58.
[96] McKenzie, “You Have Prevailed,” 228–29.
[97] Matthews, “Jacob the Trickster and Heir of the Covenant: A Literary Interpretation,” 186–87, 190.
[98] Melissa A. Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible: A Subversive Collaboration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 44–45.
[99] Hendel, *The Epic of the Patriarch*, 128–29, 131.

the plunder from Shechem, "a curse".[100] Nicolas observes that the text does not specify whether Jacob's success is due to his trickery or divine endorsement, although the trickster figure is appreciated for his duplicity in traditional understanding.[101] Anderson asserts that God is a trickster figure in the Jacob story: God is not dissociated from all deception, but engages in deception to advance the ancestral promise, like trickster deities in modern anthropological studies and a number of ancient Near East texts.[102] The "divine trickster" is a fitting description to the complex issue of divine reticence and moral ambiguity in the Jacob narrative.

Election and Abrahamic Blessing

The basic theme in the Jacob Cycle is the legitimate succession of the Abrahamic covenant,[103] but for Jacob's generation, the question of covenantal heirship is complicated by the presence of twins.[104] Isaac's election over Ishmael anticipate the question of inheritance between Isaac's two sons.[105] However, election between the twins Esau and Jacob is not unequivocal like that between Ishmael and Isaac, and a new conflict ensues.[106] The election is also no longer "under strict divine control",[107] and the issue is complicated by the law of primogeniture that passes inheritance to the firstborn.[108] The ambiguity is reflected in divine passivity and inactivity regarding selection of one of the twins, and the absence of Isaac's explicit expression of rejection of either of his sons.[109]

Fulfillment of the Abrahamic blessing of land, seed and blessing is another issue. Turner observes three levels of fulfillment: there is marked improvement regarding the

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[100] Vrolijk, *Jacob's Wealth*, 300.
[101] Nicholas, *The Trickster Revisited Deception as a Motif in the Pentateuch*, 53.
[102] John E. Anderson, *Jacob and the Divine Trickster: A Theology of Deception and YHWH'S Fidelity to the Ancestral Promise in the Jacob Cycle* (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 172.
[103] Larry R. Helyer, "The Separation of Abram and Lot: Its Significance in the Patriarchal Narratives," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 8, no. 26 (1983): 77–88.
[104] Matthews, "Jacob the Trickster and Heir of the Covenant: A Literary Interpretation," 186–87.
[105] Assis, *Identity in Conflict: The Struggle between Esau and Jacob, Edom and Israel*, 20–21.
[106] Grossman, *Jacob - the Story of a Family [Heb]*, 21–22.
[107] Cohn, "Narrative Structure and Canonical Perspective in Genesis," 10.
[108] Thompson, "The Conflict of Themes in the Jacob Narratives," 16–17.
[109] Assis, *Identity in Conflict: The Struggle between Esau and Jacob, Edom and Israel*, 27, 30–31.

promise of nationhood, considering Rebekah's oracle, Isaac's farewell blessing, and the twins' families; there is partial fulfillment concerning the land, for Jacob has purchased land but dwells as a foreigner; there is disastrous failure regarding "blessing to the nations".[110]

The ambiguity of election between the twin brothers is the starting point of the Jacob story, and the extent to which Jacob has fulfilled the Abrahamic promises is a worthwhile topic of discussion.

Future Israel

The Jacob story contains an "unfinished" nature. Turner points out how the divine oracle to Rebekah and Isaac's blessings are not fulfilled in the book of Genesis.[111] This points to an interpretation that takes into account later history. Nations descend from the characters, and the story can be a "historical blueprint of the future rise and fall of nations".[112] Jacob's journeys – from Canaan to Paddan-Aram and back, and subsequently descending to Egypt and returning (after death), broadly trace the routes that his descendants the Israelites would go – their servitude in Egypt and the Babylonian exile.[113]

The Jacob cycle is also concerned with defining Israel: externally in relation to Haran, Ishmael and Esau who are deselected, and internally by its twelve tribes.[114] In preceding generations, one chosen son carries on the lineage and the Abrahamic promise, but beginning from Jacob, all twelve sons are chosen to become ancestors of the twelve tribes.[115] The shift is accompanied by change in marital requirements; the official

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[110] Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, 135–41.
[111] Turner, 115, 119, 124–35.
[112] Assis, *Identity in Conflict: The Struggle between Esau and Jacob, Edom and Israel*, 22.
[113] Yair Zakovitch, *Jacob: Unexpected Patriarch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 6.
[114] Robert A. Oden, "Jacob as Father, Husband, and Nephew: Kinship Studies and the Patriarchal Narratives," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102, no. 2 (1983): 196.
[115] Karin R. Andriolo, "A Structural Analysis of Genealogy and Worldview in the Old Testament," *American Anthropologist* 75, no. 5 (1973): 1660–63.

separation at Gilead completely breaks Jacob's connection with Paddan-Aram, and marrying Terahite women hence becomes unnecessary and unfeasible.[116]

The connection between the person of Jacob and the nation of Israel, and the implications of the Jacob Cycle for later Israelite history and identity, explain the "unfinished" nature of the story, and the presence of elements such as etiological notes. This interpretive lens places the story in a wider perspective.

[116] Sarah Shectman, ed., "Rachel, Leah, and the Composition of Genesis.," in *The Pentateuch International Perspectives on Current Research*, by Thomas B. Dozeman, Konrad Schmid, and Baruch J. Schwartz (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 207–12, 220–22.

Four Subcycles and Recurrent Themes

Four Subcycles

This research accepts the demarcation of the Jacob Cycle as 25:19-35:29. In terms of stylistic criteria, this delimitation coincides with Toledot Isaac (25:19), which is preceded by *toledot* Ishmael (25:12) and immediately followed by *toledot* Esau (36:1,9) and subsequently *toledot* Jacob (37:2). With regard to dramatic criteria, it begins with Isaac's marriage and the twin's conception and birth (25:20-22, 24-26) and ends with the death of Isaac the father and his burial by the twins (35:29). The report of Isaac's age at his death "וַיִּהְיוּ יְמֵי יִצְחָק מְאַת שָׁנָה וּשְׁמֹנִים שָׁנָה" (35:28) also harks back to the report of his age at his marriage "וַיְהִי יִצְחָק בֶּן־אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בְּקַחְתּוֹ אֶת־רִבְקָה" (25:20) and during the twin's birth "וְיִצְחָק בֶּן־שִׁשִּׁים שָׁנָה בְּלֶדֶת אֹתָם" (25:26). A generation begins with Isaac's marriage and the twins' birth, and Isaac's death signifies its end. The beginning of the Jacob story is not placed later in the narrative when Jacob becomes the sole protagonist. Although Isaac occupies a vital role in the early episodes (25:19-28:10), the early years of the twins (25:19-34) and the theft of the blessing (26:24-28:9) display robust continuity in featuring the fraternal issues between Jacob and Esau. The termination of the Jacob story is not placed later, even though the account about Esau (36:1-43) echoes the separation of Jacob and Esau (36:6-8, 33:12-17), and so does the report of Jacob's settlement in Canaan (37:1). The headings *toledot* Esau (36:1,9) and *toledot* Jacob (37:2) indicate new beginnings. The report of Jacob's location (37:1) can be reckoned as resumptive.

This research divides the Jacob Cycle into four sections, each of which contributes to a stage of development in the life of the protagonist. Jacob arrives a new location, encounters and interacts with a new group of people, and departs with a new status. The first section (25:19-28:22) begins in Beersheba, involving Isaac, Rebekah and Esau, and ends in Bethel (28:10-22), featuring Jacob alone with the divine. The second section (29:1-32:1) begins with Jacob arriving Haran (29:1), and ends with Jacob and his large young family officially separating from Laban in Gilead (32:1). The third section (32:2-33:17) takes place in the Transjordan. Jacob faces his brother Esau, and

successfully brings his family to Succoth, avoiding Seir. The fourth section (33:18-35:29) takes place in Canaan. Jacob's family interacts with the Shechemites, and undergoes consecration and a shift in generation as they complete their journey and return to the ancestral home.

Each of the four sections constitute one "subcycle", which contains a plot pattern of "fight and flight". The designation "fight and flight" only alludes to the medical term "fight or flight response" as a pun, and does not refer to the physiological or psychological states of the characters involved. The terms "fight", "flight" and "freeze" are also understood metaphorically and symbolically. With each new subcycle, Jacob engages with a certain level of strife against the corresponding antagonist(s), and subsequently flees or departs. The "flight" frequently involves an element of threat or fear, a divine revelation or message, and a certain form of blessing. With every subcycle, Jacob advances in stages of life and his attainment of the three central goals of land, progeny and wealth. The four subcycles make up Jacob's four-part journey from birth to being an established patriarch with his own household.

The episode of Isaac in Gerar (26:1-33) is excluded in this study, for it is more disconnected from the rest of the Jacob Cycle in terms of chronology and principal characters. The repetitive themes identified in this research, however, also prevails in the Gerar episode, and its function within, and relationship with, the four subcycles, can be the topic for further research.

The structure of four subcycles offers several advantages and unique vantage points. First, Jacob's progression in stages of life is emphasized, which highlights the establishment of his household, a significant component in his election and succession as the third patriarch. Second, as the main plot is less perceived as a two-way journey (Canaan to Haran and return) or three-part conflict with two parties (conflict with Esau, Laban, and Esau), focus is not placed on the issues of morality, narrative irony and interpersonal relationships, but on Jacob's acquisition of wealth and the role of his female family members, which significantly contribute to his prosperity and rise in power and status. Moreover, attention is paid to the selective divine intervention and

reticence regarding Jacob's three central objectives, and the principle of dual causality and its significant effects are highlighted.

The Jacob Cycle has a composite nature. There are interactions with Esau, interactions with Laban, internal family conflicts, theophanies, ritualistic actions, etiological notes and a genealogical list. These episodes and reports are not treated in isolation purely due to their nature and genre, but are considered part of the main plot, belonging to one of the four subcycles of "fight and flight".

In the four subcycles, multiple themes reappear: geographical movement, an action of "fight and flight", divine intervention, involvement of female characters, the notion of fertility, acquisition of wealth, and various occurrences of transaction and deception. The interplay of these repetitive themes will accompany, and attest to, the four major stages in the establishment of Jacob's household, which involves the three central goals of wealth, progeny, and settlement in the land.

Six Recurrent Themes

Geographical Movement

Jacob's return to Canaan is a constant refrain in the narrative (27:45, 28:15, 30:25, 31:3, 31:13, 31:18, 32:10), and so is the Abrahamic promise of the land (28:4, 28:13, 35:12). Previous studies have addressed the significance of this two-way journey in terms of Jacob's election and marriage to the Terahite line. Jacob's geographical movements, however, also consist of four well-delineated stages, which are significant to his election.

Jacob's life is one of "rising and going".[1] Four main parties of antagonists and secondary characters are featured in each of the four subcycles, and Jacob often meets new and symbolic characters upon arrival: Rachel representing Laban's household at the

[1] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18-50*, 374.

well (29:6), the angelic camp of Mahanaim (32:2-3) that anticipates meeting Esau, and the sons of Hamor (33:19), who are inhabitants of Shechem.

Each subcycle involves Jacob's departure, accompanied by a divine message or a certain form of blessing, or both. Jacob leaves Beersheba with Isaac's blessing (28:1-4) and receives a theophany at Bethel that acknowledges his departure (28:13-15). He receives a divine word to leave Laban (31:3), and Laban bids his offspring farewell with blessings in Gilead (32:1). Jacob urges Esau to receive his blessing (33:11) before their separation in the Transjordan. After receiving a divine command to leave Shechem (35:1), Jacob is directly blessed by the divine in Bethel (35:9).

Jacob's movements also involve an element of fear. Jacob shows fear ("ירא") after the Bethel theophany "וַיִּירָא וַיֹּאמֶר מַה־נּוֹרָא הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה" (28:17), is afraid ("ירא") of Laban as he flees (31:31), and displays intense fear "וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד וַיֵּצֶר לוֹ" (32:8) upon hearing Esau coming with four hundred men. The Canaanites also fear "חִתַּת אֱלֹהִים" as the Jacobites "flee" Shechem (35:5).

Fight and Flight

A pattern of conflict followed by separation has been identified by previous studies. Syrén considers the dominant motif in the Jacob-Esau cycle to be the sequence of conflict followed by separation or departure, which "may take the form of flight or it may be voluntary".[2] This research reckons this "fight and flight" pattern the backbone of the main plot, which gives the narrative a four-part cyclic shape with repetitive themes.

In the first subcycle, Jacob fights against Esau for birthright, blessings, marriage arrangements, and parental acknowledgement. He then flees Beersheba for his life and his marriage plan. In the second subcycle, Jacob fights against Laban for the fruits of his labor (family and wealth) and his independence. He "fights" to flee from Laban, and to be free from Laban, which is a protracted battle. In the third subcycle, Jacob fights for the "favor in Esau's eyes", on one hand to avoid revenge and ensure his family's safety, and on the other hand to separate from Esau (his "flight"). In the fourth subcycle, Jacob's

[2] Syrén, *The Forsaken First-Born: A Study of a Recurrent Motif in the Patriarchal Narratives*, 66.

sons fight on his behalf against the Shechemites, for the sake of the family's honor and identity. Immediately thereafter, Jacob's family undertakes a ceremonial journey to Bethel, which shares multiple similar features with previous "flights".

This study does not engage with issues of reconciliation and interpersonal relationships, which are apparently irrelevant for the implied reader. Interpreting Jacob's story as a national hero epic is warranted in view of the wider biblical corpus. Nevertheless, instead of engaging with the narrative archetype of a fugitive or national hero, this research focuses on how the four subcycles of "fight and flight" contribute to Jacob's more impending and attainable objectives – acquisition of wealth, having multiple offspring and returning to the promised land.

Divine Intervention

Divine appearances are unmistakable in the Jacob Cycle, and emerge in various forms in all four subcycles. Messages can be directly given to different characters without any accompanying phenomena. Jacob receives simple and straightforward commands to set off (31:3, 35:1), Laban receives instructions in a dream (31:24, 29), and Rebekah receives an enigmatic oracle upon inquiry (25:22-23). Only Jacob the protagonist, however, experiences theophanies with an intense visual and ethereal component, and does so repeatedly. They include the dream at Bethel (28:12-17), vision at Mahanaim (32:2-3), wrestle at Peniel (32:25-33), and second vision at Bethel (35:9-13). Dramatic appearances reinforce the reader's identification with Jacob.

Divine messages address two subject matters. One is the Abrahamic covenant or future promises of a national dimension, such as Rebekah's oracle (25:23) and promises at Bethel (28:12-15, 35:9-13). The other is Jacob's current itinerary (28:15, 31:3, 35:1).

Furthermore, different levels of divine attention and involvement are given to the three central goals – land, progeny and wealth. Jacob's return to the land is given clear and direct guidance. The issue of fertility is associated with both divine and human actions. Wealth and prosperity are considered blessings from the divine by a number of characters, but such claims are not explicitly confirmed by the narrator. Selective

reticence in the issues of wealth and fertility is central to the outworking of the dual causality principle and formation of the cyclic main plot. It allows male and female human characters to fight, flee, conduct transaction, and employ deception in their quest for fertility and wealth.

Issue of Fertility and Acquisition of Wealth

In the Jacob Cycle, fertility (birth of children) is closely related to the accumulation of wealth (increase in livestock). The former concerns the family line; the latter ensures their survival. They are recurrent motifs and Jacob's central objectives.

Jacob's party grows in number, or avoids reduction in number throughout the four subcycles. He leaves his father's house as bachelor looking for a wife, with Isaac's farewell blessing of progeny and fertility (28:3-4). In Haran, Jacob builds his sizable family, and leaves with his wives and children. By avoiding Seir and Esau, he successfully brings his large young family to rest and recuperation in Succoth. In Canaan, Jacob's sons capture all the women and children from Shechem (34:29). The second journey to Bethel consecrates the family and promises progeny. By the end of the narrative, Jacob's era of fertility comes to a close.

Regarding wealth, Jacob first battles for Isaac's blessing of abundance (27:28). He leaves Beersheba with few belongings, indicated by his apparent inability to pay Laban any brideprice apart from his own labor, and his confession at Jabbok (32:11). Jacob leaves Haran with massive wealth after a prolonged struggle. In the Transjordan, wealth is a means to purchase peace, and Jacob subsequently builds his family a house and booths in Succoth. Wealth becomes an object of contention again in Shechem, and Jacob's sons acquire massive possessions, albeit through violence.

The establishment of Jacob's household involves land, fertility, and wealth, while the Abrahamic blessing consists of land, seed, and blessing. A differentiation between blessing and wealth is warranted. The meaning of blessing in the Bible often depends on context, frequently denoting a positive relationship between two people or parties, one of

the effects of blessing being fertility and prosperity.[3] Although blessings and material prosperity are not identical, they are apparently interconnected notions in the eyes of the characters in the Jacob Cycle. The notion of blessing is a constant refrain. Blessings are given from one human being to another in the name of the divine (27:27-29, 28:3-4). A blessing of abundance is taken seriously (27:4, 7, 12, 19, 23, 25, 33-36, 38), and the desire for it can be intense (27: 10, 33-36, 38, 41). Prosperity is considered a blessing from the divine by Laban and Jacob (27:27-29; 30:27, 30). A blessing can be handed from one person to another in the form of possessions as a gift to obtain favor (33:11). Direct blessing from the divine, or a divine being, can also be given (32:27, 30; 35:9). Nevertheless, the narrator refrains from directly equating material gain to divine blessing, and wealth appears to be up for grabs for various characters through carnal means. The narrator also refrains from criticizing Jacob's interpersonal relationships and tactics of accumulating wealth.

Involvement of Female Characters

The Jacob Cycle features a number of named females: Rebekah, Leah, Rachel, Zilpah, Bilhah, Dinah and Deborah. There are typical "silent and fertile females". Zilpah and Bilhah, being handmaids and concubines, have no voice, only serve a child-bearing role, and do not even struggle with infertility like the matriarchs do. Leah is exceedingly fertile, and most of her appearances involves her womb.[4] Nevertheless, female characters in Jacob's family do not only assume passive roles.

Each subcycle features one or more predominant women, who are always Jacob's close family members – his mother, wives, or daughter. She can be the person who manipulates Jacob and commands him to action: Rebekah directs and controls Jacob's fight against Esau, and Leah and Rachel make decisions for conjugal arrangements. She can mirror Jacob's actions: the rivalry between the sisters Leah and Rachel echoes that between Esau and Jacob. She can assist and support Jacob in his plans and actions:

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[3] James McKeown, "Blessings and Curses," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. D. Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL ; Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 84.
[4] Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible: A Subversive Collaboration*, 51–52.

Rebekah arranges for Jacob's departure, and Leah and Rachel support Jacob's plan to leave Haran. She can be the person that Jacob (or his representative) strives to protect. Jacob fights for the hand of Rachel, for the ownership of his wives and children against Laban, and for the safety of his women and children against Esau. Jacob's sons fight for the sake of their sister Dinah. Her actions can also initiate a whole episode of conflict between men (Rebekah in Beersheba and Dinah in Shechem). Jacob's female family members are always deeply involved in his "fight and flight". Despite conforming to the typical roles of female characters in biblical narratives, the prominent female characters in the Jacob Cycle – Jacob's mother, wives and daughter – all have palpable presences and exert substantial influence over their male family members.

Female characters also bring to light the issue of ancestry and shift in generation. Their valuable pedigrees make noteworthy contributions to the story, and are crucial factors for Jacob's successful marriage. Rebekah, Leah and Rachel all come from the house of Bethuel, a desirable family line with regard to the lineage of the elected. Jacob's positive relationship with Rebekah gives him an advantage in his marriage plan. His wives build him a household with the proper bloodline. In the patriarchal narratives, the matriarchs' Terahite ancestry legitimates their husband's heirship.[5] This distinguishes Jacob's marriage from that of Esau's, which is outside of appropriate kinship boundaries.[6] Dinah, the daughter of the house of Jacob, continues to draw attention to the issue of the family's purity and identity among other people groups.

Transaction and Deception

Previous studies have engaged with the notion of the trickster and the trickster genre, and questions of morality. This research focuses on the role and nature of transaction and deception with respect to the main plot.

Every subcycle features one or more scenes that involves an exchange of material wealth, services or status between two parties. The transaction always concerns marriage,

[5] Steinberg, "The World of the Family in Genesis," 298.
[6] Steinberg, "Alliance or Descent?," 49–50.

heirship or property. The process can be straight forward (sale of Esau's birthright, mandrakes for conjugal rights with Jacob), protracted but successful (gifts for favor in Esau's eyes), complicated by deception (Jacob's marriage), or even aborted (Shechem's marriage proposal). Jacob is usually one of the parties making the transaction with his antagonist (birthright sale, marriage agreement with Laban, flock multiplication), but can also serve as the object of transaction (mandrakes for conjugal rights) or assume a quiet and passive role (deal with the Shechemites).

Most transactions involve a certain degree of deception. It can be clear and blatant (bride-switch, the Shechemites' circumcision), or include various degrees of ambiguity (multiplication of flocks, Jacob's wages, gifts for the favor in Esau's eyes). It can take place outside the context of a transaction (theft of Isaac's blessing, theft of the *teraphim*). Jacob can act as the deceiver (Isaac's blessing) or the one being deceived (bride-switch).

The objective of a transaction or deception is often wealth and status; a female character is frequently deeply involved; there is almost always no criticism from the divine or the narrator; Jacob's life invariably undergoes a drastic change as a result.

Subcycle One (25:19-28:22) From the House of the Father to the House of God

The first subcycle begins in the house of Isaac in Beersheba, where Jacob fights against his brother Esau through several stages, the process of which involves transaction and deception. With Rebekah's assistance, Jacob is ultimately victorious, but is required to flee, creating a neat and clear-cut pattern of "fighting followed by fleeing". The theophany and divine message at Bethel assure Jacob of his geographical movement. The notions of wealth and progeny begin to emerge, in the forms of blessings, marriage plans, and divine promises. The interplay of all these elements contribute to the first stage of Jacob's development, from his conception to a potential suitor ready for marriage.

Structure of the Subcycle

Boundaries

The first subcycle begins with Isaac's marriage and Rebekah's pregnancy (25:19-21), and ends with the completion of Jacob's speech at Bethel (28:22). The break with the second subcycle is marked by changes in the type of narration (28:22 and 29:1).

Jacob's vow in the form of a direct speech (28:20-22) completes his interaction with the divine at Bethel. This is immediately followed by the narrator's account of Jacob embarking on his journey towards the east (29:1), which this study considers the beginning of the second subcycle. A demarcation between 28:22 and 29:1 is also well-recognized.[7] Nõmmik considers 29:1 a continuation of the itinerary in 28:10, and

[7] von Rad, *Genesis*, 287; Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 123; Michael A. Fishbane, "Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle (Gen. 25:19-35:22)," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 26, no. 1–2 (1975): 15–38; Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts*, 40; Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1986), 53; Rendsburg, "Chiasmus in the Book of Genesis," 17; Coats, *Genesis*, 177–78; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 461; Terino, "A Text Linguistic Study of the Jacob Narrative"; Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 201; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 169, 227; Blum, "The Jacob Tradition," 182; Walsh, *Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative*, 29–30; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18-50*, 251.

observes a chiastic structure in 28:10-29:1, the two verses in the outermost framework referring to Jacob's journey with same verb "הלך" and a mention of place names – Beersheba, Haran, and land of the east.[8] Nõmmik's observation is valuable in connecting the Bethel scene with Jacob's arrival at Haran (29:1) linguistically. Nevertheless, since this research chiefly employs dramatic criteria as a standard of textual demarcation, 29:1 is regarded as the beginning of the second subcycle, where "land of the people of the east" indicates a significant shift in geographical location and anticipate characters who will dominate the spotlight for several chapters to come.

Shape and Main Plot

According to the dramatic criteria, the first subcycle (25:19 to 28:22, excluding 26:1-33) includes the follow episodes: exposition and birth of the twins (25:19-28), birthright transaction (25:29-34), information about Esau's marriage (26:34-35), deception of Isaac (27:1-40), aftermath of Isaac's deception and Jacob's departure (27:41-28:5), Esau's marriage (28:6-9), and the Bethel episode (28:10-22).

The "fight and flight" pattern roughly corresponds to the shift in geographical location. In Beersheba, Jacob and Esau undergo four stages of "fighting", which increase in length and detail of description, and each stage is preceded by supplementary information that complements and illuminates the conflict. The marriage of Isaac and Rebekah and the issue of infertility and conception (25:19-21) set the stage for the intrauterine struggle (25:22). The divine oracle (25:23) anticipates the competitive birth scene (25:24-26). The description of the grown-up twins and parental favoritism (25:27-28) sets the groundwork for the birthright transaction (25:29-34) and deception of Isaac (27:1-40). The two accounts of Esau's marriages (26:34-35; 28:6-9) envelop the latter, and grant significance to Jacob's flight (27:41-46, 28:1-22).

The climax and culmination of the four stages of fighting leads to Jacob's flight, which begins in Beersheba (27:41-28:9), and continues through the nocturnal theophany

[8] Urmas Nõmmik, "Inclusio in Genesis 28 and 32 Synchronically and Diachronically," in *Doubling and Duplicating in the Book of Genesis: Literary and Stylistic Approaches to the Text*, ed. Elizabeth R Hayes and Karolien Vermeulen (Eisenbrauns, 2016), 184–87.

at Bethel (28:10-22), where Jacob receives his first personal theophany (28:12) and divine word (28:13-15) in a dream, which approves of his geographical movement.

Recurrent Themes

Geographical Relocation

The three locations Beersheba, Bethel and Haran are all designated "בית". The protagonist Jacob departs from his father's house, "בֵּית אָבִי" (28:21), heading towards the house of Bethuel "בֵּיתָה בְתוּאֵל" in Paddan Aram (28:2), and finds himself at the house of God "בֵּית אֱלֹהִים" (28:17, 22).

Jacob calls Beersheba "בֵּית אָבִי" (28:21), and Laban acknowledges so – "בֵּית אָבִיךָ" (31:30). Isaac the paterfamilias indeed has a palpable presence in the Beersheba episodes (25:19-28:9), giving blessings and sending off Jacob (27:27-29, 28:1-5). The combination of his influential status and passivity also allows Rebekah and Jacob to influence the course of events. While Beersheba is Jacob's "בית אב", the broader area of Canaan signified by Bethel "הָאֲדָמָה הַזֹּאת" (28:15) is Jacob's ancestral homeland. The area is later repeatedly designated so: "אֶרֶץ אֲבוֹתֶיךָ" (31:3), "מוֹלַדְתֶּךָ" (31:3), "אֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתֶּךָ" (31:13), "אַרְצֶךָ" (32:9) and "מוֹלַדְתְּךָ" (32:9). The destination of Jacob's flight, Haran (Paddan Aram), is the "בית אב" of Abraham (24:7, 38, 40) and his "מוֹלֶדֶת" (24:4, 7). Rachel and Leah call the house of Laban "בֵּית אָבִינוּ" (31:14). Jacob therefore leaves his "בית אב" in Beersheba, and his "מוֹלֶדֶת" represented by Bethel, heading towards his grandfather Abraham's "בית אב" and "מוֹלֶדֶת".

His intermediate stop Bethel is the house of God "בֵּית אֱלֹהִים" (28:17, 22), where he receives divine acknowledgement of his journey from one "בית אב" and "מוֹלֶדֶת" to another. Instead of having a gap in the geographical location, which is frequent in the Bible, here the three-fold repetition of "מקום" (28:11, 16) highlights Bethel as a significant place between Beersheba and Haran, where God takes the initiative to reveal

Himself to Jacob.[9] The two places named "בית אב" introduce the notion of Jacob building his own household from the desired line, and "בת אל" anticipates the eventual consecration of Jacob's own "בית אב". The equivalence of the two "houses" signifies God will settle with Jacob as he settles in the land.[10]

Fight and Flight

Jacob and Esau compete for the following objectives – birthright, blessing, marriage arrangement, and parental acknowledgement – through multiple stages of fighting – intrauterine struggle (25:22), birth scene (25:24-26), birthright transection (25:29-34), and the deception of Isaac (27:1-40). Their struggle increases in intensity, and the fraternal antagonism is highlighted by the brothers' similarities and differences.

The increasing intensity of the fraternal struggle is demonstrated by the expanding physical distance between the brothers and increasingly lengthy and detailed account of the four episodes. The intrauterine struggle account is extremely brief (25:22), and the birth scene (25:24-26), consisting of two verses, is written with third-person narration in a dense, terse manner. The birthright transaction (25:29-34) involves seven verses and a dialogue, while the deception of Isaac (27:1-40) is a full episode that consists of at least four scenes with multiple dialogues. Moreover, there is increasing physical distance between the brothers. They are initially two indistinguishable fetuses in the same womb, then became two newborns with distinct appearances, the only physical contact being Jacob's hand holding on to Esau's heel. In the birth-right transaction they represent different occupational realm and physical space, appearing in the same scene and conducting their only conversation. In the deception of Isaac, they never touch or speak to each other or appear in the same scene. The increasing distance concurs with the oracle that they will separate "יִפָּרֵדוּ" (25:23).

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[9] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 187.
[10] Allen P. Ross, "Studies in the Life of Jacob Part 1: Jacob's Vision: The Founding of Bethel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142 (December 1985): 233.

The brothers' similarities and differences underscore their fierce competition. They are portrayed as opposites and yet parallels and substitutes. They present striking similarities: they are twins, both "התרוצץ" in the womb (25:22), will both form a "גוי" or "לאום" according to the oracle (25:23), are both loved by a parent (25:28), are obedient sons who strife for parental approval, address oneself as the first-born (27:1, 18, 19, 24, 32), and have to tackle the issue of marriage (26:34-35, 27:46, 28:1-9).

Their similarities, nevertheless, highlight their stark differences. First, they have different destinies. The oracle indicates that one is stronger, and one will serve the other. The syntax of the oracle does not specify their identities, but the domination of one over another is unequivocal.

