

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

**God Sees and God Rescues:
The Motif of Affliction in Genesis**

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Until the 1980s, studies in Genesis largely depended on the theory of the Documentary Hypothesis, which asserts that the Pentateuch was woven together from three or four distinct sources.¹ Such an understanding of Scripture implies that an intentional coherence across a single book does not exist. In the late 70s and early 80s, guided mainly by Robert Alter, the tables began to turn to studying the books of the Bible as unified literary works.² The book of Genesis was quickly recognized as an exceptional example of literary and narrative art.³

In 1978, David Clines published one of the earliest attempts at stating an overarching theme and plot for the whole Pentateuch. His statement is as follows:

*The theme of the Pentateuch is the partial fulfilment—which implies also the partial non-fulfilment—of the promise or blessing of the patriarchs. The promise or blessing is both the divine initiative in a world where human initiatives always lead to disaster, and are an affirmation of the primal divine intentions for humanity.*⁴

Clines' assertion encouraged exploration of thematic plots in Old Testament (OT). Alter states, "The redactors had a strong and often subtle sense of thematic and literary strands."⁵ Current studies in Genesis generally work from the assumption that themes and larger plots exist in

¹ Robert Alter, *Genesis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996), xl. This theory is also known as "JEDP theory."

² Tremper Longman III, *Genesis*, The Story of God Bible Commentary series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 9.

³ Ibid.

⁴ David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1978), 30; italics in original.

⁵ Alter, *Genesis*, xlii.

Genesis and the Pentateuch.⁶ While most studies in Genesis focus on the themes of seed, blessing, and land, this project traces the motif of affliction in Genesis that helps propel the fulfillment of the covenant promises. “Affliction” (אָפּוּרָה) in this project is defined as “undeserved mistreatment inflicted by a person in power onto a victim subordinate to them.”⁷ The pattern of the affliction of the innocent contributes something additional to thematic Genesis studies: the promised blessing does not come to God’s people without trials or difficult times. The characters in Genesis that endure affliction learn through their suffering to rely on the Lord, even before his promises are entirely fulfilled.

Literature Review

The motif of affliction in Genesis has generally been overlooked. Because of this, some of the most helpful works are those which exemplify the methodology represented in this thesis. One such article is “Male and Female Sexual Exploitation in Light of the Book of Genesis” by Brian Neil Peterson.⁸ This recent article not only addresses one type of abuse in Genesis that pertains to the affliction motif traced in this thesis, but it also displays a strong example of tracing a motif through a book of Scripture. Peterson compiles every occurrence of sexual exploitation in Genesis and systematizes them into four categories. The purpose of his overview of the motif is to present evidence that women are just as culpable for the rampant crimes of sexual abuse as men.⁹ He shows that there are actually more cases of female abusers in Genesis

⁶ Todd L. Patterson, *The Plot-structure of Genesis: ‘Will the Righteous Seed Survive?’ In the Mythos-Logical Movement from Complication to Denouement* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 9.

⁷ W. J. Dumbrell, אָפּוּרָה, *NIDOTTE* 3:454-55. The definition is not a direct quote by Dumbrell, but he influences the author-created definition supplied.

⁸ Brian Neil Peterson, “Male and Female Sexual Exploitation in Light of the Book of Genesis,” (*JETS* 62 2019), 272-91.

⁹ *Ibid.* 693, 703.

than male, and he concludes that, in light of recent sexual abuse scandals, it is unwarranted to condemn men, without evidence, as solely responsible for sexual abuse crimes, making them guilty until proven innocent.¹⁰ His article was formative for this project by illustrating the possibilities in tracing a motif across a book in order to express the theological truth from the development. While Peterson's work is helpful in tracing a motif, Patterson goes even further to tracing an overarching plot.

In his book *The Plot-Structure of Genesis*, Todd Patterson states that his goal is to understand the whole of the construction of Genesis, dealing with the plot-structure of the final form.¹¹ He aims to trace the macroplot of Genesis "from complication to denouement, from beginning to middle to end."¹² He identifies the driving question of Genesis as: will the righteous seed survive?¹³ Patterson's method is to trace the concern of this question through the book, ending with Joseph as the climax and subsequent denouement.¹⁴ Furthermore, Patterson evaluates the text to determine what makes (or does not make) the seed righteous, and why some are chosen and some are not (i.e. Cain and Esau).¹⁵ Rather than constricting the text through moral evaluations, Patterson evaluates the morality of each character through the eyes of the narrator, allowing the text to present its own evaluation to the reader.¹⁶ Patterson's work is

¹⁰ Peterson, "Male and Female..." 693, 703. He does not argue that women are responsible for being raped, as some suggest that a woman's provocative dress or behavior makes them culpable for driving men to exploit them sexually. Instead, he speaks of situations where woman are the abusers themselves or where women, for their own gain, falsely accuse men of sexually abusing them.

¹¹ Patterson, *The Plot-structure of Genesis*, 8.

¹² *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 208.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

particularly formative for this thesis in method and content since he deals with the development of one theme through Genesis and analyzes the text as a literary piece shaped by a reliable narrator. His exegetical work in the narratives also pertains to the exegetical portions of this thesis.

Analyzing the motif of affliction in Genesis is timely because strong interest exists for studies that trace a theme, plot, or motif across books of Scripture. Furthermore, as already noted, there is no work that currently does a study on the motif of affliction.

Methodology

This thesis utilizes a strand of biblical theology (also called BT2) known as the Dallas school to trace the development of the motif throughout Genesis. By analyzing the recurrence of the motif of affliction in Genesis, the result will be to identify the theological goal of this motif in Genesis.

All strands of BT2 have in common that they are concerned with evaluating “the ‘parts’ in relation to the ‘whole.’”¹⁷ Thus, BT2 deals with how individual units contribute to a book, and how individual books contribute to the Canon. Klink and Lockett state,

The task of BT2 is to discern the historical progression of God’s work of redemption through an inductive analysis of key themes developing through both discrete corpora and the whole of Scripture. Major themes such as covenant or kingdom constitute the theological connecting fibers between the Old and New Testaments, and these themes necessarily run along a historical trajectory, giving fundamental structure to the theology of the Bible.”¹⁸

Klink and Lockett stress throughout their chapter that BT2 is a “whole-Bible theology,”¹⁹ but

¹⁷ Edward W. Klink and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 60.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 61; italics in original.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 60-63.

this does not entail that there are multiples unique voices all randomly contained in the canon together—in fact, the opposite. BT2 asserts that the compilation of the many voices of Scripture creates the single voice of the canon, moving particularly through the historical progression of the text.²⁰ This is why the Dallas school of BT2 focuses on one book of the Bible at a time in order to understand the theological message of each book.

BT2 traditionally divides into three schools of thought: Dallas, Chicago, and Philadelphia. The method of this project maintains most closely to Dallas thought. Although the Dallas and Chicago schools overlap more than the Philadelphia, the main difference is that the Dallas school analyses the theological message of one book in relation to a larger part (i.e. the Pentateuch, the Pauline epistles, etc.) without moving to the effect of that message on the whole canon, which they consider the job of systematic theology.²¹ Conversely, the Chicago school considers the interrelationships between key verses across the books of the Bible ultimately to discern a theological heart of Scripture, but mainly resulting in the analysis of the correspondence between the interbiblical allusions.²² Moving to the step of the Chicago school is outside the scope of this thesis. The goal of this project is to assess a motif in Genesis that has implications for the recurrence of that same motif throughout Scripture, but these recurrences will not be explored, apart from sporadic discussions of Exod 3.²³

The methodology presented in the New Studies in Biblical Theology (NSBT) book series has particular importance for the methodology of this thesis because the editor of the series, D.

²⁰ Klink and Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology*, 63.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

²² *Ibid.*, 69.

²³ Discussions of Exodus are necessary at times because part of the purpose of this project is to show that the theme of “affliction followed by rescue” that scholars mainly begin tracing in Exodus actually starts in Genesis.

A. Carson, is also one of the most recognized examples of a BT2 scholar.²⁴ Included in the series is *Unceasing Kindness: A Biblical Theology of Ruth* by Peter Lau and Gregory Goswell. The authors learn towards a Dallas school approach by focusing mainly on the book of Ruth alone. They study the themes of the book and consider narrator's perspective to be a key factor to the portrayal of the themes.²⁵ They affirm understanding the text on its own terms but also consider the relationship between the book and the rest of the canon, considering each theme within the context of Scripture as a whole.²⁶ While the book addresses many different themes in Ruth, this thesis primarily addresses one theme with some mention to how it fits within the larger themes of Genesis.²⁷

A further influence for methodology is *From Fratricide to Forgiveness: The Language and Ethics of Anger in Genesis* by Matthew Schlimm. In his work, he utilizes the methods of BT2 for his textual analysis, though the greater part of his book focuses more on biblical ethics.²⁸ In dealing with the Biblical portrayal of anger in the third part of his book, Schlimm chooses Genesis as his case study because he points out the bookends of narratives that focus on anger and forgiveness, Cain/Abel and Joseph.²⁹ He claims, "Many of Genesis' most significant plots revolve around anger that is either explicitly named or implicitly present in the text."³⁰ He then

²⁴ Klink and Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology*, 68, 77. Carson is typically associated with the Chicago school, but some of the works in the NSBT series lean more towards the Dallas school method.

²⁵ Peter Lau and Gregory Goswell. *Unceasing Kindness: A Biblical Theology of Ruth* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 1.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁸ Matthew Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness: The Language and Ethics of Anger in Genesis* (Winona Lake: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 9.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

traces the theme as it builds through Genesis, which is a significant influence on the methodology of this thesis. The main goal of his method is to “understand the text on its own terms,” which, while not groundbreaking, he considers difficult because of his focus on emotion in a laconic text.³¹ He identifies his literary approach as “closely reading biblical periscopes, seeking to understand the final form of the text on its own terms.”³² The element of close-reading pertains particularly to this thesis, but also the restriction of focusing solely on Genesis without dealing with the implications to the canon.

The practice of BT2 is to trace various narratival elements, such as character development, key words, and recurring motifs, across one book to ascertain how the movement of the narrative influences the overall theological message.³³ In this project, the key words of the affliction narratives are the verb **עָנָה** and its nominal form **עֲנָיָה**. These terms in Genesis brings attention to the motif of affliction because they are never used in the OT of deserved affliction, but only for oppression and abuse.³⁴ Furthermore, the words are used infrequently, so when they do appear, they draw particular attention. The narratives of affliction in Genesis are the following: Abram (Gen 15), Hagar (Gen 16), Jacob (Gen 29–31), Leah (Gen 29–30), Dinah (Gen 34), and Joseph (Gen 37–41).³⁵ Each of these narratives will be studied in order to see how they contribute to the overall affliction motif in Genesis.

³¹ Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness*, 7.

³² *Ibid.*, 9.

³³ Klink and Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology*, 61.

³⁴ John D. Currid, *Genesis*, Evangelical Press Study Commentary Series (New York: Evangelical, 2003), 276; W. J. Dumbrell, **עֲנָיָה**, *NIDOTTE* 3:454-55.

³⁵ Genesis 15 is unique from the rest of the affliction narratives because the protagonist (Abram) is *not* a victim of affliction, but he is the recipient of the announcement of future affliction.

In each of the affliction narratives, with the exception of Dinah in Gen 34, the victim of affliction is the protagonist of the narrative unit. The characters all undergo unwarranted mistreatment, and they all eventually escape the mistreatment, not by their own hand, but by the hand of God. As will be shown throughout the arguments of this project, God's rescue ultimately brings the victims of affliction into a greater trust in him and understanding of his sovereignty. Even though God's people experience affliction at the hands of those over them, God works the situations for his good purposes.

Many times, the good purpose that God works is the resulting faith in God and humility on the part of the afflicted. Although the victims of oppression have all angered their oppressor, they have not committed any wrongdoing that would warrant his or her affliction. The narrator portrays their attitudes as prideful, which is intolerable to God (cf. Prov 16:5; Jas 4:6-10). When these oppressive situations occur in Genesis, God sees his people and comes to their aid, working through the situation to humble and bless them (Gen 16:11; 29:32; 31:42; 41:52; cf. Exod 3:7). Ultimately, the normative result of situations of affliction is God's intervention on behalf of the afflicted, not simply for the purpose of liberating them, but for shaping them into faithful YHWH worshippers.

Chapter Divisions

The chapters are organized according to the canonical order of appearance in Genesis, and each chapter discusses only one narrative. The placement of the chapter on Jacob's narrative was debated since his affliction under Laban begins at almost the same time as Leah's affliction under Jacob begins. Additionally, Leah's affliction is resolved in Gen 29–30, and Jacob's is not resolved until Gen 31, so Jacob's chapter could logically be placed after Leah's chapter. However, since Jacob's affliction begins when Laban tricks him into marrying Leah (Gen

29:23), and Leah's affliction begins in Gen 29:31 when the narrator says that Leah was not loved, Leah's chapter is placed after Jacob's narrative.³⁶

Limitations and Delimitations

There are several boundaries set in place for this thesis project. The most significant delimitation is restricting the exegetical and literary analyses to Genesis alone. The motif traced pertains to the whole of Scripture (as BT2 asserts), but it is only addressed here through the book of Genesis. Exploring Genesis' effect on the canon is beyond the scope of this research. The single exception is the discussions throughout the project of the affliction motif in Exod 3, which is a natural expansion of the affliction motif in Genesis, especially Gen 15.

Additionally, the text of Genesis is approached as a final form text, so the discussions will not digress to the editing process of the book or the implications of multiple compilers. This thesis accepts a majority author of Moses for the Pentateuch, and because the text remains as a final form regardless of authorship, an argument for Mosaic authorship rather than multiple sources is beyond the scope of this research.

Furthermore, because this thesis traces a motif throughout the whole of Genesis, it deals with many theologically rich narratives. Some narratives receive special attention, but no exegesis of a narrative in this thesis covers the full range of interpretive issues. Instead, any issue or theme in a narrative that does not pertain to tracing the motif of affliction is left untouched. For example, the "Hagar" narrative has strong implications for God's attention to non-Israelites, the descendants that come from Ishmael, Abraham and Sarah's crisis of faith, and more, but the scope of this project is too narrow to touch on each theme in this project. Many

³⁶ Leah is also negatively affected by Laban's actions in Gen 29:23, but the true affliction occurs when Jacob chooses not to love her (Gen 29:31).

themes that usually draw scholarly attention are mentioned only in passing or not at all.

Additionally, this research does not deal with any text critical issues that do not pertain to the thematic analysis. Some passages are referenced that contain textual variances, but if the variant does not pertain to the development of the motif of affliction, the reading of the Masoretic Text is accepted.

Chapter 2:

The Announcement of Affliction in Genesis 15

Introduction

Genesis 15 provides the foundation for the affliction motif in Genesis. Brueggemann considers Gen 15 the most theologically significant chapter of the book.¹ The Lord's formal covenant with Abraham is presented in this chapter and develops the promises established in Gen 12–14. In the midst of the promise of blessings, the Lord announces that Abram's descendants will be afflicted for 400 years. While most scholars discuss the purpose of the promises, few explore the purpose of the affliction declaration. This declaration prefigures the experience of Abram's descendants starting in Genesis and culminating in Exodus. The theology of affliction established in Gen 15 shows that the Lord will ultimately fulfill his promises to Abram by rescuing his people from affliction, and this most notably occurs in Exodus, but it will also emerge in the rest of Genesis.

Exegesis of Genesis 15:1–6

Although the major discussion of affliction occurs in the second unit of Gen 15, the first unit is necessary to this discussion because it establishes the context for the announcement of affliction in the second unit. Genesis 15 begins with a transition from Gen 14 where Abram pronounced reliance on the Lord. Genesis 15:1 says, אֲחֵר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, which suggests that God's conversation with Abram is spurred by Abram's actions in Gen 14. The Lord's address to

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2005), 140.

Abram, **הָיָה דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם**, mirrors the typical prophetic introduction as recorded in 1 Sam 15:10, Hos 1:1, and others.² This is the only chapter of Genesis that utilizes this formula, so it sets the stage for Abram to receive the prophecy of Israel’s affliction.³ The word for vision, **מַחְזֶה**, only occurs in the Pentateuch in two scenes, here and in the prophecy of Balaam (Num 24:4, 16).⁴ Furthermore, the command **אֲלֹהֵיךָ** suggests the weight of a prophetic vision (cf. Gen 21:17; 26:24; Exod 3:6).⁵ Later, in Gen 20:7, Abram is explicitly called a prophet, but here, his role as a prophet is cued through the language.⁶ All this focus on prophecy and promise highlights the subject of Gen 15, which is “the announcement of events that lie far in the future (vv.13-16).”⁷ In this chapter, the Lord instructs Abram as a prophet and informs him of the affliction in Egypt, the exodus, and the conquest. The prophetic record of Gen 15 confirms Abram as a prophet when all these events later occur.⁸

² John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in *Genesis – Leviticus*, vol. 1 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 168.

³ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC 2 (Waco: Word Books, 1988), 327.

⁴ Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 173.

⁵ K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 162.

⁶ Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 168.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Konrad Schmid and James Nogalski, *Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel’s Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible* (Winona Lake: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 167. For various discussions of the accuracy of the dating with the account of Exodus, such as the reference to 400 years and the fourth generation (vv. 13-16), see Jed Abraham, “The Covenant between the Parts,” *JBQ* 36 (2008): 231-248; Paul J. Ray Jr., “The Duration of the Israelite Sojourn in Egypt,” *AUSS* 24 (1986): 231-48; David Marwil, “The Sojourn in Egypt: A Different Approach to the Chronological Problem,” *JBQ* 47 (2019): 128-32; Gadeloff, David, “How Long was the Israelite Sojourn in Egypt: 210 or 430 Years?” *JBQ* 44 (2016): 183-89; Paul Williamson, *Abraham, Israel, and the Nations: The Patriarchal Promise and Its Covenantal Development in Genesis*. London: Bloomsbury, 2001), 129-33; T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 203; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 312; and Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 178-88.

For the first time, Abram responds to the Lord in dialogue (Gen 15:2). The salient point of this verse for the affliction motif is that the inclusion of the divine name establishes a relationship between God and Abram. Abram’s use of the divine name stands out because it is a rare occurrence in Pentateuchal dialogue.⁹ The use of the divine name in Gen 15 is a marker of a relationship—just as the Lord refers to Abram by name, so Abram is allowed to refer to the Lord by name.¹⁰ With a personal name, the Lord becomes a God that Abram can worship. James Plastaras explains, “One must not underestimate the importance of a divine name. The science of comparative religion indicates that an unknown or unnamed god never becomes the object of genuine worship. Without a name, the god remains a distant impersonal force.”¹¹ Abram puts his faith in a God whom he knows by name.¹²

His dialogue starts with a reverent address, *Adoni YHWH* (אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה), but then he asks a question that rings of complaint (vv. 2–3).¹³ Abram’s main concern in Gen 15 is the unfulfilled promises God made to him.¹⁴ The first promise came in 12:1, that he would become a great

⁹ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 164. The other two occurrences of the divine name in Pentateuchal dialogue are Deut 3:24 and 9:26.

¹⁰ Elizabeth B. Tracy, *See Me! Hear Me! Divine/Human Relational Dialogue in Genesis* (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 107.

¹¹ James Plastaras, *The God of Exodus: The Theology of the Exodus Narratives* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1966), 87.

¹² The issue of the revelation of the divine name in Exod 6:3 is outside the scope of this study. For some discussions of this topic, among others, see Daniel M. Berry and Sandra Van Eden, “Did the Patriarchs Know God’s Name?” *JBQ* 47 (2017): 45–49; Jared C. Hood, “I Appeared as El Shaddai: Intertextual Interplay in Exodus 6:3,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 76 (2014): 167–88; and Christopher R. Seitz, “The Call of Moses and the ‘Revelation’ of the Divine Name: Source-Critical Logic and Its Legacy,” in *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Brevard S Childs* (Grand Rapids, 1999), 145–61.

¹³ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 328; Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 170.

¹⁴ David J. Zucker, “Abraham, The Years of Frustration: Genesis 13–14 and 15 as a Literary Unit,” *BTB* 48 (2018): 7. The unknown meaning and etymology of אֲלֵי עֵינָר הוּא דְמַשְׁקָא בֵּיתֵי הוּא דְמַשְׁקָא אֵל עֵינָר is a discussion not necessary for this project. For this topic, see Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 303–304; Raymond Apple, “The Meaning of Dammesek Eliezer,” (*JBQ* 45 2017): 188–92; and Laurence A. Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis* (London,

nation, and the second in 13:15–16, where God promised that his seed would be as the dust of earth. In chapter 15, Abram is still waiting on a son of his own. The identity of this promised seed of Abram’s next generation is one of the main questions of chapters 13–15.¹⁵ The Lord promises that Abram’s heir will be from his own loins (Gen 15:4).¹⁶ This emphasizes that God will work not only a miracle, something difficult for Abram to believe, but firmly fixes Abram in the bloodline of the righteous seed (cf. 3:15).¹⁷

When God tells Abram that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars, his imperative, הִקְטִיבֵנִי, utilizes the particle of entreaty, נָה. This particle appears with God commanding a human only four times, Gen 15 included (cf. Gen 13:14; 22:2; Exod 11:2). Each time, God asks the person to do something beyond human comprehension or reasoning.¹⁸ The promise that Abram’s seed would be as numerous as the stars reflects 13:15–16. There, God promised Abram, in the face of separation from Lot, שְׁמַתִּי אֶת־זַרְעֲךָ כְּעֶפְרַת הָאָרֶץ. God is not letting up on this remarkable promise to a man with a barren wife.

Verse 6 is the thematic climax of this chapter, and possibly the whole Abra(ha)m narrative.¹⁹ The narrator expresses, “So he [Abram] believed in the LORD, and it was regarded

GBR: Continuum International, 1990): 70-72. A further discussion of Abram’s questions is provided in this project’s discussion of verse 8.

¹⁵ Zucker, “Abraham...,” 5.

¹⁶ This promise is reverberated in the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:12).

¹⁷ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 304.

¹⁸ Zucker, “Abraham...,” 7. The other three passages are Gen 13:14; 22:2, and Exod 11:2.

¹⁹ R. N. Whybray, “Genesis,” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, eds. John Barton and John Muddiman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 50.

to him as righteousness.”²⁰ This verse does not merely imply that Abram believed God’s promise (cf. Gen 15:4–5), but that he exemplified an ongoing characteristic of faith.²¹ The form וַיִּשְׁמַע breaks the narrative chain by using a waw conjunctive instead of consecutive, which suggests not that it was the next action of the narrative, but an exposition by the narrator.²² Given the prophetic, covenantal context of the passage, this basis for Abram’s faith establishes his readiness and role in the progression of the people of God.²³

Exegesis of Genesis 15:7–21²⁴

Verse 7 is a natural break for a new unit because both verse 1 and verse 7 begin with a divine self-introduction and a promise.²⁵ While Gen 15:1–6 focus on the promise of seed, in the second pericope, God reiterates his promise of land. The two units join together “to bind the promise of seed and the promise of land together in such a way that the fulfilment of the latter is

²⁰ The salvific implications of this verse, though extensive, are not the focus of this thesis (see Gal 3:7–9; Jas 2:23; Heb 11:8–10).

²¹ Whybray, “Genesis...,” 50-51; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 328; Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 166-67.

²² Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 166; Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 172; Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 309-10. Some scholars argue that a *waw* consecutive does occur here, such as R. W. L. Moberly in his *NIDOTTE* entry on the verb (“וַיִּשְׁמַע,” 1.431-32), but most agree that it is a conjunctive.

²³ Seth Postell, “Abram as Israel, Israel as Abram: Literary Analogy as Macro-Structural Strategy in the Torah,” *TynBul* 67 (2016): 172; Moberly, “וַיִּשְׁמַע,” *NIDOTTE* 1.431-32.

²⁴ Verses 1–6 and 7–21 are often considered two separate documents brought together by a redactor, and it is a topic of some debate among scholars (Claus Westermann, *Genesis* [Edinburgh: Continuum International, 2004], 117-18). For lively conversations on the topic of the unity of Genesis 15, see John Ha, *Genesis 15* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1989), 39-60; Anthony Abela, “Genesis 15: A Non-Genetic Approach,” *MelT* 31 (1986): 9-40; Von Rad, *Genesis*, 165, 189-90; Thomas Römer, “The Exodus in the Book of Genesis,” *SEÅ* 75 (2010): 17-19; Schmid and Nogalski, *Genesis and the Moses Story*, 166-67; Williamson, *Abraham, Israel...*, 128; and Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 157-59. Additionally, Ruth Fidler offers a unique suggestion that the text ought to be rearranged and read in reverse order, moving vv. 3-6 to after v. 18 (“Genesis XV: Sequence and Unity,” *VT* 57 (2007): 169-71).

²⁵ Daniel Kwame Bediako and Elijah Baidoo, “The Covenant of Abraham: Relationship between Genesis 15 and 17,” *Valley View University Journal of Theology* 2 (2012): 5.

absolutely dependent on the fulfilment of the former.”²⁶ It is through the fulfillment of one promise that the other can be accomplished. However, and most importantly for this project, neither promise will be fulfilled until after Israel experiences affliction.

Genesis 15:7 establishes God’s characteristic as the deliverer. The formulaic expression אֲנִי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאוּר כַּשְׂדִּים (“I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans,” Gen 15:7) anticipates the similar construction found in Exod 20:2, אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם “I am the Lord your God who brought you out from Egypt.”²⁷ This additional connection between these two covenants (see verse 6) highlights the Lord as the provider and deliverer for the nation.²⁸ Just as the Lord guides Abram, he will guide and provide for Abram’s descendants (cf. 13–21).

Upon the promise of land, Abram again questions God, as he did in verse 2. Here, he asks, “how will I know that I will possess it?” (Gen 15:8). Abram’s questions pose an interpretive issue for some commentators who felt that Abram should not question God.²⁹ Several interpreters especially became convinced that God’s declaration of the affliction of Abram’s seed was a punishment for Abram’s lack of faith.³⁰ However, this interpretation does

²⁶ Williamson, *Abraham, Israel...*, 123.

²⁷ See notes on vs. 2 for a brief discussion of the use of the Divine Name.

²⁸ Postell, “Abram as Israel...,” 172; Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 310.

²⁹ Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling, *The Book of Genesis in Late Antiquity: Encounters Between Jewish and Christian Exegesis* (Leiden: BRILL, 2013), 209; Günter Stemberger, “Genesis 15 in Rabbinic and Patristic Interpretation,” in *The Exegetical Encounter between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity*. Eds. Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling (Boston: Brill, 2009), 151. Rabbinic exegetes wished to find an explanation for how anyone, even Abra(ha)m, could be justified in questioning God (cf. Tg Neofiti Gen 15:13, GenR 44:1–7, BT Ned 32a, PRE 48, Tg PsJon Gen 15:13, TanB Qedoshim 13) (Grypeou and Spurling, *The Book of Genesis*, 209).

³⁰ Stemberger, “Genesis 15...,” 151. The most prominent voices of this viewpoint are in *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* (PRE) 48 and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (TG sJon) 15:13, which “describe a causative link between the doubts of Abraham and the subsequent affliction of his descendants— it is as a direct result of Abraham’s questions,

not account for God's graciousness in this text to Abram individually (see notes on v. 15). Instead of issuing punishment to Abram, it is only his seed who will be afflicted. In Gen 15, Abram is requesting a sign of the fulfillment of God's promise, not for a reason to put faith in God's promise.³¹

The covenant cutting ceremony, beginning in verse 9, has long been rightly understood as an ancient Near Eastern (ANE) practice, one that implies "If I break this covenant, let this be done to me."³² Interestingly it is not Abram who passes through the pieces, but only God (cf. v. 17). Thus, God is implying that he will keep his covenant without fail.³³ The "deep sleep" of verse 12, as well as his exclusion from passing through the pieces in verse 17, highlight Abram's passivity in this ceremony.³⁴ The word for deep sleep, *תַּרְדֵּמָה*, is the same word used when God put Adam to sleep in 2:1, and it is also used in many divine dream and vision sequences (cf. Job

which are understood to be doubts, that the Israelites suffer slavery in Egypt" (Grypeou and Spurling, *The Book of Genesis*, 209).

³¹ Stemberger, "Genesis 15..." 152; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 335; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 308. Asking for a sign is more of a neutral action in the OT than Jesus often expressed in the NT, mainly because of the intention of the one who was asking for a sign in each case (For some examples, see Exod 4; Judg 6; Isa 7; Ps 86; Matt 16; Mark 8).

³² Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 308-09; David Andrew Dean, "Covenant, Conditionality, and Consequence: New Terminology and a Case Study in the Abrahamic Covenant," *JETS* 57 (2014): 282-84. The only other occurrence of this ceremony in Scripture in Jer 34.

³³ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 310; Schmid and Nogalski, *Genesis and the Moses Story*, 166-67; Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 172-73. The birds of prey descending on the parts are commonly seen as a device indicating a "bad omen" for Israel, usually as representing Egypt, though Alter cautions against reading too strongly into this imagery (Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996), 66). The mention of birds of prey also suggests that these events happen in the daytime, possibly the day after Abram counts the stars (Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 310).

³⁴ Abram's cutting (and protecting) of the animals has been construed as Abram's partnership involvement in the covenant ritual, but he acts only at the Lord's command rather than initiating anything himself (Bediako and Baidoo, "The Covenant of Abraham," 8; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 312).

4:13; 33:15; Isa 29:10).³⁵ The point is that God is responsible to fulfilling each promise, and one of those promises is that Israel will be afflicted (עָנָה) (Gen 15:13).

The beginning of the Lord's dialogue in 15:13, "surely you may know" וְיָדַעְתָּ יְהוָה, hearkens back to verse 8 when Abram asks how he can know that God will keep his promises. God alleviates Abram's anxiety over descendants.³⁶ He says, "Surely you may know that your seed will be a stranger in a land not their own. And they will serve them, and they will afflict (עָנָה) them four hundred years" (Gen 15:13). Abram now knows that he will have descendants, but the problem is that the alleviation of his anxiety comes in the form of a promise of enslavement. Abram is meant to understand that the enslavement is certain.³⁷

Genesis 15:13 is the first occurrence of the verb עָנָה. The typical usages of עָנָה and its nominal forms refer to those who are oppressed without just cause. Kandathil describes the verb as the most evocative description of the impact of oppression.³⁸ The word root is widely attested in ancient Semitic languages, all meaning essentially "to be humble/lowly" or "to submit."³⁹ The

³⁵ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 173; "תַּדְרִימָה," HALOT 1787. In v. 12, a terrifying great darkness, אֲדָמָה הָיְתָה וְהָאֲרָצָה הָיְתָה אֲדָמָה, falls upon Abram. The dread may have been prompted by the coming of the Deity because it is a formulaic representation of the presence of God and/or divine activity (Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 311). This parallels the Sinai covenant once again, as "both accounts describe the fear of the covenant recipient along with the presence of supernatural darkness (Gen 15:12, 17; Exod 20:18, 21)" (Postell, "Abram as Israel...", 172). The Hebrew word אֲדָמָה often depicts a fear that is "destructive (Exod 23:27; Deut 32:25; Ps. 88:16), immobilizing (Exod 15:16), intimidating and coercive (Job 9:34; cf. 33:7), or unnerving (Job 13:21)" (Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 311; cf. Miles Van Pelt and W. C. Kaiser Jr., "אֲדָמָה," *NIDOTTE* 1.381-82). However, none of these connotations are apparent in this chapter. Other than this verse (and possibly the Lord's command in verse 1), there is no textual evidence that Abram was afraid of the vision (Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 311).

³⁶ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 173.

³⁷ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 311; Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 311. This is because of the use of the infinitive absolute plus the imperfect.

³⁸ Joseph Kandathil, "Oppression/Liberation Experience of Israel in Exodus," *Jeev* 17 (1987): 441.

