

George Savran

JACOB

**CONFLICTED TWIN,
AGGRIEVED PATRIARCH**



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Hebrew Bible Monographs, 113

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George Savran



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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
AJS	Association for Jewish Studies
AO	<i>Antiguo Oriente</i>
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BM	<i>Bet Miqra</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBR	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
CSB	Christian Standard Bible
DDD	<i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i> (ed. K. van der Toorn, B. Becking and P. van der Horst; Leiden: Brill, 1999)
EBR	<i>Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception</i> (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009–)
EI	<i>Eretz Israel</i>
ETL	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Louvanienses</i>
GKC	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> (ed. Emil Kautzsch, trans. Arthur E. Cowley; 2nd ed; Oxford: Clarendon, 1910)
HALOT	<i>Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, M.E.J. Richardson and J.J. Stamm; Leiden: Brill, 2000)
HB	Hebrew Bible
HBAI	<i>Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel</i>
HBT	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HS	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
JANES	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBQ	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
JCS	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JHS	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JNSL	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSQ	<i>Jewish Studies Quarterly</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>

LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society Tanakh
NIV	New International Version
<i>OTE</i>	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
<i>SEA</i>	<i>Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok</i>
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> (ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren and Heinz-Josef Fabry; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977–2006)
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

INTRODUCTION

1. *Who is Jacob?*

Understanding Jacob is no easy task, for he is somewhat reserved in his self-expression and generally reticent about the motives behind his actions. From the standpoint of biblical tradition, he is undoubtedly a founding father, a figure of great importance whose story extends over fully half of the book of Genesis. Like Abraham he is given a new name by God, but while *Avraham* is simply a dialectical variant of his former name *Avram*, the name *Ya'āqōb*, with its negative connotations, is completely replaced by the name *Yiśrā'ēl*, a God-centered description reflecting a real change of identity.¹ His story is nearly as detailed and extensive as that of King David in the books of Samuel and Kings. Jacob is not a military leader, nor is he transformed into a model of religious piety or a messianic figure; instead, his new personal name, *Yiśrā'ēl*, becomes the eponym that signifies the entire people, Israel. Clearly there is more to Jacob's identity than his legendary description as the biological father of twelve sons who become the twelve tribes of Israel.²

Jacob has been written about many times in the past, as is appropriate for a foundational biblical figure of such importance. His development from trickster twin to progenitor of the people is recounted in one of the most interesting cycles of biblical narrative, covering the extent of his life from birth to death and ranging over fully half of the book of Genesis. This

1. Scholars have suggested that the original Jacob name may have been theophoric as well—*Ya'qub'ilu/ Ya'āqōb-’Ēl* ‘God/El protects’; cf. J. Wöhrle, ‘Jacob, Moses, Levi: Pentateuchal Figures in the Book of the Twelve’, in *The Formation of the Pentateuch* (ed. B.M. Levinson, J.C. Gertz and D. Rom-Shiloni; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), pp. 582-85; E.A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), p. 197; C. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 414; V.P. Hamilton, *Genesis 18–50* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 178. The negative sense of the name *ya'āqōb* is expressed by Esau in 27.36 ‘Was he, then, named Jacob [*ya'āqōb*] that he might supplant me (*waya'qābēni*) these two times?’ So also in the prophetic statements of Hosea (12.4)—‘In the womb he tried to supplant (*āqāb*) his brother’—and of Jeremiah (9.3)—‘For every brother takes advantage (*āqōb ya'qōb*)’.

2. C. Frevel, ‘Jacob as Father of the Twelve Tribes: Literary and Historical Considerations’, in *The History of the Jacob Cycle (Genesis 25-35)* (ed. B. Hensel; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), pp. 155-76.

study of Jacob will explore his character anew in light of the complexities of his twin identity as well as the fraught relationship between conflict and blessing throughout his life. What does it mean in the biblical world to have a twin brother who outstrips you, becoming a successful hunter and winning the love of your father? How does Jacob's identity move past his initial striving with Esau to become a patriarch in his own right, and beyond that, to embody a foundational account of the early stages of national identity? The promise of blessing is passed on to Jacob twice by his father and once again by God, yet its actualization is frustrated time and again by the narrative's numerous conflicts within the home, which in turn foster the development of Jacob's mature identity. While this family dynamic initially reflects upon his growth as an individual character, it has ramifications for Israel's identity as Edom's 'twin' as well.

Jacob's life as told in Genesis 25–50 is filled with dramatic turns. Born as a twin to Esau, he has a conflicted relationship with his brother, twice getting the better of him by devious means—taking both his brother's birthright and the blessing his father Isaac had prepared for Esau. Fleeing his brother's wrath, Jacob stays with his uncle Laban in Aram for twenty years, marrying both of Laban's daughters, siring thirteen children and gaining significant personal wealth by dubious methods. Upon leaving Aram, following a mysterious encounter with an angel, he meets up with his brother Esau once again. The results of these highly charged events are a divinely bestowed name change to *Yiśrā'ēl* and Jacob's reconciliation with Esau. Upon returning to Canaan, Jacob builds a sanctuary to YHWH at Bethel, loses his wife Rachel in childbirth and buries his father, Isaac, in the family cave in Hebron. The continuation of his life after Rachel's death is told in the Joseph story. Favoring Joseph over all his other sons, the brothers vent their anger on Joseph, sell him into slavery in Egypt, and imply to Jacob that he has been carried off by a wild animal. Jacob enters an extended period of mourning, from which he emerges only when Joseph's continued existence in Egypt is revealed to him. He descends to Egypt with the rest of his family and lives out his years in the land of Goshen, returning to Canaan only after death to be buried in Hebron.

Jacob deserves our close attention to his life and identity first and foremost because of his mythic role as the father of twelve sons/tribes; his name is changed to Israel, and his offspring are therefore called *bānē yiśrā'ēl*—the general term for the Israelites. While he can be imagined as the physical embodiment of Israel the people, one must admit that he is an odd candidate for this role. In his youth he is obsessed primarily with his own welfare and success. Far from being a paragon of righteous behavior and religious faith, he engages in elaborate deceit to receive a blessing he feels should be his own—but it takes him years to accept the reality of that blessing. As I argue in Chapter 4, Jacob's stay in Laban's homestead, the gradual changes

in his fortunes and the slow and measured acceptance that he has indeed been blessed give the reader a sense that Jacob's character is different from that of most biblical figures.

