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How Chosenness Manifests in the Book of Genesis: a Literary and Theological Exploration of the Divine Elections of Abraham, Jacob and Joseph

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Introduction & Literary Review

As the first book of the Hebrew Bible, Genesis is one of the most recognized and notable texts in the scholarly, religious and secular worlds, and is a story preoccupied with the relationships between God and his chosen people. Abraham, the first to find long lasting favor with God, Jacob, the human manifestation of Israel, and Joseph, whose story closes this narrative, are all vitally consequential to biblical thought. An examination of their stories raises powerful theological, literary and historical questions: Why are Abraham, Jacob and Joseph the ones to be chosen, what does it mean to be elected by God, and how can the contradictions within these cycles be reconciled?

At first glance, the chosenness of Abraham, Jacob and Joseph is ambiguous and paradoxical. Abraham, who is meant to father a great nation, is of an advanced age and has a barren wife; Jacob, who is renamed Israel by God, realizes his chosenness through the betrayal of his father and brother; and Joseph, the most precious son of Israel, is immature and, as a result of his election, sold into slavery.

The manifestation of their election is similarly complex. In Genesis 22, God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son; in Genesis 32, an emissary of the Lord wrestles with Jacob; and in Genesis 42, Joseph must deceive his family to determine their worth. The elections of Abraham, Jacob and Joseph, which are ostensibly promising and God-given, engender suffering in their lives and reveal their troubled relationships with the divine.

Genesis, although at times a confusing and disconcerting narrative, is critical to understanding Israel's history, whether viewed from a historical, theological or secular

perspective. What is remarkable about Genesis is that it is the first text to address the notion of election, setting a precedent for Hebrew scripture regarding chosenness and the relationships between the earthly and divine. With this in mind, the issues presented in this thesis become vitally important.

There are many processes by which these inquiries can be explored and, in this introduction, the methods of three scholars will be examined: Joel S. Baden, who is a proponent of The Documentary Hypothesis (DH), John J. Collins, who is an advocate for a historical critical method, and Brevard Childs, who places great value on the special relationship that exists between scripture and a religious community.

The DH is a long-held explanation for the composition of the Torah: it proposes that the Pentateuch is composed of four separate documents, the J, E, P and D sources, which were ultimately combined by redactors. According to Baden, most biblical scholars have employed thematic elements, such as stylistic or theological differences, to separate the texts according to authorship. It is also accepted by most that there were multiple redactors. In Baden's book *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis*, he challenges the efficacy of both this strategy and claim.¹ It is his position that, as a literary solution to a literary problem, the DH demands that the structure of the text be considered first and that any theme that consequently emerges should be considered to be secondary. The thematic approach is therefore inadequate. Furthermore, Baden argues that upon a closer inspection of the manner in which the J, E, P and D sources were grouped in the canon, it can reasonably be concluded that there was only one redactor.

¹ Baden, Joel S. *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis*. Yale University Press, 2012.

While all of Baden's conclusions are rooted in this methodological hierarchy of employing a structural analysis before any other method, there are moments when he reaches to consider structure or engages with information he previously stated he would not consider. He divides the narrative of the Sale of Joseph based on discrepancies between the Ishmaelites and Midianites and the figures of Judah and Reuben. Though these divisions are appropriate, Baden's treatment of the first three verses requires a closer examination. The verses in question, Gen. 37:18-20, read, "they saw him from afar, and before he came close to them they conspired to kill him. They said to one another, "Here comes that dreamer! Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we can say 'A savage beast devoured him.' We shall see what comes of his dreams!"'"

Baden argues for their separation, grouping 37:18 into story A and 37:19-20 into story B. It is Baden's argument that 37:18 (i.e., "they conspired to kill him,") becomes redundant when read alongside 37:20 (i.e., "let us kill him"), demonstrating that one line is of the J source, while the other two are from E. However, Baden's overarching method of structural analysis seeks to divide a text only when there is an inconsistency of claims about the way an event transpired. Of the contradictions, doublets and discontinuities that Baden uses to identify such inconsistencies, these three verses most closely resemble a doublet. Yet on doublets, Baden writes: "...two passages must not only tell a similar story, but do so in a way that renders them mutually exclusive" (17). The lines of Gen. 37:18-20 do not meet this definition.

Narrative and dialogue, although similar in this context, serve different purposes. The narrative offers the conclusion that Joseph's brothers are scheming against him, underscoring critical context and thereby focusing the reader; and the dialogue then provides the factual

support for that conclusion, prompting the reader's ready acceptance thereof. Rather than being mutually exclusive, the dialogue can be seen as a structural tool that proves the narrative, which, in turn, alerts the reader to critical information. When so viewed, these passages are better understood as mutually supportive. Ultimately, this is not to suggest that Gen. 37:18-20 should not be divided at all, but rather that redundancy is not the appropriate means for division according to Baden's strictly structural analysis.

Baden also discounts the importance of the dating of the documents. He writes: "[Even] if it could be demonstrated somehow that...D was written during the Hoover administration, the literary evaluation of the text and the isolation of the sources on the grounds of narrative flow would be precisely the same" (31). Later in his book, however, Baden relies heavily on the dating of documents to support a claim he makes about the E source. Although Baden argues for each of the four independent sources providing similar yet unique and cohesive narratives, he acknowledges that the E source does not have a clear beginning. He refutes that this undermines the legitimacy of his argument, writing, "the temporal gap between the original authorship of the documents and the compiler's work may be as much as four hundred years," meaning it is extremely likely that the clear beginning that E lacks is a result of damage to the original document (225). Furthermore, he states, "Gaps in the sources should not...automatically be contributed to the compiler." In contravention of his theory, then, Baden relies on document dating to explain the anomaly of the missing beginning of the E source (225).

Baden's arguments are compelling and many of the supportive points he raises are inarguable, but that is not to say that his hypotheses are beyond reproach. Upon a closer read of his book, non-structural analyses and contradictions did emerge. Furthermore, through his

method of structural division followed by thematic analysis, he ironically separated the text to the point where thematically analyzing it became difficult to accomplish.²

Collins, in his textbook *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, espouses a different approach.³ He emphasizes the importance of treating the bible as a historical document before understanding it as sacred scripture. He makes this point in his introduction, writing that the Hebrew Bible and Old Testament should be understood as the common heritage of Jews and Christians, not the exclusive property of either; how texts must be understood within their historical context; and how only then can someone identify what interpretations might be fairly made.

Collins places these texts within the context of their Ancient Near Eastern origin, drawing comparisons between, for instance, the creation story and the story of Atrahasis, and The Fall and the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh. On the former, he discusses misconceptions surrounding biblical creation. Although it is largely understood that this Genesis story is supportive of evolution, Collins points out that God is not portrayed as an “unmoved mover who produces creation fully formed,” but instead “proceeds by a process of trial and error, and engages in unsuccessful experiments” (69). This is the same process by which the Babylonian Atrahasis myth explains creation.

On the latter, he discusses the stark similarities between Genesis 3 and the Epic of Gilgamesh. Enkidu, Gilgamesh’s companion, is much like the Adam and Eve of Genesis,

² According to Baden’s theory, for example, his divisions of this text present an E source with no clear beginning. Without that introduction, it becomes difficult to determine E’s themes. Although Baden assumes that E’s missing beginning is due to damage to the document, Baden came to that conclusion by employing a method that stated it would not consider document dating.

³ Collins, John J. *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*. Fortress Press, 2004.

inasmuch they all begin as innocents in nature who are later corrupted by something that results in them becoming “like God” (71). Collins also notes that the story of Adam and Eve is a more severe version of Gilgamesh, as proven when God declares “by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken. For you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19).

Collins’s historical stance does not consider the importance of an interpretive approach proposed by Brevard Childs: that when understanding Israel’s history, it is critical to recognize that the literature formed the religious community and, in turn, that religious community shaped the literature.⁴ As Childs suggests, the historical critical method loses sight of the meaningful relationship between a religious community and its sacred text by only considering a historical reading of the Hebrew Bible to be valid. He emphasizes, “the canon establishes a platform from which exegesis is launched rather than a barrier by which creative activity is restrained,” and “the significance of the final form of the biblical text is that it alone bears witness to the full history of revelation” (83, 76).

This thesis, which explores the divergent ways in which chosenness manifests itself within the Book of Genesis, is informed by the historical boundaries illustrated by Baden and Collins but will place particular emphasis on Childs’s stance. To ignore the inconsistencies of the Hebrew Bible would be unreasonable, but to analyze a disparate story would fail to appreciate the force of the biblical canon. Moreover, since this thesis will identify the thematic crosscurrents contained within the Genesis narrative, it would be unproductive to engage with similar texts which are independent of the primary source. While situating Genesis in its

⁴ Childs, Brevard S. *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. 1st American ed., Fortress Press, 1979. pg. 72.

historical context, this thesis will explore Genesis theologically and literarily, allowing its rich and multilayered themes to emerge. It will consider the works of Joel Kaminsky, who writes specifically on the biblical concept of election, Gerhard von Rad and Nahum M. Sarna, who provide commentaries of Genesis, and Klaus Koch, who explores the idea of retribution throughout the Hebrew Bible.

In the first chapter, this thesis will focus on how divine election is introduced, specifically how Abraham's chosenness manifests, and what part free human action plays in that sequence of events. In the second chapter, the Jacob narrative will be similarly explored but will also be compared to the Abraham story, and will conclude that Genesis 25-36 represents a shift in the narrative. In the third chapter, this thesis will explain how that shift was completed and how the essence of the Abrahamic narrative was reversed. Ultimately, then, what this thesis will analyze is what it means to be divinely elected in the Book of Genesis, by examining the nature of chosenness and enabling a discussion of its major literary and theological trends.