³⁹ Paul Wegner, "עָנָה," *NIDOTTE* 3.449.

most common use of the verb in the OT is for people in power afflicting or attempting to humble those weaker than them, demeaning those people further in the process.⁴⁰ The afflicter typically has no means of escaping their situation.⁴¹

In the later covenantal instructions (Lev 19:10; 23:22; Deut 15:11; 24:12), עֲנִי referred mainly to the “dispossessed,” those “without landed property,” and those who are “virtually without citizenship.”⁴² The עֲנִי held a similar status to the גֵּר, “stranger,” as well as the widow and the orphan, within Israel, in that they are all categories of people disadvantaged and dependent on others.⁴³ Thus, there is a strong connection between the sojourner and the afflicted, and here in Gen 15, the two terms are used as parallel descriptions of the future struggles of Abram’s descendants.⁴⁴ As the עֲנִי among the Israelites are dependent on others, so too the afflicted Israelites will be dependent on the mercy and power of the Egyptians.⁴⁵

However, God assures Abram that he will punish the nation that afflicts Israel. Here, God stays consistent with his promise in 12:3 that he will curse those who curse Abram.⁴⁶ God makes

⁴⁰ Paul Wegner, “ענה,” *NIDOTTE* 3.450.

⁴¹ Kandathil, “Oppression/Liberation...,” 441.

⁴² W. J. Dumbrell, “עני,” *NIDOTTE* 3:455.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ The word for “stranger,” גֵּר, describes the status of someone who dwells permanently in the midst of an alien people, but it can also refer to a wandering foreigner (A. H. Konkel, “גור,” *NIDOTTE* 1.837-88). Sojourners who dwelt in Israel were generally in the service of a wealthy Israelite and under his protection (Ibid., 1.837). Nonetheless, the verbal form גָּר is used in Genesis to describe the journey of the Patriarchs (Gen 12:10; 32:5; 47:4). Ironically, later, Abram calls himself a גֵּר in Canaan (Gen 23:4), which creates a verbal connection between Abram and his descendants (Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 173).

⁴⁵ Kandathil, “Oppression/Liberation...,” 441.

⁴⁶ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 174.

an oath to Abram that he will judge the nation who enslaves and abuses Israel. This oath should strengthen Abram's (and his descendants') understanding of the Lord as sovereign over nations who do not even recognize him, not just over Israel.⁴⁷ This fact also displays God's characteristic righteousness and justice.⁴⁸ Abram and his descendants can know that the outcome of history is not a strange mixture of chance occurrences shaped by a fickle God; the Lord they serve is a reliable, trustworthy God who follows through on his word even after hundreds of years.⁴⁹

God promises Abram that when his descendants leave the land of their enslavement, they will carry great possessions (וְאֶהְרִי־כֵן יֵצְאוּ בְרִכְשׁ גָּדוֹל) (Gen 15:14). The language of רִכְשׁ reflects the way the Lord blessed Abram as he left Egypt in chapter 12.⁵⁰ Even after four hundred years of waiting, the Lord promises that he will not forget his covenant. He will bless them just as he promised (cf. Exod 12:35–39).

Within the frightening promise of enslavement and the glorious promise of rescue, none of the promises apply to Abram personally, except the reassurance of a seed from his own loins.⁵¹ Abram instead will pass away בְּשָׁלוֹם “in peace,” at שִׁיבָה טוֹבָה “a ripe old age.” This is the first occurrence of שָׁלוֹם in Scripture, and it serves as an antonym for his descendant's affliction (עֲנָה). Instead of poverty and subservience, Abram will have much wealth, power, and wellness in his lifetime (cf. 12:16; 13:2; 14:14; 20:16; 23:16; 24:10; 25:8). The use of טוֹבָה here

⁴⁷ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 187-88; Westermann, *Genesis*, 121.

⁴⁸ Westermann, *Genesis*, 121.

⁴⁹ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 187-88; Westermann, *Genesis*, 121.

⁵⁰ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 311.

⁵¹ Williamson, *Abraham, Israel...*, 123.

has the nuance of “ripe old age,” which connotes a happy end, as opposed to the misery that can often characterize the last years of life (cf. Gen 42:38; 44:29, 31).⁵²

The explicit lack of affliction in Abram’s life signifies that Abram is not being punished for his questions (see notes for v. 8). Abram believes something extremely difficult to believe, and there is no textual evidence that Abram’s questioning was viewed in a negative light by the narrator. If it were so, “God would surely not have accepted his sacrifice, made a covenant with him, promised that ten nations would be subjugated to his offspring and that he would be buried at a ripe old age.”⁵³ Instead of doubt, the main presentation of Abram in chapter 15 is as a man of faith in the Lord.

The statement לֹא־נִשְׁלַם עֲוֹן הָאֱמֹרִי עַד־הַיּוֹם, “the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete,” further implicates the control of history to the Lord (Gen 15:16). אֱמֹרִי is widely read here as a term for the Canaanites and their early people groups.⁵⁴ The verse reflects that the Lord guides the other nations, both knowing their future and shaping their current circumstances.⁵⁵ The Lord alone allots to the nations their times, just as he allots to Israel their time of affliction to come (Gen 15:13; cf. Dan 2:21).⁵⁶

⁵² Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 311-12.

⁵³ Judith Frishman, “‘And Abraham Had Faith’: But in What? Ephrem and the Rabbis on Abraham and God’s Blessings,” in *The Exegetical Encounter between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity*, Eds. Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling (Boston: BRILL, 2009): 167.

⁵⁴ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 187; Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 175; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 312; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 332.

⁵⁵ Westermann, *Genesis*, 121.

⁵⁶ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 187.

The exact referent of רָעָה here is unknown. Von Rad suggests that it refers to sexual corruption (cf. Lev 18:24–28; 20:22–24).⁵⁷ The immorality of the Canaanites is referenced throughout the Torah, with sexual immorality explicitly stated, but other forms of immorality are often denoted, making the influence of the outside nations a constant concern for Israel (Deut 9:4–5; 18:12; 1 Kgs 14:24; 21:26; 2 Kgs 21:11; Amos 2:9–10).⁵⁸ God’s delay of the promise reflects the mercy and temperance of God to allow time for the Canaanite’s repentance before their punishment. Once their immorality has “run its full measure” and “reached the point of no return,” then the Lord will wipe them out.⁵⁹

God’s presence with Abram during his announcement is marked by the motifs of fire and darkness (Gen 15:17), which is also a connection between this covenant and the Sinai covenant.⁶⁰ It is evident here that the smoking oven and fiery torch represent God, for there is scarcely another plausible option.⁶¹ Postell explains, “In both accounts, God appears to the covenant recipient in fire (אֵשׁ), smoke (רִיחַ אֵשׁ), and a torch (מַשְׂבֵּט) (Gen 15:17; Exod 19:18; 20:18). These passages are the only time ‘smoke’ (רִיחַ אֵשׁ) and ‘torch’ (מַשְׂבֵּט) are used together to describe a theophany in the Hebrew Bible.”⁶² The Lord, represented by these items, is seen

⁵⁷ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 188.

⁵⁸ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 175; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 312.

⁵⁹ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 312. This also sheds light on the warfare of Joshua, indicating the destruction as an act of the LORD’s justice, not of aggression (Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 312).

⁶⁰ Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 173.

⁶¹ Dean, “Covenant, Conditionality, and Consequence,” 297.

⁶² Postell, “Abram as Israel...,” 172.

passing between the parts.⁶³ This action implicates his commitment to the covenant with Abram (see notes on v. 9).

Interestingly, in verse 17, Abram “is both prevented from participating in, and forced to witness, the covenant-cutting ceremony.”⁶⁴ As discussed in the notes on verse 9, Abram, other than slaughtering the animals at the Lord’s command, is passive in this ceremony. This gives the impression, along with the undeniable lack of commands to Abram, that the promise is unconditional.⁶⁵ The promise in the following verse “does not explicitly depend upon human obedience.”⁶⁶ Although some commentators point to the command of circumcision of the sacrifice of Isaac as conditions placed upon Abram, this chapter by itself represents the unconditional nature of a covenant that has both conditional and unconditional aspects.⁶⁷ It was the Lord alone who would see to the fulfillment of the promises to his people, including his promise of affliction followed by glorious rescue.⁶⁸

In this covenant ratification, the promise of land and seed are depicted as mutually dependent (Gen 15:18). The Lord says in verse 18, לְזַרְעֲךָ נָתַתִּי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת, “to your seed I will give this land.”⁶⁹ He promises both descendants and a land for them, making the two

⁶³ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 334.

⁶⁴ Dean, “Covenant, Conditionality, and Consequence,” 297.

⁶⁵ Alexander, *From Paradise...*, 177.

⁶⁶ Bediako and Baidoo, “The Covenant of Abraham,” 7.

⁶⁷ Jeffrey J. Niehaus, “God’s Covenant with Abraham,” *JETS* 56 (2013): 260.

⁶⁸ Niehaus, “God’s Covenant with Abraham,” 268-69; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 333.

⁶⁹ Williamson points out the antitheses of God promising the land to Abram in vs. 7 then to his seed in vs. 18 (*Abraham, Israel...*, 126). This, among others, is one reason some scholars view the text as joined together later (see footnote 25).

promises “inextricably bound.”⁷⁰ This chapter presents the Lord as a promise-maker, and the promises preview the history of the founding of a whole nation.⁷¹

Analysis: The Purpose of the Pronouncement of Enslavement

Genesis 15 expresses God’s promise that Israel will be enslaved and afflicted, but then he will rescue them. There are four aspects to the declaration of affliction in Gen 15. Each works in conjunction with one another to express the full purpose of the pronouncement.

Faith as a Key Theme

Trust in the face of a long wait is a key theme in Abram’s life, and chapter 15 is a key text that speaks to this theme.⁷² Not only did Abram wait for most of his life to have a son, his descendants would wait four hundred years before inheriting the land promised to him. The reality depicted as necessary for Abram and his seed is continual trust in the power and plan of the Lord.⁷³ Because Abram believed God in this difficult thing, God blessed him “by guaranteeing that the divine promises regarding descendants and land will be fulfilled.”⁷⁴ This plan was meant as encouragement in the face of God’s unfulfilled promise of progeny.⁷⁵ Even for Abram, who did not face the affliction, it becomes a matter of faith in God’s sovereignty that

⁷⁰ Tracy, *See Me! Hear Me!*, 71.

⁷¹ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 150; Tracy, *See Me! Hear Me!*, 70; Williamson, *Abraham, Israel...*, 144. The long list of place names (the longest list of Canaanite groups in the OT) describe the vast parameters of the promised land (Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 176-78; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 333-34; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 313).

⁷² Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 149.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁷⁴ Alexander, *From Paradise...*, 177.

⁷⁵ Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 170.

he will fulfill his promises to Abram a long time after Abram's death, and Abram must not be anxious over the delay (cf. 15:1).⁷⁶

The presentation of faith in chapter 15 reflects the importance of the chapter as a key moment not only in Abram's life, and his legacy of faith bears heavily on God's dealings with Israel. The faith of the people is "the decisive factor in God's dealings with Abraham's 'seed.'"⁷⁷ The promise of affliction was meant to strengthen both Abram and his seed to put their trust in יהוה alone. Although the people would experience affliction, they must put their faith in knowing that history was under God's control, and he would work out his plan as promised.⁷⁸

Fulfillment in Exodus

The most apparent purpose for the Lord's pronouncement of affliction for the later audience is to see the fulfillment of this text in the Exodus narrative. This narrative looks forward to the events of Exodus through Joshua, and even into Samuel.⁷⁹ The language of Exodus 1–3 utilizes similar language to Gen 15:13–16, but it more directly reflects the language of later narratives in Genesis, particularly the formula of the Lord seeing or hearing the affliction of his people (Gen 16:11; 29:32; 31:42; 41:52).⁸⁰

Furthermore, the Sinai covenant reflects much of the language in Gen 15 (cf. Gen 15:7, 12, 13, 14, 17).⁸¹ These links make clear the connection between the Lord's promises to Abram

⁷⁶ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 148.

⁷⁷ John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative, A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1993), 152.

⁷⁸ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 188.

⁷⁹ Schmid and Nogalski, *Genesis and the Moses Story*, 165.

⁸⁰ Alexander, *From Paradise ...*, 99.

⁸¹ Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 152.

and the renewed promises to Israel at Sinai.⁸² Genesis 15 anticipates the Sinai covenant so that Abram is a predecessor to Moses (as well as representative of Israel) and the Abrahamic covenant a predecessor to the Sinai covenant.⁸³ Part of Genesis' purpose is to show that God's work in Exodus, namely, the release of Israel and the Sinai covenant, is part of the larger plan that was put into action by the patriarchs.⁸⁴

Affliction as Means, Not a Threat, to the Seed

Affliction throughout Genesis often takes the form of a threat to the promise of a righteous seed, and Israel's future enslavement appears to jeopardize the fulfillment of blessing.⁸⁵ However, God's revelation of the Israelite's affliction shows Abram and his seed that affliction would be a means, not a threat, to the blessing that God promised. Throughout Genesis, sin and violence threaten the promise of the righteous seed of 3:15.⁸⁶ In Gen 15, not only will Sarai's barrenness not pose a threat, but not even four hundred years of affliction will be a threat to God's promise.⁸⁷ Instead of doubting in the face of affliction, "Abram and his descendants would know that such oppression and enslavement was not a threat to the fulfillment of the promises—it was part of the divine plan."⁸⁸ Part of the plan includes the strengthening of the

⁸² Alexander, *From Paradise...*, 99.

⁸³ Römer, "The Exodus...", 19-20; Postell, "Abram as Israel...", 172-73.

⁸⁴ Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 152.

⁸⁵ Williamson, *Abraham, Israel...*, 131-32.

⁸⁶ Todd L. Patterson, *The Plot-structure of Genesis: 'Will the Righteous Seed Survive?' In the Mythos-Logical Movement from Complication to Denouement* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 10-11.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 106-08.

⁸⁸ Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 311.

faith of his people by means of temporary enslavement.⁸⁹ Abram would not inherit the land, but the blessings of inheritance would pass on to his descendants many generations later, and God would preserve the righteous seed.⁹⁰ God promises blessings on the Israelites, but “the way of sacred history leads first down into disappointment and apparent despair.”⁹¹ Although the people would be afflicted for four hundred years, that affliction would be the means for God to bless his people by delivering them from Egypt and ultimately bringing them into the promised land. God allowed the affliction of the people as a part of the fulfillment of his ultimate promises.⁹²

The Pattern of Affliction in Genesis

Most significantly for this research, the promise of affliction emerges in Gen 15 as a characteristic of God’s people. The cycle of affliction and rescue presents a picture of Israel’s journey throughout the rest of the OT. The Gen 15:13 use of **עֲנָה** is the first in Scripture, making it the forerunner to every other occurrence of **עֲנָה**. This being the case, the subsequent uses of **עֲנָה** and **עָנִי** in Genesis become an immediate reflection of this distinctive situation of the Israelites.

The promise of affliction becomes a key motif in the experiences of Abram’s family throughout the rest of Genesis, each reflecting in a small way the larger scale affliction of the whole Israelite people (cf. Exod 1–3).⁹³ Instead of focusing on the fulfillment of the land promise

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Williamson, *Abraham, Israel...*, 128; Abela, “Genesis 15,” 39.

⁹¹ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 188.

⁹² Patterson, *The Plot-structure of Genesis*, 204; Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 115.

⁹³ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 173; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 311.

in the rest of Genesis, after the declaration of affliction in Gen 15:13, the narratives highlight the subsequent afflictions of the family of Abram.⁹⁴ While Abram and his descendants live as sojourners (a reflection of the use of נָזַח in Gen 15) in Canaan and Egypt (Gen 21:34; 26:3; Ps 105:23), there is no record of them being subservient to or oppressed by the Canaanite people.⁹⁵ Instead, they lived generally peaceably among the Canaanites (Gen 21:22–34; 26).⁹⁶ Thus, the term נָזַח is not a term of subservience in Genesis, yet Israel’s status as strangers in Egypt serves as the provocation for the affliction in Exodus.

In Genesis, the affliction of the Israelite people primarily occurs as intra-family quarrels rather than oppression from outside nations, with the notable exception of Dinah’s affliction (Gen 34).⁹⁷ The full expression of the affliction of Gen 15 is only found in Exodus, but the struggles in Genesis are building up to the enslavement in Egypt.⁹⁸ The use of the language of affliction in Genesis represents the characteristic of Israel as an oppressed people, even in the individual lives of the patriarchs and their families. This is the topic of discussion throughout the rest of this thesis.

Ultimately, the paradigm of Israel as afflicted people becomes a large aspect of the national identity. Thus, it is no surprise that the covenant of Abraham, the father of the nation, contains a foreshadowing of the event which becomes the center of the Israelite faith and the

⁹⁴ Alexander, *From Paradise...*, 174-75. The two most significant references to land acquisition are in 17:8 and 22:17. These two accounts “mark only the beginning of the process by which God will fulfill his promise to Abraham regarding nationhood” (Alexander, *From Paradise...*, 174-75).

⁹⁵ Ray, “The Duration...,” 235.

⁹⁶ Ray, “The Duration...,” 235. Genesis 34 is an example of enmity between the Israelites and the Canaanites (see the discussion in chapter 6 of this project).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 235-236.

establishment of their identity as a people group.⁹⁹ The nationhood of the people becomes indefinitely tied to their experience in Egypt.¹⁰⁰ When God promises that the people would be afflicted before he fulfills his promise of land and nationhood, he not only requires Abram and his children to have faith in his plan, but in a way, he prophesies the actual steps that would occur before the establishment of their whole identity. God promises a history to a people yet unborn, foretelling the “main historic title of the Jewish people to its land, a title that is unconditional and irrecoverable, secured by a divine covenant whose validity transcends space and time.”¹⁰¹ The growth of the nation of Israel is a result of their experience and proliferation in Egypt, and that experience is foretold in Gen 15.¹⁰²

Conclusion

The inclusion of the announcement of affliction in Gen 15 serves as the revelation of the fulfillment of the promises of land and seed. The people will be blessed, but affliction will be the means for the blessing of the people. Genesis 15 establishes the characteristic of the Israelites (and the people of God as a whole) as an afflicted people, but the affliction they face is part of God’s plan. The rest of Genesis reveals the pattern of affliction in the lives of the descendants of Abram, showing that God uses the affliction to grow and establish his people for himself.

⁹⁹ Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible*, 1st Fortress Press edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 131.

¹⁰⁰ Williamson, *Abraham, Israel...*, 140.

¹⁰¹ Sarna, *Genesis*, 115.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

Chapter 3:

Hagar: The Afflicted Foreigner

Introduction

Perhaps as a result of Paul's metaphor in Gal 4:23, Hagar and Ishmael are often known as "mistakes" made on the path to God fulfilling his promise to Abraham and Sarah.¹ Yet, Hagar herself is not responsible for the bad choices of Abram and Sarai. Hagar is a vulnerable, sympathetic character who is mistreated by her masters. As a result, the Lord offers her a promise of blessing that is distinct from the promise to Abraham and Sarah. The narrative of Hagar's affliction reveals that the Lord pays attention to the affliction of the abused, and it is in his character to act on their behalf.

Exegesis of Genesis 16:1–6

The first pericope establishes the circumstances of Hagar's affliction. Immediately following the marvelous theophany and accentuation on the promise of progeny in Gen 15, the text turns to the Hagar narrative with its own dramatic theophany and emphasis on offspring.² The Hagar narratives (Gen 16 and 21) depend greatly on characterization in order to determine the narrator's intent. Thus, the exegesis of each pericope will highlight characterization in order to offer viable interpretive conclusions. Since this pericope establishes the cast of characters in this affliction narrative, the characterization here is especially important.

¹ Consider Paul's analogy of Ishmael as born "according to the flesh" and Isaac as "through the promise" (Gal 4:23).

² Nevada Levi DeLapp, *Theophanic "Type-Scenes" in the Pentateuch: Visions of YHWH* (London, UK: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018), 23.

The description of Sarai's barrenness in Gen 16:1 affirms both Gen 11:30 and 15:3, which make known that Abram and Sarai have no children. The childlessness apparently continues into the events of Gen 16. After this description of Sarai, the author uses a waw disjunctive to transition to the next clause. This allows the text to be read "*but* she had an Egyptian slave woman." Although the disjunctive is a minor detail, it hints at the resolution Sarai seeks for her barrenness: she is barren, *but* she has a slave who may solve this for her.

The narrator introduces Hagar as "an Egyptian slave woman" (תַּיִתְּיָה מִצְרַיִם). The translation of תַּיִתְּיָה as "maidservant" downplays the sociological implications. The word typically denotes a female equivalent to עֶבֶד. The slave woman is a possession and a laborer for the wife of the household.³ The point of this word choice in Gen 16 is to show that Hagar belongs completely to Sarai.⁴ Furthermore, תַּיִתְּיָה usually, but not exclusively, refers to an unmarried slave woman.⁵ Altogether, Hagar's introduction in 16:1 paints her as fully under Sarai's power and available to be used as a womb.⁶

Just as Abram attributed his childlessness to God in 15:3, so also Sarai attributes her barrenness to the Lord because he restrained (עָצַר) her ability to bear (Gen 16:2–3). This explanation is not offered by the narrator and instead reflects Sarai's verbal affirmation of God as the giver of life.⁷ Sarai makes no reference to the Lord's promise of offspring to Abram (cf.

³ Richard Schultz, "תַּיִתְּיָה", *NIDOTTE*, 4.212.

⁴ Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996), 67.

⁵ Schultz, "תַּיִתְּיָה", *NIDOTTE*, 4.212.

⁶ Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, WBC 2 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994), 6.

⁷ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 316.

12:1–3; 13:15–16; 15:4–5, 13–16), so it is unclear if her intention is solely to offer her husband a son or also to find a way to fulfill God’s promise.

Sarai’s plan resulted in her asserting authority over her slave woman. Tribble writes, “What the deity has prevented, Sarai can accomplish through the maid whose name she never utters and to whom she never speaks. For Sarai, Hagar is an instrument, not a person.”⁸ Sarai’s abuse of Hagar is driven by her own concerns and Abram’s, not by any concern for Hagar. Sarai could simply do with Hagar whatever she wished. The text never shows that Hagar had any say in this arrangement.⁹

It is important to note that, though to a modern audience Sarai’s offer of Hagar to Abram is unthinkable, her actions are an attested ANE practice.¹⁰ Sarai may even have chosen this route to prevent her own expulsion, for *Gen Rab* 45:3 describes barrenness for a period of ten years as grounds for divorce, and 16:3 refers to Abram having already been in Canaan for ten years.¹¹ Thus, she was likely following the accepted customs of her society in order to protect herself and provide for her husband.

Scholars debate whether Sarai intended to adopt Hagar’s son or if Sarai hoped to gain divine favor through the action. The former custom is exemplified by Rachel and Leah because they count the sons of their slave women among their numbers (Gen 30:1–21), but it may not necessarily be the case with Sarai. As an alternative, the purpose of surrogacy could be so that

⁸ Phyllis Tribble, “The Other Woman: A Literary and Theological Study of the Hagar Narratives,” in *Understanding the Word Essays in Honour of Bernhard W. Anderson* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985), 223.

⁹ Brian Neil Peterson, “Male and Female Sexual Exploitation in Light of the Book of Genesis,” *JETS* 62 (2019): 699.

¹⁰ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 7; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 317; K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 184-85.

¹¹ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 185.

the pregnancy of the mistress' servant would stimulate her own fertility.¹² This idea may be either a folk belief or it may be an attempt to gain divine favor because of a selfless act.¹³ Leah's situation is again an example because she responds after bearing Issachar, "God has given *me* my reward because I gave my maidservant as a wife" (30:18).¹⁴ Sarai's dialogue in 16:2 ("Perhaps I will be built up through her") is vague regarding which purpose she intends, but her overall attitude toward Hagar and especially Ishmael suggests that she feels no motherly attachment to Ishmael (cf. 16:5–6; 21:9–10). Her attitude insinuates that Sarai does not intend to adopt Ishmael.

Regardless of common ANE practice regarding surrogacy, the narrator expresses disapproval of Sarai's plan. First, 16:2–3 utilizes Gen 3 language, such as "Abram listened to the voice of Sarai" (cf. 3:17) and "Sarai *took*...and she *gave* her to Abram *her husband*" (cf. 3:6, italics added), to show that Sarai's act was sinful.¹⁵ Additionally, Gen 2 presents the ideal of monogamy (cf. 2:24).¹⁶ Furthermore, Gen 17:15–19 shows that God intends Sarai to give birth to a son, which does not explicitly assert disapproval to Sarai's actions, but presents them as unnecessary.¹⁷ Thus, not only were Sarai's actions toward Hagar selfish, they were pointless.¹⁸

¹² Susan M. Pigott, "Hagar: The M/Other Patriarch," *RevExp* 115 (2018): 515.

¹³ Pamela Tamarkin Reis, "Hagar Required," *JSOT* 25 (2000): 78.

¹⁴ For the Rachel and Leah circumstances, the women both consider the sons of their slave women among the numbers of their own sons *and* show evidence of seeking divine favor for their good deeds. For more on Rachel and Leah, see chapter 5 of this thesis.

¹⁵ John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1993), 154.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ It is necessary to interject that although Hagar was forced into her situation, she ultimately bore a son whom she loved dearly and whom she undoubtedly considered worth the abuse by Sarah and Abraham (cf. 21:16–21).

Notably, Hagar is described as an אִשָּׁה, not a פִּילְגֶשֶׁת (“concubine”), who is usually an auxiliary wife for sexual congress purposes (v. 3).¹⁹ The narrator calls Hagar a full wife, not a concubine.²⁰ However, in the dialogue of chapter 21, she is called an אִמָּה (“bondwoman”), so there is a contrast to how the narrator describes her and how the characters (even God) describe her (see notes for 21:10).

Genesis 16:4 offers the only possible justification for Sarai’s affliction of Hagar, and biblical scholars debate whether it is a valid justification. The text says that she (Hagar) תִּקַּל Sarai. The general debate is whether this verb refers to “cursing” or “looking down on.” The verb קָלַל is the same word that God warned against in Gen 12:3: “those who curse (קָלַל) you I will curse (אָרַר).” For this reason, Sailhamer insinuates that the expulsion of Hagar is the penalty for Hagar cursing Sarai.²¹ In support of this, Waltke suggests that Hagar is at fault for opposing Sarai because Sarai is her mistress (Gen 16:1).²² He specifically argues that the verb קָלַל suggests that Hagar acted in a wicked manner out of her contempt for Sarai, possibly verbally cursing or showing physical contempt to Sarai, which would thus give some warrant Sarai’s mistreatment.²³

¹⁹ Victor Hamilton, “פִּילְגֶשֶׁת,” *NIDOTTE* 3.618-619. Abraham’s later wife, Keturah, is also called an אִשָּׁה in 25:1, but then she is called a פִּילְגֶשֶׁת in 1 Chr 1:32.

²⁰ Alter, *Genesis*, 68.

²¹ Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 154.

²² Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 249.

²³ Waltke, *Genesis*, 249.

However, to read the verb as “cursing” ignores the verbal collocations that diminish the intensity of the verb. When the verb קלל appears in conjunction with בְּעֵינֶיהָ, “in her eyes,” as it does here, it carries the meaning of “to be insignificant in the eyes of,” or “to count as nothing;” it does not mean “cursing.”²⁴ The action of finding a person less esteemed is far less severe than “cursing,” and it results in the translation “she began to despise her mistress in her eyes” or “she lowered her mistress in her eyes.”²⁵ While Hagar may indeed be puffed up with pride, this verb does not mean that she cursed Sarai. Thus, Hagar’s self-aggrandizement does not warrant the affliction she experiences from Sarai.²⁶

The hierarchy between the two women is threatened by Hagar’s pregnancy, though Sarai is always Hagar’s mistress in legality.²⁷ The tension causes a reordering of the relationship so that “the exalted mistress decreases while the lowly maid increases...she has enhanced the status of the servant to become herself correspondingly lowered in the eyes of Hagar.”²⁸ Sarai attempted to be built up (אֶבְרָתָהּ) through Hagar, yet, in poignant irony, she has become diminished.

The first clause of Sarai’s speech in Gen 16:5 places the blame for the situation on Abram. The sentence, אֲמַסֵּי עָלֶיךָ, could either mean “May my torment be upon you (Abram)!”

²⁴ “קלל,” HALOT 1103-04.

²⁵ Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 12.

²⁶ Pace she suggests that Hagar’s קלל included Hagar making known that she would not give Ishmael up to Sarai, but Pace produces no viable evidence for this claim (Sharon Pace, *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife*, [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990], 45).

²⁷ There is no stated reason why there is tension with Hagar and Sarai but not with Rachel and Leah and their slave women. It may be because Hagar is an Egyptian (Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 319).

²⁸ Trible, “The Other Woman,” 224.

or “My torment is on account of you (Abram).”²⁹ Either way, Sarai blames Abram for her trouble, even though she immediately admits that *she* put Hagar into his lap. Sarai’s language cogently reflects a “domestic squabble” filled with bitterness and resentment toward a husband who has only done what she asked.³⁰

Ironically, in all this trouble, there is no mention of Hagar’s perspective, other than her disrespect toward Sarai. Sarai’s speech forces the reader to see the situation through her eyes, not Hagar’s.³¹ Sarai’s perspective is driven by anger for being disrespected, so she has a biased viewpoint.³² Sarai’s speech is an unreliable outburst that does not offer a full assessment of the situation.

Sarai’s speech is further exaggerated by her use of the verb **סָמַח** to describe her situation. Both the verb **סָמַח** and the noun **סָמַח** almost always refer to sinful violence.³³ Denoting either physical or verbal violence, the verb **סָמַח** and the noun **סָמַח** “express the cold-blooded and unscrupulous infringement of the personal rights of others, motivated by greed and hate and often making use of physical violence and brutality.”³⁴ For example, the noun **סָמַח** is the word

²⁹ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 186. Additionally, Christopher Heard points out that the 1cs possessive pronoun on **סָמַח** could be an objective genitive (i.e. violence done *to* me) or a subjective genitive (i.e. violence done *by* me) (Christopher Heard, *Dynamics of Diselection: Ambiguity in Genesis 12–36 and Ethnic Boundaries in Post-Exilic Judah*, [SBL Semeia Studies. Atlanta: SBL, 2001], 67). He suggests that the ambiguity may suggest a double meaning: Sarai sees herself as wronged, so she then moves to inflict her own **סָמַח** on Hagar (Heard, *Dynamics of Diselection*, 67).

³⁰ Alter, *Genesis*, 67.

³¹ Heard, *Dynamics of Diselection*, 66.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ I. Swart and C. Van Dam, “סָמַח,” *NIDOTTE* 2.178.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

chosen by God to describe the wickedness that prompted the flood (Gen 6:11, 13). The severe connotations of **סמח** make its use in Gen 16:5 gratuitous. Since there is no evidence from the root **קלל** that Hagar committed this kind of violence, and because the compassionate words of the messenger of the Lord also do not project Hagar as culpable (see notes for vv. 8–12), Sarai’s overreaction to the situation is apparent.

Abram’s words to pacify his wife are filled with verbal irony. He says, **שְׁפָתֶיךָ בְיָדֶיךָ**, “your slave woman is in your hands” (Gen 16:6). Just as Sarai had placed Hagar in Abram’s lap, so Abram places Hagar in Sarai’s hands.³⁵ Furthermore, he says, **עֲשִׂי-לָהּ הַטּוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ**, “do to her what is good in your eyes.” The idiom “in the eyes of” plays upon the earlier reference to Hagar’s eyes, as well as the two occurrences of the verb **ראה** in verses 4–5.³⁶ Abram’s dialogue consists completely of word play, which suggests that he is serving here as a passive character because he essentially offers no new ideas or instructions to rectify the situation.³⁷

Upon Abram’s words, “Sarai afflicted her (**תַּעֲנִיבָהּ**).” This laconic narrative does not even mention Hagar’s name. As noted in chapter 2’s discussion of Gen 15:13–16, the verb **עננה** refers to unjust mistreatment which results in the humbling, or putting into one’s place, of the afflicted person.³⁸ Peterson describes the use in 16:6, “Sarah, as a woman in a position of power, uses that

³⁵ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 186.