It may be easier to first clarify what Jacob is not rather than who he is. Most biblical characters can be defined initially by their societal roles, but in Jacob's case the resulting picture of him is more of a photographic negative than an actual image. While he is born into a family of patriarchal leadership, his abilities and talents do not grant him a special role in society as a heroic figure or as an individual model of justice and righteousness. Unlike Abraham he is not the knight of faith (as Kierkegaard described him), a character who emerges full blown in his devotion to God from our very first encounter with him in Genesis 12.1-9.³ Though his resolve may be tested, Abraham's obedience is never questioned; on the contrary he raises concerns about God's fulfillment of the promise: the long delay in the birth of offspring, the question of God's attention to Ishmael after Isaac's birth, and God's practice in dispensing justice fairly.⁴

A comparison with other biblical figures fares no better. Jacob is quite different from his father Isaac, the ideal sacrificial victim who allows his father Abraham to bind him to the altar, even though that father is idealized as the model for his own life.⁵ Jacob's son Joseph has exceptional powers of dream interpretation, as well as a remarkable ability to advance himself to a position of power and influence in a foreign court, neither of which resemble his father's attributes. Unlike Moses, Jacob is neither a liberator nor a lawgiver. His public persona outside the family is limited to his passive response to the Hivites following the rape of his daughter Dinah (Genesis 34) and his role as patriarchal leader in Genesis 35. Even here we see little that compares with Moses' talents in organizing the people and leading them through difficult times in the desert. Nor is Jacob a military leader or a charismatic political figure like David. Jacob may emerge victorious in his contests with his brother Esau and his uncle Laban, but not because of military prowess, exceptional daring, or bravery. Nor is he an institution builder like Solomon, whose political restructuring of tribal obligations and whose construction of the Jerusalem temple exemplify administrative talent.

Despite all these negatives, early Jewish tradition portrayed him as so perfect that even the angels who gazed on his image engraved on the divine

3. S. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (trans. S. Walsh; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 59-71. There is no biblical account of Abraham's birth or his growth from childhood to maturity, nor do we know what he learned at his father's knee or how his mother may have taught him. The famous story of Abraham in his father's idol shop is an origin tale found only in rabbinic midrash; see *Gen. R.* 38.13.

4. See *Gen.* 15.1, 17.18, 18.25.

5. See especially *Gen.* 26. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

throne admired him.⁶ Philo saw Jacob as reflecting the part of the soul that is good and Esau as the inner danger; the struggle against Esau was the internal battle with all that was evil.⁷ The classic text of Jewish mysticism, the *Zohar*, envisioned Jacob mythically as the perfect balance between justice and mercy. He embodied the divine attribute (*sefirah*) of *Tiferet*, a bridge between the upper and lower worlds whose entire purpose was bringing heaven and earth into proper alignment with one another: 'If not for Jacob the world would not endure'.⁸ But in the real world of difficult relations between Christians and Jews in Europe of the Middle Ages, the ongoing conflict between Jacob and Esau assumed center stage, with Jacob's struggle against Esau reflecting the theological tensions and societal clashes between Judaism and Christianity.⁹ This view continued to dominate depictions of Jacob during the early modern period and the Enlightenment as well.

This confrontational view began to change in the nineteenth century as the status of Jews in Europe started to improve. An important Jewish voice that envisioned a departure from the typology of conflict was that of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, who saw the reconciliation of Jacob and Esau as forecasting a major change in the relations between Judaism and Christianity.¹⁰ But only in the last century do we find Jewish commentators wrestling with Jacob's own failings and imperfections, describing him as a problematic character according to the plain sense of sections of the biblical narrative. In his commentary on Genesis (1934) Benno Jacob saw the youthful Jacob in this way but also showed him capable of constant improvement as he moved toward his great moment of change in his struggle with the angel at the Jabbok.¹¹ Jacob became a model for personal growth as reflected in his wrestling with God, his struggle with those close to him and his grappling with his own imperfections.

Indeed, Jacob's deeds do not precede him as a model leader. At times he is shown to be a trickster and a conniver, extorting his brother's birthright and stealing his blessing, deceiving his blind father in the process. To be sure he is not the only biblical figure who behaves badly in relation to his family (David comes to mind as an example of poor parenting), but he is chosen and blessed by YHWH despite his reprehensible actions. Is his exalted lineage—he is, after all, Abraham's grandson—sufficient justification for the exceptional status that accrues to him? Of all the patriarchal figures in Genesis,

6. See Jubilees 35.12-13; *Targum Neophiti* Gen. 28.12.

7. Philo, *De Fuga* 4.23-25.

8. *Zohar* I.148a.

9. See H.M. Hacohen, *Jacob & Esau: Jewish European History Between Nation and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 6-25.

10. Hacohen, *Jacob & Esau*, pp. 260-71.

11. Hacohen, *Jacob & Esau*, pp. 414-20, citing Benno Jacob's Genesis commentary.

why does Jacob merit having his name changed to *Yiśrā'ēl*, thus becoming the titular representative of the nation still waiting to be formed? Is his greatness summed up by his potency in fathering the twelve sons who come to represent the twelve tribes of Israel, or is it something more?

Among more contemporary biblical readers, Yair Zakovitch, in his eponymous book, aptly calls Jacob an 'unexpected patriarch'. Zakovitch is correct: Jacob certainly upsets one's expectations about how Abraham's grandson should behave. Jacob foils the reader's assumptions about the ways in which a divinely elected figure ought to conduct himself, not to mention how frequently he disrupts other characters' expectations.¹² As Robert Alter notes 'The great rule of Jacob's life ... is that he gets everything he aspired to have but not in the way he imagined, and at a great cost to himself'.¹³ At the same time it is unclear to what extent Jacob himself is surprised by the way things turn out for him. I tend to agree with Elie Assis that he is 'a character clearly plagued by doubt'—doubt, yes, but rarely, I would argue, guilt, which appears only later in his life as he confronts his failure to protect Joseph from his brothers' anger.¹⁴

A different approach to his character connects Jacob with the folkloric traditions of the hero. Susan Niditch describes Jacob as a trickster figure who acts in devious ways, with questionable morality, to achieve his goals—the theft of Esau's blessing, for example, and his enrichment at Laban's expense by multiplying his flocks. Niditch shows how the larger structure of Jacob's biography was attuned to this schema: his unusual birth and intense family rivalry, followed by various adventures abroad and the conflict's final resolution.¹⁵ Ronald Hendel focused on Jacob's connection to heroic folk traditions as reflected in his encounter with the shepherds in Haran and his match with the angel at the Jabbok.¹⁶ This approach was developed in greater detail more recently by Edward Greenstein, who documented how closely Jacob fits the folkloric pattern of the exiled hero who returns to reclaim his rightful position in his homeland.¹⁷ A further twist on the trickster motif was developed by John Anderson, who tied Jacob's

12. Y. Zakovitch, *Jacob: Unexpected Patriarch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), pp. 23, 166.

13. R. Alter, 'Literature', in *Reading Genesis: Ten Methods* (ed. R. Hendel; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 24.

14. E. Assis, *Identity in Conflict* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2016), p. 57.

15. S. Niditch, *Underdogs and Tricksters: A Prelude to Biblical Folklore* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), pp. 71-79.

16. R. Hendel, *The Epic of the Patriarch: The Jacob Cycle and the Narrative Traditions of Canaan and Israel* (Atlanta: Scholar Press, 1987), pp. 103-109.