Chapter One: Abraham

The intricacies of the patterns in the Book of Genesis shed light onto the enigmatic nature of divine election in the Hebrew Bible. Its motifs, contradictions and drama reveal that chosenness involves many and varied interconnecting elements, and can simultaneously manifest as elevation by a divine promise and a cause for suffering through deception, exile and sacrifice.

This chapter will examine the first half of Genesis, analyzing the complexities of the Abrahamic narrative. It will introduce its counterintuitive themes through an analysis of Genesis 4, the first narrative to deal with the concept of divine election. It will discuss the paradoxical introduction of Abraham's chosenness described in Genesis 11-12 and highlight the synergistic relationship between the chosen and the divine. It will closely inspect the sequence of events in Genesis 16-21 by identifying its themes which are common throughout the Genesis narrative, analyzing them through the lens of scholarship, and discussing the roles that Isaac and Ishmael play. It will then discern meaning from the akedah, particularly through a comparison of Gerhard von Rad and Nahum M. Sarna's divergent interpretations of this troubling event.

As the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4 will briefly illustrate, paradoxes reign as younger siblings rule over their elders, jealousy yields intervening action, divine favor generates suffering, and God's presence extends beyond the confines of his chosen people. In this episode, Cain, the first-born to Adam and Eve, presents an offering of fruit to the Lord, whereas Abel, the second son, gives the firstlings of his flock. It is the latter gift for which God declares a preference, prompting Cain, consumed with jealousy, to murder Abel. God is angered by this evil act, and renders Cain "a ceaseless wanderer on earth," so that he may live but do so without any degree of relationship with God. Once Cain grasps that Abel's murder might be avenged, God

provides him a level of divine protection: a mark, indicating that if anyone were to kill him they would suffer “sevenfold vengeance.” In spite of God’s fury, then, Cain marries, bears children and becomes the founder of the city of Enoch. Genesis 4 concludes with the birth of Adam and Eve’s third son, Seth, whose name is said to mean “God has provided me with another offspring in place of Abel.”

This account, though composed of few words, establishes major themes which arise in Genesis and focus on chosenness. Despite their birth-order, Abel is selected over his brother; his favor, although God-given, is extinguished by an intervening action; and God’s preference for Abel’s offering, however promising, is precisely why he suffers death. It is a sequence of events wherein ostensible good can lead to undeniable misfortune, divine desire can become complicated by earthly action and events can unfold ironically.

As a primary example, Cain’s murder of Abel, although hugely discordant, does not preclude the dispensation of divine mercy and, even more curiously, does not later prevent the existence of the City of Enoch. Instead, the apparent lesson of Cain’s banishment is refined by God’s ensuing oath of protection. Joel S. Kaminsky explains this phenomena by crediting Cain’s receipt of protection to his status of “non-elect,” writing:

...the non-acceptance of Cain’s offering does not mean that Cain is utterly alienated from God or somehow cursed, but only that he is not specially blessed...Cain appears to occupy a type of middle ground best described by the term ‘non-elect.’...God’s ‘unfairness’ in choosing some over others is not simply a benefit for the chosen or a detriment to the non-chosen...[and] the blessing of the non-elect [can be] brought about by their relationship to the elect.⁵

Kaminsky argues that Cain is not disadvantaged as the non-elect, but rather benefits as

Abel’s brother. Although Cain’s close proximity to Abel does not permit him to contravene God’s

⁵ Joel S. Kaminsky. *Yet I Loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election*. (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2016.), pg. 24.

will and his murderous act is commensurately punished, he is nonetheless never fully abandoned by God. God's refusal to abandon Cain indicates that the relationships between God and his chosen are not exclusively for the benefit of the chosen, but also benefit those who are non-elect.⁶ As Kaminsky later writes, "the fact that the first narrative to struggle with the issue of election is so lopsidedly preoccupied with the non-elect strongly indicates that the concept of election was never assumed to be only for the benefit of the elect, but it was always about God's plan for the whole world" (26).

The most pronounced examples of earthly/divine interplay in Genesis 4 are the events which lead to the birth of Adam and Eve's third son, Seth, and the significance of his earthly purpose. Although Cain's actions affected God's favor for Abel, they were not entirely determinative of the outcome, inasmuch as Abel's favor is never inherited by Cain but rather, is rekindled through the birth of Seth. The selection of Seth as a replacement chosen dispels any notion that chosenness can be commandeered by a usurper and even more powerfully suggests that chosenness is not something that absolutely must occur, continue or be passed through a specific individual.

Stated differently, divine election superficially presents as an indicator of success and thus reasonably implies that the chosen are in some way special and should be accorded a degree of divine protection or intervention. However, Cain's free human action, Abel's unfortunate fate and Seth's renewing birth together reenforce the notion that chosenness does not guarantee a favorable or any particular outcome, but instead can be shaped by the emotions, decisions and

⁶ Conversely, God's favor also engenders suffering for the chosen and non-elect alike.

actions of the earthly players. These notions repeat and play out in greater depth within the Abraham cycle.

Abraham is introduced genealogically as a son, brother, uncle and husband, but is given no greater apparent significance than the other biblical figures mentioned in Genesis 11. Yet in the following chapter, without backstory or explanation, he is divinely elected through a promise to become the father of a great nation. Abraham, however, has a barren wife and no children and is seemingly unqualified to bring about God's plan. The manner in which Abraham is introduced, his sudden and unforeseen election, and the reality of Sarah's infertility immediately establish Abraham's election as a paradox.

In Genesis 12, Abraham's compliance with God's commands are unquestioning and take him from Haran to Shechem to Canaan to Negeb, and then, because of a famine, to Egypt. It is there that his chosenness begins to become tangled. Aware of his wife's great beauty and his consequent fear that others would harm him to win her, Abraham requests that Sarah falsely represent herself as his sister. He is proven prescient when the Pharaoh, desiring Sarah, believes her to be unmarried and takes her as his own, gifting Abraham sheep, oxen, asses and slaves in gratitude. God thereafter punishes the Pharaoh's household with plagues, prompting him to allow Abraham to depart Egypt with his wife and previously gifted chattel.

This particular event provides important insight into the nature of divine election. The narrative focuses on Abraham's adaptability and craftiness, traits which serve as the first demonstration of his fitness for election. This scene likewise raises the question of why a deceitful person would be chosen by God or, rather, why a person chosen by God would, as a result of his chosenness, find need to be deceitful.

In this instance, chosenness has simultaneously placed Abraham in a dangerous situation, allowed him to demonstrate his mental acuity, and forced him to behave immorally at the expense of others. This demonstrates the complicated ways in which chosenness can at times manifest itself. Abraham's election is to his detriment and provides his welfare, while also revealing a necessarily ugly side of him. Although God's reasons for situating the elect in this way can never be definitively known, this scene demonstrates a strong synergistic relationship between the earthly and divine. Abraham establishes himself as a resourceful person, but it is ultimately God's plague which permits him and Sarah to leave the Pharaoh's household. Their efforts, although executed independently of the other, are collaborative and jointly achieve the patriarch's security.

The Abrahamic narrative also intermittently meditates on the issue of Sarah's infertility. Abraham dramatically announces to God that without children his steward will become his heir (Gen. 15:2), Sarah laughingly doubts God's assurance to Abraham that she will bear him a son (Gen. 18:13), and Sarah encourages her husband to allow her Egyptian maidservant, Hagar, to bear him a child (Gen. 16:2). As a result of this last example, Ishmael is born, a painful reality for Sarah when, only five chapters later, she finally and miraculously gives birth to Isaac. Overcome with jealousy for Hagar's son, Sarah then commands that her handmaid and Ishmael be cast out so that they may never share in the earthly and divine inheritances of her own, and only, child (Genesis 16-21).

This sequence of events holds critical significance in the Abrahamic narrative and, within this chapter, will be explored in three ways: through an analysis of shared themes, in comparison to scholarship, and by the juxtaposition of the births of Ishmael and Isaac. Genesis 16-21 seizes

upon the common motifs that were first introduced in Genesis 4, such as jealousy and complex treatment of the non-elect, while also demonstrating how divine election can arouse suffering. It aligns with an argument presented by Klaus Koch in “Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?,” a journal that explores the ways in which earthly and divine action interact with one another.⁷ It also presents the births of Isaac and Ishmael as confusing solutions to the issue of the identity of God’s next chosen.

Thematically, there is symmetry between Sarah and Cain, who are both envious, act upon their jealousy and, in so doing, set into motion a series of events which ultimately result in banishment. There are, of course, significant differences between these two scenarios, such as that Cain’s actions result in his own banishment whereas Sarah’s actions instead banish two others, or that Cain’s exile is a form of punishment and Ishmael’s is an appeasement of Sarah’s wishes. Even so, there is a second and significant parallel between these events: neither expulsion is wholly to the detriment of the exiled. Cain was the recipient of a degree of divine protection, which ultimately spared his life and enabled him to marry, bear children and found the City of Enoch. In a similar fashion, Ishmael’s banishment could have reasonably been predicted to result in his death, but God protects him and, as evinced by the genealogy contained in Genesis 25, he flourishes. As Kaminsky argues, then, the non-elect can be blessed through their relationship to the elect.