³⁶ Tribble, “The Other Woman,” 224.

³⁷ S. Nikaido, “Hagar and Ishmael as Literary Figures: An Intertextual Study,” *VT* 51 (2001): 230.

³⁸ Paul Wegner, “עננה,” *NIDOTTE* 3.449.

power to abuse and exploit another woman who is younger and in a vulnerable position.”³⁹ Sarai abuses her power over Hagar, given by the master of the house, to inflict either physical or verbal harm on the slave in her home.

The use of **נָנַע** ties this narrative sharply to God’s promise in Gen 15:13–16 regarding the future affliction of the descendants of Abram. Although the affliction is inflicted upon Hagar, if Sarai physically abused Hagar (which is not a necessary translation, though plausible), it could legitimately have led to a miscarriage.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Sarai would know that if Hagar ran away, the child would be in danger due to lack of resources. Ironically, instead of the afflicter being a foreign nation (cf. 15:13–14), the first afflictors in the Bible are Sarai and Abram toward a foreigner.⁴¹

As noted in chapter 2 of this project, the use of “affliction” language reflects the use in Exodus. Hagar’s experience, as the first afflicted person, offers a paradigm for the similar experiences of the Israelites in Egypt (as promised in Gen 15:13–16).⁴² Even though Hagar is a lone Egyptian woman, she sets the stage for the suffering of the entire population of Israel (of all things, by her own people).

In Gen 15 God promises to punish the nation that afflicts Israel (v. 14). Here in chapter 16, the narrator has yet to show that God will punish Sarai and Abram for afflicting Hagar. A search for God’s punishment of Abram and Sarai is a question throughout the rest of the Hagar-Sarai narrative.

³⁹ Peterson, “Male and Female...,” 699.

⁴⁰ Nikaido, “Hagar and Ishmael...,” 230.

⁴¹ Bernard P. Robinson, “Characterization in the Hagar and Ishmael Narratives,” *SJOT* 27 (2013): 204.

⁴² Aryeh Cohen, “Hagar and Ishmael: A Commentary,” *Interpretation (United Kingdom)* 68 (2014): 252.

For the moment, the only resolution of Hagar’s suffering is when she takes command of her own life, and the life of her unborn baby, by fleeing Sarai.⁴³ Throughout the pericope, Hagar had been a passive character.⁴⁴ Berlin describes this type of character as an “agent” because they fill a necessary character hole. The pericope needed someone to fill the slot of the slave woman, but the slave woman does not do much else in the section.⁴⁵ Now, Hagar acts, and thus becomes the first person in the Bible to flee oppression.⁴⁶ This ends the first scene “in total disaster for all concerned. Hagar has lost her home, Sarai her maid, and Abram his second wife and newborn child.”⁴⁷ The movement into the second pericope picks up from this low point.

Exegesis of Genesis 16:7–16

Genesis 16:7–16 describes the resolution to Hagar’s affliction, which is addressed by a divine messenger. In this pericope, the most important aspect for the affliction motif is the response by the messenger of the Lord. While Hagar was a passive character in the first section, the focus of the narrator shifts to watching what happens to Hagar instead of Abram and Sarai.⁴⁸

⁴³ Tribble, “The Other Woman,” 225.

⁴⁴ Trevor Dennis, *Sarah Laughed: Women's Voices in the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1997), 64; Cf. Adel Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 27.

⁴⁵ Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 27. Berlin uses this description in her discussion of Bathsheba because she suggests that the story simply needed a married woman to be the object of David’s sin.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth B. Tracy, *See Me! Hear Me! Divine/Human Relational Dialogue in Genesis* (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 49.

⁴⁷ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 9.

⁴⁸ Tracy, *See Me! Hear Me!*, 45.

Hagar’s affliction receives divine attention (Gen 16:7–8).⁴⁹ The main feature of note is that even though she is not an Israelite, the messenger of the Lord “finds her” (מָצָאָהּ). This shows that God’s attention is not restricted to Israelites.

The Lord’s response to Hagar’s affliction identifies the narrator’s intent for how the reader should evaluate Hagar. The messenger of the Lord is the only character to say Hagar’s name. By using her name, “the deity acknowledges what Sarai and Abram have not: the personhood of this woman.”⁵⁰ Furthermore, Hagar is the first person in the Bible who receives a visit from the messenger of the Lord.⁵¹ The divine attention to Hagar at the very least makes her a sympathetic character, and she cannot wholly be written off as a “mistake” made by Abram and Sarai.

The messenger commands Hagar to return to Sarai and submit herself under her power (הִתְעַנֵּי תַּחַת יְדֵיהָ) (Gen 16:9). This verse utilizes the same verbal root from verse 6, “Sarah afflicted her,” (וַתַּעֲנֶה). עָנָה appears in this chapter, in verb or nominal form, more than any Genesis passage, which highlights a purposeful connection to the promise of affliction in Gen 15:13–16.⁵²

⁴⁹ The identity of the messenger of the Lord is not a necessary discussion for understanding the motif of affliction in Gen 16. For some discussion, see DeLapp, *Theophanic “Type-Scenes...,”* 24-25 n. 34; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 320-21; Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 188-89; Heijne, Camilla H elena von. *The Messenger of the Lord in Early Jewish Interpretations of Genesis* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010); Vern S. Poythress, *Theophany: A Biblical Theology of God’s Appearing* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 417-27.

⁵⁰ Tribble, “The Other Woman,” 226.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 155.

Because of the messenger's command to return, it first seems that God is on the side of the oppressor, which is contrary to reader expectation.⁵³ Here, it appears that instead of having compassion on Hagar, God is more concerned with his "favorite," Abram.⁵⁴ However, the rest of narrative shows that this is not the case. Instead of identifying with the oppressor, the rest of the affliction narratives in Genesis (and Exodus) present God as advocating for the afflicted person.

It becomes clearer why the messenger made a difficult command to Hagar when he continues his dialogue in verse 10. He explains that he will multiply Hagar's descendants. His promise shows that God is not solely concerned with his vow to Abram.⁵⁵ Additionally, the Lord's promise to Hagar is unique because it is the only one given to the mother instead of the father, so instead of caring solely for Abram, the Lord shows special concern for Hagar.⁵⁶ Lastly, instead of the possibility that Sarai wished to adopt Ishmael (cf. Gen 16:2–3), the Lord promises that the child would indeed be Hagar's.⁵⁷ Although Hagar must return to Sarai, the Lord's promise makes known his concern for her and Ishmael, not just Abram and Sarai.

The messenger's announcement climaxes with the statement that the Lord has heard her affliction and has granted her a son (Gen 16:11). The word for affliction, **עָנָה**, is from the root **עָנָה**, which has already appeared in verses 6 and 9. The language of verse 11 entails language of deliverance (or, "salvation").⁵⁸ Although she must return to her mistress, Hagar's recompense is

⁵³ Dennis, *Sarah Laughed*, 66-67.

⁵⁴ Robinson, "Characterization in the Hagar," 206.

⁵⁵ Dennis, *Sarah Laughed*, 66-67.

⁵⁶ Pigott, "Hagar: The M/Other Patriarch," 514.

⁵⁷ Andrea D. Saner, "Of Bottles and Wells: Hagar's Christian Legacy," *JTI* 11 (2017): 207.

⁵⁸ Dennis, *Sarah Laughed*, 69.

her son.⁵⁹ Hagar already knew that she was pregnant, but the revelation of the birth announcement was that the baby was a boy.⁶⁰ Hagar, who presumably had no prior encounter with YHWH or who appeared to worship him, now has a piece of the blessing that the Lord gives to Abram because she will bear his child.

In verse 11, it is because God *hears* the affliction of Hagar that he responds on her behalf.⁶¹ The whole narrative highlights the key words “seeing” and “hearing,” emphasizing God’s awareness.⁶² As noted, the “affliction” language occurred in verses 6 and 9, which highlights the injustice of the situation, and God emphasizes in Gen 16:11 that he knew exactly the injustice that had happened to her. In the first pericope, “eyes” (עַיִן) occurs three times, and “to see” (רָאָה) occurs two times (vv. 4-6). This emphasis on sight comes up again here and later in the narrative.⁶³ The verb “to hear” (שָׁמַע) appears in verse 2 (“Abram listened to the voice of Sarai”), and it becomes prominent here in verse 11. These words connect the lives of Sarai, Hagar, and Abram throughout the narrative.⁶⁴ Specifically, Hagar and Sarai both see and are seen, hear and are heard in ways that move the story forward.⁶⁵

The Lord’s description of Ishmael’s future in verse 12 brought great comfort to Hagar (cf. 16:13). God’s promise to Hagar regarding Ishmael shows that Ishmael will not be subject to

⁵⁹ Dennis, *Sarah Laughed*, 70.

⁶⁰ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 322.

⁶¹ Saner, “Of Bottles and Wells,” 204.

⁶² David J. Zucker, “Seeing and Hearing: The Interrelated Lives of Sarah and Hagar,” *Women in Judaism 7* (2010): 2.

⁶³ Alter, *Genesis*, 68.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Zucker, “Seeing and Hearing,” 10.

anyone as she has been subject to and struggled under Sarai (and Abram).⁶⁶ Ishmael is not promised any land as Abram was promised; instead, he will be a wanderer. Yet, the wandering means that Ishmael would not be enslaved to or in submission to anyone, as Hagar has been her whole life.⁶⁷

After the messenger tells Hagar that her affliction has not gone unnoticed, Hagar does not express joy in the promise itself but in the divine visit she has witnessed (Gen 16:13). Instead of the pride evident from her attitude toward Sarai in verse 4, her celebration expresses her awareness of the magnitude of what she experienced.⁶⁸ Remarkably, Hagar gives a name to her God, which is simply not done. Dennis expresses the singularity of Hagar's naming motif, "[El-Roi] is Hagar's name for God, and Hagar's alone. It arises out of, and speaks eloquently of, her own private encounter with him."⁶⁹ No other person in the Bible assigns a personal name to God. Naturally, as an outpouring of gratitude for being seen in her affliction, her name for God, "the God who sees me," utilizes one of the key words of the narrative, אֵלֹהֵי.

Hagar's name for God is substantiated by the fact that the well was named "Well of the God who Sees" (Gen 16:14). Notably, the narrator does not say that Hagar named the well, just that the well was known by that name. The local inhabitants knew what happened to Hagar there and accepted the name of the well based on her story (cf. Gen 25:11).

The text does not narrate Hagar's return (i.e. "So Hagar returned to Sarai..." etc.), but it explains that Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram, which suggests that she was with him again (Gen

⁶⁶ Tracy, *See Me! Hear Me!*, 47-48.

⁶⁷ Saner, "Of Bottles and Wells," 207.

⁶⁸ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 323.

⁶⁹ Dennis, *Sarah Laughed*, 71.

16:15–16). Chapter 21 also shows that she returned in obedience to the Lord. The narrator does not give a moral assessment of Hagar’s return to Sarai and Abram, but it is evident that the promise to her son reassures Hagar to the point of willingness to obey the Lord.⁷⁰ Hagar obeys a confusing divine command, and she is rewarded for it.⁷¹

Exegesis of Genesis 21:8–17

Even though this passage of the Hagar story does not utilize the root ענה, it concludes the story of Hagar’s affliction. For the affliction motif, the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael makes it necessary to analyze this section briefly. Additionally, this passage reveals whether the Lord keeps his promise to Hagar and Ishmael in chapter 16. Lastly, there has still been no evidence that God punished Sarah and Abraham for mistreating Hagar, so the reader must yet look to chapter 21 for an answer to this concern.⁷²

Much attempt has been made to understand the characterization of Ishmael in verse 9 in order to determine why Sarah chose to cast out Hagar and Ishmael. However, no viable translations provide a justifiable reason for Sarah to cast out the mother and son.⁷³ Overall, it is unknown exactly how the narrator wished the reader to understand Isaac, but what is important

⁷⁰ Heard, *Dynamics of Diselection*, 68.

⁷¹ In a similar way, Abraham obeys a confusing divine command to sacrifice Isaac in Gen 22, and he also is rewarded for it.

⁷² See notes for 16:6.

⁷³ Some translations paint ענה as a deplorable action, like Ishmael “mocking,” or “bullying” Isaac, thus presenting an understandable reason for motherly anger. Translations that utilize this word are KJV, NLT, NASB, and CSB among others. Another option focuses on the fact that the root is the same as the name for Isaac, and it usually means “to laugh,” but the ESV is virtually alone in translating it this way (“ענה,” HALOT 1019). This translation could imply that Isaac was simply having a good time at Isaac’s party.

for this project is that Hagar and Ishmael did not deserve expulsion. Ultimately, exploring this word further is peripheral to the objective of this research.⁷⁴

Upon seeing Ishmael **קִצְיָוֹ**, Sarah decides that he and his mother must leave (Gen 21:10). Sarah's dialogue expresses a vocabulary change from calling Hagar a **שִׁפְיָה** in chapter 16 to now calling her an **אֲמָנָה**. Alter suggests that the two terms are sociological synonyms and that **אֲמָנָה** is a more international, economic term.⁷⁵ Both terms, though accurate, are derisive since they are used in place of Hagar and Ishmael's name.⁷⁶

More importantly, just as Sarah afflicted Hagar in chapter 16, Sarah again demands more mistreatment of Hagar, though the verb root **ענה** does not appear. Based on the characterization of Hagar in chapter 16, the Lord's description of Ishmael in 16:12, and the minor unclear reference to Ishmael's **קִצְיָוֹ** in 21:9, there is no evidence that Hagar and Ishmael deserved to be cast out into the wilderness. The text does not allow a firmly negative view of them.⁷⁷ Thus, there is no clear justification of Sarah's actions.

Abraham's character is briefly validated by his disapproval of Sarah's demand (Gen 21:11–13).⁷⁸ Although he bent to Sarah's will in chapter 16, this text suggests that he initially

⁷⁴ For more on the translation of this verb, see Robinson "Characterization in the Hagar," 208-209; Nikaido, "Hagar and Ishmael...", 235-36; Christopher Heard, "On the Road to Paran: Toward a Christian Perspective on Hagar and Ishmael," *Interpretation* 68 (2014): 282-83; Reis, "Hagar Required," 94-96; David J. Zucker, "What Sarah saw: envisioning Genesis 21:9-10," *JBQ* 36 (2008): 54-62.

⁷⁵ Alter, *Genesis*, 67.

⁷⁶ Reis, "Hagar Required," 98.

⁷⁷ Heard, "On the Road," 282.

⁷⁸ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 80.

denied her request. However, even though Abraham refused Sarah, God tells Abraham to go along with her request. God's support of Sarah's irrational demand is startling, and the Lord appears once again to side with his "favorite," as opposed to protecting the innocent.⁷⁹

Once again, the opposite is true. God is not seeking what is best for Abraham and Sarah alone; he is seeking what is best for his promises to Hagar and Ishmael. Hamilton explains, "A family squabble becomes the occasion by which the sovereign purposes and programs of God are forwarded."⁸⁰ Even though God is party to the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael, he makes provisions once again for their deliverance.⁸¹ God promises Abraham that he will make Ishmael a nation just like Isaac, but in order for each son to be a nation, they must be separated (v. 13).

While Abraham must obey God, the narrator's presentation of how he followed through with God's command suggests that he mistreated Hagar and Ishmael (Gen 21:14). Early rabbinic commentators were frustrated and even embarrassed by Abraham sending away Hagar with only a skin of water.⁸² Their main concern was that Abraham was wealthy, so he could have sent them away with much more than he did.⁸³ In order to preserve their perception of Abraham's character, "their embarrassment...leads to their demonization of Hagar and Ishmael. Abraham's seeming miserliness is a sign that he saw them as sinners, idolators [sic], who could not stay in the same household as he and, especially, as Isaac."⁸⁴ The rabbis are right to point out this

⁷⁹ Tribble, "The Other Woman," 236.

⁸⁰ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 81.

⁸¹ Dennis, *Sarah Laughed*, 75.

⁸² Cf. *Exod. Rab.* 1:1.

⁸³ Cohen, "Hagar and Ishmael," 251. For Abraham's wealth, see Gen 12:16; 13:2; 14:14; 20:16; 23:16; 24:10; 25:8.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

minimal provision, but their conclusion is incorrect. Hagar and Ishmael do not deserve mistreatment, and instead of verse 14 pointing to Hagar and Ishmael's poor character, Abraham is the one presented poorly.

Verses 15–16 are emotionally evocative. After the water runs out, Hagar “casts” Ishmael under a bush. Then, she moves away about the distance of a bowshot. Reis describes the significance of this distance:

She says that she does not want to see her son die, but her meaning is that she does not want to hear her son die, to hear when his moaning stops. The word ‘see’ is used here in its sense of ‘to perceive’-just as she ‘saw’ that she had conceived (16.4). Had she literally been speaking of vision, she could have settled herself next to Ishmael with her back to him. Scripture speaks of bowshot, but Hagar withdraws beyond earshot.⁸⁵

Hagar believes her son will die, and there is nothing she can do to prevent it.⁸⁶ In her heartbreak, she does not even cry out to God. Alone in the wilderness with her dying son, she weeps.⁸⁷

In Hagar's distress, God once again steps in. The narrator says, “God hears” אֱלֹהִים שָׁמַע (Gen 21:17–18). In Gen 21:16, Hagar could only say “the boy” instead of Ishmael's name, possibly out of despair to lose him. Since verse 17 immediately references God hearing, it emphasizes God's attention and salvation (even if Hagar did not think anymore that “God

⁸⁵ Reis, “Hagar Required,” 101.

⁸⁶ There is a connection between Hagar having to watch the potential death of her son and Abraham having to “watch” the potential death of his son (Il-Seung Chung, “Hagar and Ishmael in Light of Abraham and Isaac: Reading Gen. 21:8–21 and Gen. 22:1–19 as a Dialogue,” *The Expository times* 128 (2017): 575). For more on the literary connections between Hagar and Abraham, as well as other prominent figures in the OT, see Nikaido, “Hagar and Ishmael...,” 219-42; Chung, “Hagar and Ishmael...,” 573–582.

⁸⁷ Tribble, “The Other Woman,” 235.

hears”).⁸⁸ The play on words also marks the plot turning point from despair to rescue.⁸⁹ Once again, God is attuned to the voice of distress and responds with rescue. God is a God who hears the cries of distress and moves toward redemption.⁹⁰ Not only does he rescue Ishmael and Hagar from physical death, but he does even more by again promising that Ishmael will be a “great nation” (Gen 21:18, cf. 16:10), just like he promised Abraham.⁹¹

The denouement of this narrative (Gen 21:19–21) presents the outcome of Hagar and Ishmael after the affliction they experienced at the hands of Abraham and Sarah. First, God provides water by opening her eyes, which again plays upon the motif of “sight.” It is unclear if Hagar simply did not see the well, if she closed her eyes, if God made it appear at that moment, or if he withheld her from seeing.⁹² Robinson suggests that she was so focused on her son’s pain that she did not see the well.⁹³ Regardless of exactly what this phrase means, the point is that God provided water.

The story of Hagar and Ishmael concludes with a depiction of the promises of God fulfilled to Ishmael. The narrator says that “God was with the boy” (וַיְהִי אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַנְּעָר). The construction אֶת (“with”) versus לִע (“with”) is less denoting of companionship like with Enoch and Noah.⁹⁴ Instead, it suggests God’s attention upon Ishmael.⁹⁵

⁸⁸ Dennis, *Sarah Laughed*, 78-79.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁹⁰ Cohen, “Hagar and Ishmael,” 253.

⁹¹ Cf. Gen 12:2.

⁹² Cohen, “Hagar and Ishmael,” 255.

⁹³ Robinson, “Characterization in the Hagar,” 212.

⁹⁴ Cf. 5:22, 24; 6:9.

⁹⁵ Reis, “Hagar Required,” 102.

While the focus of 17–21 is on delivering Ishmael from death, the resolution is also for Hagar. As a mother, Hagar appears to have received just what she needs as well: the rescue of her son.⁹⁶ Although Hagar is the one afflicted in chapter 16, the resolution is toward Ishmael specifically, but Hagar is rescued through the blessing on her son.

The description of Ishmael’s life follows closely to what the Lord promised in 16:13.⁹⁷ Although the wilderness is a place of exile throughout the rest of the Pentateuch, here it is a place where God hears and rescues his people.⁹⁸ The expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael into the wilderness, though seemingly cruel, implies release from slavery.⁹⁹ Hagar, and Ishmael, are no longer subservient to Sarah and Abraham. The story of Hagar and Ishmael concludes with God’s promises fulfilled in their life, and this promise is affirmed by the account of Ishmael’s descendants in Gen 25:12–18.¹⁰⁰

Analysis

The Hagar narrative is the first in Genesis to fulfill God’s promise of affliction (עֲנָה) from Gen 15:13. Thus, it establishes the author’s initial perspective on the motif of affliction throughout Genesis and the Pentateuch overall. In order to understand this perspective, this section will explore the characterization of affliction in Gen 16 and 21, raise the question of punishment to the oppressors, establish the theology of affliction, and assert what unique aspects the Hagar narrative adds to the motif of affliction.

⁹⁶ Dennis, *Sarah Laughed*, 81.

⁹⁷ Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 176.

⁹⁸ Saner, “Of Bottles and Wells,” 208.

⁹⁹ Heard, “On the Road,” 285.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Gen 17:20. For the aetiological purposes of chapter 21, see Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 234-35.

Characterization in the Hagar Narrative

The moral interpretation of the characters involved in the narratives of Gen 16 and 21 warrants analysis. Readers are often swayed by presuppositions regarding the characters. In a study of female reception of Sarah and Hagar performed by Nicole Simopoulos, it became evident that female readers are driven by their own experience when judging the women in the narrative.¹⁰¹ Specifically, Heard summarizes,

Upper-middle-class Caucasian women tended to sympathize with Sarah and to see Hagar as a home-wrecking mistress, but those who had experienced divorces themselves also identified with Hagar's loneliness and despair. Latina women from Mexico and Central America, but at the time living in Northern California, tended to emphasize Hagar's experience of displacement as an "exile" from Egypt living in Abraham's household. Black South African women resented Sarah's abusiveness—including forcing Hagar to sleep with Abraham in the first place—and saw Hagar as an exploited worker.¹⁰²

Ultimately, the women in Simopoulos' study were quick to empathize with the character most like them. Their assessment of the morality of each woman did not depend upon cues from the narrator, but upon their own perspectives.

Lest it appear that a tendency to misread the morality of Hagar, Sarah, Abraham, Ishmael, and even the Lord's actions, is solely the mistake of a lay reader, take the examples of Martin Luther and Phyllis Trible. Luther viewed Hagar as sinful because she sought honors above her station, and he considered her return to Sarah repentance from sin and a confirmation that Hagar

¹⁰¹ Nicole M. Simopoulos, "Who Was Hagar? Mistress, Divorcee, Exile, or Exploited Worker: An Analysis of Contemporary Grassroots Readings of Genesis 16 by Caucasian, Latina, and Black South African Women," in *Reading Other-Wise: Socially Engaged Biblical Scholars Reading with Their Local Communities*, ed. Gerald O. West (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 63-72.

¹⁰² Heard, "On the Road," 284.

was originally in the wrong.¹⁰³ He goes so far as to consider her attitude saintly.¹⁰⁴ Overly exalting Hagar in this manner is a misreading of the text on par with demonizing her. Similarly, Tribble summarizes the presentation of Hagar's affliction: "This Egyptian woman is stricken, smitten by God and afflicted for the transgressions of Israel. She is bruised for the iniquities of Sarah and Abraham; upon her is the chastisement that makes them whole."¹⁰⁵ Tribble uses the language of Isaiah 53:5 to describe Hagar, which is language describing the suffering servant.¹⁰⁶ The utilization of this language for Hagar is unwarranted, possibly even disrespectful to the true suffering servant.

The exegesis of the two narratives provided by this research attempts to strike a balance. The characters in Gen 16 and 21, apart from the Lord himself, behave in a thoroughly human way, and usually it is not in an exemplary fashion.¹⁰⁷ In the Sarah and Hagar conflict particularly, each one is sympathetic in their own way, and their individual motives are thoroughly complex.¹⁰⁸

Still, the narrator suggests that the reader should lean toward sympathizing more with Hagar. Sarai's servant is in a challenging position. Hagar is forced into a providing a child,

¹⁰³ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 15-20* (vol. 3 of *Luther's Works*, American Edition [55 Vols.; ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann; St. Louis: Concordia, 1961]), 70.

¹⁰⁴ Heard, "On the Road," 281.

¹⁰⁵ Tribble, "The Other Woman," 238-39.

¹⁰⁶ J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 378. I openly admit my limited experience in Isaiah studies. Nonetheless, the example of Tribble's exaggeration stands. For a full work on this passage, see Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser, *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2012).

¹⁰⁷ Robinson, "Characterization in the Hagar," 215.

¹⁰⁸ Pace, *The Women of Genesis*, 20-21.

which the text does not imply she wished to do.¹⁰⁹ Then, when she does what her mistress wished her to do, Hagar is abused for it, though there is evidence that she did taunt Sarai in some way (Gen 16:4).¹¹⁰ Ultimately, the Lord's attention to Hagar and Ishmael solidifies the narrator's intention. Even though Hagar is not characteristically righteous, she is a sympathetic character precisely because God takes up her cause.¹¹¹

Punishment to Sarah and Abraham

The narrative shows no evidence that God judged Sarah and Abraham for their mistreatment of Hagar. Based on God's promise to judge the nation that afflicts (עַוְנָה) Abraham's seed (Gen 15:14), a reader would expect to see God chastise Sarah and Abraham, at least in a small way. The question of why they are not chastised is a concern. However, given the lack of textual comment on this question, there is little that is safe to say without straying into speculation. Nonetheless, God's favor on Abram and Sarai as the chosen people may explain why the narrator does not portray chastisement on them where the reader might expect to see it (cf. Gen 12:11-18; 20). As the motif of affliction continues throughout Genesis, potential judgment on oppressors in the text may yet appear. Nonetheless, though God does not punish Abraham and Sarah, he certainly rescues Hagar and Ishmael from their suffering.

God's Attention to Affliction

Hagar is the first person in the Bible to receive a divine visit, and it is prompted by her unjust mistreatment. His deep concern for the oppressed is evinced by the Lord's visit. The

¹⁰⁹ Ashley Starr-Morris, "Leah and Hagar: An Intergenerational Conversation of Belonging," *Cross Currents* 69 (2019): 389.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Nikaido, "Hagar and Ishmael...", 229.

Lord's attention to Hagar and Ishmael demonstrates "divine concern for the oppressed and [a] desire for their liberation."¹¹² When the Lord hears the cries of Hagar and Ishmael, he responds (16:11, 14; 21:17). The attention and response of the Lord is a unique in the Torah, which emphasizes God's care for the afflicted.¹¹³

However, the affliction is an opportunity for the Lord to provide blessings, so it works out for good in that way. The Lord promises blessing to Hagar because of her suffering. However, for Hagar to be privy to that blessing, she must return to her mistress and submit to her (Gen 16:9). The Lord commands Hagar to put aside her pride and not view her mistress with contempt any longer. This is a command of humility and lowliness. The Lord expects her to obey in order that she can take part in his blessing on his terms (Gen 16:9–13; 21:13, 17–21). Although the Lord responds to her suffering with an offer of redemption, it is necessary for Hagar to become humble in order to receive it.

Hagar and Ishmael's experience is emblematic of Israel's experience in Egypt (Exod 3:7–10). In a similar way to Gen 15:13–16, this passage alludes to the affliction of Israel in Egypt. In Exod 3:7, the Lord says, "Surely I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and their groaning I have heard" (רָאָה רְאִיתִי אֶת-עֲנֵי עַמִּי אֲשֶׁר בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֶת-צַעֲקוֹתָם שָׁמַעְתִּי). The vivid similarities between the Lord's speeches in Gen 16:11 and Exod 3:7 make this connection a fertile ground for research, and much has been done.¹¹⁴ Saner writes of the comparison, "God sees the afflicted, comes to their aid and, in the process, enables them (or their

¹¹² Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 12.

¹¹³ Cohen, "Hagar and Ishmael," 253.

¹¹⁴ For some examples, see Saner, "Of Bottles and Wells," 199-208; Reis, "Hagar Required," 88; Seth Postell, "Abram as Israel, Israel as Abram: Literary Analogy as Macro-Structural Strategy in the Torah," *TynBul* 67 (2016): 173-74

representative) to perceive God.”¹¹⁵ Since Hagar’s affliction anticipates Israel’s, her rescue also anticipates Israel’s.¹¹⁶

The Hagar Narrative’s Contribution to the Motif of Affliction

Since the affliction motif appears throughout Genesis and into Exodus, it is necessary to outline what Hagar’s narrative adds to the motif that the other narratives do not. First, Hagar is a foreigner, an outsider from the family of Abraham. The Hagar narrative shows that God is a God of outsiders.¹¹⁷ Through Hagar, a whole new nation is birthed.¹¹⁸ Even though this nation is not the chosen people, the Israelites, God still blesses and protects them as his own people.¹¹⁹ Of course, Ishmael does become circumcised, but he is still not identified as an “Israelite” (Gen 17:19–23).

Not only is Hagar a foreigner, there is no evidence that Hagar is a YHWH worshipper before her encounter with the messenger of the Lord. Reis asserts, “as the Lord deals with his faithful, so does he deal with deserving non-believers. Through the narrative of Israelite history, readers learn that afflicting the disadvantaged is an abomination to God, whoever the victims.”¹²⁰ Theologically, the suggestion that non-believers receive the same treatment as believers is questionable. In this case, though, God rescues an unbeliever who is abused from believers. This

¹¹⁵ Saner, “Of Bottles and Wells,” 205.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 199.

¹¹⁷ Robinson, “Characterization in the Hagar,” 207.

¹¹⁸ Pigott, “Hagar: The M/Other Patriarch,” 528.

¹¹⁹ Starr-Morris, “Leah and Hagar,” 394.

¹²⁰ Reis, “Hagar Requited,” 106.

shows that God does not look kindly on abusers, whether they are believers or not.¹²¹ Unjust affliction is an abomination to the Lord, no matter who the victim.

Lastly, Hagar does not escape oppression. Instead, she must return to it. The Lord commands Hagar to submit further to her mistress. It appears that the divine command is to a life of subservience, so she is not free until Gen 21.¹²² However, her immediate rescue is in the blessing of a son.¹²³ This suggests that God's purpose was not to alleviate her servitude, but alleviate her suffering through the message that he has a relationship with her and Ishmael, too.

The story is not about Hagar being an afflicted woman; it is about God being a God of justice and compassion.¹²⁴ Some female scholars, such as Phyllis Trible and Nina Rulon-Miller, emphasize the male versus female conflicts in the text.¹²⁵ Rulon-Miller's interpretation reaches epic male-hatred when describing the Lord himself as "leaving Hagar to fend for herself," and she calls this not an unexpected move from "a homosocializing Patriarch."¹²⁶ She writes, "When there is another male around to collude with, the woman will be diminished."¹²⁷ She asserts that any promise made to Hagar and Ishmael occurs solely because of their connection to Abraham.¹²⁸ In this reading of Gen 16 and 21, Rulon-Miller downplays God's attention to Hagar

¹²¹ For example, after the Exodus, God commands the Israelites not to perpetuate the cycle of affliction (Exod 22:22–23) (Reis, "Hagar Requited," 109).

¹²² Trible, "The Other Woman," 228.

¹²³ Dennis, *Sarah Laughed*, 70.

¹²⁴ Reis, "Hagar Requited," 76.

¹²⁵ Trible, "The Other Woman," 221-38; Nina Rulon-Miller, "Hagar: A Woman with an Attitude," in *The World of Genesis: Persons, Places, Perspectives*. Eds. Philip R. Davies and David J. A. Clines. (London: Bloomsbury, 1998): 78-79.