Second, they differ in appearance and occupation. Jacob is the "איש תם" (25:27). The phrase paints an image of a man without weapons.[11] Esau, on the other hand, owns a skill "אֵישׁ יֹדֵעַ צַיִד" (25:27). Several comparisons are made with other biblical and extra-biblical characters. The figure of Nimrod associates hunting with power, courage and authority (Gen 10:8-9).[12] David who is also "אַדְמוֹנִי" (1 Sa 16:12, 17:42), and Samson (Jdg 16-17) and Absalom (2 Sa 14:25-26) who are famous for their hair, are considered to equate Esau's character with vigor, robustness, strength and masculinity, while Jacob's smoothness (Gen 27:11) is likened to smooth talkers featured in Proverbs (5:3, 26:28).[13] Nevertheless, in the poetic passages, the words "לשון" or "שפה" are always present to denote flattering speeches, which makes the latter comparison less cogent. The twins are also compared to other ANE parallels, such as a "smooth hero and his hairy *doppelgänger*" like Gilgamesh and Enkidu,[14] or a man of culture against a thoughtless appetite-driven man of nature like Horus and Seth or Hyposouranions and Ousoos.[15] The description of physical appearance serves a plot-advancing function, anticipating Jacob's

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[11] Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 181.
[12] Sarah Schwartz, "Isaac's Dual Test in the Blessings Narrative: A New Reading of Gen 27:18-29," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 43, no. 4 (June 1, 2019): 707.
[13] Hugh C. White, *Narration and Discourse in the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 209–10.
[14] Esther J. Hamori, "Echoes of Gilgamesh in the Jacob Story," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130, no. 4 (December 1, 2011): 634.
[15] Ronald S. Hendel and Victor H. Matthews, "The Epic of the Patriarch - the Jacob Cycle and the Narrative Traditions of Canaan and Israel," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 110, no. 2 (April 1, 1990): 128–29.

masquerade of Esau (27:11), and also as a form of characterization.[16] Their dissimilar depictions underscore their antagonism.

Third, they are loved by a different parent (25:28) and occupy separate physical spaces – Esau the fields "שדה" (25:27, 29; 27:3, 5) and Jacob the tents "אהלים" (25:27). Esau's hunting is repeatedly emphasized with the root "צ-ו-ד" – "צוד" (27:3, 27:5) and "ציד" (25:27, 28; 27:5, 7, 30, 31,33). The phonetic similarity between hunting "צ-ו-ד" and field "שדה" provides further emphasis. Esau is the "אִישׁ שָׂדֶה", who returns from the fields weary – "יָבֹא עֵשָׂו מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה וְהוּא עָיֵף" (25:29) and "כִּי עָיֵף אָנֹכִי" (25:30), while Jacob dwells among the tents "אִישׁ תָּם יֹשֵׁב אֹהָלִים" (25:27) and cooks a stew "נָזִיד יַעֲקֹב נָזִד" (25:29). The two-fold appearance of the root "ז-י-ד" also creates a phonetic similarity with "שדה" and "צ-ו-ד", enhancing their contrast in occupation and physical space. Even the food they prepare concur with the characterization: Jacob makes "לֶחֶם וּנְזִיד עֲדָשִׁים" (25:29) while Esau prepares "צֵידָה" (27:31). Berlin points out that contrasts between opposites – "hunter and outdoorsman" and "mild man, indoor type" – enhances characterization.[17]

Lastly and significantly, they exhibit dissimilar behavior and priorities, especially regarding the birthright. Esau who is out in the wild perceives a survival threat, exclaiming "למה זה לי" (25:32), and despised his birthright "וַיִּבֶז עֵשָׂו אֶת־הַבְּכֹרָה" (25:34). Jacob's value of the birthright is reflected in his business-like language, requesting Esau to swear "נשבע" (25:31) and twice emphasizing immediacy with "כיום" (25:31, 33). Esau's speech and actions contribute to the characterization of a primitive, dull-witted, simple character "concerned with immediate gratification of his physical needs and cannot think about abstract things".[18] Throughout the four stages of fighting, Esau's feelings – hunger (25:30, 32, 34), sorrow (27:34, 38) and anger (27:41) – are more explicitly portrayed, but those of Jacob's are hidden. This corresponds with their respective characterization and further highlights their dissimilarities.

The objectives of their four-staged fight and the result are the most significant. The brothers fight for birthright, blessing, marriage arrangement, and parental acknowledgement. Jacob emerges as the winner.

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[16] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 48–49, 89.
[17] Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 40.
[18] Berlin, 38.

The struggle to be the first-born is implied in the intrauterine struggle and heel-grasping at birth, and articulated more explicitly in the birthright transaction episode and the self-address as "first-born" by both brothers before Isaac (27:19, 32). The root "עקב" connects all four episodes. Esau connects Jacob's name with the birthright transaction and stolen blessing "הֲכִי֙ קָרָ֣א שְׁמ֔וֹ יַעֲקֹ֖ב וַיַּעְקְבֵ֑נִי זֶ֣ה פַּעֲמַ֔יִם" (27:36), while Hosea combines two earlier scenes with the same verb "בַּבֶּ֥טֶן עָקַ֖ב אֶת־אָחִ֑יו" (Hos 12:4). The verb "עקב" (*Qal*), related to "עָקֵב", occurs only five times in the Bible, the other three in poetic texts referring to deception (Jer 9:3, Job 37:4), and the root "עקב" is attested in Ugaritic in the form *mʿqbk*, "the one who defrauds you" or "the one who holds you back.[19] The root "עקב", however, is absent from the rest of the Jacob Cycle, apart from Jacob's own name.[20] According to the narrator, Esau's birthright sale is completely voluntary (25:33-34).

The second objective of fraternal competition is Isaac's blessing (27:27-29). It is clearly highly valued by Rebekah and Esau: the former pushes Jacob to obtain it, and the latter feels intense sorrow and anger upon losing it. Isaac's blessing focuses on fertility of the land and governance without mentioning the promised land and offspring, which can be understood as awarding the firstborn with a greater portion of the assets as well as a leadership role, but the constant repetition of hunting and wild game also connects the blessing more with Isaac's favoritism and not so much with Esau's firstborn status.[21] Connection between the birthright and Isaac's blessing is only present in Esau's

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[19] Zobel, "עקב," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. J. Botterweck, Heinz-Josef Fabry, and Helmer Ringgren, trans. Douglas W. Stott and David E. Green, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 316.

[20] Smith suggest that "עקב" carries a sexual connotation, signaling Jacob's claiming possession of Esau's procreative power, and also asserts that the wrestle at Jabbok involves Jacob's genitals, making this sexual symbolism an indicator of a power-struggle in the Jacob cycle. S.H Smith, "'Heel' and 'Thigh': The Concept of Sexuality in the Jacob-Esau Narratives," *VT Vetus Testamentum* 40, no. 4 (1990): 464–73. Malul suggests that there is no sexual connotation, although the image of holding onto the heel coveys the notion of supplanting Esau's status and rights of being the first-born, including his potential property and inheritance. M. Malul, "ʿāqēb 'Heel' and ʿāqab 'To Supplant' and the Concept of Succession in the Jacob-Esau Narratives," *Vetus Testamentum* 46, no. 2 (1996): 192–93, 96.

[21] Sarah Schwartz, "Isaac's Dual Test in the Blessings Narrative: A New Reading of Gen 27:18-29," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 43, no. 4 (June 1, 2019): 699, 701, 704–5. Schwartz points to the notion of "scent of the field" in Isaac's blessing a demonstration of "future financial prosperity", and that of hairiness a representation of "destiny as a ruler", which are the motives behind Isaac's selection of Esau.

comment (27:36) and the twins' self-address as "בְּכוֹר" (27:19, 32). Interestingly, Jacob expresses more enthusiasm regarding purchasing the birthright, while Esau who easily renounces his birthright is highly concerned with the blessing.

The third and fourth objectives – marriage arrangement and quest for parental acknowledgement – are related. Jacob has Rebekah's approval throughout the pericope, but Rebekah and Esau never speak to each other. Jacob receives Isaac's farewell blessing as he is sent off to Haran (28:1-4), and Isaac does not seem to hold a grudge against Jacob for deceiving him. Although Esau has Isaac's favor (25:28), and obeys Isaac and tries to please him, his wives displease both his parents: "וַתִּהְיֶיןָ מֹרַת רוּחַ לְיִצְחָק וּלְרִבְקָה" (26:35); "קַצְתִּי בְחַיַּי מִפְּנֵי בְּנוֹת חֵת" (27:46); "רָעוֹת בְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן בְּעֵינֵי יִצְחָק אָבִיו" (28:8). Jacob, on the other hand, obeys both of his parents regarding his marital arrangements, and departs with Isaac's blessing (27:46, 28:1-5, 7). Furthermore, Isaac's commanded – " לֹא־תִקַּח אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן" (28:1), "וְקַח־לְךָ מִשָּׁם אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת לָבָן אֲחִי אִמֶּךָ" (28:2) – is an indirect polemic against Esau's wives, "בְּנוֹת הָאָרֶץ" and "בְּנוֹת חֵת" (27:46). Esau marries the daughter of Ishmael (28:9) probably as an attempt to rectify Isaac's displeasure with his Hittite wives (28:8), and appear less unpromising compared with Jacob, who is heading off to Haran (27:46, 28:1-5, 7). Nevertheless, Jacob still gains an upper hand in the competition with his brother concerning their marriage plans.

Esau's defeat lies in his failure to recognize the significance of Paddan Aram and the household of Bethuel, and his connection with them through his mother Rebekah. Esau makes several accurate observations regarding Jacob's departure: Isaac sends Jacob away and blesses him "בֵּרַךְ יִצְחָק אֶת־יַעֲקֹב וְשַׁלַּח אֹתוֹ פַּדֶּנָה אֲרָם" (28:6); Isaac commands Jacob to take a wife at Paddan-Aram "לָקַחַת־לוֹ מִשָּׁם אִשָּׁה" (28:6) and not to take a local wife "בְּבָרֲכוֹ אֹתוֹ וַיְצַו עָלָיו לֵאמֹר לֹא־תִקַּח אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן" (28:6); Jacob going to Paddan-Aram "וַיֵּלֶךְ פַּדֶּנָה אֲרָם" (28:7). They all correlate with the narrator's earlier description: " וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָו וַיְצַוֵּהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ לֹא־תִקַּח אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן" (28:1), "קוּם לֵךְ פַּדֶּנָה אֲרָם" (28:2), " וְקַח־לְךָ מִשָּׁם אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן" (28:2), "וַיִּשְׁלַח יִצְחָק אֶת־יַעֲקֹב" (28:5), and "וַיֵּלֶךְ פַּדֶּנָה אֲרָם" (28:5). Esau particularly pays attention to Jacob's obedience to both of his parents "וַיִּשְׁמַע יַעֲקֹב אֶל־אָבִיו וְאֶל־אִמּוֹ" (28:7), for this is not explicitly mentioned by the narrator. This reflects Esau's point of weakness. He has no opportunity to obey Rebekah because she has not talked to him.

Esau omits the mention of Bethuel and Laban and their relation to Rebekah, which comes from both the mouth of Isaac "בֵּיתָה בְתוּאֵל אֲבִי אִמֶּךָ... מִבְּנוֹת לָבָן אֲחִי אִמֶּךָ" (28:2) and the narrator "אֶל־לָבָן בֶּן־בְּתוּאֵל֙ הָאֲרַמִּ֔י אֲחִ֖י רִבְקָ֑ה אֵ֚ם יַעֲקֹ֣ב וְעֵשָׂ֔ו" (28:5).

Jacob gains an increasingly upper hand in his fight with Esau. The intrauterine struggle is a tie. The same verb is employed for both subjects "וַיִּתְרֹצְצוּ הַבָּנִים" (25:22). Employment of the verb in *hitpolel* may denote the uniqueness of the struggle, but the reciprocal nature of the verb also implies that no winner emerges. The even-handed nature of the struggle is echoed in the ambiguous nature of the oracle. Anderson points to the lexical, syntactical and contextual ambiguities of the oracle: in a context without clearly identified characters, it employs an unconventional word pair "רב-צעיר" instead of the more usual "גדל-קטן" that refers to age, or "בכר-צעיר" that refers to birth order, and without case markers, either "רב" or "צעיר" can be the subject.[22]

In the birth scene, Esau emerges as the first-born and the winner. Jacob holding to Esau's heel can be a demonstration of competition and hostility, a continuation of the previous intrauterine struggle according to Hosea's interpretation "בַּבֶּטֶן עָקַב אֶת־אָחִיו" (Hos 12:4).

Jacob, however, subsequently overturns Esau's apparent victory. Validity of the birthright transaction is not addressed in the narrative, and whether the deal is purely incidental or planned by Jacob is unknown, but Jacob apparently exploits his brother's weak moment.

In the competition for Isaac's blessing, Jacob has Rebekah the chief manipulator on his side and enjoys a landslide victory. First, the blessing is one of abundance "מִטַּל֙ הַשָּׁמַ֔יִם וּמִשְׁמַנֵּ֥י הָאָ֖רֶץ וְרֹ֣ב דָּגָ֑ן וְתִירֹֽשׁ יַעַבְדוּךָ֣ עַמִּ֔ים וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּ־לְךָ֖ לְאֻמִּ֑ים הֱוֵה֙ גְּבִ֣יר לְאַחֶ֔יךָ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּ֥וּ לְךָ֖ בְּנֵ֣י אִמֶּ֑ךָ" (27:28), and domination "" (27:29). Second, it is irrevocable and unrepeatable. Isaac emphasized Jacob's state of being blessed "וְאָבֹרַ֖כְתָּה גַּם־בָּר֥וּךְ יִהְיֶֽה" (27:33) and that Esau's blessing has been taken away "וַיִּקַּ֥ח בִּרְכָתֶֽךָ" (27:35). Isaac gives no affirmative answer to

[22] Anderson, *Jacob and the Divine Trickster: A Theology of Deception and YHWH'S Fidelity to the Ancestral Promise in the Jacob Cycle*, 60–66. The oracle is also interpreted to foretell Jacob's victory. Wenham, for example, through the pericope's allusions and parallels to Abraham's story and the election of Isaac, states that it "announces the God-determined career of Jacob to be one of conflict culminating in ultimate triumph". Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 173. Jacob indeed secures the right to succession subsequently, but in view of the syntax of the oracle, ambiguity is more probable.

Esau's twice repeated question for a remaining blessing, "הֲלֹא־אָצַלְתָּ לִּי בְּרָכָה" (27:36) and "הֲבְרָכָה אַחַת הִוא־לְךָ אָבִי" (27:38), and Esau's request for Isaac to bless him also "בָּרֲכֵנִי גַם־אָנִי אָבִי" (27: 24, 38), repeated twice verbatim, results in a blessing that is appears to be an inferior improvisation (27:39-40). Sarna reckons that the reversed sequence of "מִשְׁמַנֵּי הָאָרֶץ" and "עַל הַשָּׁמָיִם" (27:39) "may indicate a reversal of Jacob's blessing".[23] Fokkelman goes further and considers it a curse.[24] Third, Esau's emotional response attests to Jacob's victory: "וַיִּצְעַק צְעָקָה גְּדֹלָה וּמָרָה עַד־מְאֹד" (27:34), "וַיִּשָּׂא עֵשָׂו קֹלוֹ וַיֵּבְךְּ" (27:38), "וְחֵמָה" (27:44), "אַף" (27:45), and "וַיִּשְׂטֹם עֵשָׂו אֶת־יַעֲקֹב עַל־הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר בֵּרְכוֹ אָבִיו" (27:41).[25] Compared to the birth scene, in which Esau "יצא" from the womb first, this time Jacob "יצא" from the tent of Isaac first.[26] Lastly and most significantly, Jacob receives a marriage arrangement (28:1-5). Isaac grants Jacob a second blessing, one of progeny "וְיִתֶּן־לְךָ וְיַרְבֶּךָ וְהָיִיתָ לִקְהַל עַמִּים" (28:3), and the Abrahamic blessing of the land "לְךָ אֶת־בִּרְכַת אַבְרָהָם לְךָ וּלְזַרְעֲךָ אִתָּךְ לְרִשְׁתְּךָ אֶת־אֶרֶץ מְגֻרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן אֱלֹהִים לְאַבְרָהָם" (28:4), invoking the divine title "אֵל שַׁדַּי" (28:3) that harks back to the divine revelation given to Abraham himself "אֲנִי־אֵל שַׁדָּי" (17:1). Although just a blessing "reworked into a wish or prayer",[27] this "farewell blessing" lays the groundwork for God granting "the blessing of Abraham" to Jacob (28:13–15; 35:10–12).[28]

Jacob's flight begins with the aftermath of the deception of Isaac. It triggers a chain of actions from all four characters, each reacting to the preceding action: Esau's response of intense anger to the deception (27:41), Rebekah's response to Esau's murder plan (27:42-46), Isaac's response to Rebekah's complaint (28:1), Jacob's departure in response to Isaac's instruction to take a wife from Haran (28:5), and Esau's reaction to the parents' marriage plan for Jacob (28:6-9).

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[23] Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 194.
[24] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 109.
[25] The same verb "שטם" is employed in describing the retributive sentiment Joseph may have towards his brothers (50:15).
[26] Grossman, *Jacob - the Story of a Family [Heb]*, 152.
[27] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 447–48.
[28] Terence E. Fretheim, "Which Blessing Does Isaac Give Jacob?," in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures*, ed. Alice O. Bellis and Joel S. Kaminsky (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 279.

As a result, Jacob gains a two-fold purpose to leave Beersheba for Haran. It is an escape from Esau's wrath and murder plan (27:41-45), and also a return to his grandfather's homeland with his father's blessing to build his own family line according to his parent's will (28:1-5). The dual nature of the departure is reflected in the different terminologies employed by the two parents: Rebekah commands Jacob to "בְּרַח" (27:43), while Isaac sends him with "לֵךְ" (28:2).[29] The "flight" continues with the divine encounter at Bethel (28:10-22), which grants Jacob assurance and approval (28:13-15).

Divine Intervention

In the first subcycle, divine intervention involves two typical issues – fertility, and Jacob's geographical movements.

The first instance concerns the barren matriarch. Isaac entreats the divine for Rebekah's infertility "וַיֶּעְתַּר יִצְחָק לַיהוָה", who accepts the plea "יֵעָתֶר לוֹ יְהוָה", and Rebekah conceives "וַתַּהַר רִבְקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ" (25:21). This is the first and only direct entreaty regarding barrenness, and explicit mention of divine response that results in pregnancy. The root "ע-ת-ר", generally referring to the alleviation of affliction,[30] is repeated twice within one verse, once in *Qal* and once in *Niphal*, highlighting the dire consequences of infertility. The divine acts in response to Isaac's entreaty, but replies to Rebekah's inquiry " וַתֵּלֶךְ לִדְרֹשׁ אֶת־יְהוָה" (25:22) with an oracle (25:23). The former solves the problem of progeny, and the latter anticipates issues regarding election and heritage. Divine roles in fertility and progeny are further reflected in Isaac's farewell blessing "וְיַפְרְךָ וְיַרְבֶּךָ וְהָיִיתָ לִקְהַל עַמִּים" (28:3).

The second divine appearance takes place at Bethel, and acknowledges Jacob's geographical movements. The vision, Jacob's first theophany, is sudden, ethereal and breathtaking – sky-high "סולם" (28:12), angels (28:12), and divine appearance (28:13). The divine speech (28:13-15) is the first direct divine message given to Jacob, and is full

[29] Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 195.
[30] Gerstenberger, "עתר," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. J. Botterweck, Heinz-Josef Fabry, and Helmer Ringgren, trans. Douglas W. Stott and David E. Green, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 459.

of positive promises – land ownership, progeny, divine presence and protection until his return to the land. The experience arouses Jacob's fear and awe "וַיִּירָא וַיֹּאמֶר מַה־נּוֹרָא הַמָּקוֹם" (28:17), especially regarding divine presence: "אָכֵן יֵשׁ יְהוָה בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה" (28:16), "שַׁעַר הַשָּׁמָיִם" (28:17) and "בֵּית אֱלֹהִים" (28:17). Jacob, who has been a stoic until now, exhibits emotion for the first time.

Divine intervention and dialogues with God earn sympathy from the reader.[31] Although away from Esau's wrath and sent off with Isaac's blessing, Jacob is nonetheless alone and embarking on a long journey. Compared to Abraham's preparation for Isaac's engagement, Jacob apparently has little.[32] Lipton compares Jacob's dream in Bethel with literature from surrounding cultures, where dream reports were often used as a means of conferring status, or confirming status that had been called in doubt, and concludes that the central concern of Jacob's dream is divine validation of his dubiously acquired birthright and blessing, granting him credibility and a positive portrayal.[33] Divine approval of Jacob's deception is not evident from the text, but a theophany can be considered an additional triumph over Esau, who does not receive any divine revelation. It puts Jacob on par with Isaac and Rebekah, one of whom having an entreaty granted and the other having received an oracle.

The divine speech is particularly reassuring for Jacob. The divine's self-identification as "יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אָבִיךָ וֵאלֹהֵי יִצְחָק" (28:13) and promise of land "הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה שֹׁכֵב עָלֶיהָ לְךָ אֶתְּנֶנָּה וּלְזַרְעֶךָ" (28:13) and seed "וְהָיָה זַרְעֲךָ כַּעֲפַר הָאָרֶץ וּפָרַצְתָּ יָמָּה וָקֵדְמָה וְצָפֹנָה וָנֶגְבָּה" (28:14) hark back to Isaac's farewell blessing of progeny "וַיְבָרֶךְ וְיַרְבֶּךָ וְהָיִיתָ לִקְהַל עַמִּים" (28:3), and land possession "וְיִתֶּן־לְךָ אֶת־בִּרְכַת אַבְרָהָם לְךָ וּלְזַרְעֲךָ אִתָּךְ לְרִשְׁתְּךָ אֶת־אֶרֶץ מְגֻרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן אֱלֹהִים לְאַבְרָהָם" (28:4). The additional lengthy promise of return "וְהִנֵּה אָנֹכִי עִמָּךְ וּשְׁמַרְתִּיךָ בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־תֵּלֵךְ וַהֲשִׁבֹתִיךָ אֶל־הָאֲדָמָה הַזֹּאת כִּי לֹא אֶעֱזָבְךָ עַד אֲשֶׁר אִם־עָשִׂיתִי אֵת אֲשֶׁר־דִּבַּרְתִּי לָךְ" (28:15) is crucial in acknowledging Jacob's "flight" from Beersheba to Haran. The divine message not only lay the groundwork for the next subcycle, but it also sets the pattern regarding each of Jacob's major geographical movements. This concurs with

[31] Ska, *Our Fathers Have Told Us*, 91.
[32] Diana Lipton, *Revisions of the Night: Politics and Promises in the Patriarchal Dreams of Genesis* (Sheffield: Shefield Academic Press, 1999), 79.
[33] Lipton, 64–65.

Jacob's response to the dream, which ignores promises regarding the distant future but focuses on impending and existential needs.

Attribution of wealth and material prosperity to the divine is expressed in the stolen blessing "וְיִתֶּן־לְךָ֣ הָאֱלֹהִ֗ים מִטַּל֙ הַשָּׁמַ֔יִם וּמִשְׁמַנֵּ֥י הָאָ֖רֶץ וְרֹ֣ב דָּגָ֑ן וְתִירֹֽשׁ" (27:28). This is not confirmed by the narrator or the divine.

Fertility and Wealth

The notion of fertility is expressed in several places. Barrenness threatens survival of the family, and as a matriarch and legitimate wife, opening of Rebekah's womb warrants attention and is attributed to divine action. Her experience, nevertheless, is unique. The conception "וַתַּ֖הַר רִבְקָ֥ה אִשְׁתּֽוֹ" (25:21) and the birth account "וַיִּמְלְא֖וּ יָמֶ֑יהָ לָֽלֶדֶת" (25:24) are not reported in succession, but are separated by two verses in between, recounting the difficult pregnancy, inquiry and oracle (25:22-23). Moreover, the twenty-year period of waiting is only noted in hindsight when the reader compares Isaac's age during their marriage and the twin's birth (25:21, 26). Rebekah's agony therefore lies not in being infertile but being pregnant, which is emphasized by the repeated mention of Rebekah's belly in the oracle "שְׁנֵ֣י גוֹיִ֗ם בְּבִטְנֵךְ֙ וּשְׁנֵ֣י לְאֻמִּ֔ים מִמֵּעַ֖יִךְ" (25:23), and the birth scene "תוֹמִ֖ם בְּבִטְנָֽהּ" (25:24). The focus is therefore the birth of twins with distinct destinies and an antagonistic relationship between them (25:23, 24). Isaac's blessing (28:3), the divine promise of seed (28:14), and the marriage arrangement of the two brothers also allude to the continuation of the family line.

The acquisition of wealth will be crucial in the expansion of a family into a large tribe with significant strength, and this is expressed in a preliminary form in Isaac's blessing of abundance "מִטַּל֙ הַשָּׁמַ֔יִם וּמִשְׁמַנֵּ֥י הָאָ֖רֶץ וְרֹ֣ב דָּגָ֑ן וְתִירֹֽשׁ" (27:28). This blessing of prosperity is highly desired by Esau, who appears to have been married at this point in time (26:34-35). Esau's eager pursuit for wealth may be partly due to his need to provide for his family, for Jacob also expresses a similar desire subsequently (30:30). Jacob's theft of the blessing, however, does not appear to have a long-term effect. The twins later

prosper to a similar degree, and both possess abundant wealth (33:1, 9, 15; 36:6–8), sufficient to support their sizable families.

Female Characters

In the first subcycle, the dominant female figure is Jacob's mother Rebekah. She is a powerful character who moves the plot forward, who is the manipulator behind the deception of Isaac (27:6-40) and Jacob's departure (27:41-45, 27:46). Moreover, her connection to Paddan Aram, the "בית אב" of Abraham (24:7, 38, 40), assists Jacob in securing a marriage plan from the proper family tree.

Rebekah is a predominant character in four ways. First, she has access to exclusive information. Rebekah receives a divine oracle (25:23) upon making an inquiry (25:22). In Genesis, the verb "דרש" (25:22) is only employed with Rebekah as subject, and the phrase "לִדְרֹשׁ אֶת־יְהוָה" elsewhere describes the actions of prophets (Ex 18:15, 1 Kgs 22:8, 2 Kgs 22:18, Ezk 20:1). Not only does a unique experience grant Rebekah special importance, but Isaac is absent from the picture, and his knowledge of the inquiry and oracle is unaccounted for. Rebekah's reception of an oracle characterizes her as a "hero's mother", comparable to the figure of Gilgamesh's mother Ninsunna, who owns divine insight and engages in divinatory activity on her son's behalf.[34] Apart from receiving divine messages, Rebekah also has unexplained access to private dialogues or monologues. She hears the conversation between Isaac and Esau " וְרִבְקָה שֹׁמַעַת בְּדַבֵּר יִצְחָק אֶל־עֵשָׂו" (27:5), and later knows of Esau's plan to kill Jacob, somehow being notified of Esau's words "וַיֻּגַּד לְרִבְקָה אֶת־דִּבְרֵי עֵשָׂו" (27:42) in his internal monologue "וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו בְּלִבּוֹ" (27:41).

Second, she has power in her words. Rebekah employs several tactics to move Jacob to action. She modifies Isaac's words (27:3-4,7), toning down the mention of hunting "שָׂא־נָא כֵלֶיךָ תֶּלְיְךָ וְקַשְׁתֶּךָ וְצֵא הַשָּׂדֶה" (27:3), changing "תְּבָרֶכְךָ נַפְשִׁי" (27:4) to "וַאֲבָרֲכֶךָּ" (27:7), and adding "לִפְנֵי יְהוָה" regarding the blessing. Change of the first-

[34] Hamori, "Echoes of Gilgamesh in the Jacob Story," 634–35.

person address weakens Isaac's desire to bless Esau, and addition of the divine element renders the blessing more important.[35] Omission of hunting and Isaac's love of game "כַּאֲשֶׁר אָהַבְתִּי" (27:4) also makes the task less daunting for Jacob.[36] Rebekah exerts maternal authority in employing the verb "צ-ו-ה" "לַאֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה אֹתָךְ" (27:8). She employs the imperatival forms "...קח ...לך" twice (27: 9, 13), and Jacob responds with perfect obedience "וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיִּקַּח וַיָּבֵא לְאִמּוֹ" (27:14). She commands Jacob to listen to her "שְׁמַע בְּקֹלִי" (27:8, 13, 43) three times (27:6-13, 42-45). She refutes Jacob's worry of being labeled a deceiver (מתעתע) and being cursed (27:11-12) by taking the curse upon herself (27:13).[37] Rebekah's words also move Isaac to action. Her complaint about Esau's Hittite wives (27:46) leads to Isaac sending Jacob off to Paddan Aram with a blessing (28:1-5). She skillfully employs colorful language to express her agony "קָצְתִּי בְחַיַּי" (27:46), an exaggerated remark compared to the narrator's milder description "מֹרַת רוּחַ" (26:35), and refrains from calling the Hittite women "Esau's wives", to avoid triggering positive feelings from Isaac towards his favorite son.[38]

Third, Rebekah's actions are influential. She acts upon what she hears, be it Isaac's plan to bless Esau or Esau's plan to kill Jacob. She is the subject of a series of verbs. She prepares ("עשה") the food (27:14). She takes ("לקח") Esau's clothes and the goat skin and dresses ("הלביש") Jacob (27:15-16), and places ("נתן") the food she makes ("עשה") in his hands (27:17). Rebekah plans Jacob's escape (27:44-45). Compared to her husband, she is more aware of the fraternal conflict, and is more concerned about the marriage and future of her (favorite) son. Frisch points out the leading word "לקח" in the episode of the deception of Isaac, which is applied to inanimate objects such as goats and clothes (27:9, 13, 14, 15), as well as to people – the fetching of Jacob (27:45) and the taking of wives (27:46, 28:1, 2, 28:6, 26:34, 35).[39] Interestingly, Rebekah is often the subject of this verb (27:15, 45), or the one initiating the action "לקח", commanding Jacob

[35] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 206–7.
[36] Grossman, *Jacob - the Story of a Family [Heb]*, 139–40.
[37] Wenham notes that a curse, like Jacob's blessing, cannot be diverted. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 207.
[38] Wenham, 213.
[39] Amos A. Frisch, "'Your Brother Came with Guile': Responses to an Explicit Moral Evaluation in Biblical Narrative.," *Prooftexts* 23, no. 3 (2003): 280–81.

to take the blessing (27:9, 13, 46) or influencing Isaac so that he instructs Jacob to take a wife (28:1, 2).

Apart from her favoritism and active involvement, Rebekah's lineage also offers Jacob a significant advantage in his fight against Esau. The repeated mention of the place names Haran and Paddan-Aram in association with Laban and Bethuel attests to the importance of Rebekah's origin and identity. The place name "Paddan-Aram" and the names Laban and Bethuel frame the whole pericope of Beersheba. They appear in the introduction of Rebekah "רִבְקָה בַּת־בְּתוּאֵל֙ הָאֲרַמִּ֔י מִפַּדַּ֖ן אֲרָ֑ם אֲחֹ֥ות לָבָ֖ן הָאֲרַמִּ֔י" (25:20), and repeatedly at the end reporting Jacob departure: "לָבָן אֲחִי... פַּדֶּנָה אֲרָם בֵּיתָה בְתוּאֵל אֲבִי אִמֶּךָ֔ אֲבִי אִמֶּךָ" (28:2) and "פַּדֶּנָה אֲרָם אֶל־לָבָן בֶּן־בְּתוּאֵל֙ הָאֲרַמִּ֔י אֲחִ֖י רִבְקָ֑ה אֵ֚ם יַעֲקֹ֣ב וְעֵשָׂ֔ו" (28:5). "Paddan-Aram" also appears two more times in the scene of Jacob's departure from Esau's perspective (28:6, 28:7). The place name "Haran" frames the section about Jacob's flight, in the beginning in Rebekah's charge for him to flee to Laban her brother "קוּם בְּרַח־לְךָ֥ אֶל־לָבָ֖ן אָחִ֣י חָרָֽנָה" (27:43), and in the end in the narrator's account of Jacob leaving Beersheba for Haran "וַיֵּצֵ֥א יַעֲקֹ֖ב מִבְּאֵ֣ר שָׁ֑בַע וַיֵּ֖לֶךְ חָרָֽנָה" (28:10).