17. E.M. Greenstein, 'The Fugitive Hero Narrative Pattern in Mesopotamia', in *Worship, Women and War: Essays in Honor of Susan Niditch* (ed. T. Lemos, J. Collins and S.M. Olyan; Providence: Brown Judaica Studies, 2015), pp. 22-26.

behavior to the actions of YHWH as a trickster God, who also used deception to get his way.¹⁸ While Jacob's adherence to folkloric traditions is clear, it is difficult to define him primarily as a heroic character, for his personality tends more towards inwardness while generally avoiding the usual heroic concerns Anderson rightly identifies as power, self-assertiveness, and physical conquest.¹⁹ As convincing as the trickster paradigm may be, it is of limited assistance in exploring a major concern of this study: Jacob's self-understanding.

Walter Brueggemann correctly points out how Jacob is both a fighter and a contrarian, 'a man who will contest every step of the way'.²⁰ But there is more to Jacob than a self-interested figure struggling to get his share of the blessing. Jan Fokkelman explores how at times Jacob is exclusively taken up with his personal fate, yet on other occasions displays an identification with more communal concerns.

At several points we noticed that Jacob was not pictured as a private character, as an individual interesting in himself, but as a link in a chain; he is a member of a family to which to which the blessing of God has been given since Abraham...More than once the character of Jacob displays national interests, he is a corporate personality.²¹

Jacob's self-understanding beyond the boundaries of his personal interests is not immediately apparent, but develops slowly over time, coming to fruition following Jacob's name change to *Yiśrā'ēl*. This balance between the public and private Jacob is no less important than his self-definition as hero/trickster or the tension between Jacob's predetermined chosenness and the unexpectedness of his actions.

All these observations are notable and insightful, but none fully explores Jacob's character development in a way that addresses both his deceptiveness and his remarkable ability to change and grow. The importance of his twin identity and its relationship to Jacob's evolution is of prime significance in his development and has not been studied sufficiently. The complexity of his identity formation requires attention to the difficult question of how Jacob sees himself, and how this is represented in his various attempts to define himself when he settles on a stable identity. His ability to reformulate his sense of self has important implications for how he sees both his relationship to Esau and his relationship to God.

18. J.E. Anderson, *Jacob and The Divine Trickster* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), pp. 172-88.

19. Anderson, *Trickster*, pp. 94-125.

20. W. Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), p. 208.

21. J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975), p. 238.

This last facet is of particular interest when we examine Jacob's connection with the divine. He has direct personal contact with YHWH, being the recipient of no fewer than four separate theophanic events.²² Yet despite this multiplicity of interactions with the divine, something remains unfinished. Rarely does Jacob engage in verbal interaction with God, the exception being his discourse with the angel at the Jabbok (32.26-30).²³ Nor is it clear how his relations with the divine lead to the stabilization of this identity, for Jacob does not follow the expected biblical reaction to theophany: immediate devotion to YHWH, as with Abraham and Samuel.²⁴ Since Jacob receives a blessing from his father that invokes divine support, followed by a second promise directly from God, we might have expected a similar response. Jacob is far from indifferent to the power of this experience when he awakens from his dream at Bethel,²⁵ but his reaction the next morning records a different sort of rejoinder. Here he conditions his devotion to the divine upon YHWH actively fulfilling the promise he has made to protect Jacob and bring him home safely.

Jacob then made a vow, saying, 'If God remains with me, if He protects me on this journey that I am making, and gives me bread to eat and clothing to wear, and if I return safe to my father's house—the Lord shall be my God. And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, shall be God's abode; and of all that You give me, I will set aside a tithe for You' (28.20-22).

Instead of immediately embracing this God after he receives a truly remarkable series of divine assurances, Jacob states that fulfillment of his vow is contingent upon the validation of those divine pledges.²⁶

With this vow Jacob resists the biblical norm; despite his pedigree and his status as blessed, he does not take his chosen status for granted but

22. The ladder dream at Bethel in Gen. 28.12-15, the Mahanaim theophany in 32.2-3, wrestling with the angel at the Jabbok in 32.25-30, and the night vision with God upon leaving Canaan in 46.2-4. Jacob reports a fifth event as well in his address to his wives in 31.5-13, but the narrator does not provide verification of this theophany, as will be discussed in Chapter 4.

23. Even in this case it is less than clear that Jacob is aware that his interlocutor is something other than a mortal human at this point.

24. Abraham in Gen. 15; Samuel in 1 Sam. 3. This is an essential stage in the theophany type scene as I argue in G. Savran, *Encountering the Divine: Theophany in Biblical Narrative* (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), pp. 18-19.

25. 'Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is present in this place, and I did not know it! How awesome is this place! This is certainly the abode of God, and that is the gateway to heaven"' (28.16-17, trans. GS). Jacob's initial response to the ladder dream at Bethel in 28.16-17 is an immediate expression of *fascinans et tremendum*—complete captivation together with overwhelming fear—that is often found in theophany narratives. See Savran, *Encountering*, pp. 90-119.

26. See below Chapter 5, p. XXX.

instead treats even a divine promise with skepticism. In keeping with this 'wait and see' attitude, Jacob's delayed acknowledgement of the blessing's actuality appears only after a long process of acceptance. When he arrives at Paddan-aram after fleeing his brother and home, Jacob is at a loss to explain why, if he has truly been blessed, he is now bereft of all the benefits of that blessing. Separated from his nuclear family and under a death threat by his brother, he is exiled from the land that symbolized his fertility and his blessing. This hardly supports the idea that providential approval of his deception is the Bethel revelation's purpose. While the results of Jacob's actions are not exactly a curse (as he had feared would be the outcome of his theft of the blessing), they hardly lend support to his sense of being blessed. Receiving his father's promise of plenty has not led to comfort and abundance but to exile and near enslavement by his uncle, Laban. Even more disturbing, Jacob's brother Esau appears to have all the advantages that he himself now lacks—he is at home with their father Isaac and mother Rebekah, living on the land with his wives and his family, and able to enjoy all the things from which Jacob has been exiled.

As I describe in detail in Chapter 4, only in the latter part of Jacob's twenty years with Laban do the fruits of his blessing start to become clear to him. In the biblical world it is nearly a given that a character will accept the power of the divine to deliver on promises that have been vouchsafed.²⁷ One may question the delay in fulfillment as Abraham does ('Since you have granted me no offspring, my steward will be my heir', 15.3) but following divine encouragement, Abraham soon accepts God's promise. By comparison Jacob's reluctance to accept YHWH at his word is unusual, for it suggests a different model of relating to divine authority. He is not necessarily doubting YHWH's ability, but neither does he immediately embrace the vision of blessing presented to him in the ladder dream at Bethel. Whether this is the result of having gotten that blessing by deceit, a reaction to his physical displacement from his family, or a necessary side effect of the growing pains of adolescent identity formation, Jacob stands apart from most of his biblical counterparts. That the text allows the reader to trace the various stages of Jacob's personal development is one of the more uncommon aspects of the lengthy narrative devoted to his story. Jacob thus represents that rare model in biblical literature: an imperfect figure, even to the point of deception and opportunism, who nonetheless achieves a central position among his family—not by unanimous acclaim, nor by certainty of his own chosenness, but by the slow process of accepting and adjusting to the ebb and flow of his destiny.²⁸

27. And to protest vigorously should YHWH fail to deliver, e.g. Pss. 77.8-11; 89.39-52.

28. A further indication of this aspect of Jacob is reflected in the double recounting

Jacob is also unusual in his willingness to acknowledge change—not only regarding his own behavior (since he eventually ceases to act as a trickster) but concerning his understanding of both himself and others. In his response to the unexpected encounter with the divine at the Jabbok Jacob remarks (with apparent surprise) ‘I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved’ (32.31). Jacob’s comment reflects his astonishment that these two phenomena could co-exist—direct contact with God should have been lethal, yet the fact of his enduring existence means that he had been mistaken about God all along.²⁹ Prior to this event Jacob had implied a belief that he was God’s favorite; since he was essential to YHWH’s plan for his future, God clearly intended only good for him. But after the startling struggle with the angel at the Jabbok, Jacob admits that there is a great deal about this God that he had failed to understand. How was it that YHWH fought with him yet let him remain alive? And if YHWH truly cares for him, why did he attack him in the first place? Was this a rebuke? A trial? A lesson? Clearly this Deity is unlike what Jacob had previously assumed.