¹²⁶ Rulon-Miller, "Hagar," 78.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 78-79.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

and focuses on God's attention to Abraham. Furthermore, it undercuts Hagar's personal need for the protection of her son. Hagar desires God to protect Ishmael. God's promises to Ishmael comfort Hagar to the point of obedience in both Gen 16:13–16 and Gen 21:17–21. An overly feminist reading of Hagar does not accurately represent the text. Instead, the emphasis must be on God's mercy and compassion toward the victim of oppression, even the victim of his chosen people, Abraham and Sarah.

Conclusion

Genesis 16 and 21 make evident the vastness of God's mercy and justice. He attends to an Egyptian slave woman alone in the wilderness who has been afflicted by the progenitors of the Hebrew people, Abraham and Sarah. Furthermore, God makes a promise to Hagar that her son would become a great nation. God uses her affliction to bring her to a point where he intervenes, humbles her, and blesses her. Hagar had no hope, but God finds her, makes himself known, and by it, reveals himself in Scripture as the God of the afflicted.

Chapter 4:

Jacob: The Afflicted Deceiver

Introduction

Jacob is arguably the most complicated character in the book of Genesis. In the Jacob narrative, there are a host of interpretive issues, such as Jacob's multiple encounters with the Lord, his deceptions of Esau, his character arc, the relationship between himself and the people of Israel, and more. In this research on the affliction motif in Genesis, the focus must be narrowed to the use of "affliction" (עָנָה) in Gen 31:42. The Jacob narrative, specifically his sojourn with Laban, adds a new layer to the motif of affliction in Genesis. Elements of Jacob's life and character contribute new information to the motif of affliction in Genesis. For this reason, several pericopes of Jacob's narrative must be analyzed in order to interpret Gen 31:42 accurately. Jacob's narrative adds to the motif of affliction in Genesis because it portrays Jacob's slow process of coming to trust in God and how God uses Jacob's affliction by Laban to encourage this process and to further his covenant promise.

Textual Background to the Jacob-Laban Narrative

Jacob's background story sets up the affliction experience he undergoes with Laban. Genesis 25–28 presents Jacob and his family as shrouded with an underlayer of deception and strife. To begin with, Rebekah instructs Jacob to deceive his father Isaac, which engages both her and her son in the lie against Isaac and Esau.¹ Rebekah's influence on Jacob teaches him that

¹ David Zucker explores the possibility that Isaac was just as responsible for the deception. He even argues that Isaac and Rebekah were working together to dupe Jacob so that Jacob was not fooling anybody when he tricked Isaac (David Zucker, "The Deceiver Deceived: Rereading Genesis 27," *JBQ* 39 [2011]: 46-47). However, there is

essentially “the ends justify the means.”² Ultimately, because of Rebekah’s deception, she achieves for Jacob the covenantal blessing on Jacob that had been prophesied for him from her womb (Gen 25:23). Rebekah’s actions display to her son that the deception is worth achieving any desired result, which likely plays a role in Jacob’s later decisions to continue in trickery (Gen 30:40; 31:20; 33:17).

Before Jacob leaves, Isaac gives a further covenantal blessing to Jacob, establishing the Lord’s presence with Jacob (Gen 28:3–4). The blessing highlights the reality that will characterize the rest of Jacob’s life—sojourning. **גַּל**, “to sojourn,” becomes a key word in the Jacob narrative, not only in the twenty years he is in service to Laban, but even afterwards when he ends up in the foreign land of Egypt (cf. Gen 46:1–7).³

After Jacob flees, he has his first known personal encounter with the Lord (Gen 28:12–22). Steinmann suggests that this encounter allows Jacob to be released from a rivalry with Esau for blessing and to recognize God’s choice of him—no rivalry is necessary.⁴ God’s covenant

little convincing evidence in his article, and any textual analysis he presents twists the text to support his own theory. The text presents Rebekah and Jacob as the deceivers, not Isaac.

² Pinchas Kahn, “Jacob’s Choice in Genesis 25:19–28:9,” *JBQ* 29 (2001): 83. Kahn suggests that the similarity between “Aramean” and **רמאי**, “deceiver,” (from the root **רמ** “to deceive,” found in Gen 29:35) denotes a connection between the Arameans and deceit (Kahn, “Jacob’s Choice...,” 82). There is little evidence for the etymology of “Aramean” as from the root **רמ**, but the phonetic similarities denote a pun if nothing more. In light of this pun, Kahn suggests that Rebekah as an “Aramean” implies contrasting ideas of how to raise Jacob, namely, whether Jacob would be raised in accordance to the ethics of Abraham or in the deceitful reputation of the Arameans. There is little conclusive evidence of a deceitful tendency in the lineage of Rebekah before Laban, Rebekah, and her son Jacob. Kahn suggests that even though Rebekah separates from her family early on (cf. Gen 24:54–58), and thus from the tradition of deceit, she reverts to that role in Gen 27 (Kahn, “Jacob’s Choice...,” 82–83).

³ C. A. Strine, “The Study of Involuntary Migration as a Hermeneutical Guide for Reading the Jacob Narrative,” *BibInt* 26 (2018): 486. Notice also in Gen 28:3–4 the minor fulfillment of God’s declaration, given in Gen 15:13, of the sojourning of the Israelites.

⁴ Andrew E. Steinmann, *Genesis*, TOTC (Downers Grove: IVP, 2019), 276.

with Jacob “rests on the bedrock of God’s own initiative and covenantal fidelity.”⁵ However, in a response that becomes typical of Jacob’s character, he accepts the covenant conditionally: he says, “if” (God blesses me, etc.), “then the Lord will be my God” (Gen 28:20–21). The rest of Jacob’s narrative depicts God continually present with Jacob, but Jacob does not always recognize this and instead struggles by his own might.⁶ Even after God’s specific announcement of blessing and attention on him, Jacob accepts it skeptically. Thus, his tendency to rely on his own strength instead of trusting that God is with him continues for most of his life. Through Jacob’s affliction at the hands of Laban, God begins to reverse that tendency.

Exegesis of Genesis 29:1–30

After leaving his family, Jacob arrives in Haran and quickly meets Rachel, Laban’s daughter. The betrothal scene between Jacob and Rachel in Gen 29 lacks any mention of God, which is especially noticeable when this chapter is compared to Gen 24.⁷ However, the passage is not devoid of divine activity. First, it comes just after Jacob’s encounter with God in chapter 28. Second, Jacob’s ability to move the stone from the well on his own may indicate a divine enablement. Nevertheless, the divine handiwork does not negate the implications of Jacob’s failure to mention God. In Gen 24, Abraham’s servant gave explicit honor to God and even prayed to him for guidance before meeting Rebekah (Gen 24:12–14). Jacob’s dichotomous

⁵ John E. Anderson, “Jacob, Laban, and a Divine Trickster?: The Covenantal Framework of God’s Deception in the Theology of the Jacob Cycle,” *PRSt* 36 (2009): 10.

⁶ Todd L. Patterson, *The Plot-structure of Genesis: ‘Will the Righteous Seed Survive?’ In the Muthos-Logical Movement from Complication to Denouement* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 160.

⁷ 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: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 93-94. Mention of God is not a necessary betrothal element, but it is certainly a contrast between Gen 24 and 29.

behavior in this scene “reveals something of Jacob’s essence.”⁸ Instead of revealing a new-found trust in the Lord because of his encounter in chapter 28, Jacob reveals a self-reliant nature.

The lead-up to Jacob’s time with Laban and his family depicts an ideal living situation. Laban and Jacob’s relationship starts with promise. Laban greets Jacob warmly and takes him in to the family (Gen 29:13–14). He also refuses to let Jacob work for him without any wage (מִשְׁכָּרְתָּהּ). Although seemingly a kind offer, wages (root: שָׁכַר) and service (root: עָבַד) here introduce what becomes a paradigm for the next twenty years of Jacob’s life.⁹ While work and payment are not inherently bad, to Jacob, they become a channel for his affliction at the hands of Laban.¹⁰ Because Jacob was in such a vulnerable position, Laban was able to leverage power over Jacob for the next twenty years.¹¹ Laban acts like a loving uncle, but his mind is on the materialistic gain he can force out of Jacob.¹²

Instead of following through on his deal with Jacob, Laban’s wife swap presents the first conflict in Jacob’s situation with Laban (Gen 29:25).¹³ Jacob demands of Laban, “Why did you betray me?” The verb for betray (רָמָה) “often describes personal betrayal by family (1 Sam

⁸ Patterson, *The Plot-structure of Genesis*, 156.

⁹ J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 126.

¹⁰ Steinmann, *Genesis*, 290.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Strine, “The Study...,” 494.

¹³ Sailhamer asserts that it was God’s intention for Jacob to marry Leah, not Rachel, so that God used Laban’s tricks to subvert Jacob’s wrong intentions (John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993], 195). God’s blessing of Leah by placing her in the line of promise through Judah encourages, but not proves, this theory.

19:7), servants (2 Sam 19:26[MT v. 27]), or friends (1 Chr 12:18; Prov 26:19; Lam 1:19).¹⁴ So, this betrayal is one that occurs between those in a close, day-to-day relationship, not a political betrayal. Laban attempts to justify his betrayal by telling Jacob that his request for Rachel was inappropriate. His protest to Jacob suggests that marrying Rachel would violate a firmly established social custom, so it would warrant rebuke if they did such a thing.¹⁵ Laban voices his rationale, saying, “It is not done this way in our place to give the younger before the older one” (Gen 29:26). Ironically, placing the younger (Jacob) before the older one (Esau) is exactly why Jacob ended up in Haran with Laban, and now Laban places the older (Leah) before the younger (Rachel).¹⁶ Apparently, in a high act of poetic justice, Jacob’s past actions had now caught up with him.¹⁷

While it is noticeably common for scholars to point out the poetic justice of Laban’s deception of Jacob, the presence of poetic justice does not necessarily assert that Laban had the “right” to deceive Jacob or that Jacob “deserved” his affliction at the hands of Laban. Sailhamer describes the deception as deserved “repayment for his treatment of Esau.”¹⁸ However, why would Laban pay Jacob back for something he did to Esau and not himself? It is more likely that while Laban did not have the right to mistreat Jacob, God used the moment of mistreatment to

¹⁴ K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 470. See also Eugene Carpenter and Michael A. Grisanti, “רַחֵם,” *NIDOTTE* 3.1122-23.

¹⁵ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18-50*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 263.

¹⁶ Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 194.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*; Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 53; Steinmann, *Genesis, 277*; Fokkeman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 129.

¹⁸ Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 194.

discipline Jacob.¹⁹ Jacob's character development through the affliction offers a theological picture to understand one reason why God allows affliction. Later portions of the narrative will speak more clearly to this issue.

Exegesis of Genesis 30:25–31:1²⁰

Jacob's attempt at resolving his own affliction starts out as a self-reliant plan meant to increase his wealth, but God still blesses the plan in order to rescue Jacob from affliction. After the birth of Joseph, Jacob decides to start plans for his departure (Gen 30:25–26).²¹ Naturally, Laban seeks to keep him there for as little cost to himself as possible. He uses honeyed language to persuade him to stay (Gen 30:27). Laban says "If I have found favor in your eyes..." perhaps to feign respect, or it may show that Jacob is not intimidated by Laban, as Steinmann suggests (v. 27).²² As the *paterfamilias*, Laban certainly held some authority over Jacob in general, but Steinmann's observation highlights that Jacob could leave if he wished to, without Laban stopping him. Still, Jacob wished to acquire wealth before leaving.²³

Even though Laban afflicted Jacob, God allows Jacob's work to prosper Laban's assets. Laban's next statement in 30:27 illustrates the blessing he (a foreigner) received through Israel, which is a miniature realization of God's promise to bless the nations (cf. Gen 12:3).²⁴ Laban

¹⁹ See also Anderson, *Jacob...*, 99-100 for a fuller treatment of this issue.

²⁰ The account of Jacob's progeny through his children (Gen 29:31–30:24) is important to the overall narrative, but it does not tie significantly to Jacob's affliction at the hands of Laban. A fuller analysis of Rachel and Leah's birthing narrative is reserved for chapter 5 of this thesis.

²¹ The opening temporal clause in the passage (Gen 30:25) indicates a new pericope (Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, WBC 2 [Dallas: Word, 1994], 252). The pericope ends with a summation of Jacob's success in gaining the flocks (Gen 31:1) (Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 252, 258).

²² Steinmann, *Genesis*, 288.

²³ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 301.

²⁴ Anderson, *Jacob...*, 108. See Gen 14:20; 18:23–33; 23:16; 26:28–30 for other examples of the nations who profit through Abraham and Isaac, though some potential benefits are not actualized (cf. Gen 18:23–33).

personally benefits from God’s blessing on Jacob.²⁵ Furthermore, the announcement that God’s בְּרָכָה (“blessing”) was continually prospering Jacob comes from the mouth of the betrayer himself.²⁶ Not only is it remarkable for a non-YHWH worshipper to recognize that the Lord blesses Jacob, he even uses the personal name YHWH. His use of the divine name is ironic because Jacob was not the one to recognize God’s hand of blessing, the man who himself had a personal encounter with the Lord (cf. Gen 28:12–22).²⁷ Because Jacob overlooked this reality, it is another peg in the characterization of Jacob as “blind” to the workings of the Lord in his life. Ironically, God blessing the flock under Jacob ends up solely benefitting Jacob because he brings it all with him when he leaves. The blessing did not remain with Laban, but it was a means for protecting Jacob’s resources and providing a way for Jacob to escape affliction.

The blessing ultimately transfers back to Jacob as a punishment for Laban’s deceit. Although Laban appears to be honest when he and Jacob make an agreement, Laban betrays him once again in order to avoid losing his own flock (Gen 30:35–36). Anderson points out, “Nothing in the narrative reveals Laban’s intention to turn these animals over to Jacob as a wage.”²⁸ At this point in his time with Laban, Jacob apparently knows Laban well enough to suspect treachery because he takes measures to ensure that he will get the pay due to him. In a

Genesis 30:27 is still the first use of the term בְּרָכָה to express God’s blessing on a foreigner, and the former examples do not explicitly use “blessing” language.

²⁵ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 142.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Anderson, “Jacob, Laban...,” 14. On the ANE relevance of the verb נִחַשְׁתִּי (“I have seen by divination”) see Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 211; Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 496; Malcolm J. A. Horsnell, “קִסָּם,” *NIDOTTE* 3.945-51.

²⁸ Anderson, *Jacob...*, 110.

move typical to Jacob's character, Jacob "repays deception with deception."²⁹ Jacob once again opts for trickery in order to avoid the backlash of the mistreatment from Laban he knows all too well.

Surprisingly, Jacob finds great success in his plan, even though he resorts to trickery to alleviate his affliction. The process of breeding the flocks continued over his six years of further service (cf. Gen 31:41). Morrison outlines the ANE background of this passage, and she points out that the recorded turnover for the Nuzi flocks was around 6.5 years.³⁰ Thus, in the six years that Jacob worked the flock for his wages, it is possible that all of Laban's flocks could have died off and been replaced by the animals marked as Jacob's.³¹ Furthermore, the scene of Jacob breeding the flocks is filled with wordplays and puns which "add comedy to the narrative."³² The most prominent pun is the movement from the sheep no longer being white (לָבָן), and thus, no longer Laban's (לָבָן).³³ The pun highlights that "Jacob is not stealing Laban's flocks but that Laban's flocks are being *transformed* into Jacob's."³⁴ Jacob's plan is an overwhelming success which ends with his wealth greatly increased.

Although this information is withheld until chapter 31, the reality is that Jacob's success is due to the hand of God, which is quite a turn of events given that it means God blessed Jacob's

²⁹ Anderson, *Jacob...*, 111.

³⁰ Martha A. Morrison, "The Jacob and Laban Narrative in Light of Near Eastern Sources," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 46 (1983): 158.

³¹ Ibid. See Gen 31:1.

³² Song-Mi Suzie Park, "Transformation and Demarcation of Jacob's 'Flocks' in Genesis 30:25–43," *CBQ* 72 (2010): 669.

³³ Park, "Transformation and Demarcation..." 671; Robert L. Alden, "לָבָן," *NIDOTTE* 2.754.

³⁴ Park, "Transformation and Demarcation..." 671; italics in original.

deceit (cf. Gen 31:9). This suggests that God is willing to sanction deceitful plans in order to rescue Jacob from affliction. Jacob's breeding method is notoriously unorthodox, and there is little evidence that it would have worked.³⁵ Taken in light of his wives' struggle for children in the previous narrative, the reality is that both successes are linked directly to God's intervention.³⁶ Just as God made Rachel and Leah fertile, he brought success to Jacob's breeding strategy (cf. Gen 29:31–35; 30:2, 17–24). Jacob's bargain led to blessing and great wealth, and the point of the narrative is to show that the blessing came from God and not from Jacob's own doing.³⁷ God blessed an unorthodox plan in order to rescue Jacob from his affliction at the hands of Laban.³⁸

Exegesis of Genesis 31:2–21

Genesis 31:1–3 presents what could be the pivotal turning point in Jacob's life.³⁹ This growth shapes the motif of affliction because it reveals part of God's purpose in allowing Jacob to experience affliction. God commands Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your ancestors, and I will be with you" (Gen 31:3). This command is reminiscent of God's command to Abram.⁴⁰ Both commands required the men to leave their place of livelihood. Jacob's subsequent obedience to this command expresses a notable recognition of the Lord as his authority as well as Jacob's trust in the fidelity of the Lord's promises.⁴¹ An important aspect of

³⁵ For a brief discussion of the possible science behind Jacob's plan, see Joshua Backon, "Jacob and the Spotted Sheep: The Role of Prenatal Nutrition on Epigenetics of Fur Color," *JBQ* 36 (2008): 263-65.

³⁶ Patterson, *The Plot-structure of Genesis*, 161.

³⁷ Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 195.

³⁸ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 492.

³⁹ Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 196.

⁴⁰ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 270. See Gen 12:1.

⁴¹ Anderson, *Jacob...*, 123.

Jacob's obedience is that he did not know what kind of welcome he would receive from his estranged family.⁴² Jacob's obedience to the Lord's command suggests that he may finally have reached a right spiritual stance before the God of his fathers. Jacob's behavior after this moment will reveal that Jacob has indeed grown, but he has not had a true turning point in his character.

Jacob's conversation with his wives adds significant information to the narrative. The narrator had withheld the revelation that God is responsible for Jacob's success (Gen 31:9–13).⁴³ This revelation is the central theological affirmation of the narrative.⁴⁴ The revelation occurs after the fact (a frequent feature of biblical narrative) and serves to suppress the details for effect and/or until the opportune moment.⁴⁵ The moment of revelation occurs here after Jacob's struggle with Laban for wage because it brings to the forefront that only God can "upset the equilibrium between the two deceivers Jacob and Laban."⁴⁶ After the back and forth of the men and right before their final confrontation, the narrator contends that God is the one who resolves and will resolve their struggle (Gen 31:5–13).

Genesis 31:5–13 is important for the motif of affliction because it addresses God's attention to Jacob's affliction. It is God's intervention that alleviates, though not yet fully resolves, Jacob's affliction.⁴⁷ In verse 12, Jacob tells his wives that God said, "I saw all that Laban did to you." Fokkelman explains that "God's last sentence, v. 12b, contains the words of

⁴² Anderson, *Jacob...*, 123.

⁴³ Sailhamer, "Genesis," 249.

⁴⁴ Anderson, *Jacob...*, 116, 118-19.

⁴⁵ Anderson, "Jacob, Laban...", 19-20.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Erhard Blum, "The Jacob Tradition," in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, eds. Craig Evans, et. al. (Leiden: Brill, 2012): 184.

deliverance, which are often used when people are in distress or are suppressed, and which indicate God's mercy."⁴⁸ Fokkelman points out a key collocation for the motif of affliction, and that is God's perception (seeing or hearing) of affliction and his subsequent action to resolve. This same pronouncement came forth in Gen 16:11, and it preceded the Lord's blessing of Ishmael.⁴⁹ In the same way, God's perception in Jacob's narrative cues the forthcoming resolution (Gen 31:36–54).

Interestingly, Jacob's form of obeying God's command to leave Laban resulted in (once again) deceiving Laban through covertly fleeing him (Gen 31:20). Jacob realizes how angry Laban is with him, so he decides to flee (ברח) secretly from Laban, just as Hagar fled (ברח) secretly from Sarah (Gen 31:20; cf. Gen 16:7). There is no textual evidence that the Lord is displeased with Jacob's deceit.⁵⁰ Regardless of Jacob's consistent deceit, God blesses Jacob in spite of them and certainly not because of them (Gen 31:7).⁵¹

The unit ends on a low point with Jacob fleeing in fear (Gen 31:17–22; cf. Gen 31:31). He left to escape Esau before, and now he flees Laban (cf. Gen 27:41–45). Mathews writes, "Jacob's comings and goings were marked by fearful escapes. His life of deception entailed personal and family cost."⁵² Jacob's continual deceit puts him once again in a place of conflict where he faces personal danger.

⁴⁸ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 156. The concept is also found in Gen 16:13, 29:32, 31:42; Exod 2:25, 3:7, 9, 16.

⁴⁹ See chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁵⁰ Charles Mabee, "Jacob and Laban: The Structure of Judicial Proceedings (Genesis XXXI 25–42)," *VT* 30 (1980): 194.

⁵¹ Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 196.

⁵² Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 520. A full analysis of God's complicity in Jacob's deception or God's choice of a person so continually deceitful is beyond the scope of this discussion on affliction, but the topic will be addressed briefly in the analysis sections of this work. For a fuller discussion, see Anderson, *Jacob...*, 120–22.

Exegesis of Genesis 31:22–42

In Gen 31:22–42, Laban chases Jacob, overtakes him, and charges Jacob for his deceitful activities. There is little question that Jacob has acted wrongly by running. Although the reader knows that Jacob did not steal the gods, he broke his contractual agreement with Laban by running without first settling his contract with Laban.⁵³ Even though Jacob fled affliction, he broke custom and can only hope for pardon.⁵⁴ The outcome of Jacob’s deceit outlines God’s hand in the resolution to Jacob’s affliction.

The previous unit (Gen 31:2–21) revealed God’s attention to and protection of Jacob during his time with Laban. Here, God’s continued protection is fully evident through his warning to Laban in verse 24.⁵⁵ God says to Laban, “Be careful (or “Watch yourself,” CSB) not to speak with Jacob either good or evil” (Gen 31:24). God’s resolution to Jacob’s affliction is actualized through divine protection.⁵⁶ Verse 29 makes known that Laban was rightfully able to punish Jacob for his recent action. Here, Laban is the judicial authority: the *paterfamilias*. God was the single entity higher than the judicial authority, the only one who could possibly overrule Laban’s word, and he indeed intervenes for Jacob.⁵⁷

In verse 30, Laban’s emphasis on the theft of the gods highlights the unjustness of what he thinks is Jacob’s wrongdoing. Hamilton explains, “Laban respected Jacob’s God, but Jacob

⁵³ Mabee, “Jacob and Laban,” 195.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 198. A discussion of the household gods is beyond the scope of this research. See Morrison, “The Jacob and Laban...,” 161-62; Mabee, “Jacob and Laban,” 194; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 301; Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 273-74.

⁵⁵ Anderson, “Jacob, Laban...,” 22.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 301; Mabee, “Jacob and Laban,” 199.

has not respected Laban's gods."⁵⁸ If Jacob did steal his gods, then Laban may feel more personal reason to punish Jacob, especially since he himself showed respect to the Lord.

Jacob does not deny the charges at first, but he tries to justify his actions by saying that he ran in fear of losing his household (Gen 31:31). Jacob had said no such thing to his wives, and God did not mention it to Jacob.⁵⁹ Although it is possible that Jacob made it up on the spot to give an excuse, there is also the reality that Laban may rightly have kept things that belonged to Jacob.⁶⁰ Jacob does not deny a breach of trust on his part, but he puts himself "at the mercy of the court."⁶¹ Even though he has just heard from Laban's own mouth that God is protecting him, Jacob still pleads extenuating circumstances.

Jacob continues to seek his own justification by urging Laban to search for the gods (Gen 31:32). Jacob is not surprised when Laban did not find the gods because Jacob did not know Rachel had taken them (Gen 31:32). He views the empty search as a means for self-justification rather than simply appealing further to the Lord. Jacob evidently gains motivation and confidence because he moves into a lengthy description of his grievances in order to state his case.⁶²

Verse 36 says that Jacob **גִּבַּח** ("to debate," or "contend") with Laban, which is a term that denotes either a legal debate or a personal remonstrance outside the legal sphere.⁶³ Typically,

⁵⁸ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 301.

⁵⁹ See Gen 31:3–13.

⁶⁰ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 302.

⁶¹ Mabee, "Jacob and Laban," 199–200.

⁶² Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 173.

⁶³ John M. Bracke, "גִּבַּח," *NIDOTTE* 3.1105; see also Mabee, "Jacob and Laban," 203.

scholars interpret Jacob’s defense in legal terms.⁶⁴ Even recognizing this, Fokkelman still describes Jacob’s speech as giving Laban “a piece of his mind.”⁶⁵ He is “forceful, unafraid to assert his rights, and even accusatory.”⁶⁶ Jacob both asserts his legal rights and speaks from his twenty years of frustration.

Jacob begins his בִּינִי speech by using raised diction to stress the fact that he has done no wrong or transgression to Laban.⁶⁷ In fact, the whole speech is expressed in poetic diction, such as repetitive parallelism (vv. 36b–37a, among others), chiasmus (vv. 39 and 40, among others), and some formal archaisms, like the ending on the passive participle יִגְבַּהֲתִי (v. 39).⁶⁸ The heightened language intends to articulate Jacob’s rightness as a shepherd, similarly to 31:6 when he expresses to his wives the good work he did as shepherd.⁶⁹ Based on the ANE law code explained by Morrison, Jacob indeed has gone above and beyond his responsibilities.⁷⁰ For example, his attention to “making good the losses” of Laban’s flock was not a typical requirement of an ANE shepherd.⁷¹

⁶⁴ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 173; Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996), 173.

⁶⁵ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 160.

⁶⁶ Strine, “The Study...,” 495-96.

⁶⁷ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 173; Alter, *Genesis*, 172-73.

⁶⁸ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 173-75; Alter, *Genesis*, 173. For a strong discussion of the poetry in Jacob’s speech, see Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 173-83.

⁶⁹ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 160.

⁷⁰ Morrison, “The Jacob and Laban...,” 157-60.

⁷¹ Alter, *Genesis*, 173. The piel use of אָטַף changes the meaning from “to sin” to “to remove sin,” i.e. “to purify,” so the connotations between the two stems for this verb are incredibly dichotomous (“אָטַף,” HALOT 305; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 307). In the context of Gen 31:39, an accurate translation is “to make restitution” (“אָטַף,” HALOT 305; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 307).

In verse 42, Jacob directs attention to God’s protection over him. He says, “If not for the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the dread of Isaac upon me, surely, now you would have sent me away empty-handed (v. 42).”⁷² This statement is one of the most significant statements—if not *the* most—of Jacob’s faith in the whole *toledoth*.⁷³ At this point in the narrative, the reader can (once again) wonder if this is Jacob’s turning point.⁷⁴ How Jacob conducts himself after this point will address this question.

Jacob’s statement continues. He declares, “God has seen (הִרְאָה) my affliction (צָרָה) and the toil of my hands” (Gen 31:42). Jacob *should* point out that God has protected him. However, his claims of rightness as a shepherd serves to preface the reason why God considers him right.⁷⁵ Patterson says, “For Jacob, even God’s help has come because of his struggling.”⁷⁶ In other words, by prattling on about his success and uprightness as a shepherd and afterwards emphasizing that God saw the “toil of his hands,” Jacob expresses that he thinks God has mercy on him *because he earned it*. Thus, since Jacob sees that God had judged him legally righteous, Jacob has turned to Laban to prosecute him instead of the other way around.⁷⁷

⁷² The title קִפְחֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (“the terror of Isaac”) emphasizes that “Isaac’s God is the God who can implant fear into the hearts of those who seek to harm his people. That is exactly what God did when he spoke to Laban (see vv. 24, 29)” (Steinmann, *Genesis*, 303). God had put fear into the heart of Laban so that he would not harm Jacob. However, there is debate whether פֶּחַד has anything to do with “fear” (see Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 308-10; M. V. Van Pelt and W. C. Kaiser, Jr., “פֶּחַד,” *NIDOTTE* 3.598). A fuller discussion of the interesting title is beyond the scope of this research.

⁷³ Patterson, *The Plot-structure of Genesis*, 166.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 181-82.

One important question for this research is whether Jacob deserved his mistreatment at the hands of Laban. This question was briefly discussed at the end of the exegesis section on Gen 29:1–30. It was suggested there that even though God addressed Jacob’s pride by using Laban’s deception, Laban himself is not justified simply because Jacob had deceived others before him. Now, at the end of the Jacob-Laban narrative, the full details of the situation offer another chance to examine the situation.

So far, the narrator has revealed that Jacob was a deceiver before he had ever met Laban (Gen 25:29–34; 27:1–29). Upon meeting Laban, the narrator immediately shows that Laban was Jacob’s “match” (Gen 29:16–27). In return, Jacob deals treacherously with Laban, too (Gen 30:37–43). Chapter 31 is the point where the whole twenty years is put into perspective. During the six years that Jacob struggled for flocks, Laban continually changed his wages, likely at the end of every breeding period once Laban saw how much Jacob had earned (Gen 31:7–9). So, after 20 years of striving, Jacob leaves secretly and takes all he earned (Gen 31:17–21). What is the narrator saying through all this back and forth? Has Jacob been “afflicted” (i.e. mistreated without cause), or did he get what he deserved?⁷⁸

What Jacob says in Gen 31:36–42 is true: he had served Laban faithfully as a shepherd. ANE shepherding code shows that he had done all required of him and more.⁷⁹ Laban did unjustly mistreat Jacob. The resolution to Jacob’s affliction comes in the form of more “slight of hand,” but it was only prosperous because of God’s power (cf. Gen 31:9–13). Did Jacob still depend on his own cunning instead of depending on God? Indeed, the narrator shows us this

⁷⁸ Paul Wegner, “עֲנֵה,” *NIDOTTE* 3.449.

⁷⁹ Morrison, “The Jacob and Laban...,” 157-60.

picture. Yet, God is faithful to his covenant promises despite Jacob's continual self-reliance.⁸⁰ Not until after repeated protection from God does Jacob finally show a measure of trust in God (cf. Gen 35:5–6).

Exegesis of Genesis 31:43–55 [MT 31:43–32:1]⁸¹

After Jacob justifies himself and prosecutes Laban, Laban and Jacob make a covenant and part ways. The covenant in its own way serves as a reconciliation to Jacob's affliction.⁸² Steinmann explains, "Whenever someone sought to make a covenant or a binding oath with one of the patriarchs, it was invariably an admission of the patriarch's superior rights and claims (cf. Gen 21:22-24; 26:26-31). Because Laban found himself in a weak position, he wanted a covenant in order to protect himself from Jacob, whom God had defended."⁸³ The covenant was both a way for Laban to ward off negative effects of his mistreatment and a way for Jacob to memorialize his status as a free man.⁸⁴ With this memorial stone, the conflict of the past twenty years comes to an end.

The Aftermath of Jacob-Laban Narrative: Genesis 32–35

Although there are many theologically important issues in Gen 32–35, the point of this research is to understand what the Jacob-Laban narrative adds to the motif of affliction in Genesis. So, only details related to this question are included in the following discussion of Gen

⁸⁰ Anderson, "Jacob, Laban...", 22.

⁸¹ Throughout the analyses of Gen 31–32, the verses referenced will be the traditional English versification followed by the MT versification in brackets.

⁸² Contra George W. Coats, *Genesis*, FOTL (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 220.

⁸³ Steinmann, *Genesis*, 304.

⁸⁴ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 190.