Transaction and Deception

The birthright transaction and deception of Isaac constitute employment of wit and treachery for gains in status and wealth.

The birthright sale is an open and bilateral transaction, albeit with multiple unknown and intriguing elements. Esau requests the red stew "הַלְעִיטֵ֨נִי נָ֜א מִן־הָאָדֹ֤ם הָאָדֹם֙ הַזֶּ֔ה" (25:30), and Jacob gives it to him "וְיַעֲקֹ֗ב נָתַ֤ן לְעֵשָׂו֙ לֶ֣חֶם וּנְזִ֣יד עֲדָשִׁ֔ים" (25:34). Jacob demands the sale of birthright "מִכְרָ֥ה כַיּ֛וֹם אֶת־בְּכֹרָתְךָ֖ לִֽי" (25:31) and an oath "הִשָּׁבְעָ֥ה לִ֖י כַּיּ֑וֹם" (25:33), and Esau does exactly so "וַיִּשָּׁבַ֣ע לֹ֔ו וַיִּמְכֹּ֥ר אֶת־בְּכֹרָתֹ֖ו לְיַעֲקֹֽב" (25:33). It is unknown whether the deal is prearranged. Daube posits that, in accordance with Esau's character of a hunter in the wild, he mistakes the red stew as blood broth, due to the same color and the phonetic similarities between "דם" and "אדום", but his oath renders the birthright sale

binding.[40] Sarna also suggests that the identity of the red stew as lentils is only being revealed at the end of the episode (25:34), and the request for an oath "הִשָּׁבְעָה לִּי כַּיּוֹם" (25:33) may indicate Jacob's mistrust of Esau.[41] Esau's misconception of the broth and willingness to take an oath may explain his later comment about Jacob overreaching "עקב" him twice (27:36), but cannot fully explain Esau's lack of surprise upon receiving the lentil stew from Jacob. Frisch comments that Esau's complaint neither gains support from the narrator, who portrays the birthright sale as "a commercial transaction made with Esau's full consent", nor from Isaac, who condemns only the taking of the blessing.[42]

The validity of this birthright sale is obscure. Sarna suggests that the narrator mentioning Esau selling his birthright (25:31, 33) without stating Jacob buying it is "contrary to usual biblical legal style".[43] Ahroni also remarks that primogeniture being merchandised in "an ordinary commercial transaction" and "assumed to be valid without the father's knowledge" is exceptional.[44] The closest report of a similar transaction in the ancient Near East is in the legal materials from Nuzi, where one brother sells some already inherited property to one of his brothers.[45] Regardless of the validity of the transaction and Jacob's intention, exploitation of Esau's fragile physical and mental state to purchase his birthright with a bargain price, and ascertain it with an oath, is an undeniable fact. Jacob is eager to acquire the birthright and secure the purchase with minimal risk and cost.

The deception of Isaac presents few ambiguities. It is a deception through visual masquerade and outright lying. Jacob assumes Esau's external appearance, making himself hairy like him (25:25, 27: 11-12, 16, 21-23) and smelling like him (27:15, 27). Jacob copies Esau's actions, bringing in "צַיִד" (27:19, 25, 33) and "מַטְעַמִּים" (27:9, 14, 17) – Esau's current special mission (27:3, 4, 5, 7, 30, 31) and signature dish (25:27-28,

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[40] David Daube, "How Esau Sold His Birthright," *The Cambridge Law Journal* 8, no. 1 (1942): 72–74.
[41] Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 182.
[42] Frisch, "Your Brother Came with Guile," 281–82.
[43] Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 182.
[44] Reuben Ahroni, "Why Did Esau Spurn the Birthright? A Study in Biblical Interpretation," *Judaism* 29, no. 3 (1980): 324.
[45] Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 58.

27:4). Daube refers to Jacob's impersonation of Esau in this episode a "virtue of imitation" – the belief of succeeding a person's place by acting like him.[46] The only factor that almost gives Jacob away is his voice (27:22). Ironically, Jacob's speeches deliver the most lies. He lies about hunting the game (27:19-20), and claims to be Esau twice: "אָנֹכִי עֵשָׂו בְּכֹרֶךָ" (27:19); "וַיֹּאמֶר אַתָּה זֶה בְּנִי עֵשָׂו וַיֹּאמֶר אָנִי" (27:24). Jacob's deception is described by Isaac as "בָּא בְּמִרְמָה" (27:35). This noun and its related verb "refer to a situation in which reality differs from appearance", which "involve interpersonal transactions in which someone acts or speaks consciously and deliberately to conceal or cover up certain facts" and the purpose is often "to gain a personal advantage".[47]

From Birth to Marriage

Jacob struggles against Esau, the married firstborn and Isaac's favorite, in his "בית אב" from the womb until marriable age. Jacob manages to purchase the birthright, steal a blessing, avoid revenge, and embark for his mother's homeland with a promising marriage plan and Isaac's blessing. A prominent female character assumes a crucial role in the process, working in Jacob's favor, and the divine has not intercepted with, or criticized morally questionable behaviors. Jacob finds himself alone at "בית-אל", where he receives divine acknowledgement regarding his journey, promising him protection and assuring him of his future return, as he searches for his future wife in the land of the east.

[46] Daube, "How Esau Sold His Birthright," 75.
[47] Kartveit, "רמה," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. J. Botterweck, Heinz-Josef Fabry, and Helmer Ringgren, trans. Douglas W. Stott and David E. Green, vol. 13 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 501.

Subcycle Two (29:1-32:1) (EV 29:1-31:55) From the Well in Haran to the Heap at Gilead

The second subcycle features Jacob's struggle against Laban. The fight begins shortly after Jacob settles in the house of Laban, and ends with their formal separation at Gilead twenty years later. Jacob struggles against Laban for his rightful wages – in the form of full ownership of his wives, children and flocks. The conflicts involve various transaction agreements and tactics of deception, and female characters assume various pivotal roles. The divine is chiefly reticent, apart from sporadic actions and messages that involve Jacob's geographical movements, and to a lesser extent the issue of (in)fertility in Jacob's household.

Structure of the Subcycle

Boundaries

The second subcycle begins with the narrator's report of Jacob's movement "וַיִּשָּׂא יַעֲקֹב רַגְלָיו וַיֵּלֶךְ אַרְצָה בְּנֵי־קֶדֶם" (29:1), which marks the beginning of a new series of happenings in another land involving another group of characters.

Determination of the closing boundary is more complex. After the covenant at Gilead (31:43-54), the succeeding verse reports the departure of Laban the next morning "וַיַּשְׁכֵּם לָבָן בַּבֹּקֶר וַיְנַשֵּׁק לְבָנָיו וְלִבְנוֹתָיו וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיָּשָׁב לָבָן לִמְקֹמוֹ" (32:1) (EV 31:55). Thereafter is the verse on Jacob's movement and his next encounter "וְיַעֲקֹב הָלַךְ לְדַרְכּוֹ וַיִּפְגְּעוּ־בוֹ מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים" (32:2) (EV 32:1). The mention of the angels continues in the following verse "וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב כַּאֲשֶׁר רָאָם מַחֲנֵה אֱלֹהִים זֶה וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא מָחֲנָיִם" (32:3) (EV 32:2).

A demarcation can be placed early, after the covenant at Gilead (31:54), so that a new section begins with two parallel verses reporting two departures in separate directions – that of Laban's "וַיֵּלֶךְ ... לִמְקֹמוֹ" (32:1) (EV 31:55) and Jacob's "הָלַךְ לְדַרְכּוֹ"

(32:2) (EV 32:1). This delimitation is adopted by Westermann, who argues that the report of the parting, a "narrative form" concluding a meeting, should be preserved intact, and the verses (32:1-3) (EV:31:55-32:2) also serve as an introduction to the succeeding section.[1] Hamilton makes the same delimitation.[2]

A later boundary can be placed after the Mahanaim account "וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא מָחֲנָיִם" (32:3b) (EV 32:2), which contains the paragraph marking *Pᵉṯûḥāʾ* before the next verse reporting Jacob's further actions that involves Esau "וַיִּשְׁלַח יַעֲקֹב מַלְאָכִים לְפָנָיו אֶל־עֵשָׂו אָחִיו" (32:4) (EV 32:3). This reading is supported by the Sarna, who includes the verses about Mahanaim (32:1-3) within the larger section of the "finale" between Jacob and Laban (31:1-32:3).[3]

Another option is to make a division in the middle of a verse, putting Jacob's return "וְיַעֲקֹב הָלַךְ לְדַרְכּוֹ" (32:2a) (EV32:1a) in the previous section and the angelic encounter "וַיִּפְגְּעוּ־בוֹ מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים" (32:2b) (EV32:1b) in the next. This preserves the parallel actions between Laban and Jacob, and allows the Mahanaim episode to be connected to the subsequent two chapters (ch 32-33). This creates syntactical problems, however, as the second clause only contains a personal pronoun.

Yet another option is to place the boundary after "וַיַּשְׁכֵּם לָבָן בַּבֹּקֶר וַיְנַשֵּׁק לְבָנָיו וְלִבְנוֹתָיו וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיָּשָׁב לָבָן לִמְקֹמוֹ" (32:1) (EV 31:55). This is accepted by various researchers.[4] Terino isolates 32:1 (EV 31:55), and names it a "closure and wrap up" of the previous section.[5]

According to the dramatic criteria, the end of a scene often coincides with change of rhythm, character, locale, and drop in narrative tension.[6] This research, therefore, places the closing boundary after (32:1) (EV 31:55). This allows Laban to remain in the second subcycle, and permits the release of narrative tension to prepare for another subcycle as Jacob embarks on his journey. Moreover, the mention of Jacob embarking on

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[1] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 504.
[2] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18-50*, 316–17.
[3] Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 213, 223.
[4] von Rad, *Genesis*, 313; Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 186, 197; Coats, *Genesis*, 177–78; Blum, "The Jacob Tradition," 182; Walsh, *Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative*, 29–30; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 266.
[5] Terino, "A Text Linguistic Study of the Jacob Narrative," 61.
[6] Ska, *Our Fathers Have Told Us*, 33–34.

a journey "...וְיַעֲקֹב הָלַךְ לְדַרְכּוֹ" (32:2) parallels the beginning of the second subcycle "וַיִּשָּׂא יַעֲקֹב רַגְלָיו וַיֵּלֶךְ..." (29:1).

Shape and Main Plot

This research analyzes the Laban episodes chiefly according to the dramatic criteria, and particular attention is given to the objectives and actions of "fight and flight". There are two major waves of conflict between Jacob and Laban, and the first includes a parallel conflict between Leah and Rachel.

The first wave of conflict consists of three episodes: an introductory episode of meeting at the well and receiving a warm welcome into Laban's home for a month's stay (29:1-14), the bride-switch and fourteen years of service (29:15-30), and a continuation of the previous conflict, the wives' "fertility contest" leading to the birth of Jacob's eleven sons and one daughter (29:31-30:24). These events take place in Laban's house, and lasts approximately fourteen years.

The second wave of conflict includes four episodes: first and failed attempt to leave Laban which leads to another flock-rearing agreement that gives Jacob abundant wealth (30:25-30:43), second and successful attempt to leave Haran in secret (31:1-16), the actual journey from Haran to Gilead (31:17-21, 22-25), and the final confrontation in Gilead (31:26-32:1). Approximately six years has passed between the two attempts to flee (31:41).

Recurrent Themes

Geographical Relocation

The second subcycle involves two locations – Haran and Gilead. Jacob's arrival, stay and departure from Haran constitutes the main geographical movements.

The unexpected duration of Jacob's stay is repeatedly emphasized. The narrator repeatedly mentions Jacob's stay (ישב) or service (עבד): initially dwelling for a month "וַיֵּשֶׁב עִמּוֹ חֹדֶשׁ יָמִים" (29:14), working the first seven years "תַּעֲבֹד עִמָּדִי עוֹד שֶׁבַע־שָׁנִים אֲחֵרוֹת" (29:27), and working the second seven years "וַיַּעֲבֹד עִמּוֹ עוֹד שֶׁבַע־שָׁנִים אֲחֵרוֹת" (29:30). At Gilead, Jacob himself recalls the twenty years, "זֶה־לִּי עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה אָנֹכִי עִמָּךְ" (31:38). Rebekah has planned for him to stay for "יָמִים אֲחָדִים" (27:42), and the first seven years indeed seem so "יַּעֲבֹד יַעֲקֹב בְּרָחֵל שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים וַיִּהְיוּ בְעֵינָיו כְּיָמִים אֲחָדִים" (29:20). Nevertheless, another seven years ensue, and thereafter another six (31:38, 41).

Jacob's arrival and departure both warrant attention. His arrival is described as "נשא - רגל" (29:1), which can refer to Jacob's "resolve and confidence" after the theophany at Bethel.[7] Jacob's early days in Haran is promising. Laban welcomes Jacob "וַיָּרָץ לִקְרָאתוֹ וַיְחַבֶּק־לוֹ וַיְנַשֶּׁק־לוֹ וַיְבִיאֵהוּ אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ" (29:13), and calls him "אַךְ עַצְמִי וּבְשָׂרִי אָתָּה" (29:14) and "אָחַי אַתָּה" (29:15). Jacob is overwhelmed with joy in meeting Laban's daughter "וַיִּשַּׁק יַעֲקֹב לְרָחֵל" (29:11). His purpose of taking a wife from that family (28:2) has been addressed after a month (29:14). His departure, however, is a protracted struggle. Jacob makes two attempts to return to his homeland with all his family and possessions. At Gilead (31:26-32:1), Jacob's flight culminates in a prolonged confrontation, and a covenant marks their official separation. The confrontational and official separation contrasts the cordial welcome Jacob receives upon arrival.

Fight and Flight

Fokkelman identifies "three fighting rounds between Jacob and Laban": over the marriage arrangement (29:1-30), the herding agreement (29:31-30:43), and his flight (31:1-54).[8] This research acknowledges the same conflicts, but focuses on the nature, dynamics, and objectives of the "fight and flight".

The first wave of conflicts deals with the issue of marriage and fertility. Jacob fights against Laban for Rachel's hand in marriage (29:15-30), which leads to a period of

[7] Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 201.
[8] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 193.

"fertility contest" between Leah and Rachel (29:31-30:24). Laban takes advantage of Jacob's lack of bargaining power and determination to marry Rachel, and secures seven extra years of service through the bride-switch. Alone and powerless, Jacob suffers complete defeat in this stage of fighting against Laban.[9] Nevertheless, two wives and two handmaids from Laban's household give Jacob enormous potential in building a sizable family from the proper family line. Jacob has fulfilled his parent's commands to stay at Laban's (27:43-45) and take his daughter as a wife (28:2, 6-7), and the birth of multiple children is a powerful demonstration of fruitfulness. Jacob, however, is deceived by Laban, is passive, and is subordinate to his wives' decisions about conjugal matters.

The second wave of conflicts mainly concerns wealth and return to the land. Jacob fights for independence from Laban, his deserved wages, and ownership of his family. The first attempt to flee fails, but Jacob acquires vast amounts of wealth through his own cleverness (30:25-30:43). The second attempt to flee (31:1-21) leads to a pursuit (31:22-25) and final confrontation at Gilead (31:26--32:1), but ultimately seals their official separation. Jacob is shrewd, proactive and capable.

Three significant issues are involved in Jacob's flight: wealth, the ownership of Jacob's household, and the return to the land of Canaan.

Jacob's first concern is the land of Canaan. Jacob's request "שַׁלְּחֵנִי וְאֵלְכָה אֶל־מְקוֹמִי וְלְאַרְצִי" (30:25) verbally resonates with Isaac's farewell "יִשְׁלַח יִצְחָק אֶת־יַעֲקֹב וַיֵּלֶךְ פַּדֶּנָה אֲרָם אֶל־לָבָן" (28:5). Naming his destination his "מקום" and "ארץ" (30:25), and twice mentioning "וְאֵלֵכָה" (30:25, 26), Jacob unmistakably expresses his desire to leave Paddan-Aram. As he explains to his wives, he is returning to Isaac his father in the land of Canaan "לָבֹוא אֶל־יִצְחָק אָבִיו אַרְצָה כְּנָעַן" (31:18). Laban also recognizes Jacob's intense homesickness "כִּי־נִכְסֹף נִכְסַפְתָּה לְבֵית אָבִיךָ" (31:30), using a rare and strong term intensified through the infinitive absolute.[10]

Jacob's second concern is his own family. The trigger for Jacob to return home is apparently the birth of Joseph, for Jacob immediately requests Laban to send him off as

[9] If Jacob had been satisfied with marrying Leah and having children through her, he would have fulfilled his purposes of his trip to Haran without seven extra years of service, but the absence of fertility competition between Leah and Rachel might not have given him twelve children.
[10] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 275.

soon as (כַּאֲשֶׁר) Joseph is born (30:25).[11] Jacob also asks for full ownership of his wives and children "תְּנָה אֶת־נָשַׁי וְאֶת־יְלָדַי" (30:26), desiring to provide for his household " עַתָּה מָתַי אֶעֱשֶׂה גַּם־אָנֹכִי לְבֵיתִי" (30:30).

The third issue is wealth. In an indirect and lengthy negotiation, Jacob reminds Laban how he has prospered because of his service (30:26, 27, 29, 30). Despite an unfair agreement that grants flock ownership under highly improbable circumstances (30:26-34), and Laban's subsequent action to greatly increase his own advantage (30:35-36), Jacob manages to pull off a breeding trick and overturn his disadvantaged position (30:37-43). Jacob emerges victorious, gaining massive wealth (30:43). In the actual flight, Jacob's retinue includes his whole family (31:17), and his possessions are presented in a repetitive manner: " וַיִּנְהַג אֶת־כָּל־מִקְנֵהוּ וְאֶת־כָּל־רְכֻשׁוֹ אֲשֶׁר רָכָשׁ מִקְנֵה קִנְיָנוֹ אֲשֶׁר רָכַשׁ בְּפַדַּן אֲרָם" (31:18); "וַיִּבְרַח הוּא וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ" (31:21). The property acquired in Paddan-Aram is underscored with the triple appearance of the roots "ק-נ-ה" and "ר-כ-ש" (31:18). The lengthy description of Jacob's entourage and ample wealth (31:17-18) "slows the narrative down drastically" and highlights the current flight being a difficult operation, compared to the flight from home.[12]

While Jacob's first attempt to flee fails, his second is successful. First, there is divine intervention. Jacob receives a command him to return " שׁוּב אֶל־אֶרֶץ אֲבוֹתֶיךָ וּלְמוֹלַדְתֶּךָ" (31:3), promising divine presence "וְאֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ" (31:3). The divine also appears to Laban (31:24, 29). Second, Jacob receives his wives' support. He presents a lengthy explanation of the divine endorsement he enjoys (31:5-13), which are not verified by the narrator, but Leah and Rachel completely identify with Jacob, distancing themselves from Laban's household and supporting Jacob's plan to depart (31:14-16). Moreover, Jacob departs in haste. The narrative portrays Jacob and his whole entourage setting off without any hint of delay, immediately after the wives' consent.[13] Jacob also flees without asking for Laban's permission. The secretive nature is emphasized through the repeated appearance of the verb "ברח" to describe Jacob's flight (31:20, 21, 22, 27), and

[11] Wenham, 240, 253.
[12] Wenham, 273.
[13] Wenham, 273.

the repeated emphasis of Laban's ignorance about the matter "וַיִּגְנֹ֣ב יַעֲקֹ֔ב אֶת־לֵ֖ב לָבָ֣ן הָאֲרַמִּ֑י עַל־בְּלִי֙ הַגִּ֣יד ל֔וֹ כִּ֥י בֹרֵ֖חַ הֽוּא" (31:20).

Laban nonetheless embarks on a pursuit (31:22-25) and confronts Jacob at Gilead (31:25-32:1). Laban chases "רדף אחר" (31:23), follows close "הדביק את" (31:23) and overtakes "השיג את" (31:25). Jacob remarks, "דָּלַקְתָּ֣ אַחֲרָ֑י" (31:36). All four verbs convey an image of intense and hostile pursuit, highlighting Laban's determination. The pitched tents in Gilead (31:24) also signify "impending confrontation".[14] Laban makes two accusations, one regarding Jacob's flight in secret (31:26-29) and one concerning the *teraphim* theft (31:30). Mabee observes different judicial positions in Laban's two accusations of Jacob: regarding leaving without the proper etiquette, Laban is in the position of power and Jacob in that of liability, but regarding the *teraphim* theft, they are equal, for no proof is found.[15] Jacob's initial defense to the first accusation is feeble, only claiming his fear of Laban "כִּ֣י יָרֵ֔אתִי כִּ֥י אָמַ֖רְתִּי פֶּן־תִּגְזֹ֥ל אֶת־בְּנוֹתֶ֖יךָ מֵעִמִּֽי" (31:31).

The failed search, however, leads to Jacob's victory. As Jacob's guilt cannot be proven, "מַה־פִּשְׁעִ֑י" and "מָ֥ה חַטָּאתִ֖י" (31:36-37), he moves to justify his flight (31:38-41). Vrolijk aptly observes that Laban's failure to find the *teraphim* is a turning point that puts Laban from the offensive to the defensive, shifting the balance of power to Jacob.[16] The narrative provides insufficient evidence to support Mabee's proposition that the *teraphim* theft triggers the pursuit and is the center of dispute,[17] but the role of the unfruitful search in Jacob's defense is apparent. Laban's failure to find the teraphim is emphasized through the five-fold repetition of the verb "מצא": from Jacob's mouth (31:32, 37) and from the narrator (31:33, 34, 35). Jacob expresses anger at Laban for the first and also the last time "וַיִּ֥חַר לְיַעֲקֹ֖ב וַיָּ֣רֶב בְּלָבָ֑ן" (31:36): he challenges the aggressive pursuit (31:36), fruitless search (31:37-38), lack of just reward for twenty years of impeccable service (31:38-41), and Laban's intention of leaving him nothing (31:42).

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[14] Vrolijk, *Jacob's Wealth*, 199.
[15] Charles Mabee, "Jacob and Laban: The Structure of Judicial Proceedings (Genesis XXXI 25-42)," *Vetus Testamentum* 30, no. 2 (April 1, 1980): 192–207.
[16] Vrolijk, *Jacob's Wealth*, 200–201.
[17] Mabee, "Jacob and Laban," 194.

The exact social-legal-economic relationship between Jacob and Laban is disputed.[18] Regardless of the legitimacy of Jacob's flight, Laban's argument and confidence weakens gradually. After the futile search (31:33-35), Jacob successfully defenses his right to flee (31:36-42).

The covenant (31:44-32:1) is a sudden resolution to the prolonged "flight". Laban can only make a feeble and final claim of ownership over his family and possessions (31:43). A physical border marks complete geographical separation between Laban and Jacob (31:52). The importance of the treaty is underscored by the multiple witnesses and rituals – stones, the divine, sacrificial meal, kinsmen, and also by the duplication of "מַצֵּבָה" and "גָּל" (31:45-54).[19] Rom-Shiloni recognizes a multi-dimensional separation between Jacob and Laban: familial-economic separation is established when Leah and Rachel express their feeling of alienation and loss of inheritance and pledge alliance to Jacob; national separation is reflected in Laban being designated as Aramean and the employment of military language regarding Jacob's flight and his pursuit; geographical separation is marked by the physical boundary at Gilead; religious separation is demonstrated in the different divine epithets invoked; linguistic separation is illustrated by the Aramaic "יְגַר שָׂהֲדוּתָא" and Hebrew "גַּלְעֵד" naming of the stones (31:47).[20] Jacob has gained complete independence from Laban and full ownership of his family and possessions. Laban's departure to his own "מקום", "וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיָּשָׁב לָבָן לִמְקֹמוֹ" (32:1), echoes Jacob's initial request to return to his "שַׁלְּחֵנִי וְאֵלְכָה אֶל־מְקוֹמִי וּלְאַרְצִי" (30:25).

Jacob's flight from Haran is more justified but more difficult than that from Beersheba. Esau blames Jacob of deceiving him two times "וַיַּעְקְבֵנִי זֶה פַּעֲמַיִם", taking his

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[18] Gordon suggests that Jacob is Laban's adopted son, is under his patriarchal authority and has no right to run away. Cyrus H. Gordon, "The Story of Jacob and Laban in the Light of the Nuzi Tablets," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 66, no. 1 (1937): 25–27. Van Seters points out that Jacob's status contradicts adoption texts, for he is not addressed as Laban's son, considers Isaac his father and Canaan his home, receives wages instead of an inheritance, and pays a bride-price. John Van Seters, "Jacob's Marriages and Ancient Near East Customs: A Reexamination," *The Harvard Theological Review* 62, no. 4 (October 1, 1969): 377–95. Morrison similarly claims that Jacob is an indentured worker, who is offered a herding contract shortly after arrival, has no share in the inheritance, and bears losses while not enjoying the profits. Martha A. Morrison, "The Jacob and Laban Narrative in Light of Near Eastern Sources," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 46, no. 3 (July 1, 1983): 160.

[19] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 279–80.

[20] Dalit Rom-Shiloni, "When an Explicit Polemic Initiates a Hidden One: Jacob's Aramaean Identity," in *Words, Ideas, Worlds: Biblical Essays in Honour of Yairah Amit*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Frank Polak (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012), 209–13.

"בכורה" and "ברכה" (27:36), and Laban similarly accuses Jacob of stealing two things: "וַתִּגְנֹב אֶת־לִבָּי" (31:26); "וַתִּגְנֹב אֹתִי" (31:27); "גָּנַבְתָּ אֶת־אֱלֹהָי" (31:30). Laban, however, has more power to do Jacob harm than Esau does. Upon being told "וַיִּגַּד לְ" of Esau's plan (27:42), Rebekah helps Jacob flee "ברח" (27:43-45), but upon being told "וַיִּגַּד לְ" of Jacob's flight "ברח", Laban makes a pursuit (31:22-23). Jacob is sent off by his parents (27:43-45, 28:1-5), but is being repeatedly stopped by Laban.

Divine Intervention

In this subcycle, the role of the divine is the most unmistakable regarding Jacob's geographic relocation, namely his flight from Haran. Divine control over fertility is more firmly and frequently acknowledged by the characters than by the narrator. The acquisition of wealth and possessions, however, is attributed to divine action only by the characters.

The narrator attributes the birth of three children to divine perception and action ("ראה", "שמע", "זכר"): Leah's firstborn "וַיַּרְא יְהוָה כִּי־שְׂנוּאָה לֵאָה וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת־רַחְמָהּ" (29:31), Leah's fifth son "וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶל־לֵאָה וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד לְיַעֲקֹב בֵּן חֲמִישִׁי" (30:17), and Rachel's firstborn "וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־רָחֵל וַיִּשְׁמַע אֵלֶיהָ אֱלֹהִים וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת־רַחְמָהּ" (30:22). Jacob asserts that God withholds from Rachel the fruit of the womb (30:2). The female characters attribute more births to divine action: Leah names Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun acknowledging divine help (29:32, 33, 35; 30:18, 20), and Rachel names Dan (30:6) and Joseph (30:24) similarly.

Concerning Jacob's geographical movements, divine intervention is unequivocal and indisputable. First, the brief and direct divine command for Jacob to return to Canaan "שׁוּב אֶל־אֶרֶץ אֲבוֹתֶיךָ וּלְמוֹלַדְתֶּךָ וְאֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ" (31:3) brings about Jacob's second and successful attempt to leave Haran. The notion of return, the mention of Jacob's father, and the promise of divine presence all echo the speech at Bethel: "...וַהֲשִׁבֹתִיךָ אֶל־הָאֲדָמָה הַזֹּאת" (28:15); "...וְהִנֵּה אָנֹכִי עִמָּךְ וּשְׁמַרְתִּיךָ בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־תֵּלֵךְ... לֹא " (28:21); "שַׁבְתִּי בְשָׁלוֹם אֶל־בֵּית אָבִי... אֲעֶזָבְךָ..." (28:15). Through verbal linkages to the Bethel episode, this command reinforces Jacob's connection to the land, and divine protection over him. Second, Laban

receives a divine message in his dream "וַיָּבֹא אֱלֹהִים אֶל־לָבָן הָאֲרַמִּי בַּחֲלֹם הַלָּיְלָה" (31:24), commanding him how to treat Jacob "הִשָּׁמֶר לְךָ פֶּן־תְּדַבֵּר עִם־יַעֲקֹב מִטּוֹב עַד־רָע" (31:24). The warning is taken seriously by Laban, who repeats it almost verbatim to explain his restraint "וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבִיכֶם אֶמֶשׁ אָמַר אֵלַי לֵאמֹר הִשָּׁמֶר לְךָ מִדַּבֵּר עִם־יַעֲקֹב מִטּוֹב עַד־רָע" (31:29). The warning corresponds with Laban's power to do Jacob harm. Laban himself admits so "יֶשׁ־לְאֵל יָדִי לַעֲשׂוֹת עִמָּכֶם רָע" (31:29). Jacob explicitly articulates his fear of losing his wives "וַיַּעַן יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר לְלָבָן כִּי יָרֵאתִי כִּי אָמַרְתִּי פֶּן־תִּגְזֹל אֶת־בְּנוֹתֶיךָ מֵעִמִּי" (31:31), and his belief that Laban would have sent him away empty-handed "כִּי עַתָּה רֵיקָם שִׁלַּחְתָּנִי" if not for divine intervention "לוּלֵי אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם וּפַחַד יִצְחָק הָיָה לִי... אֶת־עָנְיִי וְאֶת־יְגִיעַ כַּפַּי רָאָה אֱלֹהִים וַיּוֹכַח אָמֶשׁ" (31:42).

Multiplication of wealth and property as divine blessing is the assumption of several characters. Laban admits that he is blessed by the divine because of Jacob "נִחַשְׁתִּי כִּי מִעַטְךָ אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה לְךָ לְפָנַי וַיִּפְרֹץ לָרֹב וַיְבָרֶךְ יְהוָה אֹתְךָ לְרַגְלִי וַאֲבָרְכָה יְהוָה בִּגְלָלֶךָ" (30:27), who agrees "וַיְבָרֲכֵנִי יְהוָה בְּגָלָלֶךָ" (30:30). The description of Laban's and Jacob's affluence "וַיִּפְרֹץ לָרֹב" (30:30, 30:43) indeed verbally echoes the divine promise at Bethel "פרץ" (28:14) and Isaac's farewell blessing "רבה" (28:3). Nevertheless, the previous blessings and promises refer to human offspring in particular, while these current claims concern material wealth, to which the narrator does not explicitly attribute to divine action.