Of course, the figures of Ishmael, Hagar and Cain all find themselves in initially unfortunate situations as a direct result of the chosenness that God bestowed upon another. Although God provides them protection, which is to their benefit, he is equally responsible for

⁷ Koch, Klaus. “Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?” 1955, *ZTK* 35 (3), pg. 57–82.

creating the very problems which are to their detriment and require the protective solution. As Abel's favor resulted in his death, Abraham's chosenness engenders sacrifice: the fulfillment of Abraham's great nation was uncertain, suspenseful and long-anticipated, underscoring how precious his firstborn was to him and how difficult it would be to have to allow Ishmael's banishment—not only because it would separate him from his child, but also because of the danger this exile would create for Ishmael, including potential death.

Within the realm of scholarship, Koch introduces the notion that humans set into motion what God later completes. He frames his position broadly, clarifying that God is not “juridical” in the sense that he assigns rewards and punishments based on a previously established norm. (59). This implies that human action always precedes divine action and, as a Western understanding of justice, assumes that the divine is always assessing humans based on a dichotomy between good and evil. Koch rather understands God to be like “a midwife who assists at birth by facilitating the completion of something which previous human action has already set in motion” (77). The consequences of an action are built into the action itself. If a person, for example, were to bring misfortune upon another, then he or she would experience misfortune at a later time. Furthermore, the misfortune they would experience would be of the same nature as the misfortune they originally imposed upon another. Alternatively, if someone bestowed a benefit upon another, then they would later be the beneficiary of similar good fortune (59).

In the context of Genesis 16-21, Sarah demonstrates one of Koch's points by setting into motion what God later completes. When Sarah feels that her son's inheritance is threatened, she tells Abraham to banish Ishmael and Hagar. Her request of exile, however, is not immediately

granted. Abraham consults with God first and only after receiving divine assurance are Ishmael and Hagar actually exiled.⁸ In an effort to help Isaac realize his divine inheritance, Sarah sets into motion the necessary action for God to complete.

Although Sarah's action, and God's completion of it, is successful, it is important to note that Ishmael had initially presented as the solution to the problem of Abraham's lack of progeny. The narrative constantly anticipates Abraham's children and Ishmael, as the firstborn, becomes a remarkable figure. Even before his birth, his mother Hagar is told by God that her son will have offspring that are "too many to count" (Gen. 16:9) and Abraham, in spite of his favored son Isaac, also dearly loves Ishmael. Reasonably, Ishmael could have been God's next chosen and his banishment, although necessary, is shocking. The critical role that Ishmael plays, then, is through his absence.

This absence both allows Isaac to realize his divine election and assume his newfound and critically important role as the sole heir of God's chosenness. Abraham's doubts of his unfulfilled nation, Sarah's painful infertility and Ishmael's potential fulfillment of God's promise followed by his exile, are all precursors to Isaac's birth. His life now becomes the crux of the Abrahamic narrative, as he has become the essential link in the generational chain necessary to fulfill God's promise.

All of this comes to crescendo when God tests Abraham. The divine declares, "Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you" (Gen. 22:2). God's language

⁸ This is not to suggest that, throughout the Abrahamic narrative, humans always begin an action and God completes it. In Genesis 22, for example, the exact opposite is true. This analysis is meant to demonstrate an instance wherein Koch's analysis and a scene from Genesis align with each other.

seems to intentionally underscore Abraham's deep love for Isaac, demonstrating the magnitude of this command. Even the narrative, which, from chapters 11-21, meditates on Isaac's arrival, verifies how important this son must be to Abraham and how malevolent God's request presents.

The narrative, however, never shares what emotions this command evokes. Rather, Abraham immediately obliges God, journeying to the stated location for three days. Upon arrival, he takes Isaac away from those with whom they travelled, binds him to the altar, and picks up the knife to slay his son. It is then that an angel of the Lord appears to say "do not raise your hand against the boy...for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me" (Gen. 22:12). The narrative is again emphasizing how precious Isaac is to Abraham, and uses it as a means to prove Abraham's fitness for divine selection. This verse also indicates that the outcome of this test had been unknown to God, when the angel of the Lord says "now I know."

The akedah is a problematic and thorny biblical account, which thereby poses difficult questions about the nature of the relationship between God and his chosen. On this matter, Gerhard von Rad and Nahum M. Sarna offer divergent interpretations. In von Rad's examination of Genesis 22, he emphasizes its remarkable narrator, who immediately reveals that God's command is a test, that Abraham is unaware of this, and, while avoiding any mention of Abraham's inner thoughts, instead concentrates on his actions. Von Rad views the focus of the akedah to be on the magnitude of God's command and Abraham's obedient response as the means by which Abraham establishes his worth.⁹

⁹ Von Rad, Gerhard. *Genesis. A Commentary*. (Translation by John H. Marks.) Revised Edition. SCM Press, 1972, 234.

Von Rad expounds on the significance of this difficult command, writing: "...one must consider Isaac, who is... the child of the promise. God...poses before Abraham the question of whether he really understands the gift of promise as a pure gift...[and that] his grace permitted Isaac to live" (239-240). Here, he is emphasizing what Isaac represents: both the loss of a cherished son and the forfeiture of the divine promise for which Abraham so long prepared and acutely suffered. Abraham is told by God that he will father a great nation, yet for many years his wife is infertile, his firstborn is exiled, and the long-awaited promise is threatened. God's test, then, is multi-layered: a trial of obedience and faith alike.

Von Rad similarly stresses that God's command is a demonstration of his grace. If both Isaac and Abraham's chosenness were bestowed from God's will alone and could therefore be retracted at any time, for any reason or no reason at all, then all that Abraham had were not rewards but gifts. If so, Abraham has no entitlement, and his obedient relinquishment of God's promise is emblematic of his subordination.

In contrast, Nahum M. Sarna's interpretation of the akedah suggests a God who seeks a partnership with his chosen. In his analysis of Genesis 22, he raises two critical points. The first, "the value of an act may lie as much in the inward intention of the doer as in the final execution," is in reference to the following divine verdict: "For now I know that you fear God" (Gen. 22:12).¹⁰ As a result of Abraham's inward willingness to sacrifice his beloved son, he is elevated in the eyes of the divine. It is important to note that Abraham's elevation is deserved not because of his actions, but because of Abraham's intention to bend to God's will as demonstrated by his actions.

¹⁰ Sarna, Nahum M. *Understanding Genesis*. Schocken Books, 1995, 163.

Sarna, in his second point, implies that the divine/chosen relationship is not as master/servant, but as a partnership, when he writes, "...the first divine communication [between God and Abraham] carried with it the promise of reward" (163). Reward carries a suggestion of entitlement and ownership, not a benefit bestowed by the grace of God but one earned by the chosen's willing participation in the relationship to effect God's will.

The equivalence of Abraham's inward intent to his obedience to God's command suggests a God who imposes tests to determine if the chosen is both willing and prepared to accomplish divine will. Isaac cannot be sacrificed simply because God demands it, but also because Abraham permits it. Sarna's understanding of chosenness, then, can be understood as a proffer that, if accepted, creates a dynamic of earthly and divine cooperation.

Sarna's position is supported by Joel Kaminsky, as evidenced when Kaminsky writes, "the Abraham sequence makes clear that being chosen demands a human response and that chosenness is brought to fruition by human action" (41). Kaminsky's point implies that, without Abraham's compliance, his chosenness could have reasonably ceased to exist, a reality which both supports Sarna's proposed partnership model and challenges the notion that God seeks subordination.

The God von Rad describes would be plausible if the akedah was understood to have occurred in isolation. Surely, if God is omnipotent yet still finds need to test his chosen, then that command to sacrifice Isaac could only be understood as an attempt to reveal God's dominion over his demonstrably inferior chosen. However, when von Rad's model is understood within the context of Gen. 4-25, it must give way to Sarna's partnership model, whose God presides throughout the Abrahamic narrative. Partnerships are joined by parties, each with their own

duties and obligations, to achieve a result unattainable by either alone. In pursuit of their goals, sacrifices are willingly made and assistance is freely given by and to each, according to their ability and need; and in the context of Gen. 4-25, God, Cain and Abel, and Abraham all interact in precisely this way. Human agency is at work in Genesis 4, for example, when Cain successfully extinguishes Abel's favor and convinces God to provide him divine protection. In the Abrahamic narrative, partnership is proven when Abraham is tested by God's directive that he bind and sacrifice the heir to the great nation. The akedah, as a test, implied two outcomes, either success or failure, and Abraham's free human action determined the future of his chosenness.¹¹ It is an instance of a collaborative effort between God and Abraham, who navigate life in a way that is mindful of and responsive to the desire and will of the other.¹²

¹¹ This statement finds support in Genesis 22:12, which, as previously stated, describes an emissary of the Lord telling Abraham "now I know that you fear God"—in other words, proof that God could not have known the outcome of this test beforehand.

¹² The final chapter of this saga passes over Isaac—rendering him a passive, subsidiary figure—and thus paves the way for Jacob.

Chapter Two: Jacob

As the successor of Abraham and predecessor of Joseph, Jacob is the pivot of the first book of the Hebrew Bible. Structurally, his history begins at the center of Genesis and, thematically, it continues, transforms and introduces old and new themes. This chapter, in its analysis of the first portion of the second half of Genesis, will narrate and discern meaning from chapters 25-36, particularly by comparing it to the Abrahamic narrative. This exploration will provide insight into the Jacob cycle both in isolation and within the larger context of Genesis, observing the ways in which this narrative remains the same, diverges, and at times reverses itself.