32–35. This portion of the Jacob narrative offers a picture of how Jacob did or did not change after his experience of God’s protection from Laban’s affliction.⁸⁵

Genesis 32:1–24 [MT 32:2–15]

Jacob’s encounter with Esau follows Jacob and Laban’s separation. After God rescues Jacob from affliction, Jacob should show that has grown to rely on the Lord. However, Jacob’s preparation to meet Esau does not reveal trust in the Lord. In Gen 32:7–8 [MT vv. 8–9], Jacob puts a plan into action. Then, in Gen 32:9–12 [MT vv. 10–13], he prays to God for protection. Although if read quickly Gen 32: 9–12 [MT vv. 10–13] might show that Jacob is casting himself on God’s mercy, the belief that he has a *claim* on God’s protection underlies Jacob’s prayer.⁸⁶ His prayer is filled with evidences for why the Lord should continue to protect him. However, this is not conclusively a character flaw.⁸⁷ The main issue is that he does not seek the Lord for how to proceed with meeting Esau, but he asks for blessing on the way he has already chosen to do it. Patterson also notes that there is no offer of sacrifice to the Lord, though he does erect an altar after he encounters Esau (Gen 33:20).⁸⁸ Furthermore, he proceeds to deceive Esau once again, so his call to the Lord is couched inside his ‘cunning’ encounter with Esau (Gen 33:17).⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 186.

⁸⁶ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 323-24.

⁸⁷ Many psalms are also formulated by giving reasons to God why he should deliver the psalmist (see Ps 4:3; 6:5; 25:2–3, 11; 28:1; 30:9; 69:6, et. al). In fact, Jacob’s prayer is a neat organization of invocation, confession, supplication, and recollection (Sarna, *Genesis*, 225). Jacob does not request the Lord’s protection in the way that the reader might expect, but there is no solid evidence that his prayer is wrong. Instead, his preceding and subsequent actions are not ideal.

⁸⁸ Patterson, *The Plot-structure of Genesis*, 168. Cf. Gen 8:20; 22:6–8; 35:14. There is no explicit mention of an offering upon the altar, but this is not uncommon in Scripture because it logically follows the erecting an altar (see Gen 12:7–8; 26:25).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

Undoubtedly, Jacob's prayer in Gen 31 is a strong step for him. This is the first time he has taken upon himself to call upon the Lord.⁹⁰ He even admits that he is "too insignificant" for God's mercies.⁹¹ Jacob is indeed growing, but Jacob's humanness is evident through his pace of growth. His prayer before meeting Esau, though a step forward, does not reveal a complete change of character.

Genesis 32:24–32 [MT 32:25–33]

The assertion that Jacob's call upon the Lord in Gen 32:9–12 [MT vv. 10–13] is an unsatisfactory display of humility finds support by the Lord choosing then to wrestle with Jacob.⁹² In other words, once it is evident by his speech that Jacob is still self-reliant (Gen 32:9–12 [MT vv. 10–13]), the Lord visits him in order to show his power. This struggle is a graphic picture that Jacob still strives for blessing inside of striving after God.⁹³ Instead of the new name for Jacob (לְיַעֲקֹב, "he struggles with God") emphasizing a change of character and a hopeful future, like in the examples of Abraham and Sarah (Gen 17:1–21), the Lord's new name for Jacob's does not suggest a change in his life but instead represents his character as it has always been (Gen 32:28 [MT 32:29]).⁹⁴ Although this scene ends by Jacob once again receiving a blessing, Poythress suggests that God's dislocation of Jacob's hip socket was meant to show

⁹⁰ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 203.

⁹¹ The word here is יָטִיבֵנִי, literally, "I am too small," from the same root as the word for "younger" brother, יָטִיב, in Gen 27:15 ("יָטִיב," HALOT 1092).

⁹² For a detailed discussion of the theophanies in the Jacob narrative, see Nevada Levi DeLapp, *Theophanic "Type-Scenes" in the Pentateuch: Visions of YHWH* (London, UK: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018), 31-41.

⁹³ Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 198.

⁹⁴ Elizabeth B. Tracy, *See Me! Hear Me! Divine/Human Relational Dialogue in Genesis* (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 110. Kahn makes the perhaps common mistake of confusing the etymology of "לְיַעֲקֹב" with "upright (יָטִיב) of God" rather than "he struggles (Qal impf 3ms of יָטִיב) with God" (Kahn, "Jacob's Choice...", 85-86; cf. John M. Bracke, "יָטִיב," *NIDOTTE* 3.1273).

Jacob that he did not gain God's blessing through manipulation. Instead, God was in control of the situation.⁹⁵

Genesis 33

As noted in the analysis of Gen 32:1–24 [MT vv. 2–35], after Jacob had already prayed for the Lord's protection and received a welcome from Esau, Jacob still deceives Esau once again by telling Esau that he will meet up with him, but then not following through on his word (Gen 33:13–17). Esau, as opposed to Jacob, shows a complete character change. He had before wished to kill Jacob (cf. Gen 27:41), but now he welcomes him (Gen 33:4).⁹⁶ There is no explanation for why Esau has changed. Even still, Jacob deceives Esau, though it may be argued that Jacob's new trick was comparatively mild with respect to his past deceptions.

After leaving Esau, Jacob builds an altar and calls it "El-Elohe-Israel" (Gen 33:20). By naming the altar "God is the God of Israel," Jacob affirms just that: God is his God.⁹⁷ Fokkelman asserts that Jacob's use of his new name and formal declaration of the Lord as his God presents Jacob, finally, as a new man.⁹⁸ Once again, Jacob's actions after this moment reveal some growth in Jacob, but not yet a full change of character.

⁹⁵ Vern S. Poythress, *Theophany: A Biblical Theology of God's Appearing* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 268. In 32:30 [MT v. 31], Jacob's declaration, "I saw God face to face, but my life was spared," reflects the similar motif in Gen 16:13.

⁹⁶ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 224. It is possible to interpret that Jacob did the right thing by leaving Esau, but there is little solid evidence. Although Esau appears to welcome Jacob warmly, the narrator may be comparing Esau's warm greeting with Laban's warm greeting (Gen 29:13–14). If Jacob recognizes the similarity, he may be preemptively protecting himself from a similar situation with Esau as he had with Laban.

⁹⁷ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 301.

⁹⁸ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 230.

Depending on the translation of Gen 33:18, Jacob’s arrival in Shechem may parallel his conditions stated in Gen 28:21.⁹⁹ The translation accepted here is “Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem” because this corresponds to Jacob’s conversation with the Lord in Gen 28:21. Jacob said, “If... I return in peace (שָׁלוֹם) to the house of my father, then the Lord will be my God” (Gen 28:20–21). Although Jacob has not yet finished his journey, he is, for all intents and purposes, safely home, just as God had promised in Gen 28:15, 21.¹⁰⁰ The importance of recognizing this translation is that Jacob arriving שָׁלוֹם contrasts his twenty years of עָנִי with Laban. As noted in chapter 2 of this research, שָׁלוֹם serves as an antonym for עָנִי in Gen 15:13–15. In Gen 33:18–20, it also serves as an antonym to the struggle he had known for twenty years (and even before). Now, with the Lord’s protection, Jacob is free from his affliction.

Genesis 35¹⁰¹

Jacob finally makes it back to Bethel after his long sojourn. This return is essentially what the reader has been waiting for since Gen 28. God had said that he would give Jacob the

⁹⁹ The debate centers around the description that Jacob arrived עִיר שָׁלוֹם עִיר שָׁלוֹם (Gen 33:18). The translation of “city of Shechem” is clear enough, but שָׁלוֹם is debated. Of course, a basic reading produces the typical translation “peace” based on the consonants, but because there is no directional indicator (which would be marked by the suffix הַ), scholars debate whether the direction “to” is implied “to Shechem” or if instead שָׁלוֹם should be understood as where Jacob arrived, namely, a city called Salim (also spelled Salem) four miles east of Shechem (Sarna, *Genesis*, 232; “שָׁלוֹם,” HALOT 1539). The LXX, *Peshitta*, and Latin Vulgate all presume the translation as the city Salim (“Jacob came to Salem, a city of Shechem” LES), but the Samaritan Pentateuch attests *shalom* “peace,” which would be translated here as “safely” (Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 342). Furthermore, there is no clear evidence that Salim was established as a distinct city from Shechem at this time (Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 574).

¹⁰⁰ Sarna, *Genesis*, 232.

¹⁰¹ Chapter 34 is skipped in this analysis because there is little of Jacob in chapter 34. The small picture of him shows him passive to his surroundings (Gen 34:5, 30). The problem is that Jacob ought to show some emotion here. Upon hearing of the rape of Dinah, the narrator does not show him upset nearly at all (Gen 34:5) (Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 356.). In contrast, after Joseph’s death, Jacob mourns for a very long time until he is reunited with Joseph (cf. Gen 37:34–35, 46:30) (Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 356.). Genesis 34 will be analyzed more deeply in chapter 6 of this research.

land that he was lying upon (Gen 28:13). The narrator reveals that Jacob will watch for God to keep that promise, and if it happens, then Lord would be his God (Gen 28:21). Now, in chapter 35, the Lord brings him back to Bethel, and Jacob will keep his word and make the Lord his God.

Jacob rids his household of all foreign gods and consecrates his family to the Lord (Gen 35:2–4). Sarna points out that the theme of defilement in chapter 34 is contrasted to the purification in chapter 35.¹⁰² The purification emphasizes Jacob’s commitment to God. After God’s resounding protection, “Jacob was now obligated to worship God alone.”¹⁰³ Jacob finally recognizes God’s continual presence and protection in his life, and God’s faithfulness urges Jacob to dedicate himself to the Lord.¹⁰⁴

The divine revelation and covenant with Jacob in Gen 35:11–12 reflect the promise made to Abraham (as well as Adam and Noah) (Gen 1:28; 9:1; 17:2, 6). Furthermore, God’s covenant echoes the blessing that Isaac bestowed on Jacob in Gen 28:3. The strong similarities between these two passages present this covenant as the fulfillment of Isaac’s blessing on Jacob.¹⁰⁵ This final covenant to Jacob reaffirms God’s protection on Jacob and God’s rescue from his mistreatment. After Jacob’s struggle during his sojourn, the Lord’s fulfillment of Gen 28:3 brings an end to Jacob’s narrative by declaring welfare upon him. Ultimately, Jacob’s blessings in Gen 48 and 49 reveal a greater understanding of the Lord, but, as shown in this analysis, Jacob took a lifetime to learn that God alone is in control. Even though Jacob only seems to understand

¹⁰² Sarna, *Genesis*, 239; Alter, *Genesis*, 196.

¹⁰³ Steinmann, *Genesis*, 328.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*; Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 324.

¹⁰⁵ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 234.

this lesson in hindsight, he is able to leave that legacy to his descendants (Gen 48:15–16; 49:2–27, esp. v. 25).

Analysis

In some ways, Jacob’s narrative presents a more convoluted situation than Hagar’s narrative. The affliction motif in Jacob’s narrative is complicated by a rather dubious protagonist and an oppressor that the narrator presents as, at times, giving Jacob what he deserves. Due to the complexity of the Jacob-Laban narrative, there are many layers to what this narrative adds to the motif of affliction in Genesis.

Characterization of Jacob

Jacob as a trickster is established early in his life when he supplants Esau’s birthright (Gen 25:27–34) and blessing (Gen 27:1–40).¹⁰⁶ Sarna argues that the biblical narrator soundly renounces Jacob’s actions from beginning to end.¹⁰⁷ Not only does his narrative begin with his deceit of his own brother, but it ends with descriptions of the further conflict in his family (Gen 34; 35:16–20; 37:26–33) and his declaration to pharaoh that “few and hard have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not reached the days of the years of the lives of my ancestors in the days of their sojourning” (Gen 47:9). As opposed to the “ripe old age” of the deaths of Abraham and Isaac, Jacob describes his years as “few and hard” (Gen 47:9; cf. Gen 25:8; 35:29).¹⁰⁸ Sarna asserts that is little doubt that the narrator presents all Jacob’s dealings in his life as unacceptable behavior.

¹⁰⁶ Richard D. Patterson, “The Old Testament Use of an Archetype the Trickster,” *JETS* 42 (1999): 390.

¹⁰⁷ Sarna, *Genesis*, 398.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 397.

However, if this is the case, what does this negative presentation say about the fact that God chose Jacob to continue the line of godly people, to receive the covenantal blessing and protection, and to be the namesake of the covenant nation?¹⁰⁹ Sarna's argument is too extreme in saying that Jacob's character is completely negative. To contest this argument, some scholars point to Gen 35 as the final moment in Jacob's life where he is a changed man, one who finally learned his lesson after years of affliction and God's continual protection.¹¹⁰ Moshe Dann speaks of Jacob's piety,

It is precisely his ability to maintain his integrity in the face of radically changing circumstances that transforms him and creates a new identity. Only in that struggle for self can one create meaning; only from profound doubt can one approach true faith. Jacob's struggle, therefore, is the first recorded crisis of human existence. That is why he, and we are called Israel.¹¹¹

Dann exaggerates Jacob's integrity—Jacob's character in Genesis is enigmatic. After his experiences in Haran and God's reiteration of blessing in chapter 35, there is still little depiction of Jacob as a changed man in the Joseph narrative.¹¹² Yet, Dann does point out what is perhaps the most valuable aspect of Jacob's characterization: he is profoundly *human*. Even in Jacob's high moments, there is a shadow of sin and pride in his life that mirrors the continual struggles of Israel in the OT and arguably of every believer who has ever lived.¹¹³ Jacob has multiple high moments where the reader can wonder: is this his turning point? Yet, Jacob keeps turning back to his old ways each time. Jacob's life presents a thoroughly human struggle with sin that no believer should emulate, but it is an up and down pattern all too familiar. Jacob's narrative is a

¹⁰⁹ Anderson, "Jacob, Laban...", 3-4.

¹¹⁰ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 505.

¹¹¹ Moshe Dann, "Themes of Betrayal and Deception in Genesis," *Midstream* 47 (2001): 26.

¹¹² Patterson, *The Plot-structure of Genesis*, 176-77.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

comfort because God remained faithful to Jacob even as Jacob struggled to be the worshipper that he ought to have been, sometimes succeeding and other times failing miserably. Jacob is neither a model character nor a dastardly crook; he is (at best) a slow learner.

This is important to the affliction motif because the motif does not just reveal theology, but it also presents examples for how believers must respond to affliction. Jacob is a character who does not respond in a spiritually healthy manner, yet God still blesses and protects him. This is a double-edged portrait of on one side God's faithfulness and on the other side a somber example of a man who does not recognize the theology of God's sovereignty until the end of his life. His life likely set a poor example to his sons that leads to their own sins, too (cf. Gen 34:13, 25–29; 35:22; 37:20, 28).

Punishment to Laban

Even though Jacob's behavior depicts poetic justice when deceit is dealt to him, God ultimately punishes Laban for his mistreatment of Jacob. In Hagar's affliction narrative, Abraham and Sarah are not punished by God. Here, in Jacob's narrative, God does punish Laban in order to resolve the affliction. Originally, God blessed Laban's flock because of Jacob (cf. Gen 30:27, 30). However, when it comes time for Jacob to work towards leaving, God blesses Jacob by making the majority of Laban's flock become Jacob's (Gen 31:7–12). In this narrative, God's blessing on Jacob serves a dual purpose as also a "curse" on Laban for his mistreatment of Jacob.

Remarkably, God's blessing on Jacob (a corresponding punishment to Laban) comes in the form of prospering human deceit. Jacob's deceit in Gen 30 is what brought him to a place where God could give him his reward and punish Laban. In Gen 30:9, Jacob declares that God was the one who prospered his plan of deceit. This makes it appear as though God will stop at

nothing, even complicity in deception, in order to make his covenant promises come to pass.¹¹⁴

Thus, just as Jacob and Laban are both tricksters, the narrative seems to present God as the ultimate trickster pulling the deceitful strings.¹¹⁵

The most important point for the problem of God's blessing on deception is that God did not just use Jacob's deception to punish Laban, God also used Laban's deception to punish Jacob. God did bless Jacob's deceit of Laban because Laban mistreated Jacob. However, God also blessed Laban's daughter-swap by giving Jacob the woman who would conceive the next in the line of the promised seed: Judah.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, having two wives allowed Jacob to birth 12 sons, which multiplies the nation of Israel. It is through Laban's deception that God furthers the covenant, and it is through Jacob's deception that God rescues his people.¹¹⁷ God's providence worked an immoral situation for his good purposes, those which he promised Jacob he would do. This portrayal is not that of a deceitful God, but a completely faithful God.¹¹⁸ He is not responsible for the deceitful decisions that the humans make, but he shapes the situation for the righteous end that he desires.

God's Attention to Affliction

Genesis 15 and 16 both present the picture of God paying attention to the affliction of his people and rescuing them from that affliction (Gen 15:13–16; 16:11). Once again, in this new affliction narrative, God's attention to affliction resounds (Gen 31:42; 30:9–13). Sailhamer asserts that the central theme of Jacob's life is God's presence with and gracious care of the

¹¹⁴ Anderson, "Jacob, Laban...", 7.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 4-5.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 22.

¹¹⁷ Anderson, *Jacob...*, 101-02.

¹¹⁸ Anderson, "Jacob, Laban...", 23.

blessing to Abraham’s descendants.¹¹⁹ This presence is highlighted through God’s perception, hearing or seeing, of his people’s situations.¹²⁰ Park explains, “God’s invisible yet significant role in this tale might reflect another theme - the theme of vision or sight - that seems to echo throughout the ancestral narratives.”¹²¹ God acts “behind the scenes” in Jacob’s situation, which reminds the reader that even when God’s presence is not apparent, he works in unknown ways.¹²² Jacob learns this reality after struggling for twenty years, and now, before he goes to meet Esau, he realizes that the Lord is present with him and will be his source of deliverance.¹²³

The Jacob-Laban Narrative’s Contribution to the Motif of Affliction

In summary, Jacob’s narrative adds several details to the affliction motif in Genesis. First, Jacob, the victim of affliction, leads a life of conflict, yet he is prominently in the line of promise. Alter calls Jacob’s narrative a most memorable depiction of human reality filled with “antagonisms, reversals, deception, shady deals, outright lies, disguises, misleading appearances, and ambiguous portents.”¹²⁴ The theme of deception features explicitly from the very beginning, and every one of Jacob’s relationships is characterized by strife.¹²⁵ As a patriarchal narrative,

¹¹⁹ Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 197.

¹²⁰ The formulaic expression is “God has seen my affliction” אָתְּעֵנִי רָאָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־עֲנִי with some variation in each narrative (Gen 16:11, 29:32; 31:42, 41:52). The expression appears in Jacob’s narrative as: אָתְּעֵנִי וְאֶת־יָגִיעַ כַּפֵּי רָאָה אֱלֹהִים (“My affliction and the toil of my hands, God has seen” Gen 31:42). “The toil of my hands” is an added clause in this narrative that does not appear in other affliction narratives.

¹²¹ Park, “Transformation and Demarcation...,” 674.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 675.

¹²³ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 456.

¹²⁴ Alter, *The Art...*, 197.

¹²⁵ Michael Fishbane, “Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle (Gen. 25:19-35:22),” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 26 (1975): 23; Coats, *Genesis*, 26-32.

striving serves as a struggle to gain the covenant blessing.¹²⁶ The conflict presented in the narrative serves to push forward the reconciliation that must occur before God bestows his blessing on Jacob.¹²⁷ The whole narrative is a most remarkable picture of God promising a blessing, Jacob instead relying on his own strength and thus being disciplined by God, and God ultimately showing Jacob his power so that Jacob realizes God's mastery in his life.

Second, the afflicter, Laban, is not an Israelite afflicting a foreigner (like in Gen 16), but is a foreigner afflicting an Israelite. Laban's affliction of Jacob serves as a threat to the covenant promises of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.¹²⁸ However, at the same time, a foreigner afflicting the people of God is, in a small way, a mirror of God's declaration of affliction in Gen 15:13–16. Israel's affliction by his master in Haran is foreshadowing to the Israelites' affliction by their masters in Egypt, though the severity is markedly reduced.

Third, God resolves the affliction by punishing the afflicter and correspondingly blessing the victim, unlike in Gen 16 when Hagar is blessed, but Abraham and Sarah are not punished. The resolution of the Jacob-Laban affliction serves to prosper the covenant promises. Although Jacob's servitude brings him far from the fulfillment of Gen 27:29, "let peoples serve you," it is at Jacob's lowest point that God turns the situation for good and for the fulfillment of his promises.¹²⁹ The Lord's hand in the situation reveals that "God's commitment to the ancestral promise is both unwavering and absolute."¹³⁰ Through the very situation of affliction that threatens the promise, God provides Jacob with a piece of the blessings which he promised all

¹²⁶ Blum, "The Jacob Tradition," 182.

¹²⁷ Jonathan Terino, "A Text Linguistic Study of the Jacob Narrative," *VE* 18 (1988): 58.

¹²⁸ Anderson, "Jacob, Laban...", 5.

¹²⁹ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 196.

¹³⁰ Anderson, *Jacob...*, 118.

along.¹³¹ Jacob leaves his afflicter having obtained much wealth and a large family, just like the nation of Israel will plunder Egypt and possessing much wealth by the bounty of the Egyptians (cf. Exod 12:36–37). God’s blessing as a means for salvation and deliverance begins here in the patriarchal narratives long before the Exodus, though in small part.¹³²

Conclusion

Unlike the vulnerable slave woman in Gen 16, the Jacob-Laban affliction narrative presents a patriarchal protagonist who deals in deceit and trusts first his own plan rather than the plans of the Lord. The affliction motif grows through presenting a character in many ways opposite to Hagar in Gen 16. Instead of a mistreated foreign slave, Jacob is a mistreated Israelite patriarch. However, like Hagar grows into a YHWH worshipper through her affliction, through Jacob’s affliction, God begins the process of shaping him into a humble servant of the Lord. Jacob’s rescue from affliction is one of the most pivotal experiences for his growth. Ultimately, Jacob’s character remains enigmatic, but more importantly, God’s attention to Jacob’s affliction once again reveals God’s care for the oppressed and sovereignty in shaping events according to his plan.

¹³¹ Anderson, “Jacob, Laban...,” 23.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 13.

Chapter 5:

Leah: The Afflicted Matriarch

Introduction

The narrator of Genesis introduces a third afflicted character who is embedded neatly into the Jacob-Laban affliction narrative: Leah. Ironically, even though Jacob is the victim of affliction by Laban, he himself is the afflicter of his wife Leah because he does not treat her affectionately or lovingly (Gen 29:31). Jacob loves only Rachel and always wanted her alone, so he never appears to develop love for Leah (Gen 29:14–31). It is a desperate situation for a wife not to be loved by her husband, and Leah is in great misery because of it. Thus, Leah seeks to gain his favor by bearing him children when Rachel could not (Gen 29:32–35; 30:9–13). Although Leah keeps hoping for Jacob’s favor, her advantage ultimately rests in God’s favor on her (Gen 29:32). Through her situation, Leah recognizes God’s sovereignty in resolving her affliction, and God blesses her with the immediate comfort of children and the long-term blessing of being an ancestress of David and the Messiah.

Textual Background to Leah’s Affliction

Leah’s situation of affliction occurs because her father sought to take advantage of her husband-to-be, Jacob (Gen 29:15–30). In Laban’s selfish attempt to entrap Jacob into another seven years of service, he does not pause to consider the life of misery he forces upon both of his daughters.¹ Laban treats his daughters as pawns, and he does not even use their names when he

¹ J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 126.

makes his arrangements with Jacob (Gen 29:27).² By leveraging his daughters in order to control Jacob, Laban puts each of his daughters into an undesirable marriage situation, Leah because her husband does not love her and Rachel because she must watch her sister have children by the man she loves.

When Laban gives Leah to Jacob, the narrator does not focus on Leah (and Rachel's) mistreatment by their father. Instead, the focus is on Jacob's affliction by Laban. Wenham asserts that Laban's act of giving each of his daughters a female slave, which is a generous dowry, suggests that Laban was kind to his daughters even though he used them as trading commodities. In this regard, there may be some element of Laban's consideration for his daughters.³ Overall, Gen 29:15–30 does not include Rachel or Leah's perspective of the situation. Laban's mistreatment of his daughters underlies the text, but it is not a chosen focus of the narrator. Leah's or Rachel's suffering centers on their conflict as co-wives, which begins in 29:31. The daughters would not have experienced that conflict were it not for their father's actions, but the narrator speaks only of "affliction" when he describes Leah's situation, not Rachel's. The scope of this thesis does not allow for affliction to be inferred where the narrator does not use the terms עָנָה or עָנָה, so Rachel is not considered a main victim of affliction in this research.⁴

² Joan Ross-Burstall, "Leah and Rachel: A Tale of Two Sisters," *WW* 14 (1994): 165.

³ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, WBC 2 (Dallas: Word, 1994), 236.

⁴ At Benjamin's birth (Gen 35:18), Rachel names him Ben-Oni, בֶּן־אֹנִי, but even though אֹנִי sounds like עָנָה, the consonants differ between א and ע. The former comes from either the root אָנָה "to mourn," or אָנָה, "to befall," and latter comes from the root עָנָה, "to afflict" ("אֹנִי," HALOT 23; "אָנָה," HALOT 69-70; "עָנָה," HALOT 853; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18-50*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 383). Since Benoni's name is not from the root עָנָה, Rachel is not included in this project as the victim in an affliction narrative.

Exegesis of Genesis 29:31–30:24

The main narrative unit that presents Leah's affliction is Gen 29:31–30:24, though some minor passages following this unit shed light on the level of resolution that occurs for Leah's affliction. Genesis 29:31–30:24 deal with Rachel and Leah's childbearing and the surrounding familial conflict. Jacob is mentioned only minimally in this unit. The focus is instead on how God provides progeny to Jacob through Rachel and Leah's conflict. The conflict occurs because Rachel has Jacob's love but seeks children, and Leah has children but seeks Jacob's love. Only one of these women will ultimately receive that which she desires, and the other learns to find encouragement in the Lord's blessing on her.

Genesis 29:31–35

The end of the previous unit (Gen 29:30) and the first verse of this unit (Gen 29:31) both describe Leah's situation of affliction.⁵ As apparent in the opening phrase "the Lord saw," the Lord enters the scene immediately in the midst of Leah's affliction, even before he is an active participant in Jacob's affliction (Gen 29:31).⁶ In Jacob's affliction situation, the Lord made his aide in the situation known only after Jacob had served Laban for 20 years (cf. Gen 31:3). God, as an agent of the resolution, quickly comes into the situation as Leah's partner; he works specifically and immediately on her behalf.⁷

Leah's affliction results from her husband's displeasure towards her. Verse 30 uses the kinder phrase "he loved Rachel even more than Leah," but verse 31 is not nearly as gentle in describing Leah's situation with Jacob. In no uncertain terms, the narrator describes that Leah

⁵ The unit break at Gen 29:30 is marked by the introduction of the new agent character, the Lord, at the beginning of Gen 29:31.

⁶ Ross-Burstall, "Leah and Rachel," 165.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 166.

was “rejected” (אָנשׂן) (Gen 29:31). The verb אָנשׂן has negative connotations in Genesis, often translated as “hated,” and the nuance here could describe sexual revulsion: Leah was physically odious (to Jacob).⁸ Verse 31 does not specify who rejects Leah. Since the verb is in the passive, the agent of the rejection could refer to Jacob, Rachel, or even Laban. However, Deuteronomy 21:15 describes the polygamous marriage context for אָנשׂן as a description used for the husband’s less preferred wife.⁹ This would mean for Gen 29 that the one who rejects Leah is Jacob. The barrier for Jacob’s love for Leah is not just that he loves Rachel more or that it is just a matter of physical attraction, but Leah is a constant reminder of Laban’s deception.¹⁰ Laban caused a disruption in Jacob and Rachel’s prospect for a peaceful, happy marriage, and Leah is the tool of his disruption.¹¹

Furthermore, the verb אָנשׂן also describes situations where a spouse wishes or intends to divorce the undesired spouse, and this nuance is attested in certain ANE documents as well as the Torah parameters for divorce (cf. Deut 24:3).¹² Genesis 29 does not express that Jacob

⁸ A. H. Konkel, “אָנשׂן,” *NIDOTTE* 3.1257; Sharon Pace, *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar’s Wife* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 74. Other uses of the verb in Genesis include 24:60; 26:27; 37:4, 5, 8. These three other uses in Genesis all express a context of strong hostility. The most notable of these comparisons is the use of אָנשׂן in Gen 37. Joseph’s brothers hate him to the point that they seek to dispose of him. Ironically, as Rachel and Jacob hate Leah, so Leah’s sons hate the favored son of Rachel and Leah. Translations that choose “hated” for Gen 29:31 are the ESV, KJV, and ERV, among others.

⁹ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 206. Coats describes Jacob’s hatred of Leah as a mere reflection of Rachel’s even stronger hatred of Leah (George W. Coats, *Genesis*, FOTL [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983], 214-15). He supports this based on Jacob’s passivity in the Leah-Rachel conflict (Coats, *Genesis*, 214). The problem with this view is that the hatred cannot be mainly Rachel’s toward Leah otherwise Leah likely would not be so distraught (Ross-Burstall, “Leah and Rachel,” 167). The text is concerned with Jacob’s lack of affection for Leah.

¹⁰ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 139-40.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² E. Lipinski, “אָנשׂן,” *TDOT* 740.

wishes to divorce her, but the possibility may have come about were it not for Leah's extensive fruitfulness by the mercy of the Lord. After all, Leah's situation is very similar to Hagar's, and that narrative ended in Hagar's expulsion (cf. Gen 21:10, 14). Leah and Hagar are both the unloved co-wife of a patriarch, and they both gain children before the loved wife, which makes the loved wife jealous. The narrator sets up the possibility that Leah may be expelled just like Hagar. However, the Lord protects Leah by opening her womb *multiple* times (rather than Hagar's one child) and continuing to not open Rachel's. The phrase "opened her womb" (Gen 29:31) appears only here in Scripture, so it emphasizes the Lord's responsibility in providing for Leah.¹³ Overall, there is no clear picture of Jacob's intent to divorce her, but his dislike towards her is given in terms connoting the level of displeasure that led to divorce in some ANE documents (including Deuteronomy).¹⁴

Right away, Leah begins bearing for Jacob (Gen 29:32), and the progression of conflict between Rachel and Leah is furthered from this point by their children-bearing. The naming process in the birthing narrative that began in verse 32 does not simply provide eponyms for the children who would become the tribes of Israel; the names carry forward the narrative conflict between Rachel and Leah.¹⁵ The names reveal the situation behind each birth, such as the competition the wives are engaged in at the given time or how each wife stands in relation to Jacob, and the names themselves are tools of combat between each wife in their "baby war."¹⁶ A name itself in the story can serve as "a malicious shaft to the co-wife," such as "Naphtali" in Gen

¹³ Andrew E. Steinmann, *Genesis*, TOTC (Downers Grove: IVP, 2019), 284. God's agency in the conceptions (or lack thereof) also recognizes that the rise of the nation of Israel is solely the Lord's doing (Steinmann, *Genesis*, 284).

¹⁴ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 266.

¹⁵ Coats, *Genesis*, 215; Sarna, *Genesis*, 401.

¹⁶ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 133.

30:8 (explained as “I have struggled mightily with my sister and prevailed,” see notes on Gen 30:8 below).¹⁷ More poignantly, the names represent each wife’s deep longing—for Rachel, the longing for children, and for Leah, the longing to be loved.¹⁸ Within the baby war, God evidently favors Leah, and this may be because while Rachel’s longing will eventually be satisfied (cf. Gen 30:22–24), Leah’s longing is never expressly met. More importantly, Rachel also appears to practice polytheism, and she also does not pray to God to give her children and instead goes to Jacob (Gen 30:1; 31:19). Both are viable reasons for God’s favor on Leah rather than Rachel.