A second instance of Jacob’s admission of incomplete understanding surfaces during his reunion with his brother Esau. Jacob compares seeing Esau to ‘seeing the face of God’ (33.10). In place of the hostile reception he had feared, Esau greets Jacob with an enthusiastic embrace. The unusual simile—‘like seeing the face of God’—is Jacob’s declaration that he has misjudged his brother, having cast Esau solely as a vengeful person who sought his death. This recognition follows hard on Jacob’s previous confusion—just as he had failed to understand the significance of the attack by God at the Jabbok, so too he had wrongly appraised the reunion with his brother.

A third admission of mistaken understanding comes later, highlighting Jacob’s changing perceptions in old age in the Joseph novella. Jacob’s confrontation with his sons about releasing his youngest son Benjamin to their care leads to an argument over whose needs are more important—Jacob’s intense desire to keep Benjamin close to him, or the sons’ wish to redeem their brother Simeon from captivity in Egypt and preserve the family’s welfare. Prior to this moment, Jacob considers himself the most important person in the family, the paterfamilias whose word is the final arbiter of

of the multiplication of Jacob’s flocks at Laban’s expense. In the first case (30.35-43) Jacob is successful due to what is portrayed as his own ingenuity regarding breeding techniques and careful guarding of his flocks; in short, he creates his own success. But when he retells this account to his wives in 31.8-10 he attributes his success to divine inspiration. Is this a recalibration of his memory in light of his success or a more mature recognition of his blessedness, a fact which he had discounted prior to this? Jacob’s refashioning of this experience again reveals an individual who does not take his blessedness as an automatic response.

29. On the lethal aspect of contact with the divine see Savran, *Encountering*, pp. 191-98.

their welfare and their future. Thus Jacob alone chose to favor Joseph above all his sons, ordered them to go to Egypt to procure food and accused them of bereaving him. But Judah's speech to his father—'Send the boy in my care [to Egypt] ... that we may live and not die' (43.8)—makes it clear to Jacob that refusing would achieve nothing positive, and that by doing so, he himself would bring about the family's demise. By acceding to Judah's demand, Jacob tempers his attitude regarding his own importance, admitting that he does not hold the key to the family's continued success: 'Take your brother; if I am to be bereaved, I shall be bereaved' (43.13-14). In recognizing the damaging effect of his refusal, Jacob accepts that he is no longer at the center of his family's life. At issue here is not his dependence upon the family for his own welfare, but rather his acceptance of the limitations of his own authority.

The first of these three realizations—the insight that follows his theophany at the Jabbok and the consequent reevaluation of his attitude toward YHWH—is not unique to Jacob. As we can see in other theophanies, this reappraisal of one's relationship to the divine in light of an experience that feels like a brush with death is an integral part of many theophanies.³⁰ But the two subsequent realizations Jacob makes are unique among biblical characters; I cannot recall another such figure who was willing to admit to his own limitations in quite this way—not as an admission of sin before the Deity, not after defeat by an enemy, but as recognition of the limits of his own perception. Jacob thus shows himself to be exceptional, a nuanced character whose personal development and growth in understanding lead him to moderate his private interests in favor of the well-being of his entire family.³¹ This is all the more remarkable in light of Jacob's earlier concern with his own welfare as the central focus of his existence.

In response to my opening question, 'Who is Jacob?' it should now be clear that there is no simple answer. His persona is multilayered, an intriguing mixture of positive and negative traits, but what stands out above all is his ability to navigate the broad range of experiences (including twinship) that shape his life. He is far from ideal, yet he is exceptional among biblical characters in his ability to recognize the need for personal change and to incorporate that realization into his life. Despite his reluctance to explain himself, Jacob is in fact a more accessible character than the other patriarchal figures: there is a down-to-earth quality about him with which readers can identify more directly than with Abraham or Isaac. Abraham is so

30. On near-death experiences of theophany see Savran, *Encountering*, pp. 190-203.

31. In light of the overall importance of the family's well-being (for Jacob as well as his sons) in ancient societies, what is depicted (for literary reasons) as a sudden shift in Jacob's priorities was likely to have been a gradual process in real life (private communication, Alison Acker Gruseke).

singular, so impressive in the biblical imagination that he can barely be approached, let alone equaled. The book of Isaiah declares ‘Abraham was one when I called him’ (Isa. 51.2), and Abraham remains an inimitable figure—a powerful model, but not one with whom one can empathize in the fullest sense. Isaac’s passivity, on the other hand—his willingness to be sacrificed and his gullibility before Jacob—undercut his attractiveness as an exemplar. Nor does Isaac’s unqualified attachment to the father who was prepared to offer him up on the altar encourage the reader’s admiration. While Joseph’s beauty, talent and ambition mark him as the very opposite of his passive grandfather, these same aspects—the brilliant son whose talents impress everyone—keep him at a distance from the reader.

While many biblical characters embody both humanity and heroism, authority as well as compassion, the Hebrew Bible does not really present an ‘Everyman’ figure, one who reflects the full range of humanity, for in-depth examination. There are ‘larger than life’ characters such as Abraham and Moses, as well as deeply human figures who fill heroic roles, including the kings Saul and David. In David’s case especially the Bible presents a complete life story that proceeds from David’s youth to his death, with a degree of detail and intrigue that rivals that of any other biblical tale. But although in many ways he is the Bible’s paradigmatic hero, David is also a deeply flawed character whose faults become more pronounced as he ages. Nonetheless, the David we encounter in 1–2 Samuel and Kings is far from an Everyman figure as his story begins with divine election and ends in his royal palace.

Jacob’s story is as intricate as David’s and as fraught with family difficulty, and through his life’s breadth and complexity he is perhaps the closest the Bible comes to offering the reader an Everyman character for examination. He is deeply human, abundant in faults, acutely imperfect, too much under his mother’s sway as a boy, then too naïve to succeed against Laban in their early encounters. His love for Rachel seems admirable in the degree of his devotion, but he is far from ideal in his relations with both his wives and his attitude towards his daughter Dinah. Nonetheless he grows and matures: he abandons his manipulative trickster ways and learns to recognize both his own shortcomings and his unique status as the recipient of blessing. Through these experiences and his responses to them, Jacob becomes recognizable to audiences as the most approachable of the patriarchs, indeed the most fully sympathetic male character in all of Genesis. Not quite Everyman, but certainly a figure whose struggles mark him as reflective of the wide span of human experience.