Specifically, this chapter will explore common themes, particularly those of paradox and the sibling rivalry contained in Genesis 30. It will demonstrate the ways in which Genesis 26-36 is at times a reversal of 11-25 by using the arguments of Klaus Koch, focusing on the figures of Sarah and Rebekah, Jacob's relocation, the sibling dynamic of Genesis 29, and the notion of ricocheting deception. It will also reveal how the Jacob cycle begins to shift away from the Abrahamic narrative to the story of Joseph, through von Rad's analysis of Jacob's renaming, the theme of reunification contained in Genesis 33, and a comparison between the events of the Jacob cycle and the akedah.

While Baden and Collins are concerned with historical and Near Eastern contexts, the analyses in this chapter will concern themselves with the literary themes which are present within the narrative. These inquiries will necessarily involve questioning how and why the narrative is changing, whether that change was intentional, and if so, what part the chosen and free action played in achieving that end.

The first mention of Jacob is in Genesis 25, the same chapter which contains Abraham's death and the strangely brief history dedicated to Isaac. In this episode, Isaac's wife, Rebekah, is infertile, as was Sarah before her, and is similarly blessed by God and conceives twin sons. Just as there was brotherly tension between Cain and Abel and even Isaac and Ishmael, Isaac's progeny are said to struggle in their mother's womb, the purpose for which is questioned by Rebekah. It is then that God makes the declaration which defines the Jacob cycle: "two nations are in your womb...and the older shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23).

The Jacob cycle, in its first few verses, establishes itself as paradoxical. Although Isaac is Abraham's long-awaited and beloved son, the narrative is now unconcerned with him; Rebekah, although the wife of God's chosen, is initially infertile; and the younger son, Jacob, is yet again ruling over his elder. This sequence of events is in many ways similar to the themes previously established in the Abrahamic narrative: Abraham's chosenness was also paradoxical, Sarah was infertile, and the younger son found favor from God. Jacob's chosenness, however, does include a slight deviation as the first patriarch to be chosen from the moment of his conception.¹³

After Jacob and Esau's birth, the narrative takes particular interest in the manner in which these sons enter into the world. Esau is described as red and hairy, and Jacob is said to emerge "holding on to the heel of Esau," symbols of the men they are to become and of the roles they are to assume (Gen. 25:25-26). Accordingly, once adulthood is achieved, Esau is known as a skillful hunter and Jacob as the mild man who stays at home. Although Isaac favors Esau, Rebekah, much as Sarah before her, favors the younger son.¹⁴

¹³ Although Isaac was also chosen from the moment of his conception, he is a passive figure and, among the three patriarchs, Jacob is the only one who God explicitly declares to be chosen before his birth.

¹⁴ The fact that Isaac prefers the son who isn't chosen by God further serves as an example of his passive nature.

Despite Isaac's preference, Jacob and Rebekah plot to obtain Esau's birthright by employing guile and deceit. As Jacob cooks a stew, a famished Esau approaches him and asks to be fed. Jacob agrees, but on the condition that Esau sell him his birthright. Curiously, Esau responds, "I am at the point of death, so of what use is my birthright to me?" (Gen. 25:32). This, however, is not enough for Jacob, who demands that Esau formally swear that he is relinquishing his birthright. Esau, evidently famished, agrees, granting Jacob the firstborn's privilege.

Although narrated in only five lines, this critically important sequence provides insight into Esau's limited mental capacity, Jacob's mental acuity, and their relative suitability to effect God's will through the realization of chosenness and a newfound status of non-elect. An exchange of a blessed birthright for lentil stew is not the result of an arm's length transaction, but is one to which Esau, who is overmatched, immediately and easily agrees. This deal both illustrates Esau's dim-wittedness and confirms Jacob's cunning and ruthless nature, while also appearing as the first likely demonstration of Jacob's fitness for election. This moment is reminiscent of Genesis 12, when Abraham is forced to deceive the Pharaoh. As complicated as that situation was, so is this situation with Jacob. Although Jacob's fitness for election is clear, his actions also call into question why a deceitful person would be chosen by God and, too, why God would expect a chosen person to be deceitful.

Furthermore, Esau's qualifications for being non-elect are as ambiguous as Jacob's eligibility as an elect. In this instance, at least, Esau is more moral than his brother. The narrative is unconcerned with Esau's morality, though, demonstrating the mystifying nature of chosenness. God never states why he prefers younger siblings to their elders, never explains why chosenness sometimes requires immoral behavior, and never exactly defines his relationship to those who

are non-elect. The nature of chosenness, in the Abrahamic narrative, in this cycle, and later in the Joseph story, must be understood as inexplicable, to varying degrees.¹⁵

Later in the narrative, in Genesis 30, Jacob's wives Rachel and Leah experience familial conflict, much like the sibling rivalry of Jacob and Esau which came before them. When Rachel notices that her sister is providing her husband with children while she struggles with infertility, she desperately declares to Jacob, "give me children, or I'll die" (Gen 30:1). Angrily, Jacob expresses to her that he is not God and that God alone can provide her with a child. This prompts her to offer Jacob her servant, Bilhah, who becomes pregnant with a son. Upon the birth of Bilhah's second son, Rachel declares that she has won over her sister now that she has, through her handmaiden, provided Jacob with two children. Leah, in a pique of jealousy, escalates the rivalry by then offering Jacob her own servant, Zilpah, who bears him two additional sons.

Later, during the wheat harvest, Rachel asks Leah if she can have some of the mandrakes of Leah's son, to which Leah replies: "wasn't it enough that you took away my husband?" (Gen. 30: 15). In exchange for these mandrakes, Rachel permits Jacob to lie with Leah again, and Leah consequently provides her husband with two more sons and a daughter, Dinah. It is after Dinah's birth that God is said to finally remember Rachel, who gives birth to Joseph.

Rachel's initial dramatic reaction to her infertility is much like Sarah's prolonged disbelief that she would ever bear a child, a sentiment that Sarah and Abraham both expressed through laughter. Also like Sarah, Rachel's solution to this problem is to offer her servant to her husband who, in this instance, provides Jacob with two children instead of one. Yet curiously,

¹⁵ In the context of this episode, the narrative is yet again presenting chosenness as a paradox. Jacob, although elected, is deceitful; chosenness, although God-given, requires immoral behavior for activation; and Esau, despite his ostensibly good nature and status as firstborn, is the non-elect.

rather than feel jealousy toward Bilhah and her sons, Rachel reveals her marital priorities as she expresses victory over Leah. Even Leah, who appears consumed with the rivalry, appears to agree that Rachel is victorious, when she pitifully asks if taking Jacob away from her was enough. Leah's compliance recalls the figure of Esau, particularly when he had asked Isaac if a blessing had been left for him. Leah, however, is no fool, and after an interesting exchange, finds herself in the position to bear her husband three more children.

The subsequent mention of the birth of Rachel's child is brief, and does not present nearly as dramatically or importantly as Isaac's birth had. Even so, since Rachel is the favored wife, and since the wives and mothers who came before her also all suffered infertility, the significance of Joseph is still apparent.¹⁶

Rachel, Leah, Sarah and Hagar all demonstrate that the sibling rivalries of Genesis are not unique to the elect and can influence the relationships of everyone involved with the chosen. The suffering that Abel, Abraham and now Jacob experience extends into the lives of their wives and children, engendering sacrifice, deception and exile that impacts each of them. A critical difference between the women of the Abrahamic narrative and the Jacob story is that Sarah calls for Hagar's banishment, whereas Rachel and Leah, however unhappily, are willing to coexist. Nevertheless, there is competition between all of them, which exists only because of their relationship to the elect.

Earlier in the narrative, in Genesis 27, a longer and more dramatic account of Jacob deceiving Esau, this time involving the all-important blessing from Isaac, occurs. By virtue of birth order, and also according to Isaac's own preference, Esau was the presumptive sole

¹⁶ It is unsurprising, then, that Joseph ultimately becomes God's next chosen, although is nonetheless curious that the narrative did not sooner reveal his divine election as it had for those before him.

inheritor of this blessing. It is one which would have bestowed him benefits from heaven and earth alike, and allowed him to both continue Abraham's line and progress through life under the influence of divine favor. Yet when Isaac mentions that he is ready to dispense this gift, Esau's own mother schemes against him. Isaac, who is blind, asks that Esau prepare his favorite meal and present it to him, yet Rebekah instructs the younger twin to bring game to her so that she can prepare this meal on his behalf. She prepares it to Isaac's taste, and in another cunning measure, affixes hair to Jacob's hands and neck, so that he might convincingly present as his older brother. When Jacob goes before his father this strategy proves successful, and he is told by Isaac that he has inherited both the "dew of heaven and fatness of the earth" (Gen. 27:28).

The news of this incident is devastating to Esau, who later asks his father if a second blessing has been reserved for him. The narrative is purposely stressing the pathetic nature of Esau's reaction to heighten the drama of the situation. For Esau, Rebekah and Jacob's actions are unjust and cruel, even more so because of their blood relation to one another. The aftermath of this situation thereby raises the question of why Esau and Isaac had to be deceived.

The necessity of this deception is the result of God's initial declaration that the older brother will serve his younger. This is precisely what motivates Rebekah to scheme against her family as she, like Jacob, embraces her cunning nature. She attends to the often overlooked details such as placing hair on Jacob's arms to more convincingly present him as Esau and, further, by adding a layer of distraction by cooking her husband's favorite meal on Jacob's behalf. In effect, she is doing everything in her power to honor her love for Jacob and, even more importantly, most closely follow the will of God.