Leah alone is the focus of Gen 29:32–35. Leah’s distress develops at this juncture in the narrative through her laments and prayers at the birth of each son.¹⁹ The naming of her first son, Reuben (רִבְיָוֶן), is most indicative of the situation of affliction that Leah faces. There is a double pun with Reuben’s name: it means literally, “See, a son!,” but it also reflects the phrase “[The Lord] has seen (רָאָה) my affliction,” because the consonants of the name, *r-’-b-n*, correspond roughly to the consonants of the declaration, *r-’-h b-’-n-y*.²⁰ Leah’s declaration “The Lord has seen my affliction” reflects Hagar’s declaration in Gen 16:11 and foreshadows Jacob’s own declaration in Gen 31:42, as well as the later iterations of the phrase in Exod 3:7; 4:31.²¹ In both Hagar and Leah’s situation, they name their son as a memorial to God’s attention to their affliction (cf. Gen 16:11, 15). Leah’s naming of Reuben reflects her expression of thanks to the

¹⁷ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 133.

¹⁸ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 442.

¹⁹ Ross-Burstall, “Leah and Rachel,” 166.

²⁰ K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 480; Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 243.

²¹ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 243. Joseph’s recognition in Gen 41:52, “God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction (רִבְיָוֶן),” reflects a similar motif, though the exact verbiage is not present (see ch. 7 of this thesis).

Lord.²² She recognizes that the child is an assurance of the Lord’s favor on her and his recognition of her suffering.²³ Her lament results from her father’s choice to put her into a marriage in which she was not wanted, but mainly from her husband’s continual portrayal of hatred to her.²⁴ She also expresses an understanding that God’s action on her behalf may serve to resolve her affliction. By having a son for Jacob, she hopes that he will now love her.²⁵

Leah’s fruitfulness achieves, at some level, her husband’s attention. If nothing more, Jacob decides to lay with her again.²⁶ However, this does not display that he loves her, because she names her second son Simeon (שִׁמְעוֹן), saying “The Lord heard (שמע) that I was not loved” (Gen 29:33).²⁷ Leah hopes that the Lord’s blessing on her womb will resolve her suffering, but the children do not seem to be permanently relieving her affliction. Yet, instead of naming her child as a memorial to her pain, like naming him a form of the word “unloved” or “affliction,” the name choice recognizes instead the Lord’s attention.²⁸ She memorializes God’s goodness instead of her pain.²⁹

Once again, Jacob recognizes Leah’s child-bearing value and sleeps with her in order to bear a third child. Nevertheless, sleeping with her does not mean that the two share relational

²² Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 134.

²³ Ross-Burstall, “Leah and Rachel,” 170.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 164.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 169.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 169.

²⁷ The ךְ ending on שִׁמְעוֹן is typically understood as a diminutive ending, meaning “beloved heard one” (“שִׁמְעוֹןִי,” HALOT 1576; Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 243). With this interpretation, the name contrasts the statement that Leah is unloved (אֲנִי) (Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 243).

²⁸ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 267.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

intimacy.³⁰ This is evident when Leah names her third son Levi (לֵוִי), for she says, “Now this time my husband will join (לוֹה) himself to me” (Gen 29:34). At the naming of her third son, Leah does not offer praise to the Lord, but the lack of reference to the Lord should be viewed in light of the three other references to the Lord at the births. She may not reference God at Levi’s birth, but she still recognizes his presence and work because at the birth of her fourth son she returns once again to referencing the Lord.

Jacob continues to perform conjugal rights to Leah until she bears a fourth son, Judah (יְהוּדָה).³¹ At the birth of Judah, Leah ceases to make laments about her situation or seek the favor of Jacob.³² Leah appears to have come to terms with her circumstance, and she seeks to praise the Lord through the naming of her son, saying, “This time I will praise (אֲדָבָר) the Lord.”³³ After the birth of Judah, Leah becomes even more distant from Jacob because she stops bearing. Whether she stops bearing because she becomes temporarily infertile or because Jacob stops sleeping with her is unclear, but either way, Jacob does not visit her anymore, which is a denial of her conjugal rights (cf. Gen 30:15–16; Exod 21:10–11).³⁴ Jacob does not sleep with her again until she starts bearing again (cf. Gen 30:19). The reality depicted by Jacob’s attentions or lack

³⁰ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 268.

³¹ For a description of OT marriage laws pertaining to the rights of the wife, especially conjugal rights, see Kotel DaDon, “Role of the Wife in the Jewish Marriage in Old Testament Scripture, in Jewish Law, and in Rabbinic Literature,” *Kairos: Evandeoski Teoloski Casopis* 12 (2018): 139–40. See also Exod 21:10–11 for a scriptural reference to marital rights.

³² Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 481.

³³ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 244. Judah means “he will be praised” or perhaps “let YHWH be praised” (Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 244).

³⁴ *Ibid.* Sarna asserts that Jacob most likely ceased the conjugal visits after Leah bore a fourth son (Sarna, *Genesis*, 207; cf. Exod 21:10–11).

of attentions is that he only finds it valuable to lie with Leah when he thinks he can gain a son from doing so.³⁵

Genesis 30:1–13

In chapter 30, the text moves to focusing on Rachel's situation. At the Lord's doing, Rachel has been infertile while Leah bears. If Rachel were not infertile, Jacob may not have seen any reason to sleep with Leah and have sons through her. The Lord protects Leah at the temporary expense of Rachel's desire for motherhood. Genesis 30:2 shows that Jacob does not answer her sympathetically, which reveals conflict between Jacob and Rachel during their first recorded interaction as man and wife.³⁶ The action of Laban switching the daughters fosters an environment for family conflict.

Rachel schemes to get children on her own, even though the Lord has prevented her, and Leah follows her example.³⁷ Genesis 29:3–4 are remarkably similar to Gen 16:2–3, which sets Sarah and Rachel's actions in comparison to one another. The comparison of Sarah and Rachel in Gen 29:3–4 draws out the similarities between Leah and Hagar as well.³⁸ Leah is the fruitful co-wife of a patriarch who does not love her, just as is Hagar. Leah is placed in competition with

³⁵ Pace, *The Women of Genesis*, 78. Pace argues that the description of Jacob's first sexual encounter with Leah, "he went into her" (Gen 29:23), makes a subtle differentiation than would be nuanced if the text used the phrase "he knew her," which is a description of intimacy (Pace, *The Women of Genesis*, 78). However, this cannot be used as a paradigm for Jacob's sexual relationship with Leah because the same description is utilized for Jacob's first sexual encounter with Rachel, and they are also the words that Jacob himself uses when he asks for Rachel (Gen 29:21, 30). Thus, the use of the phrase "he went into her" does not make a distinction between Jacob's sexual relationship with Leah and with Rachel.

³⁶ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 482.

³⁷ Todd L. Patterson, *The Plot-structure of Genesis: 'Will the Righteous Seed Survive?' In the Mythos-Logical Movement from Complication to Denouement* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 158.

³⁸ Ashley Starr-Morris, "Leah and Hagar: An Intergenerational Conversation of Belonging" *Cross Currents* 69 (2019): 389.

the favored wife, just like Hagar.³⁹ Leah and Hagar represent the main conflict in the marriages of Jacob-Rachel and Abram-Sarai respectively, but it is no action of their own that put them in this position. Leah and Hagar both cry out that the Lord has seen their affliction, and he works on their behalf (Gen 16:11; 29:32). Given these similarities, there is a hint that Leah is in danger of expulsion, just like Hagar. The Lord sees their plight and does not leave them suffering without relief, and both forms of relief are the blessing of offspring. The lives of Leah and Hagar make the motif of affliction throughout Genesis stand out as a unified thread.

Rachel mothers Dan (דָּן) and Naphtali (נַפְתָּלִי) through Bilhah, and the name-giving of these sons further develops the narrative of Leah's affliction (Gen 30:6, 8). Rachel recognizes that her conflict with Leah is for God's favor and not Jacob's.⁴⁰ This is evidenced by the names of the two sons. At the birth of Dan, Rachel says, "God judged (יָדָן) my cause and also listened to my voice" (Gen 30:6). Rachel and Leah both consider the children born through their slave women as their own children, but they also see the action of giving their husband surrogate mothers as an act worthy of divine favor. Rachel sees that God has judged her right because she did the right thing in giving Bilhah to Jacob as a wife.⁴¹ Rachel names her second son Naphtali, saying, "I have struggled mightily (פָּתַלְתִּי) with my sister and prevailed" (Gen 30:8). Rachel's only disadvantage to Leah had been her barrenness, and now she overcomes that through Bilhah.

³⁹ Starr-Morris, "Leah and Hagar," 389.

⁴⁰ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 272.

⁴¹ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 483.

Since her struggle was for God's favor and never for Jacob's, she sees that she has achieved his favor.⁴² However, God has not finished blessing Leah.

Once Leah sees that Rachel has mothered two sons, she offers Jacob her slave woman, Zilpah, too (Gen 30:9). The births of Gad (גָּד) and Asher (אֲשֵׁר) are both commemorated with Leah's celebration over children rather than her hope for favor from Jacob.⁴³ By the time Judah is born, Leah has accepted that she would not gain Jacob's favor, and her realization is still evident at the births of her subsequent children. When Gad is born, she simply says, "What fortune (גָּד)!" (Gen 30:11).⁴⁴ Instead of naming Gad something that highlights her suffering, she uses a joyous exclamation as the celebratory name. Similarly, at the birth of Asher, she says, "How happy (אֲשֵׁר) I am! For women have called me happy (אֲשֵׁר)!" (Gen 30:13). She does not mourn by saying something like "women have called me unloved," but instead once again speaks in joy. Leah appears to have come to terms with her marriage situation and finds joy in the Lord's blessing of children, realizing that it was the Lord's doing alone.⁴⁵ While acceptance becomes evident here at the births of her latter three children, the next scene portrays Leah as bitter.

⁴² Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 272.

⁴³ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 246.

⁴⁴ The Qere reading of גָּד in Gen 30:11 is גָּד אֲשֵׁר, but the Ketib reading, גָּד, is more commonly attested. The translation difference is not significant, meaning either "by fortune" (K) or "fortune has come" (Q).

⁴⁵ Both the names Gad and Asher might connect etymologically to Canaanite gods or religious practices (Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 246; Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 485-86). However, the possibility is not strong since the Canaanite religion is in no way hinted by the passage, and the words that both the names derive from have regular connotations in the context of fidelity to YHWH (Michael A. Grisanti, "גָּד," *NIDOTTE* 1.819; Michael A. Grisanti, "אֲשֵׁר," *NIDOTTE* 1.568-69).

Genesis 30:14–24

Reuben’s discovery of mandrakes incites another opportunity for a scene of conflict between Rachel and Leah.⁴⁶ At this point in the marriage(s), Rachel gained a sexual monopoly with Jacob, and Leah has turned very bitter for it.⁴⁷ Rachel asks Leah politely for the mandrakes, but Leah responds in anger.⁴⁸ Even as the barren wife, Rachel is in power over Leah, and Leah must resort to hiring Jacob, her own husband, from her sister.⁴⁹

The picture of Leah in this scene does not look like someone who has recognized God’s blessing on her and accepted her situation because of it. She snaps at Rachel, “Is your taking my husband such a small thing, now you take also my son’s mandrakes?” (Gen 30:15). Even though the naming of her children up to this point has shown a gradual movement to praising the Lord and not lamenting her situation, this scene seems to undermine the growth shown in the process of the birth of her six children. Instead, she is still apparently lamenting her situation.

However, Leah is not regressing here to once again lamenting about Jacob’s lack of affection for her. She is likely lamenting a new, even worse situation that she is in. Previously, Jacob had been providing her the conjugal rights he owed her, and she could bear children for him. Now, not only is Jacob still not affectionate to Leah, he is no longer sleeping with her *at all*, and Leah’s anger over that has built up (cf. Exod 21:10–11).⁵⁰ When she meets Jacob in the field after renting him for the mandrakes, she says to him, “To me you shall come” (Gen 30:16). Alter

⁴⁶ For details on the mandrake plant and its ANE background, see John H. Walton, Victor Harold Mathews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 62; Sarna, *Genesis*, 209; Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 486.

⁴⁷ Pace, *The Women of Genesis*, 77.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 137.

⁵⁰ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 247.

points out that this idiom typically refers to relations with a woman that the man had not before slept with, so it is “a strong indication that Jacob has been sexually boycotting Leah.”⁵¹ Leah has not fallen back into lamenting what God had already soothed for her through her children. In Gen 30:15, she laments that things have gotten even worse between her and her husband.

Once again, God listens (שמע) to her and blesses Leah with children in order to lighten her hard situation (Gen 30:17). As a result of her night with Jacob, Leah bears Issachar (יששכר).⁵² She says, “God has given me my reward (שכר)” (Gen 30:18). Jacob’s wage (שכר) in Gen 29:18, and Leah’s wage is her children. As noted previously, Rachel saw her offer of her slave woman to Jacob as an act that brought God’s favor (Gen 30:6). At the birth of Issachar, Leah expresses a similar understanding. She says, “God has given me my reward *because* I gave my maidservant as a wife” (Gen 30:18; italics added). Leah saw this as a selfless act, one worth God’s blessing upon her.⁵³ However, while Rachel seems to race for children explicitly to “beat” Leah, Leah’s continual attempt to have children is an attempt for Jacob’s favor, not necessarily an attempt to have more children than Rachel. Leah’s motivation for giving Jacob Zilpah was to gain Jacob’s favor, not to out-birth Rachel.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 160.

⁵² Although the MT retains a second ש, the Samaritan Pentateuch, Vulgate, Syriac, and Targum texts do not vocalize the second ש and instead support placing a daghesh forte in the first ש. Sarna suggests that the MT reading reflects an archaic causative form, which would mean “May he [God] grant favor/reward” (Sarna, *Genesis*, 210). The name Issachar contains the noun שכר (“wage”), which alludes to the key words that surround Jacob’s life with Laban, work and wages (Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 137). Even though Jacob was promised to be a ruler, he is reduced to a man of wages (Ibid., 138). Jacob’s family life, as well as his wives’, is reduced to dealing in work and wages (Ibid., 137).

⁵³ Steinmann, *Genesis*, 286; Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 488.

⁵⁴ Starr-Morris, “Leah and Hagar,” 388.

In some way, Issachar's birth resolves Leah's suffering by encouraging Jacob to sleep with her again. Once he sees that she is fruitful again, he decides she is worth laying with. Leah bears her sixth biological son Zebulun (זְבוּלוֹן), saying "God has gifted me with a good gift. This time my husband will esteem me (יִזְבֶּלְנִי)" (Gen 30:20).⁵⁵ From her lowly state of affliction (עָנִי), Leah hopes that her husband will raise her up (זָבַל). Ultimately, even though Jacob does not esteem her, Leah will find esteem through her offspring, Judah, by the blessing of the Lord.

Jacob again lays with Leah, and she bears a daughter instead of a son, Dinah (דִּינָה). There is no exclamation of etymological significance recorded for Dinah's name, probably because she does not have a tribe of Israel named after her. Her name means "judgment" or "vindication," and it is the feminine form of Dan.⁵⁶ Dinah's introduction here allows her to return onto the scene in Gen 34.⁵⁷ There is no further indication that Jacob visits her again, and the scene ultimately ends without Jacob's favor on Leah.

Finally, Rachel has a son of her own. The narrator points out that God remembered (זָכַר) Rachel and listened (שָׁמַע) to her, both verbs that express the Lord's fidelity. While God showed mercy to Leah and allowed her to bear children for seven years before Rachel, he always planned to allow Rachel sons, too. His mercy is not restricted to Leah because of her affliction, but it is

⁵⁵ The name Zebulun, though connected most to the verb זָבַל, also plays on the noun זֶבֶד "gift" (Sarna, *Genesis*, 210). The verb זָבַל occurs only here in the OT, and there is debate whether it means "esteem" or "dwell with" (Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 489). The Akkadian cognate *zbl*, translated "lift up, bear" in the sense of exaltation, suggests that the Hebrew זָבַל should be understood as "esteem" (Gary V. Smith, "זָבַל," *NIDOTTE* 1.1074).

⁵⁶ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 489.

⁵⁷ Sarna, *Genesis*, 210.

extended also to Rachel in her distress. Rachel's long infertility, even after she obtained the mandrakes, makes clear to Rachel and Leah that their childbearing is in the hands of the Lord alone.⁵⁸

The Aftermath of the Affliction Scene

The last recorded moment of Rachel and Leah's relationship is Gen 31:14–16. Rachel and Leah answer Jacob's desire to leave Laban in a unified voice. Regardless of any conflict, past or present, between the women, they both recognize the injustice done to their husband and to themselves by their father.⁵⁹ Ironically, when Laban later leaves Jacob, he warns Jacob not to "afflict" (אָפּוּעַ) his daughters (Gen 31:50). Laban himself has afflicted his daughters, both by putting them into a difficult family situation and by specifically putting Leah in a position where she would be unloved by her husband. The irony that he himself afflicted Jacob *and* his own daughters is lost on Laban.⁶⁰ Rachel and Leah recognize Laban's wrongdoings and speak out in one voice that they wish to leave.

The two further references to Leah in Gen 33 and 49 show that Jacob did not come to esteem her like she hoped. When he goes to meet Esau, he puts Leah and her clan in front of Rachel and her clan, which could either be a practice of formal presentation which saves his beloved wife for last or a military strategy to protect his most beloved wife (Gen 33:1–2).⁶¹ Either way, Jacob's favor on Rachel is evidently greater than his favor on Leah.

⁵⁸ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 275.

⁵⁹ Pace, *The Women of Genesis*, 80.

⁶⁰ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 314.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 342-43; Sarna, *Genesis*, 229; Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 566; Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 298.

Additionally, at the death of Jacob, he asks to be buried with Leah (Gen 49:31). At first glance, it appears that Jacob has finally shown favor to Leah, perhaps because he realizes she bore the son of promise, Judah. However, upon closer inspection, there are other factors that may have influenced Jacob's burial request. The most apparent reason is that Jacob likely chose to be buried with Leah because it was also where his fathers were buried, and that was his main goal (Gen 49:31).⁶² Nevertheless, Jacob's burial with Leah is a symbol of God's blessing on her both individually and through Judah. God may well have orchestrated the burial arrangements in a way that would one day give Leah the honor of being buried beside her husband.

Analysis

On the surface, Leah's narrative seems to further the affliction motif only minimally. Her situation shares similarities to both Hagar and Jacob's situations, making it appear that her narrative is not unique. However, though similar to other narratives, Leah's story adds to the affliction motif in a variety of meaningful ways.

Characterization

Leah is only a minimally active character in her story. She has no say in her marriage arrangements, and even as she verbally expresses her laments, they are not directed specifically to her afflicter. Never does Leah come to Jacob and plead for his love. Even in the mandrake deal with Rachel, the terms were contrived by Rachel, not Leah (Gen 30:15).⁶³ Leah's exclamations at the births of her children explain the movement of the narrative as well as theological commentaries on those narrative situations, and they are her strongest moments in the

⁶² Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 914.

⁶³ Pace, *The Women of Genesis*, 85.

story.⁶⁴ Overall, Leah's role in the story is simply to serve as a womb, though not a silent womb, which literarily reflects that her value to Jacob was solely in her fruitfulness.⁶⁵

Very quickly into Leah's narrative, she is compared with Hagar. She is the unloved, yet fertile, co-wife.⁶⁶ Leah exclaims, "The Lord has seen my affliction" just like the Lord had heard Hagar's affliction (Gen 16:11; 29:32). Both women were paired with husbands whom they expressed no desire to marry.⁶⁷ They both provide children for their husband in place of their barren co-wives.⁶⁸ Typically, bearing the firstborn son would elevate the mother, but instead, both Hagar and Leah are rejected and afflicted.⁶⁹ Leah's characterization as a Hagar-like character enforces Leah's status as an afflicted outsider, though she herself is the mother who bears the next in the line of promise.⁷⁰ Hagar was an afflicted foreigner, but the affliction motif has progressed to the point that even the matriarch of the line of promise is afflicted, and even by the father of the nation of Israel. Instead of being a celebrated matriarch, Leah is afflicted.

Punishment to the Afflictors

In Leah's situation of affliction, God once again is not recorded as in any way punishing Jacob for afflicting Leah specifically, though Jacob experiences suffering for other reasons. Laban, the initial afflicter of Leah, is punished for his actions when Jacob takes his family away

⁶⁴ Pace, *The Women of Genesis*, 85.

⁶⁵ Starr-Morris, "Leah and Hagar," 389.

⁶⁶ Robert Alter, "How Convention Helps Us Read: The Case of the Bible's Annunciation Type-Scene," *Prooftexts* 3.2 (1983): 123.

⁶⁷ Starr-Morris, "Leah and Hagar," 389.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Judah is later given the firstborn status in the kingly line, through which King David comes and ultimately the Messiah, Jesus Christ (Gen 49:8-12).

in Gen 31, but Jacob does not receive chastisement for mistreating Leah. This characteristic of the narrative is similar to Hagar's affliction where Sarai and Abram are not punished for mistreating Hagar. The similarity between Leah and Hagar's situation of affliction is highlighted further by the quality that their immediate afflictors are not punished. Instead, the affliction and God's attention to them serves more to grow the sufferer instead of chastising an afflictor.

God's Attention to Affliction

The Lord blesses and protects Leah by opening her womb and closing Rachel's. A prominent theological aspect of this text, shown in the naming process and in the events, is that God works here "independent of human effort and counter to human intention and desire."⁷¹ He neither grants desires immediately nor blesses human attempts to fulfill their own wishes, such as Rachel's inability to bear even though she obtained mandrakes (Gen 30:15–21). Jacob's progeny through Rachel and Leah is furthered by God's initiative, not human effort.⁷² In accompaniment with the surrounding narrative of Jacob's affliction, the reality shown in the childbearing narrative is that Jacob's cleverness has no true effect on his situation, a point that takes Jacob a lifetime to learn.⁷³ Rather, God's hand shapes events according to his own will. Instead of God simply blessing Rachel's womb, as Jacob's favored wife, God blesses the womb of the afflicted wife and ultimately makes her an ancestress of the line of David and Christ.

The Leah Narrative's Contribution to the Motif of Affliction

There is a great deal regarding Leah's narrative that is similar to Hagar's narrative of affliction, such as the resolution of affliction in the form of childbearing and the lack of

⁷¹ Patterson, *The Plot-structure of Genesis*, 159.

⁷² 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: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 102.

⁷³ Patterson, *The Plot-structure of Genesis*, 161.

punishment to the afflicter. Nevertheless, Leah's narrative does add to the motif in other ways. Other than Jacob, Leah is the only afflicted character in Genesis to be directly in the line of promise. Hagar, Dinah, and Joseph are all connected to the family, but Isaac, rather than Ishmael, and Judah, rather than Joseph or Dinah, are the ones who further the line. Leah is the matriarchal counterpart to Jacob, yet she is afflicted by Jacob himself. Leah's uniqueness is that she is rejected by the humans around her, but she is chosen by God to birth Judah, who furthers the line of promise.

From beginning to end, Leah's narrative is steeped in covenantal themes, specifically, the theme of progeny. Part of the Lord's purpose in blessing Leah, apart from comforting the afflicted matriarch, is to fulfill his promise of progeny (Gen 13:16; 28:14).⁷⁴ There is virtually no element of her story that is without this theme, at least in undertones. The circumstances of Jacob's polygamy, though disastrous in terms of familial peace, ultimately create an environment where Rachel and Leah strive for individual needs, but end up producing "an assembly of offspring for the patriarch."⁷⁵ In fact, instead of settling the conflict between the sisters, God contributes to it by allowing Leah to bear, and Rachel strives to catch up.⁷⁶ Instead of bearing just one child who God would choose as his own people (i.e., Isaac and Jacob), Rachel and Leah bear 12 sons who would be the 12 tribes of the nation.⁷⁷ Even in a situation of strife where all parties are driven by an unmet human need, God follows through on his promises in abundance

⁷⁴ Anderson, *Jacob...*, 102.

⁷⁵ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 473.

⁷⁶ Anderson, *Jacob...*, 105.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 101-02.

with a remarkable 13 children (at least).⁷⁸ The Lord resolves Leah's affliction as he carries through with his primary concern: keeping his promises.⁷⁹

Secondly, Leah's affliction is not resolved in the way that she wishes, which is that her husband would love her; instead, it is resolved in a better way. As opposed to Rachel following the matriarchal line of Sarah and Rebekah, Leah is the wife who bears the next in the line of the seed: Judah. Rachel even reflected the betrothal type-scene of Rebekah, so expectations are raised that Rachel will be the matriarch of line of promise, yet God allows Leah to take that position.⁸⁰ By the blessing of the Lord, Leah bears the firstborn son, who is supposed to receive the inheritance (cf. Deut 21:15–17). However, it is not even Jacob's firstborn son who gains the blessing; it is Judah, the *fourth* born son, who succeeds his father. Although Leah hopes that the resolution to her affliction will be that Jacob loves her, she does not receive that and instead receives something better: she becomes an ancestress of David (and later, the Messiah). Her realization that God's plan is better unfolds through her naming process, but she never learns the reality that Jacob chooses Judah as his successor of promise rather than Joseph.⁸¹ While Rachel has the immediate comfort of Jacob's love, Leah ultimately receives the greater honor from God of being a matriarch to David through her son Judah.

Lastly, as alluded to briefly in the previous section, the theology revealed in Leah's narrative bears import for understanding the Jacob narrative. In Patterson's outline of the

⁷⁸ Ross-Burstall, "Leah and Rachel," 163.

⁷⁹ John E. Anderson, "Jacob, Laban, and a Divine Trickster?: The Covenantal Framework of God's Deception in the Theology of the Jacob Cycle," *PRSt* 36 (2009): 23.

⁸⁰ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 473.

⁸¹ Starr-Morris, "Leah and Hagar," 391.

narrative of Jacob, he notes that Gen 29:31–30:24 serves as the center of a chiasm within Jacob’s narrative. Patterson’s outline is as follows:⁸²

Table 1: Jacob’s Narrative as a Chiasm

A	25:19–34	Jacob and Esau: The older wills serve the younger
B	26:1–26:33	Jacob’s father and a foreign king
C	26:34–28:9	Jacob and Esau: Jacob leaves the land
D	28:10–22	Jacob and God: God promises blessing
E	29:1–30	Jacob and Laban: Jacob comes to Haran
F	29:31–30:24	Rachel and Leah: struggle over sons
F’	30:25–43	Jacob and Laban: struggle over flocks
E’	31:1–32:1	Jacob and Laban: Jacob leaves Haran
D’	32:2–33	Jacob and God: Jacob struggles with God for blessing
C’	33:1–20	Jacob and Esau: Jacob returns to the land
B’	34:1–31	Jacob’s sons and a foreign king
A’	35:1–29	Jacob is established in the land as promised line of seed

Since Jacob’s struggle is the corresponding F layer to Rachel and Leah’s struggle, then what the narrator reveals in Rachel and Leah’s struggle should be taken into consideration for understanding the Jacob and Laban struggle. Specifically, the picture of God as solely in control of events in Rachel and Leah’s story permeates how the reader should understand Jacob’s situation.⁸³ Leah’s (and Rachel’s) failure to control events on their own provides an underlying comment on Jacob’s continual self-sufficiency in his life.⁸⁴ Leah receives blessing and prosperity by the hand of the Lord, which stands in contrast to Jacob seeking blessing by his own hand rather than the Lord’s.⁸⁵ Both Leah and Jacob strive to escape their affliction, but they both learn that God is ultimately the one who is responsible for resolving their suffering. Leah’s brief narrative shows her learning that lesson quickly, so the narrator provides anticipation for Jacob

⁸² Patterson, *The Plot-structure of Genesis*, 136.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Ross-Burstall, “Leah and Rachel,” 170.

to learn that lesson, too. Particularly because Leah's narrative is embedded into the larger Jacob narrative, her story provides a concise theology of God's sovereignty over human desires and plans.

Conclusion

Leah's story furthers the motif of affliction in Genesis by revealing God's commitment to fulfilling his promises in the midst of a situation of affliction, the aspect of Leah's largely unresolved immediate suffering, but ultimate spiritual blessing through her chosen offspring Judah, and the element of her story revealing theology necessary to understanding the surrounding Jacob narrative. God, working through Leah's fleshly desire to win her husband's favor, ultimately humbles Leah to realize that God is the one who made her fruitful. She recognizes God's grace by continually naming her sons in celebration of the Lord's provision (Gen 29:32–35; 30:11, 13, 18, 20). The Lord sees her affliction and has mercy on her, as she, not Rachel, is the one who bears Judah, the successor in the line of promise (Gen 29:35; 49:8–12). Leah would not know this blessing while she lived on earth, but the narrator reveals this truth by including her brief story into the Jacob narrative.

Chapter 6:

Dinah: The Voiceless Afflicted

Introduction

Genesis 34 is not about Dinah's affliction. At least, it is not *mainly* about her affliction. This passage in the Jacob narrative fits in to the surrounding themes of Genesis by introducing a new threat of assimilation into the surrounding cultures as well as the continual theme of God's people taking matters into their own hands.¹ However, these themes are not why this narrative is necessary for this research. The major conflict of Gen 34 is based on Shechem's affliction (עֲנִיָּה) of Dinah. Everything that happens in the rest of the chapter is driven by this initial outrage, yet very little time is spent on Dinah herself. In some sense, though the whole narrative founds on the affliction of Dinah by Shechem, the deception and slaughter by Simeon and Levi are the main issues in the story. Jacob and his sons are the center of the plot as they struggle with living as foreigners and with putting trust in God. Dinah is collateral damage to their story.

As a piece of the affliction motif in Genesis, this narrative plays a unique role. The victim of affliction here is not solely the person physically afflicted, but also the men in her clan because they are responsible for her. An attack on Dinah is the same as an attack on the men. Furthermore, this narrative is unique because God does not respond to the affliction. Lastly, the main victim of affliction is completely silent in the whole story and instead has a voice only through her male family members. The narrator in Gen 34 gives very little explanation for the

¹ John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 200.

affliction event and subsequent conflict, and this silence from the narrator ultimately raises some of the most difficult questions found in the Genesis affliction narratives.

Textual Background to the Dinah Narrative

Dinah's affliction narrative occurs suddenly amidst Jacob's narrative. The story is more a story about Jacobs family and experiences during his sojourning than a story about Dinah's affliction. Because the story occurs in Jacob's narrative, the themes and interpretive questions of Jacob's narrative are a significant interpretative aspect to understanding this story.² Dinah has no character role in this chapter or elsewhere in Genesis. She is essentially a stock character brought forward simply to fill the role of the afflicted family member. Her presence serves merely to explain the conflict that came upon Jacob's family by the hand of the Shechemites. Among other themes, one element of Dinah's narrative is that it presents another conflict along the survival of the seed/intermarriage theme. The threat of assimilation is presented when Shechem wishes to marry Dinah and make a treaty with Jacob.³ Ultimately, the faithfulness of Jacob and his family is at stake in this story. Any interpretation of Gen 34 must take these themes into account. However, for the purposes of this research, the elements of this narrative that drive the affliction motif are the sole focus of this analysis.

Exegesis of Genesis 34:1–31

The first big question of the narrative is whether Dinah engaged with Shechem consensually. At the start of the narrative, Dinah goes out of the family camp to visit the neighboring women (34:1). Sarna suggests that Dinah's actions of "going out" into the city

² Daniel Hankore, *The Abduction of Dinah: Genesis 28:10–35:15 as a Votive Narrative* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2013), 197.