Jacob's speech to his wives strongly attributes his prosperity to divine action. Divine presence is with Jacob "וֵאלֹהֵי אָבִי הָיָה עִמָּדִי" (31:5) despite Laban's souring attitude "רֹאָה אָנֹכִי אֶת־פְּנֵי אֲבִיכֶן כִּי־אֵינֶנּוּ אֵלַי כִּתְמֹל שִׁלְשֹׁם" (31:5). Divine protection does not allow Jacob to be harmed by Laban "וְלֹא־נְתָנוֹ אֱלֹהִים לְהָרַע עִמָּדִי", who deceives him "הֵתֶל בִּי" and changes his wages ten times (31:7, 41). The divine hand is behind the flock breeding success (31:8-9), even reassuring Jacob in a dream (31:10-12). Laban's riches are transferred to him through divine action "וַיַּצֵּל אֱלֹהִים אֶת־מִקְנֵה אֲבִיכֶם וַיִּתֶּן־לִי" (31:9). Leah and Rachel agree with Jacob, claiming that Laban's wealth is given to them by God "כִּי כָל־הָעֹשֶׁר אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיל אֱלֹהִים מֵאָבִינוּ לָנוּ הוּא וּלְבָנֵינוּ" (31:16). Jacob's account strongly suggests divine action in his acquisition of wealth, compared to the narrator's earlier report (30:31-43). Wenham observes a close parallel between Jacob's dream account with the dream at Bethel, both comprising a dream, vision, explanation, command and the angel

of God, and that Jacob's intention is to impress his wives with the divine help he enjoys.[21] Vrolijk similarly remarks, the "heart of his argument" is the "justification of his wealth".[22] According to Rom-Shiloni, Jacob's speech rewrites the previous account and adds the divine element, thereby making Jacob's flight less offensive, portraying him as a passive and dutiful worker who is simply protected and delivered by God from his ruthless master.[23] Lipton comments that in the patriarchal narratives, other characters' awareness of the protagonist's relationship with God is also significant, and divine revelation imparts importance to the character involved.[24] Regardless of the truthfulness of Jacob's claims, the dialogue demonstrates that the human characters perceive a strong connection between wealth and divine action.

Fertility and Wealth

Fertility and wealth are unmistakable notions in the second subcycle. The fertility contest and birth of twelve children (29:31-30:24) occupy center position, and Jacob desires to return home after Rachel becomes fertile (30:25). The narrator also specifies Jacob setting his sons and wives on camels in his flight (31:17).

The notion of wealth is predominant. The introductory scene at the well paints a vivid picture of pastoral prosperity: "בְּאֵר" (29:2, 3, 8, 10), "השקה" (29:2, 3, 7, 8, 10), "עֵדֶר" (29:2), "מִקְנֶה" (29:7), "רעה" (29:7) and "צֹאן" (29:2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10). Jacob's relation with Laban the flock owner is emphasized: "רָחֵל בַּת־לָבָן אֲחִי אִמּוֹ" (29:6), " רָחֵל בִּתּוֹ בָּאָה עִם־הַצֹּאן" (29:10) and "צֹאן לָבָן אֲחִי אִמּוֹ" (2X) (29:10). Alter suggests that the well in a foreign land is likely "associated with fertility and the otherness of the female body to the bridegroom", and the stone on the well (29: 2, 3, 8) represents a blockage of Rachel's womb.[25] This interpretation merges the two notions of fertility and wealth.

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[21] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 271–72.
[22] Vrolijk, *Jacob's Wealth*, 192.
[23] Rom-Shiloni, "When an Explicit Polemic Initiates a Hidden One: Jacob's Aramaean Identity," 207–9.
[24] Lipton, *Revisions of the Night*, 121, 171.
[25] Robert B. Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 152.

Jacob increases Laban's wealth in the first fourteen years: "נִחַשְׁתִּי וַיְבָרֲכַנִי יְהוָה בִּגְלָלֶךָ" (30:27); "כִּי מְעַט אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה לְךָ לְפָנַי וַיִּפְרֹץ לָרֹב וַיְבָרֶךְ יְהוָה אֹתְךָ לְרַגְלָי" (30:30).[26] Jacob, however, manages to generate his own wealth in the subsequent six (30:25-43). Disadvantaged and against the odds, Jacob breeds multicolored flocks from an exclusively white flock with a reproduction trick, and ensures he owns the stronger animals (30:37-42).[27] Jacob acquires ample wealth "וַיִּפְרֹץ הָאִישׁ מְאֹד מְאֹד וַיְהִי־לוֹ צֹאן רַבּוֹת וּשְׁפָחוֹת וַעֲבָדִים וּגְמַלִּים וַחֲמֹרִים" (30:43), and his earlier goal to provide for his household "עַתָּה מָתַי אֶעֱשֶׂה גַם־אָנֹכִי לְבֵיתִי" (30:30) is fulfilled. The increase in Laban's property "פרץ" (30:30) has happened to Jacob "פרץ" (30:43).[28] Park observes a concurrence between the shift in genealogical relationship between Laban and Jacob and the flock multiplication: as the flocks turn from being white (לבן) and properties of Laban (לבן) to being colored (עקד and נקד) and properties of Jacob (יעקב), the shift in both appearance and ownership, along with the phonetic wordplay, expresses the transformation of Laban's property into Jacob's, and this disconnection from Laban is also true of Jacob himself and his wives and children.[29] Jacob's property is emphasized by the narrator's lengthy description of the company leaving Haran: "בָּנָיו", "נָשָׁיו", "גְּמַלִּים", "מִקְנֵהוּ", "רְכֻשׁוֹ", "קִנְיָנוֹ" and "כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ" (31:17-18, 21).

Contention for wealth continues. Laban's sons (or the men of his household) complain about Jacob getting rich at Laban's expense "לָקַח יַעֲקֹב אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לְאָבִינוּ וּמֵאֲשֶׁר לְאָבִינוּ עָשָׂה אֵת כָּל־הַכָּבֹד הַזֶּה" (31:1). Laban's worsening attitude is perceived by Jacob "אֵינֶנּוּ אֵלַי כִּתְמֹל שִׁלְשֹׁם" (31:5), and reported by the narrator "אֵינֶנּוּ עִמּוֹ כִּתְמוֹל שִׁלְשׁוֹם" (31:2). Rachel and Leah protest having no inheritance "חֵלֶק וְנַחֲלָה" (31:14), being alienated "נָכְרִיּוֹת נֶחְשַׁבְנוּ" (31:15), being sold "כִּי מְכָרָנוּ" (31:15), and having their money devoured

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[26] The verb נחש means to prosper, based on Akk. *naḫāšu* meaning "to be luxuriant". Ludwig Köhler et al., eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Leiden, Cologne, New York: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2000), 690. Also Nahum M. Waldman, "A Note on Genesis 30:27b," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 55, no. 2 (1964): 164–65.

[27] Pearson provides a scientific explanation to the reproductive trick, that the branches actually physically isolate the animals with recessive genes, so colored offspring can be produced from white flocks. J. D. Pearson, "A Mendelian Interpretation of Jacob's Sheep," *Science and Christian Belief* 13 (2001): 51–58.

[28] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 144.

[29] Song-Mi Suzie Park, "Transformation and Demarcation of Jacob's 'Flocks' in Genesis 30:25-43: Identity, Election, and the Role of the Divine," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (October 1, 2010): 669–71.

"וַיֹּאכַל גַּם־אָכוֹל אֶת־כַּסְפֵּנוּ" (31:15). They lay claim to Laban's possessions " כִּי כָל־הָעֹשֶׁר אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיל אֱלֹהִים מֵאָבִינוּ לָנוּ הוּא וּלְבָנֵינוּ" (31:16).[30] Jacob defends his ownership of his wealth (31:32, 38-42), while Laban makes a similar claim " הַבָּנוֹת בְּנֹתַי וְהַבָּנִים בָּנַי וְהַצֹּאן צֹאנִי וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה רֹאֶה לִי־הוּא" (31:43). The covenant and Laban's departure (31:44-32:1) eventually make Jacob the owner of all his possessions.

In the second subcycle, Jacob gains progeny (human offspring) and wealth (livestock) from Laban's household. Just as Esau who is embittered with the loss of his blessing of abundance, Laban prevents Jacob from owning people and livestock that originally come from him.

Female Characters

In the second subcycle, the predominant female characters are Jacob's wives, Rachel and Leah. Some of their roles and actions are more passive and typical of biblical female characters, but they also mirror Jacob's actions, undertake their own transaction, and support and assist Jacob in his flight.

Rachel and Leah are treated as objects for transaction and means of bearing children. Rachel first appears as a representative of Laban's house and a messenger (29:1-12), but becomes the "מַשְׂכֶּרֶת" for Jacob's seven years of labor (29:15, 18-19, 25, 27). Laban "לקח" and "הביא" Leah to Jacob, who goes into her "וַיָּבֹא אֵלֶיהָ" (19:23). He "נתן" his daughters to Jacob (29:26, 27, 28), and "נתן" his handmaids to his daughters (29:24, 29). Laban refers to Leah and Rachel with the third person feminine pronouns (29:19) and "זֹאת" (29:27), not as "my daughter" or by name. [31] Their names further contribute to their objectification. Leah's name probably means "cow",[32] and "רחל" means "ewe" (31:18, 32:15).[33] Laban also portrays them as plunder of war " וַתְּנַהֵג אֶת־בְּנֹתַי

[30] They are given slave-girls, and Jacob pays the brideprice through his service, so the legitimacy of their claim is unknown, but their stance is unmistakable.
[31] Vrolijk remarks that the women's passivity is a noticeable feature of this passage. Vrolijk, *Jacob's Wealth*, 148–49.
[32] Köhler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2000, 2:513.
[33] Ludwig Köhler et al., eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 3 (Leiden, Cologne, New York: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2000), 1216.

כִּשְׁבָיוֹת חָרֵב" (31:26).[34] The objectification of Leah and Rachel is most evident in their relationship with Laban.

Childbearing involves a combination of active and passive roles. Fertility is significant but beyond human control. Rachel voices her desperation to Jacob "הָבָה־לִי בָנִים וְאִם־אַיִן מֵתָה אָנֹכִי" (30:1), and even for Leah whose major desire is Jacob's affection, bearing sons is a significant task and source of delight and pride (29:32-35; 30:11, 13). Nevertheless, the two wives give their handmaids to bear children on their behalf (30:3, 9), make decisions for conjugal arrangements (31:14-16), and name all the children, including those by the handmaids (31:6, 8, 11, 13).

Leah and Rachel mirror Jacob's actions. The fertility competition (29:31-30:24) echoes the fraternal rivalry between Jacob and Esau. Two wives in the same household, enjoying the husband's love and a fertile womb respectively, resemble the twin brothers each enjoying one parent's favor. The mandrakes transaction (30:14-16) is reminiscent of the birthright sale. In both scenes, one or more characters return from the field "מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה" (25:29, 30:14, 16), and in both cases the exchange is initiated by the younger sibling.[35] Both Esau and Rachel perceive impending death – Esau from starvation (25:32) and Rachel from infertility (30:1), and want a tangible object – food and offspring. Both Jacob and Leah desire an honor of a more abstract nature – birthright and the husband's recognition. The naming of Naphtali also reflects a deeper rivalry between the sisters, explicitly attesting to the "wrestling" between Rachel and Leah "נַפְתּוּלֵי אֱלֹהִים נִפְתַּלְתִּי עִם־אֲחֹתִי" (30:8), which harks back to the struggling "התרוצץ" of Esau and Jacob in the womb (25:22).[36] Pardes observes that a conversation between two women is strikingly rare in biblical narrative.[37] Leah and Rachel, who are silently traded like cattle and sheep between Laban and Jacob during the wedding, now assume the role of the dealer,

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[34] The *Piel* form of "נהג" resonates with its *Qal* from describing how Jacob leads his flocks "וַיִּנְהַג אֶת־כָּל־מִקְנֵהוּ" (31:18). Mabee remarks that Laban's assessment is faulty, for his daughters willingly flee with Jacob and are not taken as captives (31:14-16). Mabee, "Jacob and Laban," 197.

[35] Vrolijk, *Jacob's Wealth*, 160.

[36] It is merely Rachel's opinion that she has overcome her sister, and the verb describing the boys' wrestling is different, but the picture of competition or struggling between siblings share sufficient similarities.

[37] Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach*, 66.

mirroring male characters in their conduction of a transaction. They also resemble Rebekah in their ability to move Jacob into action, who complies without a word (30:16).

Rachel's theft of the *teraphim* complements and mirrors Jacob's actions. Rachel steals Laban's *teraphim* "וַתִּגְנֹ֣ב רָחֵ֔ל אֶת־הַתְּרָפִ֖ים אֲשֶׁ֥ר לְאָבִֽיהָ" (31:19), while Jacob steals Laban's heart "וַיִּגְנֹ֤ב יַעֲקֹב֙ אֶת־לֵ֣ב לָבָ֔ן" (31:20). Although Jacob's figurative stealing is self-defense while Rachel's literal theft seems arbitrary,[38] the close proximity and succession of the two accounts give them a sense of symmetry. Furthermore, Rachel hiding the teraphim in a camel's saddle (31:34-35) mirrors Jacob hiding himself in Esau's clothes and goat skin (27:15-16). Laban's feeling around the tent ("משש") (31:34) in vain to search for the teraphim also echoes Isaac's failure to tell Esau from Jacob by feeling his son "מוש" (27:21).[39] Rachel asking Laban not to be angry "אַל־יִֽחַר֙ בְּעֵינֵ֣י אֲדֹנִ֔י" (31:35) reverberates with Esau's anger at Jacob "חמה" (27:44) and Jacob's own anger at Laban "וַיִּֽחַר֙ לְיַעֲקֹ֔ב וַיָּ֖רֶב בְּלָבָֽן" (31:36).

In Jacob's "fight and flight" against Laban, Leah and Rachel serve supportive but crucial roles. They not only share Jacob's sentiments regarding relational and financial matters in Laban's household (31:14-16). They give Jacob their approval " וְעַתָּ֕ה כֹּ֖ל אֲשֶׁ֣ר אָמַ֣ר אֱלֹהִ֑ים אֵלֶ֖יךָ עֲשֵׂה" (31:16) and depart with him (31:17). Rachel also makes an extra effort to assist Jacob, if her objective of taking the teraphim is to establish Jacob as the family leader,[40] for protection over their long-distance travel,[41] or to prevent Laban from tracking their whereabouts.[42] More significantly, Rachel's success in hiding the teraphim gives Jacob confidence in his counterattack against Laban, leading to Laban relenting and resolving to making a covenant. The nature and function of the *teraphim* is not apparent from the text, but the function of its failed search in Jacob's successful separation from Laban is noticeable.

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[38] Esther Fuchs, "For I Have the Way of Women: Deception, Gender, and Ideology in Biblical Narrative," *Semeia*, 1988, 74.
[39] Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts*, 56.
[40] Gordon, "The Story of Jacob and Laban in the Light of the Nuzi Tablets," 25–27.
[41] Moshe Greenberg, "Another Look at Rachel's Theft of the Teraphim," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81, no. 3 (1962): 239–48.
[42] J. H. Hunt, "Idols, Idolatry, Teraphim, Household Gods," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. D. Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL ; Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 440.

The roles of Leah and Rachel are varied and significant. As daughters of Laban, at least one of them is Jacob's potential wife. Even their rivalry gives Jacob a large family. Their support of Jacob's second attempt to flee (31:14-16) and Rachel's theft of the teraphim and subsequent coverup (31:19, 34-35) powerfully illustrate a switch of loyalty.

Transaction and Deception

In the second subcycle, several episodes involve various extents of transaction, deception and trickery: the mandrakes transaction, Jacob's marriage contract, the breeding agreement and the *teraphim* theft.

The episode of the Mandrakes is a straight-forward and bilateral transaction without any deception or trickery, in which Leah gives Rachel Reuben's mandrakes in exchange for conjugal rights (30:14-16). Bellis suggests that Rachel has had authority over "Jacob's sleeping arrangements", and conjugal relations with Leah has ceased because of the emotional effect of Leah's pregnancies on Rachel, and this justifies Leah's angry retort that Rachel has taken away her husband (30:15).[43] Even if Jacob prefers Rachel, however, Leah the fertile first wife presumably still enjoys a respectable status in the family. This transaction is followed by a positive sequel. Both sisters agree to the exchange, and Leah bears another child (30:17). Moreover, although the deal only specifies one night "לָכֵן֙ יִשְׁכַּ֣ב עִמָּ֔ךְ הַלַּ֖יְלָה" (30:15), Leah subsequently bears two more children (30:17, 19, 21), implying that she has gained more conjugal rights, and Rachel also bears her first child (30:22-24). This transaction is unique in how no parties suffer loss, including Jacob the "object of transaction", who gains four more children.

Jacob's marriage arrangement is a transaction that involves blatant deception (29:15-30), albeit without outright lying. Jacob clearly offers seven years of service for

[43] A. O. Bellis, "A Sister Is a Forever Friend: Reflections on the Story of Rachel and Leah," *The Journal of Religious Thought* 55/56 (2000): 112.

Rachel "אֶעֱבָדְךָ שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים בְּרָחֵל בִּתְּךָ הַקְּטַנָּה" (29:18).[44] Laban, however, shrewdly employs pronouns in his reply "תִּתִּי אֹתָהּ" (29:19), and avoids mentioning "Rachel" or "younger daughter". Ska comments that verbal irony is employed here, as the "her" is Rachel in Jacob's mind and according to the context, but not in Laban's mind.[45] Laban's explanation of marrying off the elder before the younger (29:26) is evidently unconvincing. He could have clarified his stance or arranged for Leah's marriage. Given the ensuing prolonged and fierce competition between Laban and Jacob for flock ownership, Laban very presumably has planned the deception to gain seven extra years of Jacob's service. Jacob is the defenseless victim of deception. His reaction "לָמָּה רִמִּיתָנִי" (29:25) and Isaac's earlier comment "בָּא אָחִיךָ בְּמִרְמָה" (27:35) employ the same root "רימה". For Jacob, this deception costs him seven extra years of service, but considerably increases his family's size.

The flock multiplication is not strictly speaking a transaction with deception, but it is nevertheless a bilateral agreement which involves a certain extent of shadiness. Fokkelman describes the conversation as "a masterpiece of suspicious wriggle in negotiations, full of ambivalence and false buttons" between "two men well-matched in deceit".[46] Wenham demonstrates how Jacob's language is more blunt, employing straight imperatives, שַׁלְּחֵנִי (30:25) and תְּנָה (30:26), without "נא" or any of the milder forms of request, while Laban's "אִם־נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ" (30:27), "an obsequious way of addressing a superior", expresses polite, cunning and manipulative language towards his "enslaved nephew".[47] Laban's sincerity and apparent generosity, admitting being blessed through Jacob and offering wages (30:27-28), is doubtful. Laban's true objective is demonstrated in his subsequent removal of all the colored flocks (30:35-36). This does not strictly speaking involve deception, but is undoubtedly an underhanded maneuver.

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[44] Compared to the usual bride price of thirty or forty shekels of silver which is three to four years' wages, Jacob's payment is high, but he has little negotiating power, and is paying with labor. Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 61–62.

[45] Ska, *Our Fathers Have Told Us*, 57–58. Ska remarks that "verbal irony is frequent when one character wants to deceive another".

[46] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 142.

[47] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 254–55.

On the other hand, Jacob's reply "לֹא־תִתֶּן־לִי מְאוּמָה" (30:31) is "a classic bargainer's ploy", "an almost reluctant first move" reflecting his quick response and awareness of Laban's stinginess.[48] Jacob's offer of taking all the colored animals (30:31-33) "seems like he is really asking for nothing".[49] Jacob's breeding trick (30:37-43) is scientifically possible and cannot be considered deceptive according to their agreement. From a literary point of view, however, Jacob introduces a "trickster" element. White animals looking at white poplar producing colored offspring is characteristic of a trickster's prank, where "what you see is *not* what you get".[50] Laban changing Jacob's wages ten times (31:7, 41) is not verified by the narrator, but is not refuted by Laban himself either. Jacob employs the phrase "הֵתֵל בִּי" (31:7), which is weaker than "רימה".[51] Laban's power and greed has been well demonstrated, and exploitation of Jacob is highly plausible.[52] The contention between Laban and Jacob concerning flocks and wages strictly speaking does not involve blatant deception, but devious maneuvers are undertaken, especially by Laban.

The theft of the *teraphim* and its cover-up (31:19, 34-35) can be considered deception, although it is technically a theft followed by evidence tampering. Rachel steals the teraphim while Laban is away "וַתִּגְנֹב רָחֵל אֶת־הַתְּרָפִים אֲשֶׁר לְאָבִיהָ" (31:19). Laban's question "מֶה עָשִׂיתְ" interestingly echoes with Jacob's accusation of Laban about the bride switch the next morning "מַה־זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ לִּי... לָמָּה רִמִּיתָנִי" (29:25). Rachel subsequently hides the *teraphim* from Laban's search "וַתְּשַׂמֵּם בְּכַר הַגָּמָל וַתֵּשֶׁב עֲלֵיהֶם" (31:34), and the truthfulness of her claim "כִּי־דֶרֶךְ נָשִׁים לִי" (31:35) is not verified. Rachel's theft may have played a part in causing Laban's angry pursuit, but her success in hiding her theft benefits Jacob, as the failed search grants Jacob confidence in confronting

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[48] Vrolijk, *Jacob's Wealth*, 170.
[49] Alter, *Genesis*, 164.
[50] Park, "Transformation and Demarcation of Jacob's 'Flocks' in Genesis 30," 670.
[51] "תלל" with בְּ carries an aggressive connotation of "mocking" or "trifling with". Ludwig Köhler et al., eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 4 (Leiden, Cologne, New York: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2000), 1740.
[52] According to Morrison's analysis, a six-and-a-half-year turnover time demonstrated by the Nuzi flocks suggest that Laban may have changed the agreement every breeding season to limit Jacob's gain, but the original white flock are completely replaced by colored ones in the course of six years. Morrison, "The Jacob and Laban Narrative in Light of Near Eastern Sources," 160.

Laban about the legitimacy of his independence, and also ownership of his family and wealth.

Whether Jacob is the object for transaction or victim of deception, the initiator of a negotiation or an ignorant third party, his wealth or family size is enlarged, and he ultimately benefits.

The Birth of Jacob's Household

In the second subcycle, Jacob's family comes into existence. Jacob is transformed from a poor bachelor to the paterfamilias of a large and wealthy household. The protracted and arduous process of fighting against Laban – his maternal uncle, father-in-law and patron, centers on the major issues of family and flocks (progeny and wealth), and Jacob's return to Canaan. Laban initially reaps enormous benefits from Jacob's labor, but Laban's daughters eventually become Jacob's wives and his children's mothers. The offspring of Laban's flocks also become Jacob's. After building his young family and generating his newly acquired wealth, Jacob endeavors to gain full ownership and secure their independence.

Subcycle Three (32:2-33:17) (EV 32:1-33:17) From the Camps in Mahanaim to the Booths in Succoth

The third subcycle takes place in the Transjordan, where Jacob fights for the "favor in Esau's eyes", to avoid revenge and ensure successful separation. Wealth remains central to the "fight and flight", but serves as a means of transaction, and there are no instances of blatant deception, only negotiations. Female characters do not assume any active roles, and the divine does not direct or confirm Jacob's itinerary. The subcycle closes with Jacob's successful separation from Esau and settlement in Succoth.

Structure of the Subcycle

Boundaries

The third subcycle begins with Jacob leaving Gilead and continuing his journey "וְיַעֲקֹב הָלַךְ לְדַרְכּוֹ וַיִּפְגְּעוּ־בוֹ מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים" (32:2) (EV 32:1), followed by the Mahanaim account "וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב כַּאֲשֶׁר רָאָם מַחֲנֵה אֱלֹהִים זֶה וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא מַחֲנָיִם" (32:3) (EV 32:2), which ends with the *Pᵉṯûḥā᾽* marking. Esau is introduced in the subsequent verse "וַיִּשְׁלַח יַעֲקֹב מַלְאָכִים לְפָנָיו אֶל־עֵשָׂו אָחִיו אַרְצָה שֵׂעִיר שְׂדֵה אֱדוֹם" (32:4) (EV 32:3). Mahanaim is included in the third subcycle. First, it is connected to succeeding narratives through two verbal linkages: "מלאך" in "מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים" (32:2) that immediately reappears in "מַלְאָכִים" (32:4, 7), and "מחנה" (32:3) that subsequently reemerges multiple times (32:8, 9, 11,22; 33:8). Second, the naming of Mahanaim (32:3), Peniel (32:31), and Succoth (33:17) in the beginning, middle and end of the Transjordan episodes reverberate with one another. Jacob names Mahanaim after his vision of a camp of God (32:3), and Peniel after his encounter "כִּי־רָאִיתִי אֱלֹהִים פָּנִים אֶל־פָּנִים וַתִּנָּצֵל נַפְשִׁי" (32:31). Succoth is named because of Jacob's booths "עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם סֻכּוֹת" (33:17).

The separation of Esau and Jacob marks the end of the third subcycle. Jacob settles his family and flocks in Succoth "וְיַעֲקֹב נָסַע סֻכֹּתָה וַיִּבֶן לוֹ בָּיִת וּלְמִקְנֵהוּ עָשָׂה סֻכֹּת"

(33:17), while Esau returns to Seir "וַיָּשָׁב בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא עֵשָׂו לְדַרְכּוֹ שֵׂעִירָה" (33:16). Both the second and third subcycle, therefore, closes with the picture of Jacob and his main antagonist parting ways. The same verb "וַיָּשָׁב" describes Laban's return at the end of the second subcycle (32:1) and Esau's return at the end of the third (33:16). The same phrase "לְדַרְכּוֹ" is employed to portray Jacob going on his way after separating from Laban (32:2), and Esau going on his way after separation from Jacob (33:16). Blum identifies these two descriptions (32:1b-2a, 33:16-17) as parallel formulas of separation.[1]

The last three verses of Genesis 33 report Jacob settling in Shechem in the Cisjordan, purchasing land and building an altar (33:18-20). This brief episode is included in the Transjordan section by various studies.[2] Wenham describes the report (33:18-20) as an "expanded itinerary", which is "both the conclusion to chapters 32–33 and a prelude to chapter 34", closing the previous section while anticipating the succeeding story, although it does not properly begin a new episode.[3] Sarna also comments that "the names mentioned effect the transition to the next episode".[4]

A *Sᵉṯûmāʾ* is present both after 33:17 and after 33:20, which does not weaken or strengthen this episode's inclusion into preceding or successive sections. Nevertheless, Succoth is located in the Transjordan, while Shechem is in the Cisjordan. Shechem is a new location and introduces a new group of characters and antagonists. Furthermore, Jacob erects an altar "מִזְבֵּחַ" in Shechem (33:20), the very first in the Jacob Cycle, which echoes with the subsequent altar at Bethel (35:1, 3, 7), with linguistic connections between the names "אֵל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" (33:20) and "אֵל בֵּית־אֵל" (35:7). In contrast, Jacob builds a house at Succoth "וַיִּבֶן לוֹ בָּיִת" (33:17), which effectively symbolizes a long-awaited rest Jacob can offer his large young family after his strenuous efforts to protect them from harm. It also marks a critical stage in the establishment of Jacob's "בית אב".

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[1] Blum, "The Jacob Tradition," 186.
[2] von Rad, *Genesis*, 328–29; Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 223; Michael A. Fishbane, "Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle (Gen. 25:19-35:22)," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 26, no. 1–2 (1975): 20; Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts*, 48; Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1986), 59; Rendsburg, "Chiasmus in the Book of Genesis," 21; Coats, *Genesis*, 178; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 527–29, 537; Terino, "A Text Linguistic Study of the Jacob Narrative," 62; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18-50*, 349.
[3] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 287, 300.
[4] Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 231–33.

Lastly, as this research values dramatic criteria and the geographical location of events, the exclusion of the arrival in Shechem (33:18-20) from the third subcycle is more appropriate.

Shape and Main Plot

Episodes in the Transjordan have a composite makeup. The main plot consists of Jacob's preparations to meet Esau and the actual meeting, and can be interpreted in various ways. It is complicated by scenes that do not explicitly and directly contribute to the meeting of Esau, such as Mahanaim and Peniel, and also occasional ambiguous chronologies and flow of action sequence, such as the scenes surrounding Jabbok.

Bar-Efrat identifies Esau's embrace (33:4) as the turning point, the point of highest tension, in the development of the plot.[5] Terino similarly accepts the actual meeting as the peak and denouement (33:1-16), but recognizes an earlier peak between Mahanaim and Jabbok, when Jacob prepares for the meeting (32:7-22); the initial Mahanaim scene is then the prepeak (32:2-6), Jabbok the interpeak plateau (32:23-33) and the Jacob's subsequent journey the post peak (33:17-20).[6] Grossman recognizes two parallel lines in the whole story, namely Jacob's preparation for meeting Esau (32:2-32:24) and implementation of the plan in their actual meeting (32:24-33:17), both parts presenting repetitive elements: divine encounters (32:2-3, 32:24-33), Esau with his four hundred men (32:7, 33:1), Jacob dividing his family (32:8, 33:1-2), gifts to Esau (32:14-20, 33:8-9), explaining the gifts (32:21-22, 33:10-15), and movement of Jacob and his family (32:23-24, 33:12-17).[7]

Adhering to the dramatic criteria, and focusing on the theme of "fight and flight", this research interprets the Transjordan episodes from the internal point of view of the protagonist Jacob, who strives to gain "the favor in Esau's eyes", and whose senses and perception, in terms of vision, hearing and physical touch, are noteworthy elements and

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[5] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 123.
[6] Terino, "A Text Linguistic Study of the Jacob Narrative," 60–61.
[7] Jonathan Grossman, "Jacob's Struggle at Jabbok - A New Reading," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 34, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 135–37.

plot markers in the story. The narrative is viewed as a liner plot that features five stages of "fighting for the favor in Esau's eyes". Each stage begins with a "perception" on Jacob's part, which triggers an action or response from Jacob, and the five stages gradually culminate in a climax, a two-part dialogue with Esau, followed by the parting of ways.

First, Jacob sees a vision at Mahanaim. He is met "וַיִּפְגְּעוּ־בוֹ" by the angels of God (32:2), and sees "כַּאֲשֶׁר רָאָם" God's camp (32:3). He then sends messengers to Esau in Seir (32:4-6). Second, Jacob hearing a piece of critical information about Esau from the returning messengers "וַיָּשֻׁבוּ הַמַּלְאָכִים אֶל־יַעֲקֹב לֵאמֹר" (32:7). He responds with a series of actions: dividing his people and property into two camps (32:8-9), entreating for divine protection (32:10-13), sending at least four droves of gifts to Esau (32:14-22), and sending his family across the Jabbok (32:23-24). Third, a man approaches Jacob at night at the Jabbok (32:25). This encounter is less strongly connected to the main plot. Jacob receives a limp, a blessing, a change of name and a possible change of psychological state. Fourth, as Jacob sees Esau from afar "וַיִּשָּׂא יַעֲקֹב עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא" (33:1), he divides his family into three groups (33:1-3), before entering into physical proximity with Esau (33:4-7).