On the Composition of the Jacob Narrative

While the reading of Jacob in this study is based on close attention to the final form of Genesis, we should not imagine that the MT version, on which

I rely here, emerged fully formed. I will not offer a lengthy review of the secondary literature on the Jacob cycle's development; it can be found in a number of recent studies devoted specifically to the topic.³² And, while the development of Jacob's character as I present it here reflects a synchronic reading of the material, a brief discussion of how this text came to exist in its present form will be useful.

The origin of the material rests upon a composite of multiple sources.³³ According to classical source theory this amalgam of traditions was for-

32. Among the recent studies of the Jacob cycle that have added to our understanding of the entire narrative are the following: M. Fishbane, 'Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle (Gen. 25.19–35.22)', *JSS* 26 (1975), pp. 15–38; Hendel, *Patriarch*; J. Grossman, *Jacob: The Story of a Family* (Rishon LeZion: Yedioth Ahronoth Books, 2019) (Hebrew); Z. Weisman, *From Jacob to Israel* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1986) (Hebrew); P.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; Boston: Brill, 2011); Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*; Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, pp. 405–557; C.R. Heard, *Dynamics of Diselection* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), pp. 97–169; Zakovitch, *Jacob*; Anderson, *Divine Trickster*; B.A. Anderson, *Brotherhood and Inheritance* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011); Assis, *Identity in Conflict*; D. Rom-Shiloni, 'When an Explicit Polemic Initiates a Hidden One: Jacob's Aramean Identity', in *Words, Ideas, Worlds: Biblical Essays in Honor Of Yairah Amit* (ed. A. Brenner and F.H. Polak; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012), pp. 206–235; J-D. Macchi, T. Römer, *Jacob: Commentaire à plusieurs voix de Gen. 25–36* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2001); A. de Pury, 'The Jacob Story and the Beginning of the Formation of the Pentateuch', in *A Farewell to the Yahwist?* (ed. T. Dozeman and K. Schmid; Atlanta: SBL, 2006), pp. 51–72; E. Blum, 'The Jacob Tradition', in *The Book of Genesis: Composition Reception and Interpretation* (ed. J.N. Lohr, C.R. Evans and D.L. Petersen; Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 181–211; D.M. Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), pp. 256–71; K. Schmid, 'Shifting Political Theologies in the Literary Development of the Jacob Cycle', in *The History of the Jacob Cycle (Genesis 25–35)* (ed. B. Hensel; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), pp. 11–34; G.J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* (Dallas: Word, 1994), pp. 131–342; G. Savran, 'Jacob and Esau: Twinship, Identity, and Failed Friendship', in *Friendship in Jewish History, Religion, and Culture* (ed. L. Fine; University Park: Penn State University Press, 2021), pp. 129–44; G. Savran, 'Jacob and Esau: Twinship and Identity Confusion', in *Hiddushim: Celebrating Hebrew College's Centennial* (ed. A. Green, M. Fishbane, J. Sarna; Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2022), pp. 135–46; B. Hensel, 'The History of the Jacob Cycle in Recent Research', in *The History of the Jacob Cycle (Genesis 25–35)* (ed. B. Hensel; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), pp. 1–9; I. Finkelstein and T. Römer, 'Comments on the Historical Background of the Jacob Narrative in Genesis', *ZAW* 126.3 (2014), pp. 317–38.

33. See the brief summary of recent trends in pentateuchal criticism in R. Hendel, 'Abram's Journey as Nexus: *Literarkritik* and Literary Criticism', *VT* 69 (2019), pp. 568–71; Finkelstein and Römer, 'Jacob Narrative', pp. 317–18. Source criticism has described the interweaving of P and non-P material, but the identification of blocks of material that correspond to the three different traditions listed above has yielded a more cogent

merly known as the JE Jacob story but is frequently now referred to as the non-P account. However, the attempt to understand the formation of the cycle in this fashion has given way in many scholarly circles to a widely accepted history of traditions approach that appears to yield better results. According to tradition-historical analysis, three major blocks of material about Jacob were subsequently assembled in the formation of the Jacob cycle: the conflict between Jacob and Esau (Gen. 25.19–27.45, 32.1–33.17a); Jacob and Laban in Paddan-aram (Gen. 29–31); and an etiological account of the founding of the Bethel sanctuary (28.10–22).³⁴ These traditions were originally distinct from one another, but the priestly redactor of the cycle has assembled them with considerable literary skill, providing us with a more or less unified composition. So, while Esau does not appear in the Laban material, and Laban does not function as an active character in the Jacob-Esau material, the cycle's overall structure pulls them together. The Bethel material is of a different nature and serves a double purpose, encompassing both the theophanic dream account and the sanctuary's actual construction (35.1–15).³⁵

How old are the earliest written traditions of the Jacob cycle? Scholarship proposes multiple viewpoints on this question. It has been argued that earlier oral traditions about Jacob were later committed to writing, perhaps around the 8th century BCE.³⁶ Other critics see the entire story as late, composed toward the end of the monarchic period as a foundation legend intended to shore up existing notions of Israel's origins.³⁷ On the other hand, the Bethel traditions, allied with the Northern Kingdom due

picture of the formation of the present text. Particularly influential in this shift from source criticism to tradition history was the thorough examination of the Jacob cycle by E. Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), pp. 66–185. His subsequent shorter study in English, 'Jacob Tradition', pp. 181–211, was helpful in crafting the present text's outline in these paragraphs.

34. Hensel, 'Jacob Cycle', pp. 2–3; de Pury, 'Jacob Story', pp. 51–56; N. Na'aman, 'The Jacob Story and the Formation of Biblical Israel', *TA* 41 (2014), pp. 96–98. Na'aman goes on to critique this position in *idem*, p. 98–100, preferring an exilic date for the entire Jacob cycle. On the reworking of the early Bethel traditions in 35.9–15 see Blum, 'Jacob Tradition', p. 192.

35. On the relationship between the various Bethel traditions see Blum, 'Jacob Story', pp. 191–92. The historical background of these Bethel traditions is discussed in Finkelstein and Römer, 'Jacob Narrative', pp. 323–27. On the connection between the polytheistic background of Bethel and monotheistic worship there see R. Heckl, 'Remembering Jacob in the Late Persian/Early Hellenistic Times', in *Remembering Biblical Figures in the Late Persian & Early Hellenistic Periods*, (ed. D.V. Edelman and E. Ben Zvi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 45–49.

36. de Pury, 'Jacob Story', p. 62; Carr, *Fractures of Genesis*, pp. 227–32.