³ Todd L. Patterson, *The Plot-structure of Genesis: 'Will the Righteous Seed Survive?' In the Muthos-Logical Movement from Complication to Denouement* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 174-75.

would be seen promiscuously, with emphasis on the coquettish connotations of the verb.⁴ Young virgins would not typically go alone into a foreign city, so Sarna asserts that her conduct should be seen critically.⁵ It is important for the motif of affliction in Genesis to establish that Dinah in no way did anything to deserve her affliction. Schulte argues that Dinah is not culpable by pointing out many reasons why reading נָצַח in Gen 34:1 as a somehow promiscuous activity is incorrect, including the valuable argument that five of the six times that the OT describes a woman as “going out” result in positive results for the Israelite community.⁶ The sixth use is the questionable appearance in Dinah’s story, and Schulte argues that the positive result of Dinah’s going out in this story is that Jacob ultimately commits to fulfilling his vow to return to Bethel (Gen 28:20–22).⁷ Backfish also rejects Sarna’s assertion and argues that claims like Sarna’s are “not only victim-blaming but also incongruent with other women who safely and honorably go out of their households (e.g., Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, and Jael).”⁸ Ultimately, Schulte and Backfish show that the verb is not only a neutral term, but may even be a positive term in the context of these Israelite women’s actions. Dinah did nothing to deserve Shechem’s assault.

However, based on the verbs in verse 2 and the subsequent affection of Shechem, there is serious debate whether Shechem’s rape is the focus of the conflict. The focus could be on Dinah’s loss of virginity outside the usual formalities of marriage rather than the affliction of

⁴ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 233.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁶ Leah Rediger Schulte, *The Absence of God in Biblical Rape Narratives* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2017), 106-07.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁸ Elizabeth Backfish, “Household Dynamics in Ancient Israel: Genesis 34 as a Case Study” (paper to be presented for the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society), (Fall 2020), *forthcoming*.

rape itself. The narrator describes the actions of Shechem, saying, **יקח אתה וישכב אתה ויענה** (he took her, laid [with] her, and afflicted her). Some scholars translate verse 2's debated collocation of **שכב** plus **ענה** in the piel as closer to "had sexual intercourse and humiliated her" as opposed to the usual translation "raped" or "had sex by force" that most Bible translations choose.⁹ In this reading, **ענה** refers to the humiliation Dinah underwent as the result of pre-marital sex. If this reading is correct, then there is still a question of what exactly Dinah experienced and what exactly Shechem did or intended.

Most scholars support the assertion that Shechem did rape Dinah as one act that he performed against her. Schulte argues "there can be no doubt that Dinah is raped."¹⁰ Schulte cites the syntax to explain why the sex was not consensual. The text says that Shechem does not lay *with* Dinah, he lays her. The **ל** uses the o-class *holem* vowel (**לֹ**) rather than an i-class *hireq* vowel (**לִ**), which marks the word as the object marker rather than the preposition "with."¹¹ The significance of this is that Dinah most likely did not consent to laying with Shechem, which further supports the conclusion that **ל** does not describe a scandalous attitude.¹² Noble adds to

⁹ Paul Wegner, "ענה," *NIDOTTE* 3.450; Susanne Scholz, *Sacred Witness: Rape in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 35. Compare the NLT, CSB, and NASB with the ESV, NKJV, and KJV.

¹⁰ Schulte, *The Absence of God...*, 121.

¹¹ The LXX smooths out this reading to "with her," but it is more likely an editing choice by the LXX because there is no viable reason for an MT scribe to change the object marker to the preposition, but the LXX scribes would change the object marker to the preposition because that would make more sense. Both readings are true to the consonantal text and solely adjust the chosen vowels.

¹² Scholz, *Sacred Witness*, 35.

this argument that שכב plus the object marker occurs when the sexual act is somehow “irregular,” so he concludes that the narrator describes Shechem’s act in a negative way.¹³

Furthermore, the use of ענה in the sentence strengthens the depiction of Shechem’s actions as criminal. This verb in the OT describes people in power afflicting or attempting to humble those weaker than them, demeaning those people further in the process.¹⁴ Blyth explains this word, saying, “An element of disapproval appears to be implicit in the use of this verbal form to connote one person’s treatment of another; to behave towards a fellow human in such a way is considered, within the world view of biblical Israel, to be abusive, oppressive, and essentially unjust.”¹⁵ The verb certainly allows for the translation “[Shechem] humiliated her,” but this context goes beyond just humiliation. The element of the sexual act brings this verb out of solely emotional abuse and into physical abuse. In summary, the string of verbs in Gen 34:2, “he took her, laid [with] her, and afflicted her,” describes a forced sexual encounter and leaves little question that Dinah suffered unjustly.

The major argument against identifying rape as the affliction rather than pre-marital defilement is that Shechem sought to marry Dinah, meaning that according to the ANE cultural construct, instead of rape, Shechem performed an abductive marriage.¹⁶ Hankore presents the

¹³ Paul Noble, “A ‘Balanced’ Reading of the Rape of Dinah: Some Exegetical and Methodological Observations,” *BibInt* 4.2 (1996): 178. Other examples of this collocation are Gen. 26:10; Lev. 15:24; 20:11-13.

¹⁴ Paul Wegner, “ענה,” *NIDOTTE*, 3.450.

¹⁵ Caroline Blyth, *The Narrative of Rape in Genesis 34: Interpreting Dinah's Silence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 64.

¹⁶ Hankore, *The Abduction of Dinah*, 192. Here, much of the debate centers on how highly to uphold the ANE construct when interpreting the biblical text. Many scholars see the ANE background to this text as intrinsically shaping the theological meaning of this passage. However, as the rest of the discussion will reflect, the assertion of this author is that this passage is an example where ANE background helps to understand the text but does not shape the biblical interpretation. Thus, even if the ANE culture would not call Shechem’s actions “rape,” the biblical author is calling it out as “rape.”

fullest description of this argument, and he in no way minimalizes the violent nature or immorality of an abductive marriage. He describes the whole process as violent and dishonoring, often ending up with the woman killed if she fought back.¹⁷ Basically, the man would snatch the woman, take her to a hiding place, have sex with her by force, then tell the family that she is now his and commence marriage proceedings.¹⁸ Indeed, this matches well with what is described in Gen 34. Hankore argues that it is inappropriate to force Western vocabulary onto ancient practices; thus, if the people of time defined rape differently (i.e., as forced sex that did *not* end in marriage), then modern readers must operate by that standard.¹⁹ By ANE standard, the end result of the actions play a role in how the earlier actions are defined. The total of the actions equals an “abductive marriage,” so by ANE standard, the rape is not important because Shechem would marry her. Shechem did attempt an abductive marriage, but if the question is whether he raped her or committed an abductive marriage, there is no reason that the answer cannot be “both,” according to the perspective of the narrator. Shechem took her, had sex with her, and afflicted her. Rape was an action he performed in the process of abducting her, and the biblical author asserts that the rape cannot be ignored.

Dinah underwent the atrocity of rape, but going a step further, because he sought to marry her, she also faced the danger of being assimilated into a foreign culture. After he forcibly lays with her, the narrator describes that Shechem feels great affection for her. It is unclear if he felt this way before raping her or only after. Shechem as an oppressor is unique in Genesis

¹⁷ Hankore, *The Abduction of Dinah*, 185-88.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 164.

because no other afflicter along the motif of affliction reportedly loved their victim.²⁰ Sternberg enhances this picture by pointing out that verses 2 and 3 set in contrast to one another three verbs each.²¹ In verse 2, Shechem takes, lays, and afflicts, but in verse 3, his whole being (נִפְּשׁוֹ) clung, he loved, and he spoke kindly to Dinah. This suggests that “such affliction is not incompatible with love.”²² Shechem’s character is unexpected for a Genesis afflicter. In terms of the broader picture of biblical afflictors, this reminds readers not to expect paradigmatic traits from each afflicter. They can be unique characters because they were real, unique people. Still, even though Shechem wanted to marry her, which in that culture was considered the right thing to do, it was a dangerous option for people who vowed to stay separate from pagan cultures.

Jacob’s response to the news is noteworthy because he is the central figure at this point in Genesis as well as in his family. When Jacob hears about Dinah, the narrator describes that Jacob heard how Shechem *defiled* his daughter, which connotes moral and religious atrocity beyond even the verb of rape עָנָה.²³ Nevertheless, even though he recognizes the outrage of Shechem’s defilement of Dinah, he remains silent. The verb used here for Jacob’s act of silence, חָרַשׁ, does not always connote a negative silence.²⁴ Fewell and Gunn point out that this could be patience at

²⁰ Compare also the attitude of Amnon hating Tamar after raping her, the complete opposite of Shechem’s attitude (2 Sam 13:15–17).

²¹ Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 446-47.

²² Susan Niditch, “Genesis,” in *Women’s Bible Commentary*, eds. Newsom, Carol A., Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 40.

²³ Sternberg, *The Poetics...*, 449.

²⁴ John N. Oswalt, חָרַשׁ, *NIDOTTE*, 2.297.

work. They point out that keeping peace can be the most difficult response to an outrage.²⁵ However, Sternberg does not see it this way. Sternberg describes Jacob's actions (or, inaction) as true neglect.²⁶ Sternberg does not describe Jacob as "patient" but inert.²⁷ The narrator gives few clues as to whether Jacob was right or wrong to be silent; thus, it is difficult to support a conclusion without this needed textual support. Jacob's strong reaction to Joseph's supposed death cannot be ignored here (Gen 37:34–35, 46:30). Granted, the death of a child is not the same as Dinah's affliction, but her situation was grave enough to warrant at least some emotion from her father. Either Dinah would remain unmarried the rest of her life or she would marry a Hivite, her abductor. Both options were terrible, but Jacob showed no response. The patriarch is responsible for the virginity, safety, and the reputation of the women in the clan, so when Jacob did not speak up at Dinah's rape, that would be unexpected.²⁸ Simeon and Levi, on the other hand, show a strong emotional response. In place of their father, Simeon and Levi play the role of protector.²⁹ The rest of the story deals with their revenge plot since, as is common in Scripture, sexual assault leads to violent revenge, but the original victim is still given no narrational perspective.³⁰

²⁵ Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, "Tipping the Balance: Sternberg's Reader and the Rape of Dinah," *JBL* 110 (1991): 198.

²⁶ Sternberg, *The Poetics...*, 448.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 448.

²⁸ Backfish, "Household Dynamics..." *forthcoming*.

²⁹ This practice was not uncommon in ANE cultures (*Ibid.*). Grown sons often took as much responsibility for their sisters as the father (*Ibid.*).

³⁰ Ruth Everhart, "The Bible's #MeToo Stories: Abuse and Abusers in Scripture," *ChrCent* 135 (2018): 23.

As soon as the brothers enter the scene in verse 7, it becomes apparent that their whole family was attacked through the assault on Dinah.³¹ She is not the only victim here, but the whole family was shamed and threatened.³² Jacob and her brothers were not able to protect Dinah, and now their family wears that cultural stain. Both they and Dinah were shamed by Shechem's acts of defilement, which is likely the main cause of the "affliction."³³ This violation is both cultural and religious as it caused Dinah to become נִזְוָה, which typically denotes uncleanness.³⁴ Fewell and Gunn point out the brothers focus on the fact that Dinah has been lain with rather than raped.³⁵ The line is thin, but they do appear more concerned with her loss of virginity than her physical assault. Unfortunately, the brothers may be more enraged by personal and familial *pride* than by *disgust* for the violent actions forced upon their sister.³⁶

The remaining events in the chapter depict the resolution to the affliction. The main question is whether the resolution was done at the hand of God or not. There is little doubt that Shechem committed a morally reprehensible act, so the brothers are rightly incensed. This does not mean, though, that they rightly deceived and slaughtered a whole people group of men. In every other affliction narrative thus far, God pays attention to the suffering and acts to resolve it.

³¹ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18-50*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 357.

³² Backfish, "Household Dynamics...", *forthcoming*; Richard E. Averbeck, "נִזְוָה," *NIDOTTE* 2.365.

³³ Scholz, *Sacred Witness*, 33.

³⁴ Backfish, "Household Dynamics...", *forthcoming*.

³⁵ Fewell and Gunn, "Tipping the Balance," 199.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 206-07.

There is no mention of God behind the actions of Simeon and Levi, so it makes it more challenging to understand if Simeon and Levi acted righteously.³⁷

For those who argue that Simeon and Levi should not be so strongly condemned for their actions, the typical argument is to point to the need to bring Dinah back as well as to the result that the Israelites avoided intermarriage because the treaty that Hamor proposes in Gen 34:8–17 would allow foreigners to marry Israelite women and vice versa. Mathews summarizes the opposing view, though he also refutes it, saying, “That Dinah was still imprisoned and that the brothers were numerically disadvantaged have been put forward by some commentators as mitigating the heinous nature of their response.”³⁸ Hamilton argues for this viewpoint. He points out that the brothers likely thought their only chance of success was to use deceit.³⁹ Secondly, scholars point out that even though Simeon and Levi literally committed “overkill,” the result was better than assimilation into the Hivite people. Intermarriage with foreigners is typically regarded negatively in Genesis as well as later in the OT (Gen 24:3–4; 27:46–28:4). By Simeon and Levi’s acts, they successfully kept their clan from intermarrying with the Shechemites (Gen 34:8–17).

However, the problem with these solutions is that they are both driven by human effort. Simeon and Levi acted based on the numbers of the Shechemites, but God could have prospered the efforts by his own power. After all, he protected the family from resulting attacks by putting fear in the hearts of the foreigners (Gen 35:5). The same can be said for protecting the people of

³⁷ It can be said here and now that, even if Simeon and Levi did the right thing, the rest of their brothers acted reprehensibly by plundering the dead (Gen 34:27–29), which was a selfish act to increase their wealth (Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, WBC 2 [Dallas: Word, 1994], 315; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 371; K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, NAC [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996], 608).

³⁸ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 607.

³⁹ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 369.

intermarriage. God could have shaped events to keep the Israelites ultimately pure from intermarriage. God has shown himself very able to resolve hard situations for his people, as he had done for Jacob with Laban (Gen 30:37–43). Commentators may attempt to explain why Simeon and Levi did what they did, but ultimately, they acted out of a lack of trust in the Lord.

The three main reasons that Simeon and Levi’s actions are not condoned are that they used deceit, that God did not command their actions, and that the punishment outweighed the crime. Mathews says succinctly, “There is nothing admirable about their conduct.”⁴⁰ The tactic of deception introduced in Gen 34:13 shows immediately that what Simeon and Levi are planning is not righteous.⁴¹ The noun used to describe their deceit, *הַזְרָמָה*, also appears in Gen 27:35 to describe Jacob’s deceit of Isaac. Just as their father was conniving, so Simeon and Levi use deceit to achieve their desired result.⁴² The deceit also took the form of a breach of covenant. Peterson explains in great detail how Simeon and Levi acted dishonorably precisely because they broke a covenant.⁴³ He argues that this moment of deceit resulted in further decline in their family.⁴⁴ Overall, deception, a continuing problem for Jacob’s family, is condemned once again.

Secondly, God’s silence in Gen 34 indicates that he in no way commanded their actions. Mathews explains, “That God commanded and directed the insurgency of the Israelites against

⁴⁰ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 601.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 601.

⁴² John E. Anderson, “Jacob, Laban, and a Divine Trickster?: The Covenantal Framework of God’s Deception in the Theology of the Jacob Cycle,” *PRSt* 36 (2009): 13-14.

⁴³ Brian Neil Peterson, “‘Jacob’s Trouble’: The Shechem Fiasco and the Breaking of Covenant in Genesis 34,” *BibSac* 176 (2019): 278-86.

⁴⁴ Peterson, “Jacob’s Trouble,” 290. This decline is evident in multiple ways: the multiple deaths to Jacob’s clan following chapter 34, sexual sins in Jacob’s family, general family dysfunction, and finally, famine (*Ibid.*, 286-90). He does not say that the slaughter was the *direct* cause, but that pain and sorrow will follow the breaching of a covenant (*Ibid.*, 287).

Canaanite strongholds (e.g., Deut 7:1–4) contrasts with this incident, where there is no divine directive for retaliation.”⁴⁵ God did not command the destruction of the Shechemites. Even during the later Canaanite warfare, when Israel tried to take warfare into their own hands without divine approval, they failed (cf. 1 Sam 4).⁴⁶ The choice to destroy the Shechemites was not in the hands of men and should have been reserved for God alone.⁴⁷

Lastly, even if Simeon and Levi rightly retaliated against Shechem and Hamor, they went far beyond any justified retaliation by destroying all the Shechemites. Backfish asserts, “The punishment far outstripped the crime, escalated it and made the brothers worse than the original perpetrators.”⁴⁸ The actions of Simeon and Levi went far beyond any principle of *lex talionis*.⁴⁹

Because of his sons’ shameful actions, Jacob chastises them after they return with Dinah (Gen 34:30). Instead of speaking up for the affliction done to Dinah, Jacob speaks up now when he is “only concerned for his own skin.”⁵⁰ Patterson suggests that Jacob’s words offer the narrator’s assessment of Simeon and Levi’s actions.⁵¹ Jacob’s actions have been less than exemplary, but he also points out the dangerous and dishonorable actions of his sons.

Simeon and Levi respond with accusation against Jacob (Gen 34:31). They are outraged at Shechem’s gall to first defile their sister, then offer the normal bride price. They do not see any way for Shechem to reconcile the reprehensible things he has done, especially if he acts like

⁴⁵ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 593.

⁴⁶ There are few examples of this in Scripture because most of time the attack is divinely commanded.

⁴⁷ Peterson, “Jacob’s Trouble,” 276.

⁴⁸ Backfish, “Household Dynamics...,” *forthcoming*.

⁴⁹ Peterson, “Jacob’s Trouble,” 276; Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 607.

⁵⁰ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 316.

⁵¹ Patterson, *The Plot-structure of Genesis*, 175.

the process is a typical marriage exchange.⁵² Furthermore, the sons speak to their father because they also saw Jacob as culpable for treating Dinah like a whore.⁵³ By Jacob going along with the process, they saw their father as treating Dinah like a prostitute by whom he could receive money.

Genesis 34 closes with still very little comment from the narrator. Nobody is given grace in this story, which suggests that no one is condoned. The rape is not condoned, the silence is not condoned, and the deceit and murder are not condoned.⁵⁴ The resounding note from the narrator is that Simeon and Levi receive the last word. Despite all the reprehensible behavior in the chapter, the narrator points back to Dinah's innocence and the suffering she endured.⁵⁵ Whatever else happened, Dinah did nothing to deserve her mistreatment, and that is where the event ends. Thus, even though Dinah is silent in the whole unit, the narrator does not allow her suffering to be forgotten.

One simple sentence in Gen 35 shows how God resolved the situation in Gen 34. The narrator describes Jacob's family leaving Shechem at the command of the Lord, and he says, "The terror of God was upon the cities that were all around them so that they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob" (Gen 35:5). The word for "terror," *הַתַּהַרְוֹתָם*, is a *hapex legomenon* noun from the root *תהה*, which typically means "to be terrified, shattered, or dismayed."⁵⁶ The reality of this picture is ambiguous, but suggests that God caused an inexplicable fear of Jacob's family to

⁵² Noble, "A 'Balanced' Reading...", 194.

⁵³ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 317.

⁵⁴ Backfish, "Household Dynamics...", *forthcoming*.

⁵⁵ Sternberg, *The Poetics...*, 475.

⁵⁶ M. V. Van Pelt/W. C. Kaiser, Jr. "תהה," *NIDOTTE* 2.331.

overcome the nations, or perhaps they all experienced a simultaneous period of random terror not connected to Jacob's family at all.⁵⁷ Simeon and Levi had put the whole family in a very difficult position, but God protected them all. This does not mean that God condoned their actions, but he once again uses the human plans to rescue a person in the midst of affliction, and ultimately the whole family from the danger of intermarriage or extinction by the surrounding nations (cf. Gen 34:8–17).

Analysis

The major challenges of this passage revolve around who is silent and what the narrator does not reveal. Notably, Dinah has no voice in the story, even though she is the primary victim of affliction.⁵⁸ Even more significantly, God is silent in Gen 34. His silence is actually typical of biblical rape narratives, so a major question of the passage is how to interpret God's silence.⁵⁹ Still, in the very little that the narrator reveals theologically, he tells enough to know how this chapter serves the affliction motif in Genesis.

Characterization

When trying to determine what character is central to the story, it is evident that even though Jacob leads the surrounding units, he is a passive character in this story. Dinah is the center of the conflict in the story, but she is also passive. The characters most active in the story are Simeon and Levi.⁶⁰ Sternberg describes them as “idealistic and uncompromising” and thus, “the most intricate, colorful, and attractive characters in the story.”⁶¹ The actions of the men

⁵⁷ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 377.

⁵⁸ Backfish, “Household Dynamics...,” *forthcoming*.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, *forthcoming*.

⁶⁰ George W. Coats, *Genesis*, FOTL (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 234.

⁶¹ Sternberg, *The Poetics...*, 473.

surrounding Dinah receive more of the narrator's focus than Dinah's status as a sufferer.⁶² That being acknowledged, the focus of *this* analysis is Dinah because she is the one who experiences the affliction.

Although Dinah never speaks or is spoken to, her affliction drives the story.⁶³ Over half the verses contains a reference to her.⁶⁴ Her role as an afflicted character in Genesis centers on the fact that she is silent. She has no say in her rape and abduction, and she has no say in what happens afterward. She is the epitome of helpless.

Since Dinah is silent, some commentators have ventured to fill in her perspective. The speculation mainly centers on whether she would have chosen to stay with Shechem. Fewell and Gunn point out that Shechem was likely her only option for marriage, and it would be a permanent marriage, meaning she would be safe (cf. Deut 22:28–29).⁶⁵ Furthermore, Shechem takes delight in her, so the prospect may not be too bad from Dinah's perspective.⁶⁶ Even still, she is given no choice in whether she stays with Shechem or not. Fewell and Gunn point out that she is taken (לָקַח) to Shechem's by force, but she is also taken (לָקַח) away from Shechem by force.⁶⁷

The problem with this description of Dinah's perspective is that the narrator does not give it. In response to Fewell and Gunn, Noble points out the issue in trying to discern what Dinah

⁶² Niditch, "Genesis," 41.

⁶³ Fewell and Gunn, "Tipping the Balance," 209-10.

⁶⁴ Scholz, *Sacred Witness*, 34. The verses that include a reference to her are: 34:1–5, 7–8, 11–14, 16, 19, 25–27, 31. This is 17 out of 31 verses. It is notable that Jacob's speech in verse 30 is one that does not even mention Dinah.

⁶⁵ Fewell and Gunn, "Tipping the Balance," 210.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 211.

would have wanted, writing, “What is ‘probably the best’ depends on a multitude of personal, social, and cultural circumstances; but the text omits most of the information we would need to assess Dinah's situation.”⁶⁸ Noble explains that the narrator is simply not concerned with what Dinah wanted or what was best for her.⁶⁹ Rather, he is concerned with the fact that she experienced affliction, and now her and her whole family are in danger of assimilating into a pagan culture. Dinah’s character is silent, but her suffering represents extreme social and religious danger that is brought on her whole family.

Punishment to the Afflictors

In this story, there is little doubt that the afflicter receives a punishment. However, as noted in the exegetical portion, the punishment does not come at the hand of God. Undoubtedly, God used the overreaction of Simeon and Levi to ultimately protect his people, but the story shows how once again, God (himself) does not act against the afflicter in the narrative. The punishment Shechem received was by human hands only, but God used it to preserve the righteous line.⁷⁰ However, this is because God once again reshaped the broken actions of his people into something that furthered their prosperity.

God’s Attention to Affliction

The most unique aspect of Dinah’s affliction narrative compared to the rest in Genesis is that there is *no* recognition that God has seen/heard her affliction or done something to bless the afflicted. Genesis 34 is one of the few chapters in Genesis where the Lord does not appear/is not

⁶⁸ Noble, “A ‘Balanced’ Reading...,” 199.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁷⁰ This is not to say that Simeon and Levi’s (and their brothers’) actions did not have adverse consequences to the clan, but the actions did protect them from intermarriage (see Brian Neil Peterson, “‘Jacob’s Trouble’: The Shechem Fiasco and the Breaking of Covenant in Genesis 34,” for an engaging discussion of how Simeon and Levi’s actions brought negative effects upon their family).

mentioned at all.⁷¹ The divergence from the pattern must happen for a reason.⁷² There are two elements of this story that scholars point to as reasons God is absent: God is always absent from rape narratives, and he is absent because his people have been and are unfaithful in the narrative.

First, the absence of God is a common factor to rape narrative. Schulte lists them: “The four elements of biblical rape include: the *absence* of God; the *presence* of a foreigner or outsider as rapist, victim, or collaborator; and a *persistent problem* throughout each book that is *resolved incorrectly* with increased violence.”⁷³ The first two elements are clear in Gen 34, but the persistent problem is more difficult to identify. Typically in rape narratives, the absence of God is usually a result of the people’s infidelity; in Gen 34, that person is Jacob, mainly because he has delayed returning to Bethel (cf. Gen 28:15; 31:13).⁷⁴ Schulte describes the ongoing problem in the Jacob narratives as intermarriage, particularly emphasized by Esau’s intermarriage and Jacob’s search for a wife (Gen 26:34–35; 27:46–28:1, 9).⁷⁵ In Gen 34, this problem is intensified by the threat of abductive marriage following the rape.⁷⁶ The danger of intermarriage ultimately creates a threat to the survival of the righteous seed because the treaty that Hamor makes with Jacob and his sons outlines the process of merging the clans of Israel and

⁷¹ Schulte, *The Absence of God...*, 117.

⁷² It is worth exploring whether this narrative does not belong in the affliction motif because the main affliction word, נָנַע, is used in a different nuance. It is possible to translate the verbs in 34:2, “Shechem took her, laid [with] her, and afflicted her.” However, as discussed in the exegetical analysis, the truer nuance of the verb here is, “Shechem took her, laid [with] her, and raped her.” It could also be translated, “Shechem took her, laid [with] her by force, and humiliated her.” Both options present the same nuance of rape. Thus, if the verb is not used here as “afflicted,” then possibly it is not an affliction narrative. Obviously, this option is not the view of the author since Gen 34 has been included in this research. When doing a word study, an appearance should not be left out simply because it is a unique nuance.

⁷³ Schulte, *The Absence of God...*, 69; italics in original.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 75-76.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

Shechem through intermarriage (Gen 34:8–17; cf. 3:15).⁷⁷ The incorrect resolution is Simeon and Levi’s deception and slaughter of the Shechemites.⁷⁸

Since this narrative follows the typical pattern of rape narratives, it causes less question about why God is silent. However, Gen 34 is the first rape narrative, so it can be argued that this narrative establishes the pattern. Given this reality, the pattern of rape narratives alone does not completely explain God’s absence. Paired with an additional element, the silence of God can make sense.

The second reason for God’s absence is the lack of loyalty shown at this time in the story by Jacob and his family. To begin, a pattern of deceit is strongly prevalent in Jacob’s life and now his sons.⁷⁹ God’s absence in Gen 34 shows that God was not pleased with the deception, even if it led to a result he used for good.⁸⁰ Additionally, the ongoing issue in Jacob’s life is his failure thus far to fulfill his vow to God. In Gen 28:20–22, Jacob vows to God to make Bethel a house of God and give God a tenth of what he owns. Jacob has not yet fulfilled that, and when he settles in Shechem in Gen 33:18, he stunts the fulfillment of his vow. By threatening the fulfillment of his vow, Jacob put his family at risk of God withdrawing his protection.⁸¹ If this is the case, then Jacob’s return to Bethel in Gen 35 resolves this problem.⁸²

Ultimately, the absence of God can be explained without threatening the pattern of the affliction motif in Genesis. God is not absent because he for some reason ignores Dinah’s

⁷⁷ Patterson, *The Plot-structure of Genesis*, 174-75.

⁷⁸ Schulte, *The Absence of God...*, 121.

⁷⁹ Anderson, “Jacob, Laban...,” 13.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Hankore, *The Abduction of Dinah*, 196.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 198; Anderson, “Jacob, Laban...,” 13-14.

affliction; he is instead absent because of the unfaithfulness of Jacob and his sons. Dinah is not responsible for her father and brother's unfaithfulness. She in no way deserved her mistreatment by Shechem, and God's silence does not contradict her innocence. Furthermore, God's silence is broken in Gen 35 when he protects Jacob and his family from the surrounding nations (Gen 35:5).

The Dinah Narrative's Contribution to the Motif of Affliction

Dinah's narrative is the only narrative to use **עָנָה** without the subsequent announcement of God's attention to the affliction. However, as argued above, God's silence is not due to Dinah herself, but more to the men of her family. By the simple choice of using **עָנָה**, the narrator has made a swift connection to the motif of affliction in Genesis, and thus to the resulting theology implicated in the motif. Even though God is silent in Gen 34, the narrator implies God's attention simply by using the term he always uses. By using **עָנָה**, the narrator is making a precise connection between Hagar, Jacob, and Leah to Dinah's affliction. The narrator could have ended the sentence, "he took her and had sex with her [by force]," but he chose to include also "and he afflicted her." The narrator hints to us exactly how terrible and unjust this situation was for Dinah. She is oppressed here, and even though she does not have the "divine intervention" that the other characters had gotten before her, her connection to other victims suggests God's attention to her as well.

Conclusion

If it seems that this analysis has not focused on Dinah enough, that is because Gen 34 really does not focus on Dinah either. Dinah is a silent victim in every way possible. Dinah's affliction narrative offers a new angle to the affliction motif by introducing a voiceless victim as

well as by presenting the only affliction narrative where God is silent. This narrative presents the theology that even when God seems quiet, he nevertheless hears the cries of his children and cares for them. The actions of Simeon and Levi, though well intended to avenge Dinah and protect their clans, ultimately stemmed from human plans rather than God's command. Once again, God shows that even through broken human plans, he can achieve his purposes.⁸³

⁸³ Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 200.

Chapter 7:

Joseph: The Model Afflicted

Introduction

Conflict among brothers riddles the chapters of Genesis, beginning with Cain and Abel. Bookending this murder is Joseph's affliction at the hands of his brothers who wished to murder him, too. Instead of this brotherly hatred ending in pain and exile, God used the situation of affliction to bring about blessing and redemption. Joseph's affliction narrative serves as the culmination to the affliction motif in Genesis by presenting a victim who grows through his suffering and afflictors who repent and reconcile with their victim.

Background to the Joseph Narrative

The Joseph story wraps up the book of Genesis. Each major theme in Genesis continues through the Joseph story, such as the theme of blessing, seed, and land, and the motif of affliction culminates with Joseph.¹ The most important piece of background information for the Joseph story is that he is the son of Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel (Gen 30:22–24). Just as Rachel was Jacob's favorite, that favoritism transferred to her firstborn, Joseph. Furthermore, as the son of Jacob, the narrative anticipates that Joseph may follow the pattern of deception and trickery that Jacob portrays.²

¹ Todd L. Patterson, *The Plot-structure of Genesis: 'Will the Righteous Seed Survive?' In the Mythos-Logical Movement from Complication to Denouement* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 196.

² Genesis has several examples of sons following the pattern of their father. Some examples of this recapitulation are Isaac hiding the fact that Rebekah was his wife, like Abraham did (Gen 12:10–20; 20:1–6; 26:1–33), and Jacob showing favoritism to his son, like Isaac did (Gen 25:18; 37:2).

Exegesis of Relevant Passages

Genesis 37–50 details the events of the Joseph narrative. The narrative contains rich imagery, substantial theology, and complex characters. More importantly for this research, Joseph’s narrative presents the culmination of the affliction motif in Genesis and leads directly into the affliction theme in Exodus. Since Joseph’s narrative spans several chapters, only certain passages in the Joseph narrative will be explored for their development of the affliction motif.

Exegesis of Genesis 37: Inciting Incident and Affliction

Genesis 37 presents the events leading up to the act of affliction dealt by the sons of Jacob to their brother, Joseph, who is Jacob’s favorite child. The first representation of Joseph shows him as a spoiled tattletale when Joseph gives his father a bad report about his brothers (Gen 37:2).³ The word for report (רִבְּרָה) often denotes gossip or rumors, the kind of report that would aggravate Joseph’s brothers.⁴ The collocation of רָעָה “evil” with רִבְּרָה “report” indicates an *untrue* report, not a true account of something bad.⁵ Most likely, Joseph exaggerated his account of his brothers or simply made something up. This is not a picture of an innocent boy who was simply being honest with his father but of a spoiled son exploiting his father’s favoritism. This incident and his father’s clothing gift stoke his brothers’ hatred (Gen 37:3). The narrator explains that Joseph’s brothers were not able to speak peaceably (שָׁלוֹם) to him (Gen 37:4). The use of שָׁלוֹם contrasts the later use of עָנָי, “affliction,” to describe Joseph’s experience at the hands of his brothers. The use of these antonyms serves to illustrate the loss of

³ Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996), 208.