The fifth and final part begins with another physical encounter – Esau's approach "וַיָּרָץ עֵשָׂו לִקְרָאתוֹ", embrace "וַיִּשָּׂא יַעֲקֹב עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא", and kissing "וַיִּשָּׁקֵהוּ" (33:4). Jacob also draws near "עַד־גִּשְׁתָּו עַד־אָחִיו" (33:3), and so do his family members (33:6-7). The two groups – Jacob's entourage and Esau's four hundred men – finally come into close physical proximity, and the brothers engage in a two-part dialogue. The first is Jacob's fight for "the favor in Esau's eyes" in terms of appeasing him with gifts (33:5, 8-11), to prevent any revenge. The second is Jacob's fight for "the favor in Esau's eyes" in terms of rejecting travelling to Seir with Esau (33:12-15). The episode ends with their separation, Esau returning to Seir and Jacob travelling to Succoth (33:16-17).

Recurrent Themes

Geographical Relocation

Jacob and his company undertake multiple movements within the Transjordan: passing through Mahanaim, crossing the Jabbok, moving towards Esau who comes from Seir, and travelling to Succoth. The precise locations, their significance in the plot, and correlation with Jacob's actions all involve a certain amount of ambiguity.

Mahanaim, Peniel and Succoth mark critical turning points in Jacob's meeting with Esau. Mahanaim begins the story and precedes the sending of messengers (32:3-4), marking the beginning of Jacob's preparations. Succoth marks the end of their meeting, completing the story by noting Jacob's physical distance from Esau (33:16-17). Peniel roughly marks the transition from Jacob's preparations to the actual encounter. Jacob immediately sees Esau from afar after the revelation at Peniel (33:1), but makes further preparations (33:2-3) before physically meeting his brother (33:4).

Mahanaim, Peniel and Succoth are named and phrased similarly: "וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם מַחֲנָיִם הַהוּא" (32:3); "וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם פְּנִיאֵל" (32:31); "עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם סֻכּוֹת" (33:17). All three names are based on Jacob's perception or actions: "וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב כַּאֲשֶׁר רָאָם מַחֲנֵה אֱלֹהִים זֶה" (32:3); "כִּי־רָאִיתִי אֱלֹהִים פָּנִים אֶל־פָּנִים וַתִּנָּצֵל נַפְשִׁי" (32:31); "וְיַעֲקֹב נָסַע סֻכֹּתָה וַיִּבֶן לוֹ בָּיִת וּלְמִקְנֵהוּ עָשָׂה סֻכֹּת" (33:17). As Ross observes, these three places are named and etymologized by Jacob in his return to Canaan.[8] While Mahanaim and Succoth bookends the subcycle, Peniel stands in the middle of the pericope, and as Jacob names the place (32:31), Jacob himself is also given a new name (32:29).

Succoth is important in two more ways. The first lies in the building of a house and booths "וַיִּבֶן לוֹ בָּיִת וּלְמִקְנֵהוּ עָשָׂה סֻכֹּת" (33:17), which represents settlement for a significant time period, in contrast to the transient camps in the previous transitional stops in Gilead, Mahanaim and Jabbok. The young members of Jacob's family and flocks is a major concern in this subcycle, and the deliberate description of a house and booths for the animals strongly portrays a picture of rest and rejuvenation.

[8] Allen P. Ross, "Studies in the Life of Jacob Part 2: Jacob at Jabbok, Israel at Peniel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137 (1985): 341.

Moreover, settling in Succoth instead of following Esau to Seir illustrates a successful separation. Throughout the whole subcycle, Jacob tries to protect his family and property from Esau, and the ability to choose Succoth over Seir symbolizes his success. Esau's return to Seir echoes the beginning of the episode, when Jacob sends messengers to Esau in Seir, the field of Edom "וַיִּשְׁלַח יַעֲקֹב מַלְאָכִים לְפָנָיו אֶל־עֵשָׂו אָחִיו אַרְצָה שֵׂעִיר שְׂדֵה אֱדוֹם" (32:4). Esau arrives from Seir in the beginning (32:4, 7; 33:1), and returns without Jacob (33:14, 16) at the end.

Fight and Flight

The overarching theme of the third subcycle is Jacob's fight to obtain the "favor in Esau's eyes", which has double objectives – urging Esau to accept his gifts, and to journey to Seir without Jacob, which can be considered Jacob's "flight". Appeasing Esau with gifts and maintaining a distance between Esau's company and his own family is Jacob's endeavor throughout the Transjordan scenes. The phrase "לִמְצֹא־חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ" is repeatedly spoken by Jacob, who undertakes four actions to appease Esau, and four other to prepare to flee from him and minimize his own loss.

To appease Esau, Jacob sends messengers with a word (32:4-6), sends at least four droves of gifts (32:14-22), prostrates to Esau while his family follow suit (33:3, 6-7), and pushes Esau to accept the gifts (33:5-11).

Sending messengers occurs immediately after Mahanaim. Alter remarks that the verbal repetition between Jacob's "מַלְאָכִים" (32:4) and the "מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים" at Mahanaim (32:2) creates a linkage that is a common principle of biblical narrative.[9] Jacob explicitly expresses his wish to find favor in Esau's eyes for the first time "וַיְהִי־לִי שׁוֹר וַחֲמוֹר צֹאן וְעֶבֶד וְשִׁפְחָה וָאֶשְׁלְחָה לְהַגִּיד לַאדֹנִי לִמְצֹא־חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ" (32:6), through telling Esau about the wealth he had acquired in Haran. The rationale and result of this dispatch is unaccounted for, but the messengers return with vital information (32:7).

[9] Alter, *Genesis*, 178.

Jacob sends droves of gifts ahead of himself (32:14-22) after hearing about Esau coming with four hundred men (32:7). There are at least four separate delegations: הָרִאשׁוֹן (32:18), הַשֵּׁנִי, הַשְּׁלִישִׁי and גַּם אֶת־כָּל־הַהֹלְכִים אַחֲרֵי (32:20). The word "מִנְחָה" is repeated four times (32:14, 19, 21, 22), and Jacob explicitly expresses his hope to appease Esau with the gifts before him "אֲכַפְּרָה פָנָיו בַּמִּנְחָה הַהֹלֶכֶת לְפָנָי וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן אֶרְאֶה פָּנָיו אוּלַי יִשָּׂא פָנָי" (32:21).

As Jacob approaches Esau, he bows to the ground seven times "וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַרְצָה שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים" (33:3), followed by his whole family (33:6-7), expressing a high level of deference. This is a reversal of Isaac's blessing, that Jacob's brothers bow before him: "וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לְךָ בְּנֵי אִמֶּךָ" (27:29).[10]

Jacob convinces Esau to accept his gifts in the first part of their dialogue (33:5-6, 8-11), and Jacob's desire for Esau's favor ("חן") cannot be overemphasized. The root "חנן" frames their conversation regarding the gifts (33:5-11).[11] To Esau's first question about the women and children, Jacob attributes his children to God's favor ("חנן") "הַיְלָדִים אֲשֶׁר־חָנַן אֱלֹהִים אֶת־עַבְדֶּךָ" (33:5). To Esau's second question about the camps of gifts "מִי לְךָ כָּל־הַמַּחֲנֶה הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר פָּגָשְׁתִּי" (33:8), Jacob explains his desire to find favor ("חן") in Esau's eyes "לִמְצֹא־חֵן בְּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנִי" (33:8). This is the second time Jacob employs the phrase. When Esau declines the gifts "יֶשׁ־לִי רָב אָחִי יְהִי לְךָ אֲשֶׁר־לָךְ" (33:9), Jacob makes another appeal for the favor ("חן") in Esau's eyes "אַל־נָא אִם־נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ" (33:10a), that Esau will take his gifts "וְלָקַחְתָּ מִנְחָתִי מִיָּדִי" (33:10b). This is the third time Jacob employs the phrase. Jacob again mentions the divine favor ("חנן") he has received "כִּי־חַנַּנִי אֱלֹהִים וְכִי יֶשׁ־לִי־כֹל" (33:11). Jacob's two references to God's "חן" (33:5, 11) envelop the two pleadings for the favor in Esau's eyes (33:8, 10). By comparing Esau's face to God's face "כִּי עַל־כֵּן רָאִיתִי פָנֶיךָ כִּרְאֹת פְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים וַתִּרְצֵנִי" (33:10), Jacob is hoping to receive favor ("חן") from Esau, just as he has received favor ("חן") from God.[12] Jacob changes his terminology in the final plead "קַח־נָא אֶת־בִּרְכָתִי אֲשֶׁר הֻבָא לָךְ" (33:11), switching from "מנחה" to "ברכה", which may appear to be the key to Esau's change of mind. The word

[10] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 223–24; Laurence A. Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis* (Sheffield: JSOT Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 122–23; Jesse C. Long, "Wrestling with God to Win: A Literary Reading of the Story of Jacob at Jabbok in Honor of Don Williams," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 54.
[11] Vrolijk, *Jacob's Wealth*, 249.
[12] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 225.

"ברכה" indeed appears multiple times in earlier scenes (27:12, 35, 36, 38, 41; 28:4), and is the reason for Esau's anger at Jacob (27:41, 44, 45). Nevertheless, Jacob is presumably not referring to their tumultuous history. Bridge aptly suggests that Jacob's employment of the term "ברכה" (33:11) is not a return of the blessing he has stolen, for the blessing cannot be revoked (27:33-38).[13] Jacob's success is more probably due to his relentless pleading for the favor in Esau's eyes. Jacob's urging immediately precedes Esau's concession "וַיִּפְצַר־בּוֹ וַיִּקָּח" (33:11).[14]

Jacob's second objective in seeking favor in Esau's eyes constitutes his "flight" – to flee from Esau's presence and influence, and to protect his family from potential harm. This is expressed through another set of four actions: division of his entourage into two camps (32:8-9), praying for deliverance lest Esau strikes (32:10-13), dividing his family into three while approaching Esau (33:1-2), and convincing Esau to let them travel separately (33:12-16).

Jacob divides his entourage into two camps " וַיֵּצֶר לוֹ וַיַּחַץ אֶת־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־אִתּוֹ וְאֶת־הַצֹּאן וְאֶת־הַבָּקָר וְהַגְּמַלִּים לִשְׁנֵי מַחֲנוֹת" (32:8b). "שְׁנֵי מַחֲנוֹת" hark back to "מָחֳנָיִם" (32:3),[15] although no explicit explanation connects the two episodes. The reason for the division, however, is unequivocal and explicit. Jacob is in intense fear "וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד וַיֵּצֶר לוֹ" (32:8) upon hearing about Esau coming with his four hundred men (33:7). His rationale is further explicated in his internal monologue, to preserve at least half of his group, which consists of people and possessions – "עם", "צאן", "בקר", "גמלים" (32:8), should Esau attack "אִם־יָבוֹא עֵשָׂו אֶל־הַמַּחֲנֶה הָאַחַת וְהִכָּהוּ וְהָיָה הַמַּחֲנֶה הַנִּשְׁאָר לִפְלֵיטָה" (32:9). Employment of the word "פליטה" elsewhere expresses the idea of a narrow escape or a relatively small percentage of survivors (Gen 45:7, Ex 10:5, Jdg 21:17, 2 Sa 15:14, 2 Kgs 19:30-31, Is 4:2, 10:20). Jacob perceives immense threat and danger.

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[13] Edward J. Bridge, "The 'Slave' Is the 'Master': Jacob's Servile Language to Esau in Genesis 33.1-17," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 38, no. 3 (2014): 267.

[14] "פצר" implies urging and coercing. Köhler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2000, 3:954. The verb "פצר" in Qal appears several times elsewhere, in most cases concerning one character urging another to an action: Lot (Gen 19:3), the Sodomites (Gen 19:9), the Levite's father-in-law (Jdg 19:7), Elisha's men (2 Kgs 2:17), and Elisha (2 Kgs 5:16).

[15] Alter, *Genesis*, 177; Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 202.

Jacob entreats the divine to be rescued from the hands of Esau "הַצִּילֵנִי נָא מִיַּד אָחִי מִיַּד עֵשָׂו" (32:12a), fearing attack and loss of life "פֶּן־יָבוֹא וְהִכַּנִי אֵם עַל־בָּנִים" (32:12b). He repeats his earlier concern that Esau would come "בוא" and attack "היכה" (32:9). Jacob's previous focus on his whole camp – his "עם", "צאן", "בקר" and "גמלים" (32:8), is now centered on his family – "אֵם עַל־בָּנִים" (32:12). Zakovitch remarks that the phrase "אֵם עַל־בָּנִים" denotes incomparable brutality (Hos 10:14).[16] Jacob's admission of his fear "כִּי־יָרֵא אָנֹכִי אֹתוֹ" (32:12) corresponds with the narrator's description "וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד וַיֵּצֶר לוֹ" (32:8), although Jacob's own confession is more toned down.

Jacob divides his family into three groups (33:1b-3), upon seeing Esau coming with four hundred men (33:1a). Now Jacob sees the scene with his own eyes "וַיִּשָּׂא יַעֲקֹב עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה עֵשָׂו בָּא וְעִמּוֹ אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת אִישׁ" (33:1) what he has heard earlier "וְגַם הֹלֵךְ לִקְרָאתְךָ וְאַרְבַּע־מֵאוֹת אִישׁ עִמּוֹ" (32:7). No explicit reason is hereby given regarding Jacob's inner psychology, but Jacob's previous fear (32:8) can be inferred. The reason for arranging his family into three groups with the concubines in front and Rachel at the rear (33:2-3) is not explicit. This may reflect Jacob's intention to preserve his family, especially its most valuable members, namely Rachel and Joseph. Alternatively, it can be for presentation to Esau.[17] Previously, Jacob also orders a distance to be maintained between the four droves of gifts he sends Esau "וְרָוַח תָּשִׂימוּ בֵּין עֵדֶר וּבֵין עֵדֶר" (32:17). Both divisions can be a safety measure, or for esthetic and presentation purposes, or both.

The second part of the dialogue with Esau is the final stage of Jacob's flight. Jacob strives to reject Esau's offer "נִסְעָה וְנֵלֵכָה וְאֵלְכָה לְנֶגְדֶּךָ" (33:12), offering to travel slowly "לְאִטִּי" behind Esau towards Seir (33:14), because of the young children and flocks (33:13). Wenham suggests that the first person singular and a vague delay עַד אֲשֶׁר־אָבֹא אֶל־אֲדֹנִי שֵׂעִירָה (32:14) is actually a polite rejection.[18] Esau apparently do not trust Jacob's promise, or interprets an opposite message between the lines, for he proposes leaving some of his men with him "וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו אַצִּיגָה־נָּא עִמְּךָ מִן־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר אִתִּי" (33:15a). This second offer is again declined by Jacob, who replies with what is apparently his last

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[16] Zakovitch, *Jacob*, 96.
[17] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 524–25; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 298; Alter, *Genesis*, 184; Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 229. Westermann remarks that it "corresponds to the order of rank as in the court ceremonial".
[18] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 299–300.

resort, pleading for favor in Jacob's eyes for the last time "לָמָּה זֶּה אֶמְצָא־חֵן בְּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנִי" (33:15b). Bridge identifies the reply as an ambiguous off-record statement, a polite way of saying no, which Esau has to interpret and decide whether to accept or reject.[19] Jacob makes a strenuous effort to avoid any physical proximity with Esau, not even with some of his men. He finally succeeds in securing their separation, as Esau returns to Seir on the same day (33:16) and Jacob journeys to Succoth (33:17).

The endeavor to acquire the "favor in Esau's eyes" is complex and prolonged. On one hand, Jacob has to approach Esau physically and presentably, and offer him gifts. On the other hand, he has to ascertain a safe and complete separation at the end, protecting his family from any harm. His "fight" and "flight", at the same time drawing near and keeping a distance, begins in Mahanaim and culminates in their physical meeting and dialogue. The difficulty is increased by the obscurity of Esau's intention. Four hundred men represents a standard regiment or raiding party,[20] or the size of militia heading to battle,[21] but Jacob's messengers return unharmed.[22] Although Esau greets Jacob warmly and passionately (33:4),[23] and employs friendly language (33:9), his refusal of Jacob's gifts (33:9) and subsequent insistence on travelling with Jacob (33:12, 15) may reflect an underlying intention to maintain control over his brother. Kodell suggests that Jacob is always wary of Esau's apparent generosity and forgiveness, and therefore ensures that the gifts neutralize any hostile intent, and avoids the company of his people.[24] Jacob's previous experience with Laban, who welcomes him warmly at first but later exploits him, may be the reason for Jacob's relentless effort to appease Esau and keep a distance from him, despite his friendly and accepting behavior. The "flight" is nevertheless successful, for Esau returns to Seir (33:16), just as Laban goes back his way (32:54).

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[19] Bridge, "The 'Slave' Is the 'Master,'" 274.
[20] Alter, *Genesis*, 178.
[21] Zakovitch compares this number with David's men, which also numbers four hundred (1 Sa 22:2, 25:13, 30:10). Zakovitch, *Jacob*, 98.
[22] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 290.
[23] Esau runs towards Jacob "וַיָּרָץ עֵשָׂו לִקְרָאתוֹ", embraces him "וַיְחַבְּקֵהוּ", falls on his neck "וַיִּפֹּל עַל־צַוָּארָו", kisses him "וַיִּשָּׁקֵהוּ", and weeps "וַיִּבְכּוּ" (33:4). The run, embrace and kissing recalls Laban's reaction when Jacob first arrived Haran "וַיָּרָץ לִקְרָאתוֹ וַיְחַבֵּק־לוֹ וַיִּנַּשֵּׁק־לוֹ" (29:13), and the falling upon the neck "וַיִּפֹּל עַל־צַוָּארָי" and weeping "בכה" later appears in Joseph's reunion with Benjamin and Jacob (45:14, 46:29).
[24] Jerome Kodell, "Jacob Wrestles with Esau (Gen 32:23–32)," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 10, no. 2 (May 1, 1980): 67.

Divine Intervention

Divine appearances in the third subcycle varies from those in other cycles. Jacob receives no direct messages about his journey, but there are two theophanies – a brief account of a vision at Mahanaim (32:2-3), and a physical combat and dialogue with a divine being at Jabbok (32:25-33). They do not make indispensable contributions to the main plot, but present multiple linguistic and thematic links to other scenes in the Jacob Cycle. They are markers in the narrative, indicating a new stage in Jacob's meeting with Esau. Being places named by Jacob in the Transjordan, and places where theophanies remind Jacob of his past experiences and ensuing challenge, Mahanaim and Peniel both strengthen the connection between Jacob's journey and the divine. Another connection is created by Jacob's plea to the divine for deliverance (32:10-13).

The brief episode at Mahanaim appears disconnected and bewildering. Jacob is met by angels "וַיִּפְגְּעוּ־בוֹ מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים" (32:2b), and according to what he sees "וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב כַּאֲשֶׁר רָאָם מַחֲנֵה אֱלֹהִים זֶה" (32:3a), names the place "וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא מָחֲנָיִם" (32:3b). There are multiple unknowns: whether it is a vision or dream or a real-life encounter, whether the angels come from heaven or earth, and whether the encounter is hostile or amicable, for the words "פגע ב" and "מחנה" may carry military or antagonistic connotations, but can also signify a chance encounter.[25] Houtman suggests that experience of divine proximity encourages Jacob and inspires him to send messengers, and this reading is supported by verbal linkages with the Bethel episode: the initial meeting "וַיִּפְגַּע בַּ" (28:11) and "וַיִּפְגְּעוּ־בוֹ" (32:2), the angels "מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים" (28:12) and "מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים" (32:2), the naming of the place "וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא" (28:19) and "וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא" (32:3), and the reference to Jacob continuing on his journey "בַּדֶּרֶךְ הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ" (28:20) and "וְיַעֲקֹב הָלַךְ לְדַרְכּוֹ" (32:2).[26] Bethel prepares Jacob for his encounters at Haran and interactions with Laban; Mahanaim anticipates the events

[25] Cornelis Houtman, "Jacob at Mahanaim: Some Remarks on Genesis XXXII 2-3," *Vetus Testamentum* 28, no. 1 (1978): 37–38. Fokkelman suggests that the terminologies convey a military overtone, reverberating with Esau's contingent of four hundred men. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 198–99.
[26] Houtman, "Jacob at Mahanaim," 198–99.

leading up to Jacob's reunion with Esau. The episode of Mahanaim is also linguistically connected to subsequent scenes: Jacob sends messengers "מַלְאָכִים" to Esau (32:4), divides his company into two camps "שְׁנֵי מַחֲנוֹת" (32:8-9), expresses gratitude regarding his current ownership of two camps "שְׁנֵי מַחֲנוֹת" (32:11), spends the night in the camp " וְהוּא לָן בַּלַּיְלָה־הַהוּא בַּמַּחֲנֶה" (32:22), and explains the camps of gifts "כָּל־הַמַּחֲנֶה הַזֶּה" to Esau (33:8). Moreover, the final scene is one of "two camps" approaching each other: Esau and his four hundred men on one side, and Jacob's camp on the other. By its resemblance with Bethel, verbal linkages to subsequent scenes, and position in the narrative, Mahanaim serves as an anticipation of Jacob's impending journey.

The theophany at Peniel (32:23-33) consists of multiple unknowns: intention and logistics of crossing the Jabbok, identity of the assailant, reason for the wrestle, nature of Jacob's injury and victory, implications of the new name and blessing, and the significance of the whole event. Nevertheless, two pieces of information are highlighted: Jacob is separated from all his possessions, and is alone without any company " וַיִּוָּתֵר יַעֲקֹב לְבַדּוֹ" (32:25). Vrolijk points to the climatic effect of Jacob separating from offspring and wealth he has striven so hard to attain.[27] Ross remarks that Jacob's objective of moving his family and possessions is irrelevant and unimportant, compared to his solitude, which the narrative strongly underscores.[28] Savran identifies the intricate relation between the notion of separation and theophany: for multiple biblical characters, separation is a *mise-en-scène* for theophany, as the private, mystical, and extraordinary nature of encountering the divine is apparently antithetical to human company.[29] Jacob's separation from his newly acquired wealth and family, and doing so at night, turns him back to his state of nocturnal solitude at Bethel.

Peniel contributes to the characterization of Jacob as a hero. McKay considers the crossing of Jabbok and the fight Jacob's rite of passage, which vindicate the hero and accredit him with the power of the supernatural opponent, making him invulnerable to

[27] Vrolijk, *Jacob's Wealth*, 231–32.
[28] Ross, "Studies in the Life of Jacob Part 2: Jacob at Jabbok, Israel at Peniel," 343.
[29] George W. Savran, *Encountering the Divine: Theophany in Biblical Narrative* (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 14.

the human adversary Esau.[30] Anderson identifies the wrestle at Jabbok as an episode that highlights Jacob's character as a fighter, and this is underscored with his new name.[31] Hendel points to the significance of a divine adversary, for "the greater the adversary, the greater the hero", and similar to Moses in the blood bridegroom episode (Ex 4:24-26), a "dimension of danger" between the divine and his "chosen hero" shapes the hero.[32] The fight may also produce a positive psychological effect. McKenzie asserts that prevailing over a stronger opponent and extracting a blessing from him grants Jacob confidence regarding his confrontation with Esau.[33]

Another possible function of Peniel is to highlight the fraternal struggle between Jacob and Esau by alluding to their previous contests. First, Peniel involves a one-to-one physical combat. A man wrestled with Jacob "וַיֵּאָבֵק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ" (32:25), and Jacob wrestled with him "בְּהֵאָבְקוֹ עִמּוֹ" (32:26). This is reminiscent of the struggle in the womb "וַיִּתְרֹצְצוּ הַבָּנִים" (25:22). Both scenes employ rare verbs, hapax legomena "נאבק" and "התרוצץ". The verb "נאבק" carries the connotation of being intertwined,[34] and "התרוצץ" kicking and shoving one another.[35] Both scenes paint a similar picture of one-to-one entanglement and close combat. Second, the wrestling takes place at night until the breaking of day "עַד עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר" (32:25), and the nocturnal timing is repeatedly emphasized in this episode by three allusions to rising of the sun: "עָלָה הַשָּׁחַר" (32:25 and 27) and "וַיִּזְרַח־לוֹ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ" (32:32). The struggle in the womb (25:22) also takes place in the dark. Third, there is an involvement of the lower limb. The man touches Jacob's thigh "וַיִּגַּע בְּכַף־יְרֵכוֹ וַתֵּקַע כַּף־יֶרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב" (32:26), while Jacob grabs Esau's heal "וְיָדוֹ אֹחֶזֶת בַּעְקֵב עֵשָׂו" (25:26) in the birth scene. Moreover, victory is not one-sided. The man cannot prevail against Jacob "לֹא יָכֹל לוֹ" (32:26), but Jacob's thigh is strained "וַתֵּקַע כַּף־יֶרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב בְּהֵאָבְקוֹ עִמּוֹ" (32:26) and given

[30] Heather A. McKay, "Jacob Makes It Across the Jabbok: An Attempt to Solve the Success/Failure Ambivalence in Israel's Self-Consciousness," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 12, no. 38 (June 1, 1987): 3–13. Kodell considers the wrestling a symbol of character maturity and moral development. Kodell, "Jacob Wrestles with Esau (Gen 32:23–32)," 68. A character change is not evident from the text, however.
[31] Bradford A. Anderson, "The Intersection of the Human and the Divine in Genesis 32–33," *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 128, no. 1 (2016): 32.
[32] Hendel, *The Epic of the Patriarch*, 101–3, 105, 109.
[33] McKenzie, "You Have Prevailed," 227.
[34] Ludwig Köhler et al., eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Leiden, Cologne, New York: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2000), 9.
[35] Köhler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2000, 3:1286.

a limp "צֹלֵעַ עַל־יְרֵכוֹ" (32:32). Jacob has the power not to let go "לֹא אֲשַׁלֵּחֲךָ כִּי אִם־בֵּרַכְתָּנִי" (32:27), and has prevailed "כִּי־שָׂרִיתָ עִם־אֱלֹהִים וְעִם־אֲנָשִׁים וַתּוּכָל" (32:29), but the man has the power to name and bless Jacob and to conceal his own name: "לֹא יַעֲקֹב יֵאָמֵר עוֹד שִׁמְךָ כִּי אִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל" (32:29), "לָמָּה זֶּה תִּשְׁאַל לִשְׁמִי וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתוֹ שָׁם" (32:30). In the story of the twins, Esau comes out of the womb first, but his heel is held onto, and his birthright and blessing is taken later in the story. Furthermore, Jacob receives a name "וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב" (25:26) both in the birth scene (25:25-26) and Jabbok "לֹא יַעֲקֹב יֵאָמֵר עוֹד שִׁמְךָ כִּי אִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל" (32:29), and receives a blessing both at Jabbok "וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתוֹ שָׁם" (32:30), and during the deception of Isaac (27:26-30, 28:1, 4, 6). Jacob's relentless request for a blessing (32:27) is also reminiscent of Esau's persistent pleading for a blessing (27:34, 36, 38). Lastly, Jacob prevailing over his opponent "יכל" (32:26, 29) echoes Rachel's perception of her victory in wrestling against Leah "נַפְתּוּלֵי אֱלֹהִים נִפְתַּלְתִּי עִם־אֲחֹתִי גַּם־יָכֹלְתִּי" (30:8), which is itself a mirror of the twins' infighting. A phonetic wordplay is also created by the three words "יעקב" "נאבק" and "יבוק".[36] The multiple linguistic and thematic connections allude to the general sibling rivalry between Jacob and Esau.

Jacob's plea for deliverance (32:10-13) points to previous divine speeches regarding his itinerary. Jacob's address of the divine "אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי אַבְרָהָם וֵאלֹהֵי אָבִי יִצְחָק" (32:10) echoes God's self-identification at Bethel "אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אָבִיךָ וֵאלֹהֵי יִצְחָק" (28:13). Jacob mentions God's previous command for him to return to Canaan "שׁוּב לְאַרְצְךָ וּלְמוֹלַדְתֶּךָ" (32:10), which is a close quotation of the divine instruction to leave Haran "שׁוּב אֶל־אֶרֶץ אֲבוֹתֶיךָ וּלְמוֹלַדְתֶּךָ" (31:3). Jacob's concern for the safety of his family in the upcoming journey (32:12) also reverberates with his vow at Bethel (28:20-21).

There are faint allusions to the divine's role in fertility and wealth. Jacob attributes his children to being divinely granted "הַיְלָדִים אֲשֶׁר־חָנַן אֱלֹהִים אֶת־עַבְדֶּךָ" (33:5). He makes another similar acknowledgement of divinely given wealth "כִּי־חַנַּנִי אֱלֹהִים וְכִי יֶשׁ־לִי כֹּל" (33:11). Jacob's entreaty expresses his gratitude of God's "חֲסָדִים" and "אֱמֶת" that allow him to grow from one person to two camps (32:11).

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[36] Stanley Gevirtz, "Of Patriarchs and Puns: Joseph at the Fountain, Jacob at the Ford," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 46 (1975): 51; Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 210; McKenzie, "You Have Prevailed," 226.

Fertility and Wealth

In the third subcycle, Jacob's wealth and fertile family is repeatedly emphasized. Jacob charges his messengers to mention he has "עֶבֶד וְשִׁפְחָה", "שׁוֹר", "חֲמוֹר" and "צֹאן" (32:6). Jacob's two camps include "הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־אִתּוֹ", "צאן", "בקר" and "גמלים" (32:8). This concurs and reverberates with the earlier list of Jacob's possessions acquired in Haran, which includes "צֹאן רַבּוֹת", "וּשְׁפָחוֹת וַעֲבָדִים", "וּגְמַלִּים" and "וַחֲמֹרִים" (30:43). Jacob acknowledges he has gained his wealth in the past twenty years " בְּמַקְלִי עָבַרְתִּי אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה וְעַתָּה הָיִיתִי לִשְׁנֵי מַחֲנוֹת" (32:11).

The most impressive list is the four droves of gifts Jacob sends Esau (32:14-15): 200 "עִזִּים" and 20 "תְּיָשִׁים", 200 "רְחֵלִים" and 20 "אֵילִים", 40 "פָּרוֹת" and 10 "פָּרִים", 20 "אָתֹנֹת" and 10 "עְיָרִם", and 30 "גְּמַלִּים מֵינִיקוֹת וּבְנֵיהֶם". For each type of livestock, the numbers of females are double, four times, or twenty times the number of males. This vaguely reflects the male to female ratio in Jacob's marriage, namely one paterfamilias, two wives and four mothers. The enormous quantity of animals also echoes the large number of children and servants in Jacob's family.