37. Na'aman, 'Jacob Story', pp. 103–110; N. Na'aman, 'The Jacob Story: Between Oral and Written Modes', *SJOT* 33 (2019), pp. 138–40.

to Bethel's location in the North, are to be dated in the 9th–8th centuries BCE.³⁸ The Jacob-Esau material may also predate the formation of Edom as a nation (also 9th–8th centuries); it reflects the early relationship between the Edomites and the Israelites as described in the discussion of the twinship of Jacob/Israel and Esau/Edom in Chapter 1.³⁹

Dating the material in the Jacob cycle ought to be made easier by the existence of extra-pentateuchal traditions about Jacob by the prophet Hosea (8th century BCE):

12.³ The Lord once indicted Judah and punished Jacob for his conduct, requited him for his deeds. ⁴ In the womb he tried to supplant his brother, grown to manhood he strove with a divine being. ⁵ He strove with an angel and prevailed—he wept and implored him. At Bethel he [Jacob] would meet him, there to commune with him. (Hos. 12.3-5)

12.¹³ Then Jacob fled to the land of Aram; Israel served for a wife, for a wife he guarded [sheep]. ¹⁴ But when the Lord brought up Israel out of Egypt, it was by a prophet they were guarded. (Hos. 12.13-14)

The similarities with Genesis are certainly striking, but when we inquire into the relationship between Hosea and Genesis things become somewhat murky. Since Hosea 12.3-5 recalls the twins struggling in Rebekah's womb, Jacob's connection to God at Bethel, and the episode with the angel at the Jabbok, we might assume that Hosea was the actual source for the Jacob narrative in Genesis, giving us a *terminus post quem* for the Jacob cycle at the time of Hosea.⁴⁰ But the tradition in Hosea 12.13-14 is less appreciative of Jacob: while Jacob 'guards' sheep (שמר) for his own benefit in Aram, the actual 'guarding' or preserving of Israel (שמר) was accomplished by the prophet Moses in Egypt. When read in this fashion, Hosea's prophecy appears to be a critical reaction to the Genesis portrayal of Jacob as focused largely on his own welfare, a tradition already known long before Hosea.⁴¹ So the question of dating the Jacob material in Genesis remains a quandary.

The linkage between the three traditions mentioned above—Jacob-Esau, Jacob-Laban and Bethel—is accomplished by a series of priestly texts that consist primarily of itineraries and genealogies.⁴² These connecting texts

38. Blum, 'Jacob Tradition', pp. 207-208.

39. See the discussion in J.M. Tebes, "'You Shall not Abhor an Edomite for He is Your Brother": The Tradition of Esau and the Edomite Genealogies from an Anthropological Perspective', *JHS* 6 (2006), pp. 7-11; J.R. Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), pp. 117-28.

40. Finkelstein and Römer, 'Jacob Narrative', pp. 321-23. Na'aman ('Jacob Story', pp. 112-17; 'Oral and Written', pp. 138-40) dates the Genesis Jacob material to 6th century BCE.

41. Wöhrle, 'Jacob, Moses, Levi', pp. 998-1007; de Pury, 'Jacob Story', pp. 59-62.

42. Blum ('Jacob Tradition', pp. 190-91) points to Gen. 25.19-20; 26.34-35;

are not simply filler but bind the material together in a creative and sophisticated manner. In the words of Albert de Pury:

The author of P^s is not a minor redactor trying to correct or emend, or even to reformulate, an existing literary work: he is a concepthor, an architect, and a creator...The extant non-P Jacob story in Gen. 25–35 is, in its substance, preexilic and originally north Israelite...the Jacob *gesta*, as a whole, is old and functioned as a tribal or national legend of origin. P^s takes over the mere structure of the old Jacob story and uses it as a narrative and genealogical link between parts 2 and 3 of his work.⁴³

This final editorial/redactional process is widely assumed to be late, either exilic or post-exilic, as most critics consider the Priestly redaction among the Pentateuch's final editorial layers.⁴⁴ The patriarchal narratives in Genesis as a whole present wandering and exile as a constant factor in the lives of the patriarchs, but exile here—especially the final move of Jacob and his family to Egypt—is not seen as punishment:

The epilogue [of Genesis] ... forces the intended audience to look on exile positively and to understand that although exile is an inevitable part of life, it has to be temporary and people in exile have to keep their hope of return to the homeland.⁴⁵

In this sense Jacob in the story's final version becomes the paradigmatic exilic figure who leaves his ancestral home twice—first alone, to Laban in Paddan-aram for twenty years, then to Egypt with his entire family, with only the promise of return.⁴⁶ One of the purposes behind the patriarchal narratives, therefore, appears to have been the presentation of a model for the

27.46–28.9; 31.17–18; 35.9–15, 22b–29 as the most important of these priestly linking texts which lend shape and continuity to much of the cycle.

43. De Pury, 'Jacob Story', pp. 68, 71. 'Part 2' refers to the Abraham and Jacob narratives while 'Part 3', includes the account of the Exodus and the construction of the Tabernacle. De Pury explains the siglum P^s as 'the *Priestergrundschrift*, the original [priestly] work before its junction with other pentateuchal material' (*idem*, p. 62).

44. De Pury, 'Jacob Story', pp. 69–71; Carr, *Reading the Fractures*, pp. 136–40.

45. Y. Amit, 'The Place of Exile in the Ancestors' Narratives and in Their Framework', in *The Politics of the Ancestors: Exegetical and Historical Perspectives on Genesis 12–36* (ed. M.G. Brett and J. Wöhrle; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), p. 136.

46. Note Heckl's observation ('Remembering Jacob', p. 68): 'Jacob was very popular in the post-exilic period because in his stories he also did not yet possess the land. Remembering Jacob ... made him a forerunner of the hoped-for resettlement of the land'. Further connections between the model of Jacob and the exilic and post-exilic mindset are argued by K. Schmid, 'The Diaspora as a Blessing for the Nations: The Case of Gen. 28.14', in *Yahwistic Diversity and the Hebrew Bible* (ed. B. Hensel and B. Adamczewski; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), pp. 80–87, and by Na'aman, 'Jacob Story', pp. 118–19.

exiles to aid them in coping with the loss of the land and encouraging the hope of restoration.

It seems, then, that the numerous journeys into exile in the Ancestors' narratives have a purpose: to convey the idea of exile and at the same time the return from it, and thus to confront the possibility of immigration and assimilation. The historical experience of exiled populations from Northern Israel, assimilated and lost, accentuated the motif of return from exile. Perhaps this struggle against assimilation, and fostering the idea and hope of return from exile created the seeds, or the generations, that were ready to listen to Cyrus's decree.⁴⁷

The Jacob Narrative as Story Cycle

This cycle of stories, once assembled, is a not a single continuous account, for each narrative is a complete story unto itself and can remain independent of the rest. Stringing them together as a cycle creates a complex, multilevel portrait of Jacob, leaving the reader with no small degree of uncertainty (if not confusion) as to who the Jacob we encounter in the MT really is. The individual sections of the story cycle are unified by their focus on Jacob's actions throughout, but without the uninterrupted plot line we find in the Joseph narrative or the book of Esther. The Jacob episodes are arranged in chronological order, but each makes only limited reference to the previous stories.⁴⁸ Bar Efrat notes that the loose nexus between cause and effect is one of the story cycle's essential aspects; it is usually left to the reader to suggest causal connections, which may vary from reader to reader.⁴⁹ I will explore a number of these linkages as we traverse the events of Jacob's life.