⁴ Andrew E. Steinmann, *Genesis, TOTC* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2019), 349.

⁵ Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, WBC 2* (Dallas: Word, 1994), 350; “רִבְּרָה,” HALOT 208.

peace between Joseph and the rest of his family members.⁶ The narrative provides further characterization when Joseph recounts his dreams without any tact or humility, which suggests his deep-seated pride (Gen 37:6–10).⁷ Joseph’s boastful presentation of his dreams pushes their rage over the edge (Gen 37:4, 5, 8, 11).

Even though Joseph provoked his brothers, there is no excuse for his brother’s mistreatment of him. Like all the other victims of affliction in Genesis, Joseph did not deserve what happened to him. As revenge for Joseph’s narcissism, his brothers planned to murder (לָרַחֵק) Joseph (Gen 37:20). Judah is the one who suggests selling Joseph into slavery instead so they can get something further out of their revenge (Gen 37:26–27).⁸ His brothers’ actions cause Joseph’s successive suffering in Egypt. Yet, when the narrator begins to describe Joseph’s suffering in Egypt, instead of presenting a man living in pain and fear, he presents Joseph as calm and trusting in the Lord.

Exegesis of Genesis 39: The Lord’s Attention and Joseph’s Response

Genesis 39 outlines God’s attention to Joseph’s affliction, even though Joseph ended up in an Egyptian prison. The chapter begins and ends with the statement that God was with Joseph (Gen 39:2, 21). God made all that Joseph did succeed, as he had done with Jacob at the hands of Laban (Gen 37:4; 31:5–9). However, unlike Jacob, Joseph responds favorably to God’s attention at every opportunity.⁹ When Potiphar’s wife propositions Joseph, he refuses because “breaching

⁶ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 351. See also the appearance of שְׁלוֹמֵךָ as an antonym to עָנִי in Gen 15:15 and 33:18.

⁷ Alter, *Genesis*, 208.

⁸ Reuben also had a private plan to save Joseph altogether, but he did not implement his plan in time (Gen 37:21–22, 29–30).

⁹ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 271.

Potiphar’s trust meant breaching YHWH’s trust. These two are intrinsically connected” (Gen 39:7–8).¹⁰ Joseph recognizes the Lord’s authority over him and responds with obedience. This moment is the first illustration of his character growth.¹¹

Exegesis of Genesis 41:51–55: Initial Resolution

After God brings Joseph to a position of prominence in Egypt, Joseph has children and names them in commemoration of God’s faithfulness. He names his first son Manassah, whose name comes from the root נָשָׁה (Gen 41:51). Most scholars interpret Joseph’s explanation as “God has made me forget.”¹² This could explain why Joseph, even with all the resources he has, does not attempt contact with his family.¹³ Joseph’s name choice for his son implies that he has fully accepted the new home God brought him to, but he does not (at this time) wish to reconcile with his brothers.

Joseph names his second son Ephraim, which comes from the root פָּרָה (Gen 41:52). He declares, “God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction (עֲנִי)” (Gen 41:52). Joseph’s affliction has been resolved by God uplifting him to second in command, and he reflects on all that has happened since his brother’s had attacked him (Gen 41:41–44). The use of “fertility” and “affliction” so close to one another serve to contrast his past suffering followed by the Lord’s

¹⁰ Josef Sykora, “The Mission That Transforms: A Development of Joseph’s Character in Genesis 37–50,” *Canadian Theological Review* 4 (2015): 14.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹² Leslie C. Allen, “נָשָׁה,” *NIDOTTE*, 3.85; David W. Baker and Jason Anthony Riley, *Genesis 37–50: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2014), 181, 183; Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 398. Alter suggests that the nuance of נָשָׁה does not mean “cause to forget” but instead “hold in debt” which would translate into the piel as “relieve from debt” (Alter, *Genesis*, 242). However, this interpretation is inconclusive.

¹³ K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 766.

blessing.¹⁴ Even before he encounters his brothers, Joseph has received peace and comfort after all his suffering. Through the naming of his son, Joseph memorializes God's blessing on him during his suffering.¹⁵ Even in prison, Joseph maintained his trust in God. Joseph is a model for his response in the midst of affliction.

Since Joseph is now second in command Egypt by God's design, he is in the position where he will rescue Egypt and all the surrounding people groups (Gen 41:55). When the famine begins, Pharaoh tells the people, "Go to Joseph. What he tells you, you shall do" (Gen 41:55). Joseph is essentially the people's human savior, and this is because of the hand of God (Gen 39:23; 45:8 50:20). God provides Joseph with the wisdom to save Egypt and the surrounding lands from perishing during the famine (Gen 41:16, 28, 39). God brings Joseph from the pit of affliction to the seat of authority.¹⁶

Exegesis of Genesis 44:33–34: Final Resolution

When Joseph encounters his brothers, he uses his own form of trickery to test them (Gen 42:25; 44:2). This deceitful test he made for them diverged from the deceit of his father because Joseph was not seeking material gain from it (like Jacob had done, cf. Gen 27:19; 30:37–43), and it was also meant to reveal the righteousness of the persons being tricked rather than to simply trick them (again, like Jacob was, cf. Gen 27:19; 30:37–43).¹⁷ The brothers earlier equated their suffering to their actions against Joseph (Gen 42:21–23), but Joseph's test is not finished until he

¹⁴ Sarna, *Genesis*, 290.

¹⁵ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18-50*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 512.

¹⁶ See especially Gen 45:5–8 and the corresponding discussion below.

¹⁷ John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 222; Patterson, *The Plot-structure of Genesis*, 199; Richard D. Patterson, "The Old Testament use of an Archetype the Trickster," *JETS* 42 (1999): 389.

poses a threat to the youngest, Benjamin, to see how they respond. Joseph creates the perfect opportunity for them to be rid of the new favorite of their father, Benjamin.¹⁸ Even better, they would have a legitimate excuse for getting rid of him; it would be the fault of the cruel Egyptian.¹⁹ Genesis 44:33–34 is the moment where Judah puts his life on the line for Benjamin. This assures Joseph that his brothers have repented of the actions they committed against him.

Exegesis of Genesis 45:5–8: Joseph’s Theological Commentary

After Joseph reveals his identity, he tells his brothers exactly what Genesis’ affliction motif has been saying all along: God was with Joseph and worked things for good. He says, “God sent me here as a deliverer before you” (Gen 45:5). Sarna points out, “He no longer accuses the brothers of having sold him but says they ‘sent’ him, thereby substituting the beneficial result for their evil purpose.”²⁰ Even more, he repeats “sent” three times in verses 5–8, as well as adding “he put me here” at the end (Gen 45:8). Not only did God pay attention to Joseph’s affliction, he again utilized human plans for his own good purposes, as he has done in the other affliction narratives.²¹ God shaped the events of Joseph’s life, and Joseph responds with evident growth and trust. He even says at the end of the book, “The evil that you planned against me, God planned it for good” (Gen 50:20).²² His final speech before his death assures his brothers that God will be faithful to his covenant, so even in death, Joseph asserts God’s power and faithfulness (Gen 50:24).

¹⁸ Patterson, *The Plot-structure of Genesis*, 199.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Sarna, *Genesis*, 309.

²¹ Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 212.

²² Sykora, “The Mission That Transforms,” 15; Alter, *Genesis*, 305.

Analysis

Although there is so much more to learn from the Joseph narrative, these passages provide all that is necessary to understand Joseph's place in the affliction motif. Unlike some other narratives in the affliction motif (e.g. Dinah, Gen 34), very little is hidden in subtext about the affliction motif in the Joseph narrative. In making clear explanations regarding the affliction in Joseph's life, the narrator climaxed each aspect of the motif in Joseph's story.

Characterization

Like every other victim of affliction in Genesis, Joseph initially displayed an attitude that triggered the afflictors. Nevertheless, the narrator describes Joseph's noticeably change from a young, prideful boy to a faithful, humble man.²³ In Gen 37:2–11, Joseph appears as a spoiled youth who is excited by the prospect of his brothers bowing to him. Then, after Joseph becomes enslaved to Potiphar, Gen 39:1–6 describes him as a faithful, reliable servant. Furthermore, when Potiphar's wife propositions Joseph, he shows self-control and refuses her in order to honor God and Potiphar (Gen 39:7–12). Even after Potiphar throws Joseph in prison, Joseph remains faithful and trustworthy, so much so that the jail keeper put the prison matters under his hand (Gen 39:21–23). While in prison, he conducts himself favorably with his fellow inmates and checks in on their well-being (Gen 40:7–8). Then, when he comes before Pharaoh, he is sure to give glory to God for the wisdom he received from him (Gen 41:16, 39). He again serves faithfully as Pharaoh's second in command and provides a way for the land to survive the famine (Gen 41:48–49, 54–57). Later, when Joseph's brothers appear to him, his harshness does not result in further hardship on his brothers, but appears to be solely for the purpose of assessing their character rather than harming them (Gen 42:7–9; 24; 43:23–34; 44:1–2; 45:1–15). Finally,

²³ Fred Guyette, "Joseph's Emotional Development," *JBQ* 32 (2004): 188.

Joseph's godly words at the close of Genesis provide a last assessment of his character growth (Gen 50:20–21, 24–25).

Unlike his father, Joseph's growth is profoundly evident.²⁴ He lives to serve the Lord, even though he is living in slavery and in prison while in Egypt. After all the characters who experience affliction in Genesis, Joseph finally responds to God's attention in the ideal way.²⁵

Punishment to the Afflictors

The confrontation with the afflictors in Joseph's narrative took the form of Joseph's test of growth. Just as Joseph is the model victim along the affliction motif in Genesis, Joseph's afflictors also have the ideal response when offered a chance to show their own growth. No other afflicter in Genesis repents of his or her actions like Joseph's brothers. No other victim experiences relational reconciliation with his or her afflicter(s). Just as Joseph grows during his time in Egypt, so do his brothers. In Gen 37:4, 11, and 20, they are presented as jealous, hateful, and murderous, which is not unlike how Simeon and Levi reacted to Shechem and Hamor (Gen 34). Reuben, the oldest, shows the most positive character in Gen 37:22 because he persuades his brothers not to kill Joseph, and he is also not present when his brothers sell Joseph (Gen 37:29).²⁶ Selling Joseph into slavery was Judah's idea, so he at least convinced his brothers not to kill their own brother (Gen 37:27). Nonetheless, Judah's character is still marred by selling Joseph, and all his brothers, apart from Reuben (and Benjamin), bear the guilt of ignoring the pain that selling Joseph would bring upon their father. In Gen 38, Judah experiences growth through his

²⁴ Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 536.

²⁵ For an outline of Joseph's character change throughout the narrative, see Ernest Neufeld, "The Anatomy of the Joseph Cycle," *JBQ* 22 (1994): 38-46.

²⁶ Reuben's character is still established as unfit for the line of the seed since he slept with his father's concubine, Bilhah, just like Simeon and Levi are also unfit because of their slaughter of the Shechemites (Gen 35:22; 34:25–26).

encounter with Tamar, and it sets up his character to show change when he later encounters Joseph (Gen 38:26). The brothers' true growth comes to light in their dealings with Joseph. When they go to Egypt, Joseph sees that they are ashamed of and recognize the horror of what they did to him (Gen 42:21–22). After Joseph takes Simeon and orders them to return with their youngest brother, the remaining nine brothers are distraught and show concern for their father's well-being, especially Reuben, who vows to protect Benjamin or else his own two sons could be killed in return (Gen 42:37). Instead of quickly offering up Benjamin without a care, the brothers show deep concern for his well-being and hold him back from Egypt until they could no longer wait (Gen 43:10). The brothers again show concern for Benjamin and their father, and Judah vows to bear the blame if harm comes to Benjamin (Gen 43:9). Finally, when Benjamin is in danger, the brothers tear their garments in distress (Gen 44:13), and then before Joseph, Judah makes a plea which shows both great concern for Jacob and Benjamin (Gen 44:16–34). At the end of the plea, Judah begs to take Benjamin's place so as to spare him and the sorrow that would come upon Jacob (Gen 44:33–34). This progression shows remarkable growth from callous afflicters to selfless servants. Specifically, the brothers recognize their sin of afflicting Joseph and seek to reconcile their father's pain (Gen 42:21–23; 44:33–34). God shapes the events so that both Joseph and his brothers receive the release of forgiveness and reconciliation.

God's Attention to Affliction

Joseph's story shouts the theme of divine providence (Gen 39:2, 21; 40:8; 41:16, 25, 28, 32, 52; 43:23; 45:5–10; 48:11, 15–16, 21; 50:20, 24).²⁷ Right at the start of Joseph's suffering, the narrator announces that God is with him (Gen 39:2). If this statement was not enough, the

²⁷ Robert E. Longacre, *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence: A Text Theoretical and Textlinguistic Analysis of Genesis 37 and 39-48*, 2nd ed. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 41.

narrator bookends the same chapter with another of these statements, but the repetition points out that even in prison, God is with him (Gen 39:21). When Joseph tells Pharaoh the meaning of his dreams, God again is with Joseph and gives him wisdom (Gen 41:16, 25, 28, 32, 37, 39). All this attention on God's presence with Joseph points to the true center of this story: not Joseph's faithfulness, but God's faithfulness to his promises.²⁸

The Joseph Narrative's Contribution to the Motif of Affliction

As discussed in the preceding analysis, the Joseph narrative develops the affliction motif in several apparent ways. First, out of all the victims of affliction, each who showed varying levels of spiritual growth, Joseph's growth outlines what the narrator sees as the ideal response of the afflicted. Second, this narrative offers a presentation of the repentance of afflicters. No other afflicter who appears in Genesis repents of what he or she had done to their victim. Third, Joseph's narrative establishes the people of Israel as they settled in Egypt. The story prefigures the affliction (עֲוֹן) that Israel later experiences in Egypt (cf. Exod 3:7; Gen 15:13–16).²⁹ Because Joseph remained righteous through affliction, both the nations of Israel and Egypt received protection from famine (Gen 41:57; 46:25).³⁰ Joseph's actions serves as an example for his descendants.³¹

²⁸ Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 211.

²⁹ Sarna, *Genesis*, 254, 290.

³⁰ Patterson, *The Plot-structure of Genesis*, 196. Because of the severity of the famine, the Egyptians had to sell all their property to Pharaoh (Gen 46:20). Yet, this difficult process still saved their lives.

³¹ In Exod 3, the Lord says that he has seen the affliction of his people in Egypt, and he uses the same language as all four of the above narratives (Exod 3:7). After the continual struggle for the people of God to survive and God continually rescuing and blessing his people, the reader begins Exodus with the strong hope that procreation and blessing will continue among the people of God, and that the people of God will live in humility and dependence on the Lord. The use of the familiar language of rescue from affliction supports this hope.

Conclusion

Joseph's experience of affliction ultimately results in tremendous blessing for the whole family of Israel. At this point in Genesis, the affliction motif reaches its culmination. Unlike the other victims of affliction, Joseph gets to experience reconciliation with his afflicters, his brothers. More importantly, Joseph succeeded in what he could control himself: he forgave his brothers and trusted in the Lord. Joseph's personal redemption sets the ideal example for the victims of Egyptian affliction in Exodus. Just like Joseph, the Israelites will not deserve the affliction they experience in Egypt, but out of the affliction, God rescues them in one of the most significant events in redemptive history.

Chapter 8:

Conclusion: The Theology of the Affliction Motif

Introduction

The unassuming motif of affliction in Genesis has gone mostly unnoticed, yet the motif appears at multiple significant junctures where the threatened posterity of God's people is assuaged. The affliction motif in Genesis begins by God explaining exactly what he would do for his people in the face of affliction (Gen 15:13–16), then the subsequent affliction narratives portray God following through on his promises. The motif of affliction in Genesis reveals the theology that even in affliction, God protects and prospers his people, not for the mere purpose of making them safe and happy, but so that they learn to trust and obey him alone.

Tracing the Affliction Motif in Genesis

The motif of affliction begins in Gen 15 with God declaring that Israel will be afflicted by a foreign nation for 400 years (Gen 15:13). Yet, at the same time, God also tells Abraham that he will rescue his people because of his loyalty to his promises (Gen 15:14). This establishes God's paradigmatic response to affliction: rescue and blessing. Instead of waiting until the Exodus fulfillment of Gen 15 to show an example of this character of God, Gen 16 immediately picks up on the motif of affliction and confirms God's response to affliction when God hears the Egyptian slave woman Hagar crying out in her affliction, and he responds with rescue and blessing (Gen 16:11). After Hagar flees Sarai's affliction, God meets her in the wilderness and blesses her, and he tells her that Ishmael will father a great nation (Gen 16:7–13). In response, Hagar recognizes God's faithfulness and worships him (Gen 16:13). God's attention to Hagar

and Ishmael shows that God's rescue is not reserved just for Israel in Egypt, but for any of his people.

After establishing God's paradigmatic response to the oppression of his people with Hagar, the rest of Genesis reveals four more instances of oppression that are all tied to the patriarchal family of Jacob. First, Jacob himself is afflicted by Laban who both tricks Jacob into marrying Leah and changes Jacob's wages ten times (Gen 29:23; 31:36–42). God allows Jacob's affliction to continue for 20 years in order to show Jacob his divine sovereignty. Jacob is characterized as a cunning deceiver, but God still protects him, and he even prospers Jacob's trickery in order to illustrate his divine control (Gen 31:9, 12, 16, 42). Through Jacob's subservience to Laban and God's protection, he learns to rely less on his own cunning and instead rely on God's power (Gen 35:1–3; 48:15–16).

During Jacob's 20 years of affliction under Laban, he himself becomes an afflicter of his undesired wife, Leah. Jacob does not treat her with the same attention and affection as he does to Rachel (Gen 29:30–32). Leah's troubles get to the point where she must buy the rights of sleeping with Jacob from her sister Rachel (Gen 30:15–16). Leah is an unwanted wife, but God protects and blesses her by giving her many children and simultaneously closing Rachel's womb for an extended period so that Leah will be valuable to Jacob (Gen 29:31). Through this circumstance, the righteous seed continues in Leah's son, Judah.

After God brings Jacob out from Laban, affliction once again comes upon Jacob's family when Shechem rapes Dinah, Jacob's daughter by Leah (Gen 34:2). Not only is this an act against Dinah, but it is also a threat on the whole family of Jacob because the possibility of intermarrying with foreigners becomes a reality (Gen 34:8–17). If this happens, then the promise of nationhood to Abraham would fail (Gen 12:1–3, 15:5; 17:1–2; cf. 3:15). God protects Dinah

and Jacob's family by placing a terror upon the surrounding nations (Gen 35:5), even though Simeon and Levi had threatened the safety of the family by slaughtering the Shechemites (Gen 34:31).

Finally, the last affliction of Genesis, the affliction of Jacob's favorite son Joseph, leads the reader right into the affliction of Israel at the hands of a foreign nation, as declared in Gen 15:13. Out of bitter jealousy, Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery in Egypt, and Joseph faces years of affliction in that land (Gen 37:28; 41:52). However, Joseph responds to God's favor positively and learns immediately to trust God (Gen 39:2, 9). Thus, God blesses and prospers Joseph, to the point where all Israel is protected from extinction by famine (Gen 41:55–57; 47:28). Nevertheless, this protection means moving to Egypt, the very place where Israel will become enslaved for 400 years (Gen 15:13–16).

Similarities Among the Affliction Narratives

Although each narrative contributes its own unique elements to the motif, there are significant similarities across the narratives that make it possible to draw conclusions regarding what can be understood about God's character.¹ The first similarity between these narratives is the use of similar language. The narratives typically use the same key Hebrew word, **עָנָה**, to describe the experience of affliction. Likewise, the narratives use a combination of God as the agent of "hearing," **שָׁמַע**, (cf. Gen 16:11) or "seeing," **רָאָה**, (cf. Gen 29:32; 31:42) (in essence,

¹ The divergent details of the individual affliction narratives in Genesis cannot be dealt with here. See the final analysis section of each of the body chapters for discussions of how each narrative contributes new information to the overall motif.

paying attention to) the affliction of his people. He knows the affliction of his people, and he responds by rescuing them.²

The narratives also bear a similarity in the situations of their victims. In each narrative, the victim of oppression is in a subordinate or vulnerable position to their oppressor, which makes it very difficult for them to protect themselves. For example, in both the Hagar and the Leah narratives, the afflicted wife is subordinate to the oppressive wife. In both narratives, the subordinate wife is the one who first gives birth, and both of the children are named after the fact that God addresses their distress and answers them.³ This attention to the vulnerable reminds the reader that God often blesses the subordinate, unnoticed of society.⁴

Another similarity is in the status of the afflicted. All of the victims are connected with and a part of the patriarchal family. This is natural since the focus of Gen 12–50 is on the patriarchal families and God’s loyalty to the promises he made to Abraham, but since the affliction happens to the family of God, it is a reminder that blessings do not come without trial.

Furthermore, no victim treated their oppressor in a way that would warrant their affliction. Nevertheless, Hagar, Jacob, and Joseph showed pride in some way that ultimately led to their oppression, though Jacob is not mentioned as taunting Laban directly (Gen 16:4; 27:41; 31:38–41; 37:6–9). Their prideful attitudes serve to illustrate how the afflicted grow in humility through trusting God once they realize his sovereignty over their situation.

² As discussed in chapter 6 of this project, Dinah’s narrative does not contain a reference to God’s attention, but this lack is explained in chapter 6. “Seeing” or “hearing” is not present in Joseph’s narrative, but the passage explains that God was “with” Joseph (Gen 39:2, 21).

³ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18-50*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 267.

⁴ Ibid.

Lastly, the similarity in the resolution of each affliction is that the Lord rescued them from situations where they themselves could not change their affliction. Hagar broke under her affliction and ran away (Gen 16:6). Jacob was in danger from Laban until the Lord appeared to Laban and warned him not to touch Jacob (Gen 31:24). Leah could not find Jacob's favor without the Lord's intervention (Gen 29:31-32; 49:31). Dinah could not escape Shechem, and her family could not avoid intermarriage without the Lord putting terror on the nations so that they could leave the area (Gen 35:5). Joseph was in jail, unable to do anything to free himself except remain faithful and wait on the Lord (Gen 39:20-23; 50:20). Each situation ultimately humbled the victims to the state where they learned that the Lord is truly sovereign.

The Affliction Motif in Exodus

The message of the affliction in Genesis immediately influences how the book of Exodus is interpreted. Exodus begins where Genesis left off: with the Israelites in Egypt (Gen 47:27; Exod 1:7).⁵ However, instead of Israel being protected by Joseph, the Israelites once again face another threat to survival. The Israelites face horrific oppression at the hands of the Egyptians (Exod 1:14, 22). Yet, based on the attention God shows in Genesis, the reader can expect God to once again see his people and rescue them from Egypt.⁶

The keyword of the affliction motif, **עָנָה**, and its nominal form, **עֲנָי**, take center stage in Exod 3.⁷ When the Lord speaks with Moses and commands him to return to Egypt, he declares:

⁵ R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 12.

⁶ Tremper Longman III, *Genesis*, The Story of God Bible Commentary series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 1.

⁷ James Plastaras, *The God of Exodus: The Theology of the Exodus Narratives* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1966), 28.

Surely, I have *seen* the *affliction* of my people who are in Egypt and their groaning I have *heard* from the face of their *oppressors*, for I know their suffering. I will go down to deliver them from the hand of the Egyptians in order to bring them up from that land and to the good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites. Now behold, the cry of distress of the sons of Israel has come up to me, and also I have *seen* the *oppression* with which the Egyptians are *oppressing* them. Now, go and I will send you to Pharaoh in order to bring out my people, the sons of Israel, from Egypt. (Exod 3:7–10; italics added)

Here, God uses the same language (“seeing/hearing” the “affliction”) with Israel as is used in several of the affliction narratives in Genesis (Gen 16:11; 29:32; 31:42). The whole correspondence is filled with relationship language—God had established a relationship with Abraham, and he illustrates his continued care and attention to Abraham’s children by seeking to protect his nation Israel and showing how he has never abandoned them.⁸ God had promised in Gen 15:13–16 that he would bring the Israelites out from the people who would afflict them, and here, in God’s call to Moses, he follows through on his word, just as was confirmed by his continued attention to the afflicted in Genesis. The fulfillment of the promise in Gen 15:13–16 culminates in the exodus—one of the most significant events in redemptive history.

Since the exodus holds such significance, there is no doubt that scholars focus on the affliction and subsequent oppression in the book of Exodus. The problem is that scholars generally confuse Exodus with the start of the affliction motif in the Bible. For example, Plastaras’ description of God’s attention to affliction surfaces in his explanation of Exodus’ theology. He says, “*Ever since the exodus*, Israel understood that Yahweh was the Just One who would himself hear the call of the oppressed and come to their rescue.”⁹ He continues, “In the exodus Israel *began* to understand God’s mysterious preference for the lowly and the helpless.

⁸ David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1978), 47.

⁹ Plastaras, *The God of Exodus*, 28; italics added.

She saw that her own title to election had not been merit, but simply smallness and helplessness.”¹⁰ He suggests that the theology of God’s attention to the afflicted first emerges in Exodus. However, the point of this thesis was to trace this theology back even further into Genesis. The rescue of a handful of afflicted people in Genesis may not be as extraordinary as the rescue of all of Israel, but the theology prevails regardless of how many victims are rescued. This focus on drawing attention to the true beginning of the affliction motif in the Bible is a noteworthy contribution of this research to the field of biblical studies.

The Affliction Motif and the Themes of Genesis

The affliction motif does not just drop randomly into the book of Genesis simply to build up to the book of Exodus. The motif serves the themes of Genesis while it also sets up of themes of Exodus. Genesis is foundational to shaping the theologies of the rest of the Bible.¹¹ Sarna articulates:

In order to understand the divinely ordained history and destiny of Israel, the nature of God, the nature of humankind created by God, and the relationships between the two—one must look back to the beginning of things. The early chapters serve to set forth the world views and the values of the civilization of the Bible, the pillars upon which the religion of Israel rests. The chapters, thus, comprise the fountainhead of ideas and concepts from which all future developments spring.¹²

If the affliction motif is shown to undergird the fulfillment of God’s promises in Genesis, it can be expected that affliction will appear again at multiple places throughout the Bible, just like the larger themes in Genesis appear throughout Scripture.

¹⁰ Plastaras, *The God of Exodus*, 30; italics added. For further examples of scholars who discuss the affliction motif in Exodus, see Cole, *Exodus*, 24-30; Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 34-36; Walter Kaiser Jr., “Exodus,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Genesis – Leviticus*. Eds. Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 341-42.

¹¹ Longman, *Genesis*, 13.

¹² Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), xii.

The main themes in Genesis are each in some way driven by the conflicts in the affliction (עונָה) narratives. The overarching focus of Genesis is God’s promise, or covenant, with the righteous, and most notably Abraham and his sons. The Abrahamic covenant provides a means for reconciliation between God and man, which culminates in the Mosaic covenant.¹³ God promises Abraham offspring, blessing, and territory, and the partial fulfillment of those promises is the theme of the Pentateuch as a whole (Gen 12:1–3; 13:14–17; 15:5).¹⁴ Much of the conflict in Genesis centers on threats to the fulfillment of the promises of blessing, offspring, and land.¹⁵ Each affliction narrative in Genesis reveals a new threat to the fulfillment.¹⁶ Yet, it is through God’s dissipation of the threat and his subsequent blessing that God’s people grow in righteousness and trust.¹⁷

Growth in righteousness is particularly necessary because the prosperity of the righteous seed of Eve is an additional major theme of Genesis.¹⁸ In Gen 3:15, God declares to Eve that her seed (עֲרֵב) will defeat the seed of the serpent. Reconciliation between God and humanity is sought through this seed.¹⁹ So, a major complication of the book of Genesis is: “Will the seed

¹³ John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Genesis – Leviticus*. Eds. Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 40.

¹⁴ Sarna, *Genesis*, xiii; Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 30.

¹⁵ Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 45.

¹⁶ The threats to the promises in each narrative are the following: Gen 15, Abram still had no children; Gen 16, 21, Abram had a child by a foreigner, then later expelled them both; Gen 29, Jacob must work 7 years for a wife and children, then he is given the “wrong” wife; Gen 30–31, Jacob is enslaved and cannot return to the land (cf. Gen 15); Gen 34, Dinah marries a foreigner and Jacob’s sons seemingly agree to intermarry; Gen 37–41, the seed of promise Judah, appears to be not righteous, then the survival of the family is threatened by famine.

¹⁷ Todd L. Patterson, *The Plot-structure of Genesis: ‘Will the Righteous Seed Survive?’ In the Mythos-Logical Movement from Complication to Denouement* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 10-11.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Longman, *Genesis*, 15; Andrew E. Steinmann, *Genesis, TOTC* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2019), 2.

master sin (will it be righteous) and will it survive?”²⁰ The affliction narratives illustrate this complication, but they also illustrate God’s personal protection of the righteous seed. He sees his people and uses the trials of affliction to facilitate opportunities for spiritual growth in righteousness.²¹

The Theology of the Affliction Motif

The point of the motif of affliction in Genesis is that even though the opening pages of Exodus pose a new threat to the survival of the righteous seed in the form of affliction, and thus, even though there are many ongoing threats to the people of God, God has already demonstrated how he responds to the affliction of his people. Simply put, God’s attention to the affliction of his people reveals that he alone is the one who redeems his people and brings them into spiritual blessing.²² The motif shows that “it is His very nature to rescue the oppressed and helpless.”²³ The announcement of affliction in Genesis serves to foreshadow the affliction in Egypt revealed in the opening chapters of Exodus (Gen 15:13–16; Exod 3:7–10). The affliction narratives in Genesis provide a theological message of God’s faithfulness so that God’s people can know to trust him (Gen 16:11; 29:32; 31:42; 41:52). As he did for the individuals afflicted in Genesis, so he will do for his people experiencing affliction in Egypt, and as he did for Israel in Egypt, so he will do for all generations of his children who face affliction.

However, in no way is the rescue from affliction simply about bringing God’s people out of a bad situation. The theology of the affliction motif is to show God’s sovereignty so that his

²⁰ Patterson, *The Plot-structure of Genesis*, 208.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 210.

²² Cole, *Exodus*, 28.

²³ *Ibid.*

people will be humbled and trust him rather than their own abilities. Even in Exodus, the liberation from Egypt is not just a relocation so that Israel would be safe, but it is a message from God to humanity, which says that God is the one God who loves, protects, blesses, and rules his people.²⁴ When God brings his people out of affliction, they escape servitude to men and have the freedom to serve God.²⁵ God's redemption necessitates a response of worship and obedience.²⁶

Suggestions for Further Research

The narrow focus of this study made it impossible to examine thoroughly the nature of trials and struggles in the narratives of the people of God beyond Genesis. Further research could develop the theme of affliction throughout the rest of the OT in order to analyze how humility through affliction is an ideal trait of the people of God. This would include poetic descriptions of affliction leading to humility in the wisdom literature as well as the exhortations of the prophets to implement the theology of "attention to the afflicted" into the daily life of a follower of the Lord. Further research can also develop the expansion from the OT examples of humble living in affliction into the New Testament commands for humility and meekness. Lastly, further research can explore instances in Scripture where God does *not* resolve affliction in the paradigmatic way but reserves the resolution solely for the afterlife.

²⁴ Stuart, *Exodus*, 35.

²⁵ Plataras, *The God of Exodus*, 32.

²⁶ Cole, *Exodus*, 28.

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