At Jabbok, Jacob moves his whole family " שְׁתֵּי נָשָׁיו וְאֶת־שְׁתֵּי שִׁפְחֹתָיו וְאֶת־אַחַד עָשָׂר יְלָדָיו" (32:23) and all his possessions "וַיַּעֲבֵר אֶת־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ" (32:24) across the river. The expressions highlight the quantity of Jacob's hard-earned wealth and the size of Jacob's precious family. The picture of crossing a body of water is reminiscent of crossing the Euphrates earlier, where a similar phrase "וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ" is employed to describe Jacob fleeing Haran and crossing the river with all his possessions (32:21). The enormous entourage that crosses the Euphrates also includes Jacob's sons and wives " וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת־בָּנָיו וְאֶת־כָּל־מִקְנֵהוּ אֶת־כָּל־רְכֻשׁוֹ אֲשֶׁר רָכָשׁ מִקְנֵה קִנְיָנוֹ אֲשֶׁר רָכַשׁ בְּפַדַּן אֲרָם" (31:17), and all of his possessions " וְאֶת־כָּל־מִקְנֵהוּ וְאֶת־כָּל־רְכֻשׁוֹ אֲשֶׁר רָכָשׁ וְאֶת־נָשָׁיו עַל־הַגְּמַלִּים" (31:18). Jacob's dialogue with Esau repeatedly mentions their respective wealth. Esau indicates that he has abundant possessions "יֶשׁ־לִי רָב" (33:9), while Jacob claims to have everything "יֶשׁ־לִי־כֹל" (33:11). Their respective wealth is recognized as the cause of their separation in *toledot* Esau following the Jacob Cycle "כִּי־הָיָה רְכוּשָׁם רָב מִשֶּׁבֶת יַחְדָּו וְלֹא יָכְלָה אֶרֶץ מְגוּרֵיהֶם לָשֵׂאת אֹתָם מִפְּנֵי מִקְנֵיהֶם" (36:7). Esau has wives, sons, daughters, people of his household "כָּל־נַפְשׁוֹת בֵּיתוֹ", cattle "מִקְנֵהוּ", animals "בְּהֶמְתּוֹ"

and acquired possessions "כָּל־קִנְיָנוֹ אֲשֶׁר רָכַשׁ" (36:6). The same phrase describing Esau's possessions "קִנְיָנוֹ אֲשֶׁר רָכַשׁ" (36:6) is also used to describe Jacob's riches gained in Paddan-Aram as he returns to Canaan (31:18).

Vrolijk observes that it is precisely Jacob's abundant wealth that compels him to move with caution and face Esau, just as his massive entourage limits his travelling speed earlier, and allows Laban to overtake him, forcing Jacob to confront his opponent and reach a resolution.[37] Apart from producing logistical challenges and thus forcing Jacob to confront his opponents, wealth also assumes a central role in Jacob's dealings with his antagonists. It is an object of contention in opposite ways: Laban and Jacob fights for ownership of the same possessions, while Esau and Jacob urge one another to take their possessions or keep it for themselves, both claiming to having sufficient wealth.

Events in the Transjordan repeatedly hark back and recall Jacob's acquisition of wealth and the formation of his large family in Haran. The final settlement in Succoth allows Jacob's young family and flocks to settle, as Jacob builds a house "וַיִּבֶן לְוֹ בָּיִת", and also booths for his livestock "וּלְמִקְנֵהוּ עָשָׂה סֻכֹּת" (33:17).

Female Characters

In the third subcycle, female characters only assume passive roles. They are voiceless, and their thoughts and emotions are concealed. The women are not separated from their children, and the four mothers and the eleven children form a collective group. They simply represent what Jacob has acquired in Haran, and Jacob repeatedly strives to protect them from Esau.

The women and children are sent across the Jabbok by Jacob together with all of Jacob's possessions (32:23-24). The narrator particularly mentions the presence of the two wives, two maidservants, and eleven children "וַיִּקַּח אֶת־שְׁתֵּי נָשָׁיו וְאֶת־שְׁתֵּי שִׁפְחֹתָיו וְאֶת־אַחַד עָשָׂר יְלָדָיו" (32:23). They are probably also divided into two camps by Jacob earlier,

[37] Vrolijk, *Jacob's Wealth*, 220.

although they are not distinguished from the rest of Jacob's people "הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־אִתּוֹ" (32:8), and are mentioned together with the animals "וְאֶת־הַצֹּאן וְאֶת־הַבָּקָר וְהַגְּמַלִּים" (32:8). Subsequently, the mothers and children are divided and categorized according to their value in Jacob's eyes, the servants with their children in front, followed by Leah with her children, and then Rachel with Joseph at the rear (33:1-2). Their only action is coming forward and bowing themselves to Esau in three groups (33:6-7), following and mirroring the action of Jacob in front (33:3). Although Leah and Rachel are repeatedly mentioned, they always appear with their children, and almost always with Jacob's servants and flocks. They are portrayed as Jacob's property, members of Jacob's household, albeit enjoying different status and value.

Jacob's children are a concern in his flight from Esau. Esau almost immediately notices the mothers and children "וַיִּרְא אֶת־הַנָּשִׁים וְאֶת־הַיְלָדִים" (33:5), among the flocks and male and female servants (30:43, 31:18, 32:6, 8), and enquires about their identity "מִי־אֵלֶּה לָךְ" (33:5). Jacob introduces the women and children as the result of divine favor "הַיְלָדִים אֲשֶׁר־חָנַן אֱלֹהִים אֶת־עַבְדֶּךָ" (33:5). Jacob, however, strives to protect them from Esau. He specifically prays for divine protection of the "mothers with children" " פֶּן־יָבוֹא וְהִכַּנִי אֵם עַל־בָּנִים", that they be spared from the hands of Esau "הַצִּילֵנִי נָא מִיַּד אָחִי מִיַּד עֵשָׂו" (32:12). Jacob's young children are the reason he gives for refusing to travel with Esau. His children are tender "אֲדֹנִי יֹדֵעַ כִּי־הַיְלָדִים רַכִּים" (33:13), and Jacob offers to lead on gently according to their pace "לְרֶגֶל הַיְלָדִים" (33:14). Frolov asserts that Jacob has not protected his women and children, as he suddenly disappears across the Jabbok leaving them without their protector.[38] This is not evident from the text, however.

Transaction and Deception

The major transaction in the third subcycle is Jacob "buying" the favor in Esau's eyes, first with gifts, second with direct persuasion, and third with referential language and actions of deference. In their lengthy negotiation, Jacob and Esau do not express

[38] Serge Frolov, "The Other Side of the Jabbok: Genesis 32 as a Fiasco of Patriarchy," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 25, no. 91 (December 1, 2000): 41–59.

themselves directly, and their intentions are not completely transparent and unmistakable to the reader. There is no blatant deception in the third subcycle, and this coincides with the renaming of Jacob "לֹֽא יַעֲקֹ֥ב יֵאָמֵ֖ר עוֹ֑ד" (32:29) that has been associated with deception in the mouth of Esau (27:36). There is tactful persuasion and negotiation instead.

First, Jacob sends massive quantity of gifts (32:14-22), and repeatedly and explicitly expresses that he hopes to find favor in Esau's eyes (32:6; 33:8, 10, 15). The keyword "חן" not only frames the brothers' conversation regarding the gift (33:5, 11), but also the whole subcycle, from the first preparation to meet Esau (32:6) to the end of their conversation before their separation (33:15).

The second tactic is direct, effective and persistent persuasion. Jacob repeatedly expresses his intention and request to gain the favor in Esau's eyes (33:8, 10, 15). Comparing Esau with the divine through the four-fold repetition of the root "חנן" (33:5, 8, 10, 11) significantly contributes to his persuasion. Jacob's final appeal in requesting their separation also employs the magic phrase of requesting favor in Esau's eyes. When Jacob's initial proposal of following Esau slowly according to the pace of his weak young children and flocks is ineffective (33:15), Jacob resorts to pleading for Esau's favor "לָ֣מָּה זֶּ֔ה אֶמְצָא־חֵ֖ן בְּעֵינֵ֣י אֲדֹנִ֑י" (33:15), which proves to be successful. Jacob also urges ("פצר") Esau to receive his gifts (33:11).

The third tactic involves employment of referential language and actions of deference. The narrator and Jacob's messengers both call Esau Jacob's brother – " עֵשָׂ֥ו אָחִ֖יו" (32:4), "בָּ֣אנוּ אֶל־אָחִ֗יךָ אֶל־עֵשָׂו֙" (32:7). Esau calls Jacob "אחי" (33:9), which is an "affectionate term".[39] Jacob, however, repeatedly addresses Esau as "אדון" (32:5, 6, 19; 33:8, 13, 14, 15) and himself as "עבד" (32:19, 21; 33:5, 14). Jacob never addresses Esau as "brother".[40] Bar-Efrat remarks that Jacob addressing his brother as "lord" and himself as "servant" is not typical of siblings, who usually employ the terms "my brother" or "my sister", but the polite speech expresses his guilt and desire to appease, not unlike Aaron's language to Moses after the golden calf incident (Ex 32:22).[41] Bridge posits that Jacob

[39] Alter, *Genesis*, 185.
[40] Vrolijk, *Jacob's Wealth*, 253.
[41] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 67.

employs polite language and deferential actions to flatter Esau and indirectly persuade him to relinquish revenge.[42]

The two dialogues between the brothers (33:5-11, 12-15) echo the flock breeding agreement with Laban (30:25-34), in which requests and counteroffers are exchanged indirectly. In Haran, Jacob fights against Laban for property ownership and fair wages, and wealth is the object of contention. In the Transjordan, however, Jacob pushes Esau to accept his wealth and grant him "חן" in return.

Succoth and Seir

The central issue of the third subcycle is the preservation of Jacob's large and young family. The text repeatedly emphasizes Jacob enormous wealth, which he uses to "purchase" Esau's favor, in addition to employing tactics of persuasion and referential language. Successful appeasement of Esau, and avoiding traveling to Seir, protect Jacob's women and children from harm. Naming of places and various allusions to previous theophanies implicitly point to divine guidance in Jacob's current journey through the Transjordan. Eventual arrival in Succoth allows Jacob's large young family to remain safe and secure, to eventually settle down in houses and booths, to rest and recuperate, and to prepare for settlement in Canaan.

[42] Bridge, "The 'Slave' Is the 'Master.'"

Subcycle Four (33:18-35:29) From the Outskirts of Shechem to the Ancestral Home in Hebron

The fourth subcycle takes place in Canaan, the Cisjordan, where Jacob is confronted with a dilemma whether to fight against the local inhabitants. His sons ultimately undertake the fighting on his behalf, for the sake of their sister, employing deceit in the process, and giving the family vast amounts of wealth. Dinah the daughter becomes the active female character, while the exit of several other women marks the end of an era in Jacob's life. The divine once again directs Jacob's itinerary, and Jacob's household undertakes a journey of consecration, and heads towards their ancestral home.

Structure of the Subcycle

Boundaries

This research marks the beginning of the fourth subcycle as Jacob's arrival in Shechem "וַיָּבֹא יַעֲקֹב...עִיר שְׁכֶם" (33:18). First, a possible time gap between Succoth and Shechem supports a demarcation between 33:17 and 33:18. Jacob's children are still frail when they arrive Succoth, but must be of a significant age in the Dinah episode, and Westermann and Sarna both point out a considerable time gap between 33:20 and 34:1.[1] The children, however, can also grow up in Succoth, and the building of houses and booths (33:17) support the idea of a prolonged stay. Wenham similarly suggests that an extended time of settlement takes place in Succoth.[2] Second, the geographical location Shechem and the characters "בְּנֵי־חֲמוֹר" (33:19) present a fitting and corresponding backdrop to the Dinah episode (34:1-31). Third, Shechem is in the Cisjordan " עִיר שְׁכֶם אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן" (33:18). The issue of Jacob's return to Canaan is continually addressed until Isaac's death at end of the whole subcycle (35:29), so the land purchase "וַיִּקְנוּ אֶת־

[1] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1985), 537; Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1989), 233
[2] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 300.

חֶלְקַת הַשָּׂדֶה" (33:19) and altar building "וַיִּצֶּב־שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ" (33:20) in Shechem constitute a fitting introduction to an extended process of homecoming. The altar at Shechem and its name "אֵל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" (33:20) also reverberate with the altar at Bethel, also named " אֵל בֵּית־אֵל" (35:7). The building of altars reflects the establishment of a family religion and the worship of an ancestral deity.[3] The participation of Jacob's family is a central theme in the fourth subcycle. The altars in Shechem and Bethel also echo Abraham's altars "מִזְבֵּחַ" in these two places (12:6-8). Moreover, the report of Jacob's itinerary " וַיָּבֹא יַעֲקֹב...עִיר שְׁכֶם" (33:18) corresponds to the beginning of subcycle two (29:1) and three (32:2), both of which reports Jacob's arrival or departure, as thus serves as a more appropriate beginning to a subcycle.

The fourth subcycle ends with Jacob's final stop at Mamre, where Isaac dies and is buried by Esau and Jacob (35:29).

Shape and Main Plot

The fourth subcycle consists of several episodes. The settlement in Shechem (33:18-20) is a summary of Jacob's activities in the area. It is the backdrop to the succeeding Dinah episode (34:1-31), a detailed story of bargains and conflicts, which involves dialogues and multiple scenes. It constitutes another "fight and flight". The "flight" from Shechem, which is actually a divine call to move to Bethel, begins the next episode.

Jacob and his family consecrate themselves (35:2-4) and journey to Bethel (35:5-6) upon divine command (35:1). At Bethel, Jacob builds an altar (35:7), receives another theophany (35:9-13), and performs further ritualistic actions (35:14-15). The two accounts of theophany-followed-by-human response (35:1, 2-7 and 35:9-13, 14-15) are separated by a brief report of the death and burial of Deborah (35:8).

Ephrath (35:16-20) and Migdal Eder (35:21-26) are intermediate stops through which Jacob travels from Bethel to his father's house in Mamre. Rachel's death and the

[3] Steinberg, "The World of the Family in Genesis," 285–86.

birth of Benjamin (35:16-20) takes place in Ephrath, and in Migdal Eder Reuben sleeps with Bilhah (35:21-22a). This is followed by the complete list of Jacob's children, arranged according to their birth order and respective mothers (35:22b-26).

Mamre (also known as Kiryath-Arba and Hebron) is the final stop. Jacob returns to Isaac (35:27), who dies at an old age and is buried by his twin sons (35:28-29).

The establishment of Jacob's household is demonstrated the above events: the family's identity is confronted in Shechem (33:18-34:31); the family is consecrated in the journey to Bethel (35:1-15); Ephrath (35:16-20) and Migdal Eder (35:21-26) marks the cessation of Jacob's fertility; Mamre marks the complete shift in generation (35:27-29).

Recurrent Themes

Geographical Relocation

Shechem marks Jacob's return to his homeland. The narrator specifically mentions Shechem's location in Canaan "וַיָּבֹא יַעֲקֹב שָׁלֵם עִיר שְׁכֶם אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן" (33:18), and the two-fold repetition of the verb "בוא" underscores Jacob's homecoming. The verb "בוא" (33:18) also mirrors its antonym "יצא" (28:10) describing Jacob departure from Beersheba.[4] Jacob's arrival fulfills multiple earlier anticipations of returning to the land, to his "בית אב" and "מולדת": Rebekah's plan to bring him back "לְקַחְתִּיךְ מִשָּׁם" (27:43-45), the promise at Bethel "וַהֲשִׁבֹתִיךְ אֶל־הָאֲדָמָה הַזֹּאת" (28:15), Jacob's request to return home "מְקוֹמִי וּלְאַרְצִי" (30:25), the divine command to return "שׁוּב אֶל־אֶרֶץ אֲבוֹתֶיךָ וּלְמוֹלַדְתֶּךָ" (31:3), Jacob seeking the support of Leah and Rachel in his return to his "ארץ מולדת "(31:13), the narrator's account of Jacob leaving Paddan-Aram for Canaan " לָבָוֹא אֶל־יִצְחָק אָבִיו אַרְצָה כְּנָעַן" (31:18), Laban's acknowledgement of Jacob's homesickness " נִכְסֹף נָכְסַפְתָּה לְבֵית אָבִיךָ" (31:30) and Jacob recalling the divine command when he is in the Transjordan "שׁוּב לְאַרְצְךָ וּלְמוֹלַדְתֶּךָ" (32:10).

In Shechem, Jacob purchases land (33:19) and builds an altar "מִזְבֵּחַ" (33:20). As patriarchal altars do not require land purchase, Jacob's land purchase expresses the

[4] Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 231.

resolve to permanently settle in the land and to inherit it.[5] In general, altars mark the introduction of the worship of a particular god in a new land, or signify the territory of a deity.[6] The name of the altar at Shechem "אֵל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" (33:20) indicates that Jacob has accepted his new name,[7] and acknowledges this God as his descendants' God.[8] The land purchase, the altar and its naming all point to Jacob's acknowledgement of his God and his land during his first stop in the Cisjordan.

Shechem is also the battle ground of the "fight and flight" pattern. Jacob's family is confronted with the thorny issue of assimilation and intermarriage (34:1-31). Jacob's family is able to preserve their identity, gain massive wealth, and leave the area in safety.

The place name Bethel appears seven times in just sixteen verses (35:1-16): the divine commands the movement (35:1), Jacob relays the command to his family (35:3), the actual arrival occurs (35:6), Jacob calls the place "El-bethel" (35:7), Deborah is buried in Bethel (35:8), Jacob names the place Bethel (35:15), and the family leaves Bethel (35:16).

One significant feature of the Bethel episode is the participation of Jacob's family. Upon receiving the divine command (35:1), Jacob immediately charges his family, "הָסִרוּ אֶת־אֱלֹהֵי הַנֵּכָר אֲשֶׁר בְּתֹכְכֶם וְהִטַּהֲרוּ וְהַחֲלִיפוּ שִׂמְלֹתֵיכֶם" (35:2). Rendsburg notes that washing and changing of clothes before returning home or upon returning home is a feature of the homecoming motif in ancient Near East and Mediterranean epic literature.[9] The homecoming thus involves Jacob's whole household. Jacob's family receives instructions "וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ וְאֶל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עִמּוֹ" (35:2), performs a series of purification rituals (35:2,4), leaves Shechem "וַיִּסָּעוּ" (35:5), arrives in Bethel " וַיָּבֹא יַעֲקֹב... הוּא וְכָל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־עִמּוֹ" (35:6), and departs from Bethel "וַיִּסְעוּ מִבֵּית אֵל" (35:16).

Another significance is the return to a previous location of theophany. The former visit to Bethel is alluded to multiple times, by the divine (35;1), Jacob (35:3), and the narrator (35:7). In both instances, Jacob receives a theophany (28:13-15, 35:9-13), erects a pillar (28: 18, 22; 35:14), and names the place (28:19; 35:15). Active participation of

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[5] Sarna, 232.
[6] Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 44, 67.
[7] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 230.
[8] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 30.
[9] Gary A. Rendsburg, "Notes on Genesis XXXV," *Vetus Testamentum* 34, no. 3 (1984): 361–66.

the whole family in this second visit demonstrates the renewal of promises to include Jacob's seed.[10]

Ephrath (35:16-20) and Migdal Eder (35: 21-26) can be grouped together as the third geographical location, which features internal family matters. The death of Rachel, the birth of Benjamin and Reuben's act of incest are indeed insignificant events with regard to the main plot. The account of Reuben sleeping with Bilhah is only reported briefly "וַיֵּלֶךְ רְאוּבֵן וַיִּשְׁכַּב אֶת־בִּלְהָה פִּילֶגֶשׁ אָבִיו וַיִּשְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל" (35:22), and the details are obscure. Kugel observes multiple unknowns: the timing (whether it happens before or during Jacob's trip to Hebron), the circumstances (Bilhah's role and whether she is a willing accomplice), the consequences (Reuben's and Bilhah's punishment), and the implications (whether the list of Jacob's children immediately following implies Jacob's decision to stop having more children).[11] The two events, however, carries thematic significance. The complete list of Jacob's children (35:22b-26), which immediately follows, indicate that Jacob bears no more children, and the child-bearing stage of his life has ended. The mention of sons born in Paddan-Aram "אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר יֻלַּד־לוֹ בְּפַדַּן אֲרָם" (35:26) is inaccurate, as Benjamin is born in Canaan.[12] This summary is therefore more thematic than factual. It marks the termination of an era and a shift in generation, which is a prominent notion in the fourth subcycle.

Mamre is Jacob's final stop, where Jacob returns to Isaac "וַיָּבֹא יַעֲקֹב אֶל־יִצְחָק אָבִיו" (35:27). Their reunion does not involve embracing, weeping, dialogues or deathbed blessings. Mamre (Kiryat Arba, Hebron) plays no role in the Jacob narrative, but is the place where Abraham and Isaac have sojourned "אֲשֶׁר־גָּר־שָׁם אַבְרָהָם וְיִצְחָק" (35:27).[13] The focus is therefore not Jacob's reunion with his father, but his connection with Abraham and Isaac, both of whom die in the same location and are buried in similar manners. Isaac's death "וַיִּגְוַע יִצְחָק וַיָּמָת וַיֵּאָסֶף אֶל־עַמָּיו זָקֵן וּשְׂבַע יָמִים" (35:28), and burial by Esau and

[10] Shubert Spero, "Jacob's Growing Understanding of His Experience at Beth-El," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (1998): 213–14.
[11] James L. Kugel, *The Ladder of Jacob: Ancient Interpretations of the Biblical Story of Jacob and His Children* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 83, 91, 93, 97, 106–7.
[12] Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 240.
[13] Previous references to the place include Abraham building an altar (13:18), Abraham receiving a theophany (18:1), Abraham buying burial ground for Sarah and burying her (23:2, 17, 19), and Abraham's burial (25:9).

Jacob "וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אֹתוֹ עֵשָׂו וְיַעֲקֹב בָּנָיו" (35:29), are verbally reminiscent of Abraham's death "וַיִּגְוַע וַיָּמָת אַבְרָהָם בְּשֵׂיבָה טוֹבָה זָקֵן וְשָׂבֵעַ וַיֵּאָסֶף אֶל־עַמָּיו" (25:8), and burial by Isaac and Ishmael "וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אֹתוֹ יִצְחָק וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל בָּנָיו" (25:9).

Fight and Flight

The fourth subcycle features one episode of "fight and flight". After Shechem's humiliation of Dinah "וַיִּקַּח אֹתָהּ וַיִּשְׁכַּב אֹתָהּ וַיְעַנֶּהָ" (34:2), Hamor and Shechem propose intermarriage and business cooperation between the two families (34: 6, 8-12). Jacob can agree, which allows settlement in the land and promises prosperity, but threatens loss of identity. He may reject, which may protect his family's bloodline and honor, but jeopardizes his safety and prosperity. Jacob freezes, while his sons opt for deception and a surprise attack.

The fight is triggered by a female character, Jacob's daughter, who goes out to see the daughters of the land. The designation "בְּנוֹת הָאָרֶץ" (34:1) is reminiscent of Esau's Hittite wives: "בְּנוֹת הָאָרֶץ" (27:46) and "בְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן" (28:1, 6, 8).[14] Dinah becomes the object of Shechem's four actions: "ראה", "לקח", "שכב", and "ענה". The verb "ענה" points to the social-juridical debasement of a women and by inference the men related to her, consequently affecting the whole society.[15] Sarna notes that the three verbs of increasing severity "לקח-שכב-ענה" underscore the brutality of the assault.[16] Jacob and Dinah's brothers perceive the action as "טמא" (34:5, 13, 27). Defilement of a woman making her unfit for marriage is understandably a crime of far-reaching consequences. The brothers refer to the act as "נְבָלָה" (34:7), which denotes extreme acts of unruliness and disorder, utterly senseless and deplorable actions that violate boundaries between clans and collapse relationships.[17] The brothers also reckon marrying their sister to an

[14] Sarna remarks that the phrase "בְּנוֹת הָאָרֶץ" carries undertones of disapproval. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 233.
[15] Ellen J. van Wolde, "Does 'innâ Denote Rape? A Semantic Analysis of a Controversial Word," *Vetus Testamentum* 52, no. 4 (2002): 542–44.
[16] Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 234.
[17] Anthony Phillips, "Nebalah: A Term for Serious Disorderly and Unruly Conduct," *Vetus Testamentum* 25, no. 2 (1975): 237–38, 41.

uncircumcised man a "חרפה" (34:14), disgrace and shame making one liable to criticism and ridicule.[18] As Shechem is not from the same political, ethnic and religious entity, such union resembles prostitution.[19] To a group like the Jacobites, who relies on proper sexual behavior to preserve their identity, purity, longevity, internal bonding, and group obligation, these cohesive ideals are violated and threatened by sexual behaviors that cross group boundaries.[20] Shechem's defilement of Dinah is therefore a serious threat to their honor and identity.

The brothers undertake the fighting. First, they respond with emotions. They feel "התעצב" (34:7) – "deeply worried and hurt".[21] The verb implies that an intervention must follow.[22] Alter remarks that the rare employment of free indirect discourse " כִּי־נְבָלָה עָשָׂה בְיִשְׂרָאֵל לִשְׁכַּב אֶת־בַּת־יַעֲקֹב וְכֵן לֹא יֵעָשֶׂה" (34:7) underscores the brothers' rage.[23]

Second, the brothers take charge of the negotiation. Hamor originally arrives to speak to Jacob "וַיֵּצֵא חֲמוֹר אֲבִי־שְׁכֶם אֶל־יַעֲקֹב לְדַבֶּר אִתּוֹ" (34:6), but begins to address the whole group "וַיְדַבֵּר חֲמוֹר אִתָּם" (34:8) as the sons return (34:7). The brothers reply Shechem and Hamor "וַיַּעֲנוּ בְנֵי־יַעֲקֹב אֶת־שְׁכֶם וְאֶת־חֲמוֹר אָבִיו" (34:13), while Jacob stays silent "וְהֶחֱרִשׁ יַעֲקֹב עַד־בֹּאָם" (34:5). They decide whom their sister can marry "לֹא נוּכַל לַעֲשׂוֹת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה לָתֵת אֶת־אֲחֹתֵנוּ לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ עָרְלָה" (34:14), and how the two people groups should interact (34:16). Their approach is business-like, with an orderly flow of logic and clear expression of their justification, conditions and offers. They begin by setting their standard, that an uncircumcised man is unacceptable "כִּי־חֶרְפָּה הִוא לָנוּ" (34:14). Two options are then laid out, both in the form of a protasis and an apodosis. All the Shechemite males have to be circumcised "אַךְ־בְּזֹאת נֵאוֹת לָכֶם אִם תִּהְיוּ כָמֹנוּ לְהִמּוֹל לָכֶם כָּל־זָכָר" (34:15) if the two tribes are to assimilate and intermarry " וְנָתְנוּ אֶת־בְּנֹתֵינוּ לָכֶם וְאֶת־בְּנֹתֵיכֶם

[18] Ludwig Köhler et al., eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Leiden, Cologne, New York: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2000), 356; Kutch, "חרף Ḥrp* I," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, by G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and David E. Green, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 203–9.
[19] Angela B. Wagner, "Considerations on the Politico-Juridical Proceedings of Genesis 34," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 38, no. 2 (2013): 161.
[20] Lyn M. Bechtel, "What If Dinah Is Not Raped? (Genesis 34)," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, no. 62 (1994): 21–34.
[21] Köhler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2000, 2:864–65.
[22] According to Gen. 6:6. Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 539.
[23] Alter, *Genesis*, 190.

וְנִקַּח־לָנוּ וְיָשַׁבְנוּ אִתְּכֶם וְהָיִינוּ לְעַם אֶחָד" (34:16). They will take back their sister if the other party does not agree to their stipulation "וְאִם־לֹא תִשְׁמְעוּ אֵלֵינוּ לְהִמּוֹל וְלָקַחְנוּ אֶת־בִּתֵּנוּ וְהָלָכְנוּ" (34:17). The intonation, logical strength and rhetorical skill of this discourse concurs with Simeon and Levi's final pungent one-lined concluding remark phrased in a rhetorical question "הַכְזוֹנָה יַעֲשֶׂה אֶת־אֲחוֹתֵנוּ" (34:30-31).

Moreover, the brothers take drastic action. Simeon and Levi kill all the males in Shechem and take Dinah home (34:25-26) and the brothers finish off the operation by plundering the city (34:27-29). Retrieving Dinah their sister is apparently top priority; killing all the males may prevent further revenge; plundering the city may simply be normal practice to strengthen and empower their group. According to Koefp-Taylor, removing all the males destroys the defense of a community, and renders dependent members and all their property completely vulnerable.[24] The long list of spoils (34:28-29) ironically fulfill Hamor's word that the Jacobites get property (האחיז) in their land (34:10).[25] It produces an "ironic twist of fate", for the Hivites acquire nothing (34:23), but are sacked by the Jacobites.[26] The Shechemites' circumcision "figures as a kind of reverse rape",[27] and capturing the city's women can be a form of revenge for Dinah's defilement.[28] The verbs "בזז" and "שבה" (34:29), and the eightfold repetition of the direct object marker "את" (34:28-29) allude to war and military operation.[29]

The plunder is considered unjust and selfish by some, demonstrated by the detailed list of booty unnecessary to the plot.[30] Nevertheless, it is not portrayed in a negative light by the narrator. As Alter points out, the narrator's employment of the third person plural subject referring to Dinah's perpetrator "אֲשֶׁר טִמְּאוּ אֲחוֹתָם" (34:27) is an

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[24] Laurel W. Koefp-Taylor, *Give Me Children or I Shall Die: Children and Communal Survival in Biblical Literature* (Fortress Press, 2013), 41–42.
[25] Frank M. Yamada, *Configurations of Rape in the Hebrew Bible: A Literary Analysis of Three Rape Narratives* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 60.
[26] Mary A. Bader, *Sexual Violation in the Hebrew Bible: A Multi-Methodological Study of Genesis 34 and 2 Samuel 13* (New York: Lang, 2006), 106.
[27] Alice A. Keefe, "Rapes of Women/ Wars of Men," in *Women, War and Metaphor: Language and Society in the Study of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Claudia V. Camp and Carole R. Fontaine (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 84.
[28] Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 205.
[29] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 2000, 316; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 543.
[30] Paul Noble, "A 'Balanced' Reading of the Rape of Dinah: Some Exegetical and Methodological Observations," *Biblical Interpretation* 4, no. 2 (January 1, 1996): 193.

exaggeration that justifies the brothers' anger and violent actions.[31] Grossman points to four signs that attest to the narrator's agreement with the brothers: first, the writer disapproves of Jacob's silence (34:5), for the lack of emotion is problematic, and sharply contrasts with the son's anger (34:7); second, the action of Simeon and Levi is portrayed more as a rescue than a mass murder (34:26), their "יצא" and "לקח" of Dinah reversing Shechem's action in the beginning (34:1); third, Simeon and Levi have the last word, and Jacob's rebukes, in this episode (34:30) and later on his deathbed (49:26-27), only focuses on politics, security, and his sons' lack of restraint and discretion ; fourth, the inhabitants' fear and the Jacobite's uneventful relocation (35:5) demonstrate the absence of repercussions.[32]

The "flight" in the fourth subcycle is the journey to Bethel, one of consecration. The verb "עלה" (35:1, 3) is topographically accurate, for Bethel is higher in altitude,[33] but it also denotes a pilgrimage.[34] The journey, however, harks back to previous flights in multiple ways. First, threats and hostilities are present, considering Jacob's fear of revenge from surrounding tribes (34:30). Second, the plunder of Shechem increases Jacob's wealth immensely. Third, the divine's self-designation (35:1) and the narrator's report of the altar-building in Bethel (35:7) both directly recall Jacob's flight from Esau. Moreover, Jacob gains his family's support, who responds to Jacob's words " וְנָקוּמָה וְנַעֲלֶה בֵּית־אֵל" (35:3) with silent obedience (35:2-4). Furthermore, the journey is uneventful and free of any subsequent vengeance or counterattacks, for "חִתַּת אֱלֹהִים" (35:5) befalls the neighboring peoples, and there are no hindrances on the road to Bethel " וְלֹא רָדְפוּ אַחֲרֵי בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב" (35:5). In addition, questionable actions are not condemned by the narrator or the divine.