The three blocks of tradition have been joined in a carefully structured fashion. The closing section in Genesis 35 is balanced over against the beginning of the cycle in Genesis 25, the theft of the blessing in Genesis 27 is matched with Jacob and Esau's reunion in Genesis 33, and the rest of the narratives offset one another in similar complementary fashion.⁵⁰ Michael Fishbane has performed an invaluable service to readers by uncovering the chiasmic structure illustrated below. The interlocking nature of the different

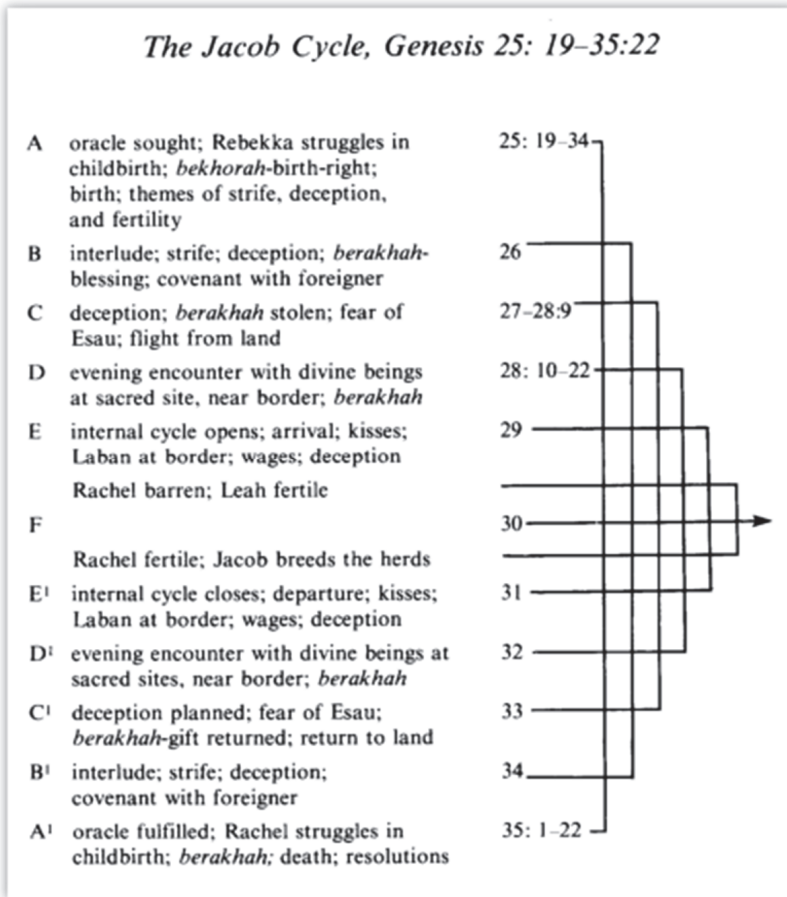
47. Amit, 'The Place of Exile', p. 146.

48. Jacob's theft of the blessing (Gen. 27) makes almost no reference to the purchase of Esau's birthright (Gen. 25), and Jacob's theft goes unmentioned in the Laban material (Gen. 29–31). On the biblical story cycle see S. Bar Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), pp. 135–39, who brings further examples from the cycle of stories about Elijah in 1 Kgs 17–2 Kgs 2 and from the Samson narrative in Judg. 13–16.

49. Bar Efrat, *Narrative Art*, p. 136.

50. Blum, 'Jacob Tradition', p. 181.

sections and the development of its central themes are essential for understanding the cycle as a whole:



(Fishbane, 'Jacob Cycle', 20).

Fishbane's mapping of the entire cycle's structure artfully integrates the individual stories within the larger whole as they build on the overall themes of blessing and birthright. A good deal of what I develop in this study uses Fishbane's insights as their foundation, even when I depart occasionally from his structure.

Fishbane also recognizes the nature of Genesis 26 and Genesis 34 as outliers, external to the cycle's overriding theme despite their inclusion in the chiastic pattern. Genesis 26 details various events in Isaac's life while making no mention of Jacob. Rather than continuing the events of Genesis 25, it is best understood as a flashback to Isaac and Rebekah's lives

before the births of Jacob and Esau. In a similar way the story of Dinah's rape (Genesis 34) is only peripherally related to the events that precede and follow it. It does not continue the connection with Esau and Edom developed in Genesis 32–33 but instead constitutes an interlude of sorts between Jacob's departure from Esau and his arrival at Bethel. At the same time the chapter explores developments in Jacob's character that continue to impact him and his relations with his children. As Fishbane notes, both texts are unusual within the Jacob cycle in that they deal with characters outside the family—Abimelech the Philistine and the Hivites Shechem and Hamor.⁵¹ Neither chapter will be examined in detail by themselves here but will be addressed insofar as they impact upon Jacob's story: Genesis 26 reveals interesting aspects of Jacob's parents while Genesis 34 discloses something of the dynamics of the relationship between Jacob and his sons.

* * * *

This book is organized, by and large, according to the sequence of the Jacob cycle. The focus on Jacob's twin identity is introduced in Chapter 1 in the context of a discussion of the phenomenon of twin births and the relationship between twins (twinship), with particular attention to anthropological and psychological research. Since this provides important theoretical underpinning for this study, I will raise general aspects of the twin relationship that set the stage for the interaction between Jacob and Esau. What characterizes twin relations according to psychological research, and how does being born a same sex twin impact the development of personal identity? Equally important is the role of conflict in twin relations and how it affects individual identity formation. The chapter offers some preliminary observations on how this research impacts the reading Jacob and Esau's relationship.

Chapter 2 is devoted to Jacob's parents—how Isaac and Rebekah interact with one another and how their preferences for different twins create a

51. Gen. 26.1-33 is not addressed directly in this study as it describes a situation different in time, place and mood from the rest of the cycle. It will, however, be touched upon as part of the discussion of the Isaac-Rebekah material in chapter 2. Gen. 26 breaks the narrative continuum between the birth and childhood of the twins (Gen. 25) and Jacob's theft of Esau's blessing (Gen. 27). On a narrative level it retards the steady build-up of tension apparent in the rest of Gen. 25–28, and prepares the reader for Isaac's role as the arbiter of the blessing in Gen. 27. It is best understood as a flashback to an earlier time before the birth of Jacob and Esau. See Blum, 'Jacob Tradition', pp. 181-82; Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 423; H. Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1901), p. 299; Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, pp. 113-15; G.G. Nicol, 'The Chronology of Genesis: Genesis XXVI 1-33 as "Flashback"', *VT* 46.3 (1996), pp. 330-38; G.G. Nicol 'The Narrative Structure and Interpretation of Genesis XXVI 1-33', *VT* 46.3 (1996), pp. 357-58.

complex family dynamic. Isaac and Rebekah are emotionally close, largely cooperative with one another and capable of displaying an unusual degree of harmony when compared to other couples in Genesis: Adam blames Eve for his participation in eating the fruit of the forbidden tree, Abraham and Sarah argue strenuously over Hagar and Ishmael, and Jacob himself shows resentment towards both his wives; Leah's love for Jacob is unrequited, and Rachel displays a mixed attitude toward her husband. Yet amidst all these couples, Isaac and Rebekah act together more than once: Isaac prays for Rebekah while she is barren; both are displeased with Esau's first marriages; and both agree on the importance of sending Jacob away from Canaan to find a wife. At the same time it is clear that Rebekah is the more active and more dominant of the two figures, with Isaac tending towards passivity. Perhaps this is part of their successful *modus vivendi*—an unspoken agreement that, contrary to expected patriarchal relations, Rebekah's dominance will be accepted by her husband. Just how this reversal of patriarchal gender roles impacts Jacob's developing identity will be explored as well.