As the wives and mothers of God's chosen, Rebekah and her situation are similar to Sarah and the sequence of events contained in the Abrahamic narrative. They each suffer from infertility, favor the son who God also prefers, and exist in narratives shaped by their manipulative acts. Sarah, for instance, doubted God's assurances that she would conceive a child (Gen. 18:12), and thus attempted to control her situation by allowing Abraham access to her handmaiden. Rebekah acted to promote her favored son, which also fulfilled the will of the divine through the use of guile and deceit to divest Esau of his birthright (Genesis 27).

Though similar, there exist critical differences between these figures which ignite the theme of reversal within the Hebrew Bible. The first chapter of this thesis contended that, according to Klaus Koch's argument, Sarah and God's collective banishment of Ishmael and Hagar demonstrated an instance of human action beginning that which divine forces complete. In the case of Rebekah, however, the opposite is true. It was God who first declared that Rebekah's son Jacob would rule over Esau. Rebekah schemed so that Jacob was able to successfully usurp his older brother's patriarchal blessing. Ultimately, then, Genesis 27 is an instance of the divine beginning an action which human performance is instrumental in completing. If Genesis 27 is viewed in isolation, then these arguments are simply case-studies of the complicated and confusing ways in which God can at times interact with his chosen. When this sequence of events is understood within the context of the entirety of Genesis, it proves the beginning of this newfound theme of reversal in the narrative.

This trend is apparent in other areas of the Jacob narrative, particularly that of Jacob's relocation. After Jacob successfully steals Esau's birthright and his distraught brother realizes that no divine favor has been left for him, Esau threatens to murder his brother. Rebekah instructs

her beloved son to flee in order to avoid his twin's wrath. In so doing, Rebekah's actions have banished Jacob from his homeland, a result strongly reminiscent of Sarah's hand in banishing Ishmael. Both of these banishments advance the cause of the elect, while also avoiding any detriment to the non-elect. In the case of the Abrahamic narrative, for example, Ishmael's banishment was consistent with God's plan to grow Abraham's great nation through Isaac, yet concomitantly facilitated God's promise to Ishmael to father the Ishmaelites. Similarly in the Jacob cycle, Jacob's banishment was a link in the chain of events that led him to his wives, a seeming fortuity which inexorably resulted in the twelve tribes of Israel. Moreover, Esau's genetic line is also included in the narrative, and is in fact very similar to the presentation of the genealogy of Ishmael.

Despite the strong similarities between these two instances, they also represent the second reversal of the Jacob cycle. In the Abrahamic narrative, and even more obviously and dramatically in Genesis 4, it is the non-elect who is banished. Cain and Ishmael are forced to leave because of the threat they create to those who are divinely elected or, in Cain's case, the threat they fulfilled. Yet in the Jacob cycle, it is the patriarch himself who, for the first time, must flee his home, even though the non-elect, Esau, is the threatening aggressor.

Once Jacob arrives in Haran, he sets out to find his uncle Laban but instead encounters Laban's comely daughter, Rachel. Jacob is immediately taken with her and when he settles in Laban's home, offers to exchange seven years of service for Rachel's hand in marriage. Jacob is said to love Rachel, whom the narrative contrasts with her homely sister, Leah, who is described as having "weak eyes" (Gen. 29:17).

When Jacob completes his service, his uncle Laban delivers Jacob a wedding as he was promised. However, in an act of deception, Jacob is unwittingly married to the wrong bride. When Jacob realizes he is married to Leah, he confronts Laban, who justifies his deception, stating, "it is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the older... wait until the bridal week of this one is over and we will give you that one too, provided you serve me another seven years" (Gen. 29:26-27). Jacob, in his love for Rachel, agrees, and this is ultimately how he comes to have both Leah and Rachel as his wives.

This event represents contained reversals which, in this context, is a reversal of narrative that occurs within, and is unique to, the Jacob narrative. Here, there is a reversal of sibling dynamic. Like Jacob, Rachel is a favored younger sibling and is implied to have the upper hand over her less attractive sister. Like Esau, Leah is older but overlooked and unfavorably described. Yet it is Leah who gets to marry Jacob first and, as was previously discussed, more easily provide him with children.

The narrative also reverses Jacob's status as a deceiver to a person who is himself deceived. On this matter, in addition to Koch's idea that humans set into motion what God completes, Koch argues that "[if a person] brought misfortune on another, that same misfortune would fall upon said person in some future time" (59). If this part of Koch's argument is applied to Genesis, specifically within the Jacob cycle, it introduces a theme of ricocheting deception. Since Jacob deceived his brother and his father, he must now be subject to his uncle's treachery.

This idea of ricocheting deception continues in Genesis 30. After the birth of Joseph, Jacob wishes to leave Haran with his wives and children and return to his homeland. Laban begs that he stay, and even offers him the opportunity to name his price for not leaving. To this, Jacob

tells Laban that every speckled or spotted animal that is born henceforth will become his. Laban, fully-knowing that such animals are rare, readily agrees but as an extra precaution, separates the pre-existing spotted animals from Jacob's flock.¹⁷ Jacob, however, takes branches and makes "white stripes on them by peeling the bark and exposing the white inner wood of the branches" (Gen. 30:37). He then places these modified sticks into the water troughs of the animals, partaking of which would cause these animals to breed streaked, speckled and spotted young.

Later, in Genesis 31, Laban's manner toward Jacob changes and, as Jacob himself notes, Laban time and again unfairly diminishes his wages. God instructs Jacob to depart from Haran with his family, leaving Laban behind. When Jacob explains this to Rachel and Leah, he notes, "God...would not let [Laban] do me harm. If [Laban] said thus, 'the speckled shall be your wages,' then all the flocks would drop speckled young" (Gen 31:8). He also relays a dream that he had, wherein the "he-goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled and mottled" (Gen. 31:10), and that God had informed the patriarch that this had occurred as a direct result of Laban's ill treatment of him.

Jacob appears to be aware of the effects of God's favor. The greatest evidence of this is contained in the events of Genesis 31, when God explicitly communicates to him in a dream that, when he is wronged, that culprit will be wronged himself. This aligns with Koch's notion of ricocheting deception. It supports the sentiment by suggesting that what Laban puts into the world will later come back against him, and thus also represents a form of retribution against Laban for swapping Leah as Jacob's bride. Von Rad supports this notion, writing:

¹⁷ As von Rad notes on page 296, "spotted or striped animals are much rarer."

The way Jacob, under such unfavorable conditions, performs a trick to arrive at enormous profit, the way he greatly outwits the clever Laban, seems like a burlesque farce and could be designated generically, when considered by itself, as only a humorous story... however, for the men in question, it is very earnest... Laban can only perceive advantage for himself in this proposal and he agrees, [even adding] a safety clause for himself... [yet] this caution will be of no avail whatever to him (296).

While this event in Genesis 30 could be more simply understood as a mere benefit of God's favor, von Rad argues that even more, it represents another instance of deception. Von Rad acknowledges that Jacob is performing a trick, a cunning act which will inure to his benefit and Laban's detriment. Von Rad also emphasizes how this scheme presents to Laban, mentioning the rarity of spotted and speckled animals and therefore the absurdity of the wages to which Jacob agrees. This fact would not be lost on Jacob, who consistently demonstrates a keen intellect and willingness to engage in battles of wits. It is certainly the case, then, that Genesis 30 and 31 collectively reveal an instance of Jacob deceiving Laban.¹⁸

In Genesis 32, the story begins to reveal the ways in which the Genesis narrative is shifting. In the first half of this episode, the patriarch takes the necessary steps to prepare to reunite with his brother Esau. Jacob has an invitation delivered to him but subsequently receives word that while Esau agrees to meet, his acceptance includes four hundred of his men. The undertone of this response is worrisome to Jacob, causing him to divide his accompanying people and animals into two separate groups, so that if one were to perish the other could escape. Thereafter, Jacob prays to God for protection, and plans to present gifts to Esau upon his arrival.

¹⁸ As the Joseph cycle will later reveal, Jacob will be deceived again when his sons falsely report the death of his most beloved son, Joseph. This recurring theme of ricocheting deception, so prevalent throughout the Jacob cycle, carries even further into the Joseph story: as the narrative will also reveal, Joseph's sons, who tricked their father, fall victim to deception themselves, when Joseph ultimately dupes them.

The narrative, in its discussion of the reunion between Jacob and Esau, creates a deliberately suspenseful tone. Even Jacob, who so far has proved to be fiercely loyal to the divine, expresses a degree of doubt, when he feels the need to remind his God during prayer that he was promised “descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted” (Gen. 32:12). Will Esau forgive Jacob, or follow through on his previous threat to kill him? The narrative does not immediately answer these questions, instead transitioning to nighttime.

The second half of Genesis 32 contains perhaps the most significant moment in the Jacob cycle. Jacob takes his wives, female servants, eleven sons and belongings, and sends them all across the stream, leaving himself alone. During his isolation, he is said to have “wrestled with [a man] till daybreak” (Gen. 32:24). This man, who is never explicitly identified, realizes he cannot overpower Jacob and, significantly, touches the socket of Jacob’s hip, dislocating it. The man then requests to be released, but Jacob explains to him that he will do no such thing until he is blessed. In response, the man tells him, “your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome” (Gen. 32:28). When Jacob requests that this mysterious figure then tell him his name, the man replies by asking why Jacob would want to know this, providing no answer to the question. Thereafter, Jacob is granted his blessing.

This is the moment in which Jacob becomes the symbol of Israel and his chosenness, although previously activated through acts of deception, is most forcefully realized in this instance. Even so, the event is a confusing one. The man, who in fact behaves too divinely to be man, never truly reveals his identity; Jacob, like Abraham before him, is suddenly renamed; and

the narrative itself, however important, is also an interruption of the story of Jacob's reunion with Esau.