Unlike his previous experiences with Laban and Esau, Jacob neither fights nor flees in the Dinah episode. He freezes. His silence can be explained by engagement in cautious thinking and planning,[35] or by having limited choices in a difficult situation:

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[31] Alter, *Genesis*, 194.
[32] Grossman, *Jacob - the Story of a Family [Heb]*, 424–31.
[33] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18-50*, 374.
[34] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 550; Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary*, 239; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 2000, 323.
[35] Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 198.

Dina goes out on her own accord, Shechem offers a solution, Dinah is currently held hostage, and Hamor and his son appears respectful.[36] Jacob may also desire security, considering his experiences with Laban and Esau.[37] His concerns may reflect practical consideration of small nomadic tribes who avoids military encounters.[38] When Jacob opens his mouth for the first and only time, he does not address the issue of circumcision, deception, plundering, or killing, but only the consequences.[39] He perceives being put into a state of disorder, confusion, ruin and disaster "עֲכַרְתֶּם אֹתִי" (34:30).[40] By referring to himself eight times on one verse (34:30), his focus is limited to his own suffering.[41] He fears vengeful attack by a more numerous people " וַאֲנִי מְתֵי מִסְפָּר וְנֶאֶסְפוּ עָלַי וְהִכּוּנִי וְנִשְׁמַדְתִּי אֲנִי וּבֵיתִי" (34:30).[42]

The external fight against Shechem is followed by an internal fight within Jacob's family – Reuben's sexual relationship with Bilhah " וַיֵּלֶךְ רְאוּבֵן וַיִּשְׁכַּב אֶת־בִּלְהָה פִּילֶגֶשׁ אָבִיו וַיִּשְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל" (35:22a). Sarna suggests that the phrase "וַיֵּלֶךְ רְאוּבֵן" indicates "a calculated act".[43] Reuben may attempt to confirm his status as firstborn.[44] Claiming possession of a concubine implies laying claim to one's inheritance and assuming heirship, as the first-born son in contemporary Canaanite society may inherit that father's wives together with the estate as a validation of his succession.[45] Using his father's sexual partner is also seen as an attempt to usurp the authority of the family patriarch.[46] Nevertheless, Reuben can also be acting out of zeal for his mother. Because of Jacob's neglect of Leah, Reuben emotionally crushes Jacob by ruining Bilhah, preventing Jacob from obtaining any possible consolation through sleeping with the maid of his beloved wife who has just

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[36] Joseph Fleishman, "Why did Simeon and Levi Rebuke their Father in Genesis 34:31?," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 26, no. 2 (2000): 108, 112.
[37] Thomas L. Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, & Theological Commentary* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 336.
[38] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 543.
[39] Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, 473.
[40] Köhler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2000, 2:824.
[41] Bader, *Sexual Violation in the Hebrew Bible: A Multi-Methodological Study of Genesis 34 and 2 Samuel 13*, 108.
[42] "Neighboring peoples may well have been bound to Shechem by treaty obligations". Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 239.
[43] Sarna, 245.
[44] Vrolijk, *Jacob's Wealth*, 289.
[45] Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 244.
[46] Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 68.

passed away.[47] The violation of Bilhah prevents her from threatening the position of Leah, who has not received well-deserved attention or honor from Jacob.[48] Grossman notices that Reuben intends to pressure Jacob to leave the tent of Bilhah, where Jacob is probably staying with Joseph and Benjamin, and this idea is reinforced by the report of pitching a tent in the preceding verse (35:21).[49] Sarna suggests that both intentions coexist: Reuben's attempt to promote his mother's rights is at the same time a challenge to his father's authority.[50] Both fights illustrate the rise of Jacob's children and the shift in generation.

Divine Intervention

In the fourth subcycle, the divine directs Jacob's geographical movements. The command to move to Bethel is brief and direct. The direct discourse formula "וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־יַעֲקֹב" (35:1) reverberates with the previous one at Haran "וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־יַעֲקֹב" (31:3). Both are direct speeches without any accompanying vision. Both involves the command to move with an imperative: "קוּם עֲלֵה בֵית־אֵל וְשֶׁב־שָׁם" (35:1) and "שׁוּב אֶל־אֶרֶץ אֲבוֹתֶיךָ וּלְמוֹלַדְתֶּךָ" (31:3). Both include an additional message: the promise of divine presence "וְאֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ" (31:3), and the command to build an altar "וְעַשֵּׂה־שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ" (35:1).

Divine protection over the journey to Bethel is implied, although not explicitly asserted. The command comes immediately after the plunder of Shechem which makes Jacob immensely troubled and afraid (34:30). The terror that befalls the local inhabitants "וַיִּסָּעוּ וַיְהִי חִתַּת אֱלֹהִים עַל־הֶעָרִים אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבֹתֵיהֶם" (35:5a) can be attributed to divine action.[51] Alter considers the phrase deliberately ambiguous, which can refer to fear of the divine, or mean "an awesome terror".[52] Regardless of the nature and nuance of this fear, the

[47] George G. Nicol, "Genesis XXIX. 32 and XXXV. 22a Reuben's Reversal," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 31, no. 2 (1980): 537–38.
[48] Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary*, 244; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 2000, 327.
[49] Grossman, *Jacob - the Story of a Family [Heb]*, 471–72.
[50] Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 245.
[51] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 545. Noble similarly attributes the lack of reprisals to a supernaturally induced fear. Noble, "A 'Balanced' Reading of the Rape of Dinah," 185.
[52] Alter, *Genesis*, 196.

absence of any pursuit or revenge against the Jacobites is explicitly expressed "וְלֹא רָדְפוּ אַחֲרֵי בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב" (35:5b). The verb "רדף" echoes Laban's chase "וַיִּרְדֹּף אַחֲרָיו דֶּרֶךְ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים" (31:23), powerfully alluding to the difficult flight from Haran that enjoys divine provision and protection (31:3, 24, 29, 42). The mention of previous flights by the divine (35:1) and the narrator (35:7), and Jacob's own acknowledgement of divine benevolence upon him "אֵל הָעֹנֶה אֹתִי בְּיוֹם צָרָתִי וַיְהִי עִמָּדִי בַּדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר הָלָכְתִּי" (35:3) further recall divine protection in previous flights.

The journey is also one of consecration. The "אֱלֹהֵי הַנֵּכָר" are removed and buried (35:2, 4). They can be spoils from Shechem,[53] or cultic figurines from Mesopotamia.[54] The elimination of any signs of loyalty to other gods is part of the purification ritual, and dedicates the family to worship their patron deity as their protector and provider.[55] They purify themselves and change their garments "וְהָטַהֲרוּ וְהַחֲלִיפוּ שִׂמְלֹתֵיכֶם" (35:2). The laundering and changing of clothes can be related with the renunciation of foreign gods, purification from the bloodstain from Shechem, or preparation for journeying to a sacred space and receiving a theophany.[56] A pattern of "divine word followed by human response" underscores the solemnity of the event. To the initial divine instruction (35:1), Jacob responds with consecration of the family (35:2-4), the actual journey (35:5-6), and building of an altar (35:7). To another theophany at Bethel (35:9-13), Jacob performs further rituals (35:14-15).

The second visit to Bethel is an elevated version of Jacob's previous experiences. First is the divine command to build an altar "וַעֲשֵׂה־שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לָאֵל הַנִּרְאֶה אֵלֶיךָ" (35:1), which is emphasized by Jacob himself "וְאֶעֱשֶׂה־שָּׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לָאֵל הָעֹנֶה אֹתִי" (35:3) and the narrator's report "וַיִּבֶן שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ וַיִּקְרָא לַמָּקוֹם אֵל בֵּית־אֵל כִּי שָׁם נִגְלוּ אֵלָיו הָאֱלֹהִים" (35:7). The divine initiative is unique, compared to other altars that are spontaneous or responsive.[57] This is an enhanced version of the altar at Shechem (33:20), which is built on Jacob's own initiative. Second is the divine appearing "וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶל־יַעֲקֹב עוֹד וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתוֹ" (35:9) and also departing "וַיַּעַל מֵעָלָיו אֱלֹהִים בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר אִתּוֹ" (35:13). This is an advanced version of the

[53] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 323.
[54] Alter, *Genesis*, 195; Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 239–40.
[55] Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 67.
[56] Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 239–41.
[57] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18-50*, 374.

appearances and departures of the angels at Bethel (28:12), the camp of angels at Mahanaim (32:3-4) and the man at Peniel (32:25-26). Third is a direct blessing from the divine (35:9). It is a culmination of previous blessings: Isaac's blessings in God's name (27: 28-29, 28:3-4), mention of nations being blessed because of Jacob in the first theophany at Bethel (28:14), and blessing from the divine being at Peniel (32:29). Fourth is the name-change from "Jacob" to "Israel" by the divine (35:10), which is a more powerful version of the previous name-change by an angelic being at Peniel (32:29).

The divine speech at Bethel reinforces previous promises of descendants, progeny and land. The self-designation "וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אֱלֹהִים אֲנִי אֵל שַׁדָּי" (35:11a) harks back to Isaac's farewell blessing "וְאֵל שַׁדַּי יְבָרֵךְ אֹתְךָ" (28:3). The promise of offspring " פְּרֵה וּרְבֵה גּוֹי וּקְהַל גּוֹיִם יִהְיֶה מִמֶּךָּ" (35:11b) reverberates with the farewell blessing "וַיַּפְרְךָ וְיַרְבֶּךָ וְהָיִיתָ לִקְהַל עַמִּים" (28:3) and the first theophany " וְהָיָה זַרְעֲךָ כַּעֲפַר הָאָרֶץ וּפָרַצְתָּ יָמָּה וָקֵדְמָה וְצָפֹנָה וָנֶגְבָּה וְנִבְרְכוּ בְךָ כֹּל־מִשְׁפְּחֹת הָאֲדָמָה וּבְזַרְעֶךָ" (28:14). The promise of land " וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְאַבְרָהָם וּלְיִצְחָק לְךָ אֶתְּנֶנָּה וּלְזַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ אֶתֵּן אֶת־הָאָרֶץ" (35:12) echoes the previous promise " הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה שֹׁכֵב עָלֶיהָ לְךָ אֶתְּנֶנָּה וּלְזַרְעֶךָ" (28:13) and the farewell blessing " לְרִשְׁתְּךָ אֶת־אֶרֶץ מְגֻרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן אֱלֹהִים לְאַבְרָהָם" (28:4). The promise of future kings "וּמְלָכִים מֵחֲלָצֶיךָ יֵצֵאוּ" (35:11b) reverberates with the stolen blessing " יַעַבְדוּךָ עַמִּים וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּ לְךָ לְאֻמִּים הֱוֵה גְבִיר לְאַחֶיךָ וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּ לְךָ בְּנֵי אִמֶּךָ" (27:29). The only missing element is the notion of wealth and abundance in Isaac's blessing "וְיִתֶּן־לְךָ הָאֱלֹהִים מִטַּל הַשָּׁמַיִם וּמִשְׁמַנֵּי הָאָרֶץ וְרֹב דָּגָן וְתִירֹשׁ" (27:28).

Divine intervention and appearances in the fourth subcycle are concerned with the itinerary of Jacob's family and the issues of progeny and land. The issue of wealth, however, is met with silence.

Fertility and Wealth

The notion of fertility is treated differently in the fourth subcycle. Instead of birth accounts, there are death reports, and instead of the creation of a household, there is acknowledgment of an established household and affirmation of its identity. Rachel and Deborah pass away, Bilhah is defiled, and Rebekah, Leah and Zilpah silently exit the scene. The list of Jacob's sons (35:22b-26) suggest the shift in generation and the end of

Jacob's fertile years. The divine promise at Bethel (35:10-12), however, acknowledges Jacob's household.

The notion of wealth, as in previous subcycles, is subject to human actions and conflict, and is the object of desire and contention. Vrolijk observes that economic transaction and monetary concern is central to the episode of Dinah.[58] Shechem is willing to pay a handsome "מֹהַר וּמַתָּן" (34:12).[59] Hamor offers the land and properties "וְאִתָּנוּ תֵּשֵׁבוּ וְהָאָרֶץ תִּהְיֶה לִפְנֵיכֶם שְׁבוּ וּסְחָרוּהָ וְהֶאָחֲזוּ בָּהּ" (34:10). The vast amount of wealth that is available and desirable is underscored by the list of plunder (34:28-29): "אֶת־צֹאנָם וְאֶת־בְּקָרָם וְאֶת־חֲמֹרֵיהֶם", "וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר־בָּעִיר וְאֵת־אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׂדֶה לָקָחוּ" (34:28), "וְאֶת־כָּל־חֵילָם" (34:29), "וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר בַּבָּיִת" (34:29), "וְאֶת־כָּל־טַפָּם וְאֶת־נְשֵׁיהֶם" (34:29). Jacob's entourage to Bethel "אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ וְאֶל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עִמּוֹ" (35:2) probably includes the captives taken at Shechem.[60] The "herding tower" of Migdal Eder, an installation pastoralists use to protect flocks,[61] faintly alludes to their ownership of property. There is no indication of divine help in the acquisition of wealth, but no divine criticism regarding the deception and violence involved either.

Female Characters

Female characters in the fourth subcycle (Dinah, Rachel, Bilhah and Deborah) do not assume active roles, but they contribute to a central notion – the shift in generation. All four stories mark the passing of an era, and the second generation of men begins to take charge over the female members of Jacob's household.

Deborah's death and burial is an abrupt and brief report (35:8), appearing between Jacob's altar-building and theophany at Bethel, which may serve to slow down the narrative and build up tension. She plays no role in previous episodes and is only known here as Rebekah's nurse, probably the one accompanying Rebekah to Canaan

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[58] Vrolijk, *Jacob's Wealth*, 256.
[59] "מֹהַר" is an indemnity for her family while "מַתָּן" is a present or gift. Köhler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2000, 2:554, 654.
[60] Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 240.
[61] Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 68.

(24:59). It is unknown when, how and why Deborah joins Jacob's entourage. The character of Deborah and the report of her death, therefore, do not contribute to the plot, but conveys a thematic message. First, Deborah serves to recall the character of Rebekah, whose presence and original plan of bringing back Jacob (27:45) falls into silence. Rendsburg remarks that this death report, "seemingly out of place", alludes to Rebekah, the only matriarch whose death is not reported, and who could have passed away while Jacob was in Haran.[62] Second, the death of Deborah signifies a disconnection. Sarna observes a phonetic and narrative similarity between the burial of idols at Shechem "תַּחַת הָאֵלָה" (35:4) and Deborah's burial "תַּחַת הָאַלּוֹן" (35:8), the former representing the purging of idolatry and the latter severing of all connections with Mesopotamia.[63] Her death and burial symbolize the severing of ties with Haran, foreign gods, and the previous generation.

Rachel's death means Benjamin would be the second and last child of Jacob's and Rachel's. Fuch points out that Rachel simply "dies at a convenient point", as the birth of her second son completes her procreative role, and she disappears abruptly after performing her assigned actions.[64] Rachel's death, however, presumably leads to Reuben's defilement of Bilhah. Although no further children born after Benjamin is only confirmed in hindsight, the list of Jacob's sons appearing immediately after the report of the incestuous action, which directly follows Rachel's death, marks both episodes as the finale of Jacob's fertile years.

Bilhah is originally Laban's "שִׁפְחָה" (29:29), given to Rachel as "שִׁפְחָה" (30:4, 30:7) and "אָמָה" (30:3). Rachel in turn gives her to Jacob to give birth on her behalf (30:3-4), and she is also called Jacob's "פִּילֶגֶשׁ" (35:22), whose main role is to give the family children.[65] The account of her defilement is brief and obscure "וַיֵּלֶךְ רְאוּבֵן וַיִּשְׁכַּב אֶת־בִּלְהָה פִּילֶגֶשׁ אָבִיו וַיִּשְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל" (35:22a). Bilhah has no voice, performs no actions, and the narrator offers no insight into her emotions. The same verb phrase "שכב את" (34:2, 35:22a) is also applied to Dinah. Unlike Dinah, however, no man fights for Bilhah's

[62] Rendsburg, "Notes on Genesis XXXV," 365.
[63] Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 241.
[64] Fuchs, "For I Have the Way of Women: Deception, Gender, and Ideology in Biblical Narrative," 81.
[65] Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 68.

rights and dignity. Jacob hears about the incident but performs no action.[66] Bilhah's role echoes that of Deborah's. Although her position "שִׁפְחָה", "אָמָה", or "פִּילֶגֶשׁ" is different to that of a nurse "מֵינֶקֶת" (24:59, 35:8), they both complement the role of the mother.[67] The death of Deborah and Rachel, and the defilement of Bilhah, therefore, mark the end of "motherhood" in Jacob's family.

Dinah is the female character of the next generation, whose birth is previously reported (30:21).[68] As a daughter, however, her name is not explained like her brothers' are (29:21), and she is not counted among Jacob's eleven children crossing the Jabbok (32:23).[69] Dinah indeed kickstarts a long chain of actions (34:1), but she subsequently plays a passive role. She says nothing, her inner thoughts are concealed, and she is the objectified female family member who is to be protected or defended. Dinah's brothers speak and act for her. Dinah is the object of the verb "לקח" four times, the subject being Shechem (34:2), Hamor (34:4), Dinah's brothers (34:17), and Simeon and Levi (34:26). As a female, Dinah is a defenseless member of her society, not unlike the women of Shechem. Jacob is also silent and passive regarding Dinah's humiliation.

Dinah's actions, however, lead to the rise of Jacob's sons. The narrator emphasizes that their attack of Shechem is due to the defilement of their sister " אֲשֶׁר טִמְּאוּ אֲחוֹתָם" (34:27), clarifying their objective as fraternal zeal rather than greed.[70] Simeon and Levi also justify their violent act with a pungent, one-lined rhetorical question defending their sister's honor "הַכְזוֹנָה יַעֲשֶׂה אֶת־אֲחוֹתֵנוּ" (34:31). Sternberg argues that the narrator's sympathy ultimately lies with Simeon and Levi.[71] The brothers' dominant role is reflected in the recurrent kinship references connecting Dinah with her brothers: " דִּינָה אֲחוֹתָם" (34:13), "דִּינָה אֲחֹתָם" (34:14), "שִׁמְעוֹן וְלֵוִי אֲחֵי דִינָה" (34:25), "טִמְּאוּ אֲחוֹתָם", (34:27)

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[66] Sarna points out that the description "וַיִּשְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל" suggests imminent action, but none is reported. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 245.

[67] Bilhah can also be referred to as a nursemaid, according to Steiner's interpretation of Jacob's blessing "כִּי עָלִיתָ מִשְׁכְּבֵי אָבִיךָ אָז חִלַּלְתָּ יְצוּעִי עָלָה" (49:4), that reads the last clause with the masculine third person singular subject "עָלָה" as "the bed of a nursemaid". Richard C. Steiner, "Poetic Forms in the Masoretic Vocalization and Three Difficult Phrases in Jacob's Blessing (Gen 49:3)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129, no. 2 (2010): 209–35.

[68] This is unusual for a daughter, and serves as an anticipation of chapter 34, just as the mention of Rebekah (22:23) anticipates chapter 24. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 309.

[69] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18-50*, 353.

[70] Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 238.

[71] Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, 475.

and "אֲחוֹתֵנוּ" (34:31). Designations of characters often reveal the viewpoint the narrator has adopted.[72] It is not Jacob who fights for a female family member, but his sons. Dinah's brothers, especially Simeon and Levi, has assumed authority over the household.[73] Jacob's knowledge and control over the situation is unknown, and he only expresses his displeasure much later on his deathbed (49:3-7). Kraut draws parallels between Reuben's actions to "reassert himself as the defender of Leah's honor" and how Simeon and Levi react to the defilement of their sister.[74]

The accounts of Deborah, Bilhah and Rachel represent the end of motherhood. The story of Dinah marks the end of fatherhood. Jacob's children begin to act independently, and challenge or replace Jacob's position.

Transaction and Deception

The fourth subcycle features two related transactions at Shechem: Jacob's land purchase (33:18-20), and the Hivites' marriage-business proposal (34:8-12). The location and main antagonists remain the same. The former is a brief account that does not involve any negotiation, while the second is a lengthy episode that includes treachery and shady practices.

Upon Jacob's arrival in Shechem, he buys a piece of land for a hundred pieces from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father "וַיִּקֶן אֶת־חֶלְקַת הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר נָטָה־שָׁם אָהֳלֹו מִיַּד בְּנֵי־חֲמֹור אֲבִי שְׁכֶם בְּמֵאָה קְשִׂיטָה" (33:19).[75] It is unknown if the transaction is fair. Even if the price is favorable, the Shechemites may be planning to benefit materially subsequently. This transaction only features the sons of Hamor, but the permanent transfer of

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[72] Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 36–37.

[73] Their dominant role in the negotiations with respect to their sister's marriage can be attributed to the institution of fratriarchy, which existed in the Hurrian society in the milieu of Haran. Ernest G. Neufeld, "The Rape of Dinah," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (1997): 221; Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary*, 175.

[74] Judah Kraut, "The Literary Roles of Reuben and Judah in Genesis Narratives: A 'Reflection Complex,'" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 43, no. 2 (2018): 13–14.

[75] A hundred kesitahs can be a unit of weight or a lamb, and an exact price for a piece of real estate marks a perpetual and incontestable sale. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 232. Wenham remarks that the absence of negotiation may indicate positive relations between Jacob and the sons of Hamor; If a hundred "קְשִׂיטָה" worth relatively little, it demonstrates the Hamorites' generosity, and a high price can indicate Jacob's wealth or the acquisition of a large piece of land. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 300–301.

ownership of ancestral estate involves the entire clan in the decision.[76] It is therefore closely related to the marriage-business proposal. Hamor's later offer of business cooperation may also be particularly appealing to Jacob due to his land purchase.[77]

The marriage-business arrangement begins with a marriage proposal, which is of questionable sincerity and reveals some deviousness. Shechem himself offers to pay a high bride-price: "וַאֲשֶׁר תֹּאמְרוּ אֵלַי אֶתֵּן" (34:11); " הַרְבּוּ עָלַי מְאֹד מֹהַר וּמַתָּן וְאֶתְּנָה כַּאֲשֶׁר תֹּאמְרוּ אֵלַי אֶתֵּן אֵלָי" (34:12). A higher bride price indicates the bride's higher social status or a desirable value such as beauty.[78] This is true with Jacob in Haran, who has little bargaining power, but loves Rachel (29:18, 20, 30), who is beautiful (29:17). Shechem's circumstances are different – his family has power, and he has already defiled Dinah. Shechem's generosity is unnecessary, and may simply be a tactic to push for an affirmative answer. Hamor portrays Shechem's love of Dinah as genuine and honorable "חָשְׁקָה נַפְשׁוֹ בְּבִתְּכֶם" (34:8), and makes no reference to the rape.[79] Hamor proposes assimilation of two groups with intermarriage and business cooperation.

Both parties – Jacob's sons on one side and Hamor-Shechem on the other – approach the transaction with a hidden agenda. The narrator explicitly reports Jacob's sons answering with deceit "בְּמִרְמָה" (34:13). The same phrase "בְּמִרְמָה" is employed by Isaac to describe Jacob's words and actions (27:35), and Jacob also uses the same root while questioning Laban about the bride switch "לָמָּה רִמִּיתָנִי" (29:25). The brothers ignore the economic and financial offers and focus on the marriage proposal.[80] They bring in tribal-religious-cultural issues, requesting circumcision of the Shechemite men (34:14-17). Circumcision is known to be a stipulation given to Abraham (17:9-14), but its religious value in this narrative is questionable. Cohn suggests that the proposal is simply deceit, for the rite only separates Abraham's descendants and cannot be a means to assimilate male outsiders.[81] The crucial effect of circumcision in this narrative is several

[76] Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 232.
[77] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 309.
[78] Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 66–67.
[79] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18-50*, 358, 360.
[80] Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 235–36.
[81] Robert L. Cohn, "Negotiating (with) the Natives: Ancestors and Identity in Genesis," *Harvard Theological Review* 96, no. 2 (2003): 157–58.

days of postoperative debilitation.[82] The narrator's explicit comment about deceit and the sequel of the story makes a planned attack probable. The proposal is thus double-edged: circumcision signifies their collective identity, but also inflicts pain on the offending organ.[83] The brothers' deceit can be justified considering the circumstances. The Shechemites are local landlords, while the Jacobites are newcomers and foreigners. Their disadvantaged position is demonstrated by Hamor's offer to obtain holdings in the land "וְהֶאָחֲזוּ בָּהּ" (34:10).[84] Moreover, Dinah is detained, granting the Shechemites leverage and causing a power-imbalance in the negotiation.[85] Bechtel remarks that "acting with cunning is not uncommon when a less privileged party has to confront a powerful one".[86]

The counteroffer requires the Shechemites' approval, and Hamor and Shechem also employ shady tactics with their kinsmen (34:20-24). Hamor's unusual title "נְשִׂיא" (34:2) reflects "a confederacy of various ethnic elements" in Shechem, and his limited power requires him to call a town meeting and present a convincing argument.[87] The arrangement may be typical of agreements between city-states and surrounding nomadic groups, and the description "כָּל־יֹצְאֵי שַׁעַר עִירוֹ" (34:24) can refer to free citizens or the males of military age.[88] With either interpretation, the repetitive wording "וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶל־חֲמוֹר וְאֶל־שְׁכֶם בְּנוֹ כָּל־יֹצְאֵי שַׁעַר עִירוֹ וַיִּמֹּלוּ כָּל־זָכָר כָּל־יֹצְאֵי שַׁעַר עִירוֹ" (34:24) emphasizes a strong and mobile male population, who will fall victim to Hamor's sly persuasion and the brothers' deceit. Hamor's two proposals to the different parties contain significant changes in content, wording and sequence. To the Jacobites, he offers settlement, trade, and property "אִתָּנוּ תֵּשֵׁבוּ וְהָאָרֶץ תִּהְיֶה לִפְנֵיכֶם שְׁבוּ וּסְחָרוּהָ וְהֶאָחֲזוּ בָּהּ" (34:10) after mentioning intermarriage (34:9), and is silent about the Hivites gaining access to their property; before his kinsmen, however, he does not mention the Jacobites acquiring property, and the

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[82] Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 167.
[83] Alter, *Genesis*, 192.
[84] *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 235.
[85] Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, 456. The fact is revealed in retrospect (34:26), but the brothers' claim "we will take our sister and go" (34:17) may provide some indication.
[86] Bechtel, "What If Dinah Is Not Raped? (Genesis 34)," 33. Hamilton similarly notes that "facing a superior opponent, the only way to victory is to engage in deceit". Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18-50*, 369.
[87] Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 234.
[88] Sarna, 237.

circumcision requirement (34:22) is preceded by the harmless idea of trade and intermarriage with a peaceful people in a spacious land (34:21) and followed by the favorable picture of acquiring massive wealth "מִקְנֵהֶם וְקִנְיָנָם֙ וְכָל־בְּהֵמָתָ֔ם הֲלֹ֥וא לָ֖נוּ הֵ֑ם אַ֚ךְ נֵאוֹתָה לָהֶ֔ם וְיֵשְׁבוּ אִתָּֽנוּ" (34:23).[89] Hamor is also silent about his son's marriage, focusing only on the advantages for the whole city, and as his case is presented for formal, public approval, Hamor is "clearly guilty of double dealing".[90]

In Shechem as in Haran, a business-marriage transaction takes place between an advantageous local group (Laban and the Shechemites) and a disadvantaged alien party (Jacob himself and Jacob's family as a collective). Both involve a high bride-price: seven years of labor and city-wide circumcision. Both involve deceit. As Neufeld remarks, deception occurs in the marriage of Leah, and afterwards in the marriage of the daughter of Leah.[91] In Haran, Jacob the foreigner is the one who is deceived, and in Shechem his sons the newcomers are the victorious deceivers. In Haran, the marriages are consummated resulting in many births, but in Shechem it is aborted resulting in many deaths. In both cases, however, Jacob's household ultimately gains immense wealth.

Return to the Homeland and Shift in Generation

The fourth and final subcycle concerns settlement in Canaan, preservation of identity, consecration, and return to the ancestral home. The exit of mothers and related figures symbolizes the end of Jacob's fertility and fatherhood. Jacob no longer fights, but freezes. While theophanies and interactions with the divine are still exclusive to Jacob, his sons and daughters act independently and rise to prominence. Jacob's sons fight on behalf of a female relative, face a powerful antagonist, employ deceit, and acquire enormous wealth. The designation "בני יעקב" appears seven times in the fourth subcycle (34:7, 13, 25, 27; 35:5, 22, 26), out of nine appearances in the book of Genesis. The death and burial of Isaac mark the complete establishment of the house of Jacob.

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[89] Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 77–79; Alter, *Genesis*, 193.
[90] Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 236–37.
[91] Neufeld, "The Rape of Dinah," 223.

Meaning of the Four Subcycles

Three Levels of Divine Intervention

The co-existence of both extraordinary divine theophanies and general divine reticence regarding human actions is a significant feature of the Jacob Cycle. Although the crucial timing and incorporeal nature of Jacob's theophanies reflect divine control of events, Jacob also acts independently to exercise control and maximize his own gain.[1] Von Rad remarks that characters have "amazingly unrestricted" autonomy "for long stretches in the narrative", although an underlying divine plan cannot be overlooked.[2]

Jacob pursues three major goals in the four subcycles of fight and flight – wealth, fertility, and return to the land, which are highly associated with the Abrahamic blessing of land, seed and blessing. Divine intervention and reticence vary over these three central objectives.