Genesis 25–28 chart Jacob and Esau's youth and are discussed in Chapter 3; they constitute an essential source for understanding the complexity of their twin relationship. The disturbance in Rebekah's womb during her pregnancy, the drama around the twins' births and the matter of parental favoritism are essential to understanding the conflicts encircling the brothers. The narrative of the sale of Esau's birthright describes a surprising role reversal, as Jacob, the younger brother, dominates and Esau accedes to his demand. This confrontation leads directly to the more significant theft of the blessing in Genesis 27, where we see Jacob's great difficulty in defining himself over against his twin. Each brother wants to repudiate the twin relationship—Jacob by masquerading as Esau, and, subsequently, Esau by taking revenge and killing Jacob. This chapter also explores the intense family dynamics from which these tensions emerge, and how the symmetrical tension between parents and sons leads to the breakdown of that structure and to Jacob's departure to Laban's household in Paddan-aram.

Chapter 4 addresses Jacob's years of employment in Laban's household, covering Genesis 29–31. This constitutes the central text of Jacob's story, for it describes how the core of Jacob's mature identity begins to emerge.⁵² His negotiations with Laban over his status and his wages leave him at a distinct disadvantage in relation to his uncle. His problematic relationship with his wives and their fraught emotional linkage with each other permeates the narrative of his sons' births. In contrast to his passivity with his

52. Fishbane ('Jacob Cycle', p. 30) labels this section as the internal narrative cycle of the Jacob story, in that it presents *in nuce* all the major themes of the larger Jacob-Esau narrative. Esau is absent in these chapters but Leah and Rachel assume the roles of the younger and elder siblings in conflict.

wives, Jacob's striving for parity with his uncle involves active cleverness and trickery. Laban serves in some sense as a foil for the absent father Isaac, and Jacob's struggles with his uncle complicate his efforts at forming a new identity without his twin brother's presence. The emergent Jacob retains aspects of his earlier trickster self, yet we also discern a degree of maturity now in his confrontation with Laban. It is during this section that Jacob begins to see himself as blessed, to consider what blessing means for his relationship with YHWH and to start functioning as the head of his family.

Esau's reemergence in Jacob's life in Chapter 5 both reinforces and challenges Jacob's new identity as the *paterfamilias* who attends to the welfare of his wives and children. The struggle with the man/angel at the Jabbok leaves Jacob wounded but transformed—Jacob is renamed *Yiśrā'ēl* and for the first time the text speaks of 'the sons of Israel'—not just as Jacob's sons but looking ahead to the evolution of a norm in Israel's behavior (32.33). But the conjunction of personal and public identities does not yet emerge in Jacob's actions here. Rather, the personal remains dominant in the focus on Jacob's anxiety at Esau's impending approach and his various attempts to undercut the threat Esau poses for him. Can Esau be bought off with an elaborate gift or placated by an exaggerated display of subservience, including the 'return' of the blessing Jacob stole from him? Jacob adopts a more positive attitude towards Esau here, but the fact that he snubs his brother's offer of hospitality in Seir suggests a conflict of identities—the complexity of the twin connection between Jacob and his brother, anxiety about venturing onto Esau's territory and the emerging public identity suggested by Jacob's new name.

While the shift from the personal to the national began with Jacob's pact with Laban at the conclusion of Genesis 31, it is developed more fully in Chapter 6. The story of Dinah's rape is at once an account of familial strife, a cautionary tale about contact outside the family, and a window into the status of daughters in a patriarchal society. The negotiation with the Shechemites goes beyond personal concerns about Jacob's daughter to address larger social issues such as trade, intermarriage, and circumcision as public symbols of identity. Jacob's role in these negotiations is moderated by his sons' emergence as a newly dominant force in the family, providing a potential new arena of familial conflict between them and their father. Reuben's appropriation of Jacob's concubine Bilhah raises the conflict between father and first-born son to a new level, setting the stage for familial conflicts in the Joseph novella and subsequent biblical stories of fathers and sons. At the same time that Jacob's public role becomes more apparent, his personal authority within the family is diminished in his conflict with his sons.

Chapter 7 explores Jacob in the context of the Joseph story. It is clear that the Joseph novella is the product of different writers and traditions than those

represented in the Jacob cycle, and that Jacob's character displays both continuity with his earlier depiction and significant transformation. I will refer to this narrative as Part II of Jacob's story in order to focus more clearly on Jacob (rather than on Joseph). In this section Jacob presents as more emotionally open, a father who reveals his feelings directly—anger at his sons, vulnerability and fear of death, grief over Joseph's disappearance and delight at seeing Joseph once again. Jacob is no longer a trickster; he appears to have exchanged trickery for unconcealed favoritism towards one son in particular: Joseph. Jacob is now less fully in charge of his family, even though he remains its official head. He is portrayed as weakened—unable to protect Joseph from his brothers, he can neither provide for his sons' welfare in Canaan nor shield Benjamin from harm in Egypt. The crisis in family relations in Part II of Jacob's story has moved away from parent-child conflict over blessing and succession to fraternal contention for the sake of revenge or for personal gratification. Jacob's demise as a controlling figure marks the end of patriarchal authority as manifested in the Jacob cycle, as familial authority is eventually succeeded by prophetic leadership under Moses in the book of Exodus. This section is a farewell to the rule of the father as the dominant mode of leadership for the people as a whole, and it is followed by a brief afterword on Jacob's identity relative to others in Genesis, and how the afterlife of that character finds expression as the Tanakh continues.

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A few technical matters need to be addressed: Because the book of Genesis is referenced frequently throughout this study, numerical citations with no attribution of biblical book all refer to Genesis. English translations of biblical texts follow the NJPS Tanakh unless otherwise noted. Earlier versions of some of the chapters were presented at biblical studies conferences in Israel, Europe and the US. Parts of Chapter 3 appeared in 'Jacob and Esau: Twinship and Identity Confusion', in *Hiddushim: Celebrating Hebrew College's Centennial* (ed. M. Fishbane, A. Green, J. Sarna; Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2022), pp. 135-46. A previous version of chapter 5 appeared as 'Jacob and Esau: Twinship, Identity and Failed Friendship', in *Friendship in Jewish Culture, History, and Religion* (ed. Lawrence Fine; University Park: PSU Press, 2021), pp. 129-44.

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כִּי־חַנְנִי אֱלֹהִים וְכִי יֵשׁ-לִי־כֹל
(Gen. 33.11)