Von Rad addresses all of these concerns. Of the mysterious figure he assigns a degree of divinity and highlights the fact that he neither shares his identity nor immediately grants Jacob the blessing he requested, noting that, "[the man] does not permit his mystery and his freedom to be touched" (318). Jacob is not one whom this being could overpower, yet the being is nonetheless divine. The point of the encounter was never for Jacob to prove his superiority, but rather to prove his worthiness.

Proof of Jacob's worthiness specifically lies in his renaming. Von Rad describes the then extant power of nomenclature, emphasizing the correlation between one's character and name. Accordingly, when the divine being first asks Jacob his name, he is essentially asking Jacob to reveal his true and whole nature. Moreover, implicit in the act of renaming Jacob is his transformation into a symbol of Israel (316).

This episode, which interrupts Jacob and Esau's reunion, is not a narrative obtrusion. Rather, structurally, its placement in Genesis is of great significance, as it links Jacob's first deceptive act to the moment of his renaming. As von Rad writes, "the narrator, [in the reunification of Jacob and Esau], tells of a remarkable consequence which is very closely related to the event of [Jacob's renaming] and therefore must be considered along with it." In so doing, the narrative subtly recalls Jacob's trickery, demonstrates the fruit of his duplicity, and confirms his worth before God, all as a precursor to the introduction of the theme of unification (321).

Jacob's reunion with Esau occurs in Genesis 33, and it unfolds as Esau and his four hundred men approach Jacob. Jacob instructs Rachel and Joseph to stand in the rear, thereby, for

the first time, identifying Joseph as his favored son. Jacob positions himself at the fore, and bows before his brother seven times. Although the narrative creates tension in this dramatic buildup, it anticlimactically diffuses when Esau embraces his brother and inquires about Jacob's family. Jacob then offers Esau gifts, which are initially and politely rejected but ultimately accepted upon Jacob's insistence. The reunion narrative is brief, and Esau departs as quickly as he was introduced.

This episode is an example of an instance of unification of family in the Hebrew Bible. As the narrative of Genesis will later demonstrate, this theme persists in the Joseph cycle. It was even present within the Abrahamic narrative, when Abraham died and Isaac and Ishmael were briefly mentioned as burying their father together (Gen. 25:9). This fact, despite being relayed in one verse, implies that there was some form of reunion between those half-brothers. However, the narrative was also evidently unconcerned with revealing when, why and how such a reunion occurred and, therefore, this dramatized and fully-described reunion between Jacob and Esau represents a shifting in the narrative between Genesis 11-25 and 26-36.

The other shifting theme of the Jacob cycle is how closely divine will and human action align, something that is revealed by the ways that chosenness manifests itself. Jacob's need to engage in trickery and deceit to effect the will of God is a curious notion. Why would God present him with such a challenge? One explanation is that God is testing Jacob to determine his fitness for election. In other words, although Jacob is chosen by God, he must demonstrate his innate abilities and willingness to achieve God's will.

The declaration that Jacob is chosen, the necessity of Rebekah's plot, and the success of Jacob's immoral actions are all reminiscent of the akedah. In Genesis 22, Abraham was presented

with a difficult situation that required a specific action in order to maintain his chosenness. Here, Jacob faces a similar reality. Upon his conception, he was proclaimed to become God's next chosen, yet his birth order precluded his receipt of either the birthright or Isaac's blessing. Accordingly, he was faced with the option of deceiving Isaac and maintaining his chosenness or, by refusing to act, risk the potential extinguishment of his divine favor. In order to activate his divine election, he is forced to hoodwink his family and, as Abraham's chosenness required a demonstration of willing sacrifice, Jacob's election then required a demonstration of willing deception.

The akedah and Jacob's ability to shape earthly events are both indispensable parts of aligning divine will and earthly action. Noticeably, though, as the narrative of Genesis progresses, God's presence is decreasing. Although he continues to test his chosen, he does so in much subtler ways. These different methods become increasingly more effective, progressing from the extinguishment of Abel's favor and its renewal in Seth to the birth of Ishmael and then necessity to banish him and, now, from the issue of Jacob's birth-order to a successful ploy to obtain the firstborn's privilege. The comparisons of these narratives then reflects the shift toward aligning divine will and earthly action.

In Genesis 4, Cain proved the ability to impact the outcome of God's favor and influence divine decision. In Genesis 11-25, Abraham and God's relationship presented as a partnership, implying that divine desire can be reshaped by the chosen, and Sarah demonstrated how those close to the elect can also impact the will of God. In the Jacob story, however, God's will is made known to the earthly players and, through free human action, the chosen and non-elect alike perform the necessary steps to satisfy God's will.

Structurally, the Jacob narrative ends very similarly to the Abrahamic one. In Genesis 35, Jacob and his family witness the birth of Rachel's second son, Benjamin, and her subsequent death. Her passing is only touched upon briefly and is followed by the narrator's observation that Jacob now has twelve sons representing the twelve tribes of Israel. This chapter concludes with the report of Isaac's death, who had faded from preeminence in the Jacob cycle and who, according to the way his death is recounted, remains a subsidiary figure. Finally, in Genesis 36, Esau's line is reported in a similar fashion to Ishmael's genealogy, concluding the Jacob narrative.

In both the Abraham and Jacob stories, the patriarch's wife dies in a brief narration and the non-elect is provided for by God. Yet thematically, the Jacob story tonally shifts away from that established in the Abrahamic narrative, for in the former, human action and divine will are beginning to align. As an illustration, in Genesis 4 God favored Abel, yet Cain successfully murdered his brother, was exiled from God and created the need for Seth to restore Abel's election. Thus revealed, the story of Cain and Abel can be seen as God's plan in chaos and his will laid vulnerable to human action. Later, chaos reigns throughout Genesis 11-25, when Abraham and Sarah suffer from doubt, resulting in the birth and subsequent need to banish Ishmael. In the Jacob cycle, however, the apparent chaos of Jacob's banishment gives way to order when Jacob, as a direct consequence, is led to his wives.

Although the figures of each story in Genesis engage in free human action, they approach that free action differently. Similarly, God's interactions with his chosen evolves and, thus, the synergies between the earthly and divine are reshaped. The Abrahamic narrative, and to a lesser extent Genesis 4, introduce notions of the nature and consequences of chosenness. The Jacob

cycle, however similar to Genesis 11-25, predominately represents a shift in the features of election. It is in the Joseph story, a narrative even less similar to the Abrahamic one, where the shift introduced in the Jacob cycle fully evolves.

Chapter Three: Joseph

The story of Joseph concludes the Book of Genesis and is markedly different from the narratives of Abraham and Jacob. The cycle of Abraham introduced the complex and interconnecting elements of divine election and demonstrated an earthly and divine partnership. The Jacob cycle, while maintaining old themes, signaled a shift away from this model through the maintenance, transformation and introduction of old and new themes. In the Joseph cycle, themes will also be maintained, but the essence of the Abrahamic narrative will reverse itself and the shifts introduced in the Jacob cycle will be completed.

In the final chapter, this thesis will prove the change of narrative by comparing and contrasting old and new motifs across Genesis, while also acknowledging how the themes of the Joseph narrative deviate from the ones found in the Abrahamic and Jacob cycles. It will closely analyze the scenes from Genesis 39-40, demonstrating how God works through Joseph, defining the relationship between Joseph and the divine with support from von Rad, and explaining how these episodes indicate the completion of a shift. It will then explore how chosenness manifests itself, comparing Genesis 39-40 to the rest of the Genesis narrative, discerning how God communicates with his chosen, and observing how each of the patriarchs responded to their respective situations. It will also explain the significance of Genesis 41-45 to be the completion of the shift which began in the Jacob cycle and its theme of reunification. Finally, in an analysis of Genesis 45-50, this chapter will explore the difference in Jacob in his own narrative in comparison to this one. These observations will be understood both within the context of the entirety of Genesis and within the isolated Joseph cycle, in order to fully understand what election is according to the remarkable narrative of the first book of the Hebrew Bible.

The story of Joseph introduces its namesake as a mere boy seventeen years of age, describing him as one who often "brought bad reports of [his brothers] to their father" (Gen. 37:2), suggesting a certain level of immaturity. Joseph, despite these impish tendencies, is nonetheless Jacob's favorite, and Joseph is gifted an ornamented tunic. That act engenders the now familiar reaction of jealousy amongst Joseph's brothers, a situation which is exacerbated after Joseph shares his revelatory dream that he will reign over them. The brothers then plot Joseph's murder.

In pursuit of their scheme, the brothers take the ornamented tunic from Joseph and cast him into a pit. When one brother, Judah, comes to Joseph's defense, they collectively decide to not kill him, but rather to sell him to the Ishmaelites.¹⁹ In exchange for Joseph, Jacob's sons are given silver and their brother is brought to Egypt. Left with only the ornamented tunic, the siblings then kill an animal, dip the tunic in its blood, and present it to their father, explaining that Joseph has been killed by a beast. Jacob, devastated, mourns his beloved his son (Genesis 37).

Familiar themes yet again emerge as younger siblings are chosen in favor of their elders, the non-elect are consumed with envy, and jealousy yields intervening action. And in the vein of ricocheting deception, Jacob is deceived by his own sons who, in an exceptionally painful act, convince Jacob that his favored son is dead.²⁰

¹⁹ As Joel Baden pointed out, there are discrepancies in this episode which raise questions regarding whether Judah or Reuben came to Joseph's defense and, later, whether Joseph was sold to the Ishmaelites or the Midianites. For more on compositional issues in the Jacob and Joseph cycles, see Baden 1-12, 34-44, and 230-244, which deal with the Sale of Joseph and Jacob's Return to Bethel.