The role of the divine in Jacob's geographical movements is direct and unmistakable. The theophany at Bethel promises Jacob's return to the land, and divine presence and protection in the meantime (28:15). In Haran, Jacob receives a divine command to return to Canaan (31:3), and the warning Laban receives in his dream ensures Jacob's safe and successful departure (31:24, 29). In Shechem, Jacob receives another divine command to travel to Bethel (35:1), a journey that involves extensive preparations to consecrate the family. The theophanies at Mahanaim and Peniel are more obscure, but nevertheless recall previous promises and anticipate the ensuing journey. Jacob himself also acknowledges divine guidance and protection (32:10-13, 35:3). Divine authority over land ownership and geographical boundaries is directly articulated in the two theophanies at Bethel (28:13; 35:12), directly promising Jacob the land of Canaan. Various characters also express their acknowledgements: Isaac invokes the divine in his farewell blessing regarding Jacob's possession of the land (28:4), and so do

[1] Cohn, "Narrative Structure and Canonical Perspective in Genesis," 9.
[2] von Rad, *Genesis*, 315.

Laban and Jacob regarding international boundaries during their covenant and official separation in Gilead (31: 49-50, 53).

Fertility, a crucial objective of Jacob's fight and flight, is associated with divine action to a lesser extent. The two divine appearances at Bethel (28:14, 35:11) promise Jacob progeny, and a significant number of characters – Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Leah and Rachel – all consider childbearing a matter subject to divine control. Some births, however, are recounted as ordinary births without any reference to the divine. Some births are attributed to divine action by a character without the narrator's confirmation – such as the births of Simeon (29:33), Judah (29:35), Dan (30:6), and Zebulun (30:20). Divine solution to barrenness is indeed a central motif in Genesis.[3] Nevertheless, the narrator is only interested in the first-borns of the matriarchs – Esau and Jacob (25:21), Reuben (29:31), and Joseph (30:22). Issachar (30:17-18) is an exception. This deviates from the general Near Eastern view, that gods are involved in all births.[4] Furthermore, the status of the mother matters. Zilpah and Bilhah do not struggle with infertility, and their conceptions are never attributed to divine action. Only the (in)fertility and inner world of the matriarchs – Rebekah, Leah, and Rachael – warrant attention. Limited divine interference and involvement in the important issue of progeny lead to the prominence of female characters, as they employ various tactics to produce children for themselves and their family, and endeavor to ensure favorable statuses and prosperity for their children. This also leads to internal conflicts within Jacob's family. The competition between Leah and Rachel is a rivalry between co-wives, and Reuben's incestuous action with Bilhah is a continuation of the rivalry, as Leah's son fights for the status and rights of his mother, the fertile but unloved wife. The former brings Jacob multiple offspring; the latter marks the end of Jacob's fertile years.

Wealth is not indisputably attributed to divine action by the narrator. The divine blesses Jacob (35:9), and mentions blessings in the distant future (28:14), but neither case is directly associated with Jacob's current pursuit of wealth. Multiple characters, however, associate material prosperity with divine action. Isaac gives Jacob a blessing of

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[3] Steinberg, "The World of the Family in Genesis," 283.

[4] Rebecca Raphael, *Biblical Corpora: Representations of Disability in Hebrew Biblical Literature*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies (London; New York: T & T Clark International, 2008), 77.

abundance (27:27-28). Rebekah adds the divine name in her quote of Isaac's statement about the blessing (27:7), and Jacob lies about receiving divine help in bringing Isaac the wild game (27:20). Both Laban and Jacob reckon Laban's increase in livestock a divine blessing because of Jacob (30:27, 30). Jacob's accumulation of wealth at the expense of Laban is attributed to divine action by both Jacob and his wives (31:5, 7, 9, 11, 16, 42). Jacob himself subsequently admits to Esau that his fertile family and massive livestock is divinely granted (33:5, 11). According to the narrator, however, divine intervention only takes the form of an instruction or warning in Laban's dream regarding his treatment of Jacob (31:24, 29). The context is Jacob's flight and Laban's pursuit, and the message is not explicitly concerned with wealth or ownership of possessions. The plunder from Shechem is not connected to divine action by any characters. Vrolijk considers the wealth gained at Shechem a curse without divine involvement, and that acquired in Haran a mixture of divine action and human struggle.[5] The acquisition of wealth, however, is only attributed to divine action by the mouth of human characters, and the narrator refrains from any direct verification or explicit confirmation.

Three distinct levels of divine intervention and reticence lead to the outworking of the principle of dual causality, and in turn the unique interrelationship between the six themes in the four subcycles.

Dual Causality and the Six Recurrent Themes

Divine restraint contributes to the "fight and flight" pattern. As human initiative assumes a predominant role in shaping the course of events, the strife for status, fertility and material prosperity leads to recurring conflicts, in which transaction and deception becomes a central feature, and a pattern of "fighting and fleeing" ensues. As Jacob fights and flees, he is almost always fighting for fertility and possessions, or fleeing in order to preserve it. Vrolijk observes that material gain is a source of conflict, motivating characters and driving narrative actions, and is a feature in Jacob's struggle against

[5] Vrolijk, *Jacob's Wealth*, 300.

various antagonists.[6] A connection also exists between wealth and his geographical relocations, as people in general move with their belongings, and "all major movements in Gen 12–50 coincide with the occurrence of רְכוּשׁ" (12:15, 31:18, 46:6).[7]

Divine reticence permits females to emerge as influential and preeminent characters. Apart from being silent wives, fertile mothers, objects of ownership and tools in offspring production, women also come into the spotlight as rounder characters with thoughts, words and action. Leah and Rachel explicitly voice out jealousy (30:1, 8), implicitly express their competitiveness in the naming of their sons (29:31-30:24), and conduct a transaction of conjugal rights (30:14-16). Rebekah and Dinah also influence the male protagonists and antagonists, assuming central and crucial roles in the four subcycles of "fight and flight". Steinberg notices that conflicts in Genesis usually involve people of the same gender – men against men and women against women, the former concerning succession, inheritance, wealth and status in the kinship unit, and the latter involving reproductive capabilities and contribution to the patrilineage, which determines a woman's value, identity, power, and future security.[8] This is true in the Jacob cycle to a certain extent. Jacob fights against Esau, Laban, Laban's sons and the Shechemites, while Leah and Rachel compete against each other for childbearing. Reuben's incestuous action with Bilhah is also a rebellion against Jacob. Men fight against men for the sake of women (their mothers, sisters and wives), and women fight against women for the sake of men (their sons). Nevertheless, exceptions to this pattern also occur. Rebekah does not engage in conflict with another woman or rival wife, but fights against men (Esau and Isaac) for the sake of another man (Jacob). Leah and Rachel, by siding with Jacob, cease from competing with each other and act in unison, indirectly fighting against Laban and "בְּנֵי־לָבָן" (31:1). Claiming that Laban's wealth belongs to them and their children (31:16), Laban's daughters are competing against Laban's sons, and fighting for the wellbeing of their own offspring. Leah and Rachel side with the younger group of father-and-sons (Jacob and their children) against the older group of father-and-sons (Laban and his sons). Rebekah similarly fights for Jacob the younger son against other older male

[6] Vrolijk, 296–98.
[7] Vrolijk, 3–4.
[8] Steinberg, "The World of the Family in Genesis," 284–85, 297–98.

members of the family (Isaac and Esau). Whether the female characters are fighting against each other, or against male characters, the issue of contention remains chiefly the same – fertility, or at a later stage the status of their own or favorite son(s).

Throughout the four subcycles, the predominant female character, a close family member of Jacob's, is first assumed by Jacob's mother, then his wives, and lastly his daughter. This progression brings about the idea of growth and continuation of the family line, which complements the emphasis on the Terahite lineage, and grants legitimacy to the establishment of Jacob's household.

Divine reticence also allows human characters to conduct transactions and act with deceit in their contention for wealth, fertility and privilege. As the human characters, whether male or female, exerts a higher influence in the course of events, transaction and deception becomes a feature in the process of "fighting" and "fleeing". Jacob's wealth and fruitfulness is mainly obtained through a series of transactions, with or without deception. The birthright purchase and deception of Isaac leads to two blessings from Isaac and a marriage plan. The bride-switch and transaction of mandrakes gives Jacob multiple offspring, and the flock-breeding agreement grants him enormous wealth. The teraphim theft indirectly assists Jacob in justifying himself against Laban's accusations. The successful transaction of gifts for the favor in Esau's eyes allows Jacob to safeguard his young family's wellbeing and settlement in Canaan, and his son's deception of the Shechemites greatly increases Jacob's possessions. Wealth features prominently in the marriage and flock-breeding agreements between Laban and Jacob, and the business-marriage deal between Jacob's sons and the Shechemites. Both cases involve deception to maximize one's own material gain.

The narrator refrains from making moral comments on the words and acts of deception, and there are no rebukes from the divine. This includes instances in which characters employ the divine name in deception: Rebekah adding the divine name to Isaac's words (27:7), and Jacob lying to Isaac about divine help (27:20). The questionable misuse of the ritual of circumcision by Jacob's sons (34:15-17) also receives no negative comment. There are only three explicit mentions of "רימה": Isaac's comment on Jacob's masquerade (27:35), Jacob's rebuke of Laban's bride-switch

(29:25), and the narrator's description of the brothers' deceitful answer to Hamor (34:13) without any accompanying judgement.

As the divine adopts a lower profile, human characters shoulder higher responsibilities for the unfolding of the plot. Jacob controls his own destiny through duplicity and treachery, and his "entire role as protagonist rests on deceit".[9] Antagonists and other characters also act dubiously or deceitfully: Isaac's gives his blessing for wild game, Esau sells his birthright for a meal, Laban deceives and exploits Jacob, Rachel steals the *teraphim*, Shechem rapes Dinah, Hamor proposes a double deal, and Simeon and Levi kill all the males in the city. The questionable morality of antagonists – Hivites being twisters, Esau being a glutton who despises his birthright – introduces ambiguities.[10] Deception is employed by the protagonist, antagonists, and other supporting characters.

The effect of dual causality also applies to female characters, who are involved in most instances of transactions and deceptions. They can be the deceivers. Rebekah is the manipulator and commander behind Jacob's deception of Isaac. Rachel's theft of the *teraphim* is conducted on her own initiative, and her effective tactic of hiding the stolen objects from Laban echoes Rebekah's maneuvers in designing Jacob's deception of Isaac. They can be the tools of deception. Leah participates passively in the deception of Jacob on his wedding night, most probably under the control of Laban, who is unmistakably the responsible party, according to both the narrator and Jacob. Leah is therefore the object employed in deception, while Rachel is the object of desire that makes the deception successful, giving Laban another seven years of cheap labor. They can conduct a transaction, as in the Mandrakes episode. They can be the goal of a transaction. Jacob strives to gain favor in Esau's eyes is to ensure the safety of his wives and children. The marriage deal between Laban and Jacob, and the Shechemites and Jacobites, both involve the "transaction" of gifts or services for a bride. Lastly, a female character can indirectly initiate a transaction, such as Dinah's going out leading to the marriage-business deal in the first place.

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[9] Cohn, "Narrative Structure and Canonical Perspective in Genesis," 9–11.
[10] Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, 495.

When female characters serve as objects or targets in a transaction, the issue at hand is often marriage, which is associated with heirship and property. When female characters engage in acts of deception, their objective is often for the benefit of a male family member, one whom they identify with. Rebekah engineers the deception of Isaac for the sake of Jacob. Rachel and Leah support Jacob's flight, choosing to side with him and their children rather than with Laban. Rachel's theft of the *teraphim* indicates her loyalty to, and investment in, Jacob's household rather than Laban's. Fuchs identifies three features in "biblical tales of female deception": the "suppression of explicit indices of motivation" that "makes it difficult for the reader to exonerate the female deceiver", the "suspension of authorial judgment" from the narrator that creates moral ambiguity and associates femininity with deceptiveness, and the "absence of closure" that further enhances the vagueness regarding the legitimacy of women engaging in deception.[11] Compared to accounts of deception undertaken by male characters, female deception are more opaque, such as Rachel's deception of her father (31:35), and the sisters' complaint about Laban's attitude and treatment.[12]

As human initiative dominates the narrative, characters are more fully developed through the longer scenes and dialogues.[13] This is well demonstrated in the four subcycles of "fight and flight", where male and female characters compete for wealth, fertility or status with their own means, and continuously engage in various kinds of conflict, transaction and deception.

The Four Subcycles and the Household of Jacob

With every new subcycle, Jacob advances in a crucial stage of life and attains a higher level of independence, making another notable step forward in the establishment of his own household.

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[11] Fuchs, "For I Have the Way of Women: Deception, Gender, and Ideology in Biblical Narrative," 70.
[12] Fuchs, 71, 73.
[13] Cohn, "Narrative Structure and Canonical Perspective in Genesis," 10.

Jacob leaves his own "בית אב" (28:21, 31:30) a poor bachelor, albeit with two blessings and a promising marriage plan. He subsequently builds his own family from his grandfather's and cousin's "בית אב" (24:7, 23, 38, 40; 31:14), the Terahite line in Haran. As he successfully separates from Laban in Gilead, he emerges as an independent family with full ownership of its people and possessions, drawing clear geographical-social-political-economic boundaries with Mesopotamia. Jacob manages to fight for the favor in Esau's eyes in the Transjordan, avoids travelling to Seir, and brings his large and young family to Succoth to rest and safety, securing the future prospect of settling in Canaan. In Shechem, Jacob is confronted another local Canaanite "בית אב" (34:19), and his children prove themselves to be a family with self-identity and power, zealous in maintaining their honor and purity. They ultimately return to Bethel, the whole family consecrating themselves to the divine, and Jacob receives further affirmation of the divine promises given him. As Jacob journeys towards his ancestral home in Mamre, the end of Jacob's era of fertility and the passing of the previous generation take place. The formation of Jacob's family "בית אב" culminates in these final events.

The construction of Jacob's household is closely related to Jacob's increasing acknowledgement of the divine throughout the four subcycles. He initially only refers to the divine as his father's God, even though he begins to acknowledge divine actions in granting him fertility, wealth and protection while in Haran and the Transjordan (27:20, 28:20-22, 31:53, 32:10-13). He only fully adopts the deity as his own after his return to Canaan (33:20, 35:1-4, 9-15). The divine acknowledgement of Jacob's "בית אב" culminates during the second visit to Bethel. The critical and fundamental feature of the Bethel episode is the participation of Jacob's whole family (35:2, 4, 5, 6, 16) and the repetition of previous promises and responses. The journey from Bethel to Mamre (35:16-29) is also a reversal of the first subcycle – the movement from Jacob's "בית אב" to "בית אל".

Establishment of Jacob's household is significantly related to his position in the ancestral line. The "בית אב", "house of the father" or "ancestral household", is the "primary socio-economic unit" and "basic unit of production and reproduction", which

increases in scale to form the clan "משפחה" and the tribe "שבט".[14] The two latter terms do not appear in the Jacob Cycle, but they appear in significant places in stories of preceding and succeeding generations. Abraham's original clan in Haran is known as his "משפחה" (24:38, 40, 41), Esau's descendants form clans "משפחה" (36:40), and the sons of Israel subsequently become twelve tribes of Israel "שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" (Gen 49:28). The formation of Jacob's "בית אב", and the length of text devoted to the process, accompanies the process of the election of Jacob as the heir to the Abrahamic promise. The text does not explicitly describe Jacob building his own "בית אב", but the process is demonstrated in the main plot, in the four subcycles of "fight and flight". The three central objectives in the establishment of Jacob's household – settlement in Canaan, production of multiple offspring, and the accumulation of wealth – are also closely related to the three major elements in the Abrahamic blessing – land, offspring and blessing.

[14] Steinberg, "The World of the Family in Genesis," 282.

Conclusion

The Jacob Cycle is a story about the establishment of Jacob's household, which involves three central objectives: wealth, offspring and return to Canaan, highly associated with the Abrahamic blessing of land, seed and blessing. There are noticeably different extents of divine intervention: clear direction and intervention in the return to the land, partial involvement in the issue of progeny, and almost complete reticence in the acquisition of wealth. Human characters therefore assume a more influential role in the course of events, especially in the latter two objectives of wealth and fertility. As a result, a distinctive four-fold "fight and flight" pattern emerges. The protagonist Jacob journeys through four major geographical locations, and struggles against four main groups of male antagonists, striving for the establishment, ownership, wellbeing, independence and purity of his family. The process involves divine intervention, the active participation of female characters, and the repeated employment of deception by various parties. This cyclic plot development and interplay of several repetitive themes throughout the four subcycles highlight the complex but colorful four-staged process of the building of Jacob's household, which is essential to the establishment of Jacob as the third patriarch and eponymous father of Israel.

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Abstract (Hebrew)

תזה זו חוקרת את המבנה של סיפורי מחזור יעקב (בראשית כ"ה,יט – ל"ה,כט), וקו העלילה המרכזי בתוכו, ומשמעותו העולה כתוצאה מכך. הטקסט המדובר מורכב, ומזהים בו מסורות ומקורות שונות. מעמדו של יעקב כיורשו של אברהם ואביה של ישראל מאפשרים פרשנות של הסיפור באופנים מגוונים. תזה זו מתמקדת בשלבי חייו העיקריים של יעקב הגיבור, ומכירה בכך ששלוש המטרות המרכזיות של יעקב - עושר, צאצאים וחזרה לארץ – מתגשמות בדרכים שונות, בולטות וראויות לציון. רמות שונות של מעורבות אלוהית מובילות להופעתו של דפוס מחזורי של ארבעה שלבים במסעות יעקב. כל אחד מהם מציג תבנית חוזרת של "הילחם וברח", וכולל מספר אלמנטים חוזרים. מבנה מחזורי זה מהווה את ארבעת השלבים העיקריים בהקמת "בית האב" של יעקב, המטרה הסופית של קו העלילה המרכזי של סיפורי מחזור יעקב.

מחקר זה מבוסס על שיטה הסינכרונית, ומתייחס לטקסט כמכלול אינטגרלי. על בסיס עקרונות הביקורת הרטורית, כוונת המחבר ומשמעותו של הטקסט נמצאים בצורתו ובמבנהו. זה מתבטא בגבולות, צורה כוללת, עיצוב ותנועה של יחידה ספרותית, וגם הרצף והיחס בין יחידות בודדות בתוכה. על פי עקרונות הביקורת הנרטיבית, קריטריונים דרמטיים (שינוי בזמן, בנושא ובמקום) משמשים כגורם הקובע העיקרי בחלוקה הסיפורית ובניתוח העלילה המרכזית, וקריטריונים סגנוניים (כותרות, כתוביות, סיכומים, נוסחאות, דפוסים ספרותיים חוזרים) מיושמים ככללים משניים. המספר היודע כל והנוכח בכל מקום מבטא את נקודת המבט האלוהית ומעביר את המשמעות והמסר האידיאולוגי של הסיפור. המספר גם מבטא את עקרון הסיבתיות הכפולה - דו קיום של התערבות אלוהית ומאמץ אנושי - בהבנת הסיפור. לאור ההטרוגניות של הטקסט והקשרו הרחב יותר - מיקומו בסיפורי האבות, בספר בראשית, בחומש ובתנ"ך, מופעל גם עקרון הקורא המרומז. הוא מזוהה כצאצא של ישראל, שהקמת בית ישראל (יעקב) חשובה לו.

סקירת המחקרים הקודמים מתמקדת בשני תחומים: מבנה מחזור יעקב כולו, והנושאים המרכזיים שזוהו בתוכו. הראשון כולל את גבולות הנרטיב, חלוקתו וצורתו. מכיוון שאין לסיפורי האבות גבולות ברורים ומוחלטים, מופיעים גבולות שונים, בין אם על פי קריטריונים דרמטיים (לידות ופטירות, כניסות ועזיבות, גיבורים ודמויות אחרות), או אלמנטים סגנוניים (גנאלוגיות, רשימות ונוסחאות תולדות). חלוקת ספורי מחזור יעקב מתבצעת לעתים קרובות על פי נושאים ומוטיבים חוזרים (כגון קונפליקט ופתרון, ברכה ובכורה). הנרטיב המרכזי מספר את מסעו הדו-כיווני של יעקב לחרן (כ"ה,יט-לד, כ"ו,לד-לה, כ"ז,א-ל"ג,יז), הכרוך בסכסוכים של יעקב עם עשו ועם לבן. הפרשה של יצחק בגרר, שבה נעדר יעקב לחלוטין (כ"ו,א-לג), מתפרשת בדרך כלל בנפרד. כך גם סיפור דינה (ל"ד,א-לא), שמציג בעיקר את ילדי יעקב. סדרת האירועים

האחרונה - מות דבורה ורחל, הולדת בנימין, טומאת בלהה ומותו וקבורתו של יצחק (ל"ה,טז-כט) - נחשבים לרוב לדיווחים שונים העוסקים במקרי מוות וסגירות. בנוסף, מחזור יעקב כולל טקסים ונרטיבים מקדשים, הערות אטיולוגיות וטקסטים שונים. מבנה קונצנטרי או כיאסטי מקובל היטב, והנושאים העיקריים נדונים בשילובים שונים, כגון כנען הארץ המובטחת, השושלת המשפחתית בחרן, בחירה ודחייה, ראשונות, סכסוך ויחסים, גיבור הנמלט, גיבור לאומי, התגלויות אלוהיות, עושר, אבות ומעצמות זרות, גלות ושיבה מארץ זרה, הונאה ותחבולות, דמות הטריקסטר, האירוניה והגמול, ההבטחה האברהמית וההשלכות על ישראל העתידית.

מחקר זה מזהה את גבולות סיפורי מחזור יעקב כבראשית כ"ה,יט – ל"ה,כט, ומזהה ארבעה חלקים בתוכו (כ"ה,יט – כ"ח,כב, כ"ט,א – ל"ב,א, ל"ב,ב – ל"ג,יז, ל"ג,יח – ל"ה,כט). סיפורו של יצחק בגרר (כ"ו, א-ל"ג) אינו נכלל, מכיוון שהוא מנותק משאר הסיפור לפי הקריטריונים הדרמטיים. הקשר שלו עם סיפורי מחזור יעקב גם ראוי למחקר נוסף, שכן הנושאים העיקריים שזוהו בסיפורי יעקב גם נמצאים בתוכו. תבנית מחזורית מזוהה, המחלקת את כל הנרטיב לארבעה תת-מחזורים. במחקר זה, המונח "תת-מחזור" מציין "תת-יחידה של מחזור", מחזור קטן יותר המציג קווי עלילה דומים ונושאים חוזרים בהשוואה לתת-מחזורים אחרים בתוך מחזור גדול יותר. כל תת-מחזור כולל תבנית "הילחם וברח". יעקב מגיע למקום חדש, נפגש עם קבוצה חדשה של דמויות, מתמודד עם רמה מסוימת של מחלוקת, ובורח או עוזב. עם כל תת-מחזור, יעקב מתקדם משמעותית בשלבי חייו, וארבעת תת-המחזורים בונים את מסעו של יעקב מלידה עד מעמדו כפטריארך מבוסס.

שישה נושאים מופיעים בארבעת תת-המחזורים באופן חוזר: תנועה גיאוגרפית, לחימה ובריחה, התערבות אלוהית, פוריות ורכישת עושר, תפקידי דמויות נשיות, ועסקה והונאה. הנושאים החוזרים על עצמם תורמים למבנה המחזורי.

פרשנות של סיפורי מחזור יעקב כארבעה תת-מחזורים מציעה שלוש נקודות תצפית ייחודיות. ראשית, מודגשת התקדמותו של יעקב בשלבי החיים, שמבליטה את הקמת משפחתו,והיא מרכיב משמעותי בבחירתו והפיכתו לפטריארך השלישי. שנית, ניתן לתת יותר תשומת לב לרכישת העושר של יעקב ולתפקידן של הנשים במשפחתו. שני הגורמים תורמים משמעותית לכוחו, להצלחתו ולמעמדו. תפקידן של הדמויות הנשיות בקונפליקטים של יעקב ובמבנה סיפורי מחזור יעקב משך פחות תשומת לב במחקרים קודמים. שלישית, התערבות והסתייגות אלוהיות סלקטיביות מייצרות דינמיקה אלוהית-אנושית ייחודית בסיפור יעקב.

תת-המחזור הראשון (כ"ה,יט – כ"ח,כב) מתקיים בכנען. הוא מתחיל בבאר שבע, בית האב, שבו פועלים יצחק, רבקה יעקב ועשו. הוא מסתיים בבית אל, בית האלוהים, ושם נמצא יעקב לבדו ומקבל את התיאופניה הראשונה שלו והבטחה אלוהית במסעו. יעקב עובר ארבעה שלבים של לחימה עם עשו - מאבק תוך רחמי, סצנת הלידה, חילופי בכורה, והונאת יצחק. יעקב זוכה בניצחון מכריע במאבק, הכרוך בעסקאות והונאה, וכולל ארבע מטרות: בכורה, ברכה, סידור נישואין והכרת הורים. הדמות הנשית הבולטת היא רבקה, והיא ממלאת תפקיד מרכזי בסוגיית הפוריות והייחוס המשפחתי. ברכת השפע של יצחק מביאה את מושג העושר, והיא מושא המחלוקת המרכזי בין עשו ויעקב.

תת-המחזור השני (כ"ט,א – ל"ב,א) (גירסאות באנגלית 29:1-31:55) נוגע ליצירת בית יעקב. הוא מתרחש במסופוטמיה, מתחיל בבאר בחרן כשיעקב מגיע לבדו, וכלה בגל האבנים בגלעד. שם נפרדים יעקב ומשפחתו באופן רשמי מלבן, דודו, פטרונו, וחותנו.יש שני גלים מרכזיים של סכסוך בחרן. הראשון כולל מפגש בבאר וקבלת פנים חמה לביתו של לבן לשהייה של חודש, החלפת הכלה וארבע עשרה שנה של עבודה, והיריבות בין הנשים, המשך לסכסוך הקודם. הגל השני של הסכסוך כולל: הניסיון הראשון והכושל לעזוב את לבן שמוביל להסכם רועה נוסף המעניק ליעקב עושר בשפע, ניסיון שני ומוצלח לברוח מחרן בחשאי, הבריחה בפועל והמרדף של לבן, והעימות האחרון בגלעד. מסעו של יעקב כולל שלוש מטרות מרכזיות - חזרה לכנען (אדמה), בעלות על משפחתו (צאצאים) ושכרו המגיע לו (עושר). התערבות אלוהית מתרחשת עם שני הנושאים הקודמים – אדמה וצאצאים. הדמויות הנשיות השולטות הן נשותיו של יעקב, רחל ולאה. פוריות ועושר הם המטרות והתוצאות של הסכסוכים, שבהם מעורבים היקפים שונים של עסקאות, הונאה ותחבולות.

תת-המחזור השלישי (ל"ב,ב – ל"ג,יז) מתרחש בעבר הירדן. יעקב נלחם על "חן בעיני עשו", ראשית כדי שיוותר על נקמה, ושנית כדי שיאפשר להם להיפרד – "בריחתו" של יעקב. יעקב מבצע ארבע פעולות לפייס את עשו, וארבע פעולות אחרות כדי להתכונן לברוח ממנו ולמזער את אובדנו. ארבעת הראשונים כוללים: שליחת שליחים עם הודעה, שליחת לפחות ארבעה עדרים כמתנות, השתחוות לעשיו, ודחיקה בעשו לקבל את המתנות. הארבעה האחרים כוללים: חלוקת קבוצתו לשניים, תפילה לעזרה שמא יעש יבוא לתקוף, חלוקת משפחתו לשלושה תוך כדי התקרבות לעשיו, ושוכנע את עשו לתת להם להיפרד. דמויות נשיות אינן ממלאות שום תפקיד פעיל, אלא משמשות כרכושו של יעקב שיש להגן עליו. אין מקרים של הונאה ברורה, אם כי קיים משא ומתן. התגלויות אלוהיות אינן מכוונות את מסעו של יעקב או מעודדות אותו, אלא מעניקות משמעות נושאית. יעדו של יעקב, סוכות, מהדהד עם מחניים ויבוק כמקומות הנקראים על ידי יעקב, או על פי פעילותו.

תת-המחזור הרביעי (ל"ג,יח – ל"ה,כט) מתקיים בכנען – בשכם, בית-אל, אפרת, מגדל עדר וממרה. המשפחה עומדת בפני דילמה: להתבולל אך ליהנות משלווה, או לשמור על זהותה הטהורה אך בכך להסתכן בעוינות. יעקב חדל מכל פעולה, ובניו נלחמים במקומו, תוך שימוש במרמה והם צוברים הון עצום. הלחימה מתבצעת למען אחותם, דינה, בתו של יעקב, הדמות הנשית הבולטת. הדמות האלוהית שוב מכוונת את מסעו של יעקב, וכל בני ביתו של יעקב יוצאים למסע לבית אל, שניתן להתייחס אליו כ"בריחה". תת המחזור הרביעי מדגיש את ההשתתפות וההתקדשות של משפחתו של יעקב, ואת שינוי הדורות. כמה דמויות מהדורות הקודמים הולכות לעולמן, וילדיו של יעקב ממלאים תפקידים משפיעים.

ששת הנושאים החוזרים בארבעת תת-המחזורים של "הילחם וברח" פועלים יחדיו ליצירת מסע בן ארבעה שלבים בהקמת ביתו של יעקב. הרמות השונות של התערבות והסתייגות אלוהיות לגבי שלוש המטרות - אדמה, צאצאים ועושר - מאפשרות ליוזמה אנושית לקחת תפקיד דומיננטי יותר בהשפעה על אירועים. זה מוביל לתבנית "הילחם וברח" ולתנועותיו הגיאוגרפיות של יעקב, וגם למספר רב של עסקאות והטעיות, כאשר דמויות אנושיות נלחמות על עושר ופוריות. כתוצאה מכך, דמויות נשיות גם נכנסות לאור הזרקורים, כדמויות משפיעות, וגם כתורמות לסוגיית הפוריות, מוצא ושינוי דורות. כפטריארך השלישי ויורש ההבטחה האברהמית, ואב ישראל המכונה, הקמת "בית אב" של יעקב היא משמעותית. מחקר זה מציג פרשנות למחזור יעקב המדגיש את הקמת בית ישראל (יעקב).

עבודה זו נעשתה בהדרכתו של

פרופ'אליהו עסיס

מן המחלקה לתנ"ך ע"ש זלמן שמיר

של אוניברסיטת בר אילן

אוניברסיטת בר-אילן

תבנית חוזרת במחזור יעקב

המבנה של סיפורי מחזור יעקב (בראשית 25:19-35:29) ומשמעותו

חנה לאי

עבודה זו מוגשת כחלק מהדרישות לשם קבלת תואר מוסמך
במחלקה לתנ"ך ע"ש זלמן שמיר
של אוניברסיטת בר-אילן

רמת גן תשפ"ב