²⁰ This chapter will later demonstrate how this theme of ricocheting deception emerges again, this time when Joseph deceives his brothers.

But despite these similarities, there are still slight deviations. Joseph, for example, is the younger brother but not, as the narrative has previously presented chosenness, the youngest. Throughout Genesis, the chosen child has been both younger than other siblings and the youngest of a patriarch's favored wife. Abraham, for example, is stated to have had more children after Ishmael and Isaac, but Isaac is Sarah's only child. Rebekah and Isaac have only two children, Jacob being the younger. Even Abel's chosenness is temporary and ultimately rekindled in Seth, skipping over, for various reasons, Cain.

Another pronounced difference in the Joseph cycle is the absence of the matriarchal figure. Although great detail about Rachel was provided in the Jacob cycle, her death precedes the Joseph cycle, setting this story apart from the rest of Genesis (Genesis 35). By way of illustration, Sarah played an important role in the Abrahamic narrative in Isaac's inheritance of Abraham's chosenness, by demanding the banishment of Ishmael and Hagar. Similarly, Rebekah staged the deception that stole Esau's birthright and activated Jacob's chosenness. But in contrast, Rachel, other than the favor she holds for Joseph, has no influence over his chosenness.²¹

Another divergence of the Joseph narrative from the established themes of Genesis has to do with the non-elect, who have now greatly increased in size. The sibling rivalries of Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, and Esau and Jacob dominate the majority of the Genesis narrative but, in this last patriarchal cycle, the chosen is exceedingly outnumbered. Even so, the jealousy of

²¹ This is in part due to the fact that human intervention is no longer necessary within the Joseph narrative. As this chapter will later discuss, God does not need to interact with Joseph or others because he is rather acting through his chosen.

these brothers, like the jealous actions of the figures before them, lead to banishment and, in the model of the Jacob and Joseph narratives, it is the elect who is driven out.²²

Genesis 39 and 40 describes Joseph's first years in Egypt. In Genesis 39, Joseph flourishes upon his arrival because "the Lord was with [him]" (Gen. 39:2). Potiphar, a courtier of the Pharaoh, takes Joseph into his home and puts him in charge of his household. But Potiphar's wife is attracted to Joseph and, acting upon this allure, greatly complicates matters. She tries to lie with him on multiple occasions but is rebuffed by Joseph, who tells her that he would never betray his master in this way or "sin before God" (Gen. 39:9). Undeterred, Potiphar's wife assertively grabs Joseph's garment and requests that he lie with her, an act that causes Joseph to flee. Having left his clothes behind, Potiphar's wife then uses the garment to falsely accuse Joseph that he attempted to rape her and, when she screamed, fled the scene. Consequently, Joseph is jailed, yet the Lord is still with him, and Joseph finds himself in the favor of the chief jailer, who puts Joseph in charge of all of the prisoners without supervision.

In the subsequent episode, the Pharaoh becomes angry with his cupbearer and baker and jails them both. There, they encounter Joseph and the cupbearer relates a strange dream, wherein he envisioned a vine with three branches that, although barely budded, blossomed into a cluster of grapes. Taking these grapes, the cupbearer pressed them into wine and delivered it to the Pharaoh. In explaining its meaning, Joseph assures the cupbearer that the three branches equate to the three days it will take the Pharaoh to issue a pardon and restore the cupbearer to his post. Joseph, who prefaced his interpretation with the acknowledgment that it was God who

²² This is also a slight deviation from the Genesis narrative, because the banishment did not occur as a result of the mother's influence.

interpreted this dream, concludes his service with a request: that the cupbearer remember him when he is again in the Pharaoh's presence by mentioning him to free him from jail.

Next, Joseph interprets the dream for the baker. This dream involves three baskets on the baker's head, the uppermost containing food which birds were eating. Joseph interprets the three baskets to again represent three days until an event, this time indicating that the baker will die. True to Joseph's interpretation, once those three days passed the chief cupbearer was restored to his position and the baker was impaled. The episode then curiously ends with the line, "Yet the chief cupbearer did not think of Joseph; he forget him" (Gen. 40:23), indicating that Joseph remains in confinement.

Joseph's God-given ability to interpret dreams in the context of these two chapters illustrates that God works through Joseph. Joseph's request, however, is ignored, despite the narrative's assurance that the Lord is always with him. If God is truly with Joseph, then why does the patriarch remain in jail? The answer to this question involves defining the relationship between Joseph and the divine.

In the first chapter of this thesis, two models of the divine were proposed. Nahum M. Sarna's interpretation aligned with the events of the Abrahamic narrative and suggested that the synergies between the earthly and divine could be classified as a partnership, whereas von Rad described a God who seeks subordination. It is the latter God who is present within the Joseph cycle, reversing the divine-model contained within the Abrahamic narrative.

Von Rad's interpretation of the akedah presents as a multilayered test, one that represents a trial of obedience and faith alike, and dictates that any event that results from a divine/chosen relationship is a demonstration of God's grace. Applying the von Rad model to the Joseph cycle

reconciles the seeming paradox of Joseph's continued confinement. Joseph is granted the ability to interpret dreams through God, a gift he acknowledges is God working through him. However, when Joseph asks the cupbearer to mention his name to the Pharaoh, he presents as neither obedient nor faithful. Joseph is undergoing a lesson of humility. In these two episodes, he is elevated as Potiphar's assistant, jailed, elevated again as the head of this jail, then forgotten. God is with Joseph because he is chosen, but allows him to stay in his confinement as a reminder that divine forces, although in relationship with those on earth, remain superior. God interacts with Joseph in this way, then, to command Joseph's subordination.

In addition to reversing the Abrahamic narrative, this episode marks the beginning of the completion of shifts that were first presented in the Jacob story. In the second chapter of this thesis, the idea that divine will and earthly action were beginning to align was introduced. Where in the Abrahamic narrative there is partnership and in the Jacob cycle these elements of divine and earthly will and action begin to overlap, it is in the Joseph cycle that those elements unite.

This chapter will support this idea by exploring how chosenness manifests. It will accomplish this through a comparison between Genesis 39-40 and the rest of Genesis, specifically by describing and analyzing how God chooses to communicate with his chosen; and by observing how the three patriarchs respond to their respective situations.

Anthropomorphism is present in the stories of Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel, as God, for example, "[walks] about...the garden [of Eden]" (Gen. 3:8) and often expresses his rage. In the Abrahamic narrative, God does not walk and talk amongst those on earth yet does frequently speak directly to Abraham and to the non-elect alike. In Genesis 22, God tests Abraham through an emissary, who comes to earth to speak directly to Abraham. The Jacob cycle is similar in these

regards: God speaks directly to those on earth, although to a significantly lesser degree, and an emissary of the Lord appears on earth to wrestle with Jacob. In the Joseph narrative, God is noticeably silent, although his presence is often mentioned. Furthermore, there is no emissary of the Lord except for Joseph, who is himself an emissary.

When Joseph interprets the dreams of the cupbearer and baker, he explicitly states that it is God who is interpreting these dreams. Certainly, then, there is a strong connection between Joseph, the angel who tested Abraham in Genesis 22, and the angel who wrestled with Jacob in Genesis 32. Each of them interacts with people on earth on behalf of God, to deliver a divine message. Whereas God was once anthropomorphic and free human action and divine will were more often not aligned, the divine/earthly relationship evolved into who Joseph ultimately becomes: a chosen who acts on behalf of the Lord.

Genesis 39 and 40 also demonstrate how Joseph responds to his chosenness. Unlike the preceding narratives, from Joseph's election emerges moral behavior. In Genesis 12, Abraham is forced to deceive the pharaoh as a result of his divine selection and, in order to activate his chosenness, must be willing to sacrifice his son. Jacob also deceives and is deceived himself on multiple occasions, both as a necessary step to activate his chosenness and as a result of situations his chosenness places him in. Joseph, rather, is presented with the opportunity to lie with Potiphar's wife, but refuses her advances out of his respect for Potiphar and his refusal to sin before God. Joseph's chosenness, therefore, manifests as service, and underscores the development of his moral character.²³

²³ Although Joseph deceives his brothers by withholding his identity (Gen. 42), it is arguable that that particular act of deception was both with good intention and an act of God acting through Joseph.

In Genesis 41, two years are said to have passed before Joseph is finally freed from confinement. When the Pharaoh mysteriously dreams of seven strong cows consumed by seven gaunt ones, then later of seven ears of healthy grain juxtaposed against seven scorched ones, he looks for someone to interpret their meanings. It is then that the chief cupbearer finally remembers Joseph, and the Pharaoh summons him. Joseph explains that, “God has told Pharaoh what He is about to do” (Gen. 41:25), clarifying that there will be seven years of abundance followed by seven years of a famine. The Pharaoh then, so pleased with Joseph’s ability to interpret his dream and recognizing his unmatched relationship with God, places Joseph in charge of his court, telling him that “only with respect to the throne shall I be superior to you” (Gen. 41:40).

In the following chapter, the narrative returns to Jacob and his sons, as they realize that the famine is upon them. Jacob sends ten of his sons into Egypt to procure food for the family but holds Benjamin back, fearing harm might befall him just as Jacob believes that something grave happened to Joseph. Joseph, now the vizier of Egypt, immediately recognizes his brothers, yet they do not recognize him. Joseph insists to them that they are spies, to which they declare that they are not. Joseph then says to them, “By this you shall be put to the test: unless your youngest brother comes here, by Pharaoh, you shall not depart from this place! Let one of you go and bring your brother, while the rest of you remain confined, that your words may be put to the test whether there is truth in you” (Gen. 42:15-16).

The brothers successfully convince their father to allow Benjamin to come with them and, once they pass this test, Joseph decides to test them once more. In Genesis 44, after sharing a meal with all of his brothers, Joseph instructs a member of his steward to place a goblet inside

of Benjamin's bag. Then, Joseph strategically pretends to discover that Benjamin has stolen this goblet from him and demands that the youngest brother remain in his household as a prisoner. With every intention of saving this brother, Judah offers himself as a surety for Benjamin, for without this youngest son their father Jacob would surely die. Thus, the brothers pass the second test to which Joseph has subjected them.

Overtaken with emotion, Joseph then decides to reveal his identity to his brothers. He declares, "God has sent me ahead of you to ensure your survival on earth, and to save your lives in an extraordinary deliverance. So, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, lord of all his household, and ruler over the whole land of Egypt" (Gen. 45:7-8). Joseph then embraces all of his brothers and later, Jacob is informed that his favored son is alive and they joyfully reunite as well.

This sequence of events is important for two major reasons: it completes the shifts of divine testing and of reunification. The notion of a test is present throughout most of Genesis, most literally during Genesis 22 but also when Jacob is presented with the choice to deceive to activate his chosenness through deception. Yet in the Joseph cycle, divine testing manifests in a strikingly different way. In the narratives of Abraham and Jacob, God tests his chosen and free human action, although influential by varying degrees, is at play. In the Joseph story, it is Joseph who instead tests the non-elect.²⁴

This shift harkens back to the idea that Joseph is an emissary of God. No one speaks as confidently or assertively about the divine as does Joseph, especially when he reveals to his

²⁴ Although it's arguable that during Genesis 22 Abraham was testing Isaac's subordination or in Genesis 25 Jacob was testing if Esau was worthy of his divine inheritance, neither Abraham nor Jacob ever acted through God in the way that Joseph has in their respective cycles.

brothers that it was not them who sent him to Egypt but God. Despite the narrative's omissions of God speaking to Joseph, his presence is overwhelmingly present through this patriarch. Joseph seems aware of God's messages and desires at all times, and he behaves accordingly.

Furthermore, Joseph's statement affirms that human agency is not at play in this narrative in a significant way and that, no matter what Joseph or any of the non-elect could have done, the sequence of events in their lives were all an inevitability. This represents a perfect alignment of divine will and earthly action.

The narrative also heavily focuses on the idea of reunification. In Genesis 4, Cain and Abel could not be further removed from each other after Abel dies and Cain is exiled from God. In the Abrahamic narrative, Isaac and Ishmael are briefly reunited to bury their father Abraham, but the mention of this is contained in a single line with no elaboration, demonstrating the narrative's relative lack of concern with that event. The narrative begins to shift in favor of the reunification of families in the Jacob cycle, which dedicates multiple chapters written in a dramatized manner. Here in the Joseph cycle, though, the idea of reunification elevates the dramatic undertones.

Joseph was betrayed by his brothers in an ultimate way, endured years of service in a foreign land, and encountered them years later in his position as the Vizier. It raises the question of when, if ever, Joseph will reveal himself to his brothers, heightening the drama of this narrative. Multiple chapters pass before Joseph finally does reveal his identity, and the fact that these siblings then all embrace, cry and kiss one another is explicitly stated. It is especially gripping when Jacob learns of his son's well-being, declaring, "My son Joseph is still alive! I might go and see him before I die" (Gen. 45:28).

Jacob's final moments are detailed in Genesis 48, a chapter in which various significant moments occur that most forcefully confirm the completion of the shift that began in Genesis 25. Jacob, on his deathbed, summons Joseph to come to him. Joseph appears with his children, who Jacob is unable to clearly see because of his advanced age. Joseph informs his father that they are his sons, and Jacob blesses them according to a hierarchy.

There is a strange moment in which Joseph attempts to correct his father mid-blessing, suggesting that his elder son should be the one to receive the more favorable blessing. Jacob, however, tells Joseph that “[the older son] too shall become a people...yet his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall be plentiful enough for nations” (Gen. 48:19). Jacob thereafter blesses all of his sons, granting Joseph the most favorable, and dies.

In this episode, Jacob is blind as his own father was, but his son Joseph does not deceive him. There is no need to, inasmuch the younger brother, whom God has consistently preferred throughout Genesis, is the one who Jacob is initially inclined to bestow his favor upon. Joseph's confusion could be for two reasons: the narrative wanted to reiterate its preference for younger siblings, or Joseph, as the eldest son of Rachel, possibly has his own preference for his elder child. The narrative is unconcerned with choosing one answer over the other, though, and instead underscores Jacob's authority. It is here that God now acts through Jacob, in the same ways that he had acted through Joseph earlier in the narrative. Through Israel, the shift toward the alignment of divine will and earthly action is complete.

In Genesis 50, the final chapter of the Joseph cycle and the entire narrative, Joseph's brothers officially submit to his authority, confirming the prophecy of Genesis 37. The narrative

then concludes with Joseph's death, who is said to have lived until the age of one hundred and ten years.²⁵

The story of Joseph, if viewed in isolation, is a remarkably intricate narrative that demonstrates the mysterious ways in which God's presence can manifest. Although noticeably absent from the narrative, the divine was present throughout and interacted with those on earth through his surrogate, Joseph. Within the context of Genesis, the Joseph narrative presents as a reversal, a completion of a shift, and a departure from the norm. The narrative of each patriarch included the common themes of sibling rivalry, jealousy, deception, and exile, but with each manifesting differently from narrative to narrative. The force of the Joseph cycle as the last narrative of the Book of Genesis is the culmination of the evolution of these themes, which, in this final patriarchal cycle, suggests a God who seeks subordination and a people whose actions perfectly align with divine desire.

²⁵ The final chapter of Genesis establishes contained reversals within Joseph's narrative. For example, in the beginning of the Joseph cycle, Joseph is enslaved and Jacob mourns his beloved son; but in the final chapter of the Joseph cycle, Joseph's brothers says "we are prepared to be your slaves" (Gen. 50:18) and Joseph is mourning Jacob.

Conclusion

Within Genesis, I discovered there was neither a uniform manifestation of chosenness nor a constancy in God's dealings with the elect. Divine election could demand sacrifice, deception or service, just as God was sometimes anthropomorphic, malevolent or benevolent, or altogether absent from the narrative. There were themes which were present in every chapter, not introduced until the narrative's midpoint or which appeared only intermittently, and the questions that arose from these complexities were often simply left unanswered.

I realized that my original research question, which sought to determine why specifically Abraham, Jacob and Joseph had been chosen, was inadequate. The narrative provided answers to certain specific questions it raised, but remained unconcerned with the reconciliation of other paradoxes. It did not explain or apologize for the immoral behavior of God's chosen or, likewise, God's seeming cruelty during episodes like the akedah. The point of Genesis, I learned, is not to read God's mind, question how immoral people could be chosen or attempt to discern why ironical themes reign. Chosenness is complex, consisting of many varied interconnecting elements, and answers only those questions deemed significant. The question is never "why?," but "how?" and "what?" How does chosenness manifest in the first book of the Hebrew Bible and what does the answer imply?

The first chapter of this thesis explored the dominant themes of chosenness in Genesis 4 and how they resurfaced in the Abrahamic narrative. Through a close analysis of Genesis 16-21, it unpacked the nature of the relationships between God and his chosen and the divine and the non-elect, exploring how Sarah's request to exile Abraham's firstborn was permitted by God and how Ishmael's banishment made room for Isaac's chosenness. Then, through a comparison of

von Rad and Sarna's analyses of the akedah, it defined Abraham and God's special relationship as an example of a partnership.

In the second chapter, common themes were again considered and the ways in which they diverged, transformed and reversed across Genesis became clear. Notions of ricocheting deception and of the chosen being banished instead of the non-elect were introduced, and the important scenes of Jacob's renaming and his reunion with Esau were explored. Upon reflection of those episodes in comparison to the Abrahamic narrative, a shift throughout Genesis was revealed.

In the final chapter, common themes and their deviations were once more examined. It was proposed that Genesis 39-40 demonstrates how God works through Joseph, defines Joseph's relationship with the divine, and represents a completion of a shift introduced in the Jacob story. Genesis 39-40 was then placed into the context of the entirety of Genesis, enabling a discussion of how chosenness manifests itself as service, humility and subordination, thus reversing the partnership model of the Abrahamic narrative. It explained the significance of Genesis 41-45, focusing on the theme of reunification in comparison to the reunions of Isaac and Ishmael and Jacob and Esau. Finally, it analyzed Genesis 45-50, noting how God, for the first time, appears to act through Israel.

Abraham's election was founded in his free human action. He often directly communicated with God through conversation and, in Genesis 22, an emissary, unequivocally revealing their respective wills. The akedah, as a test, highlighted Abraham's freedom of choice and how his relationship with God, although initiated by the divine, was sustained only through human action.

Jacob's election, although reliant upon earthly activation, was more significant for its shift towards earthly actions aligning with God's will. Where Abraham's chosenness involved cooperative interplay between divine and chosen human forces, Jacob's election was more forcefully introduced: unlike Abraham, he was divinely selected from the moment of his conception and realized his chosenness with Rebekah's help.

Joseph's chosenness involved less choice and more straightforward action, that happened to align perfectly with what God desired. Joseph did not speak directly to God or to an emissary of the divine, because God's will was already made known to him and Joseph himself was an emissary.

A strictly theological understanding of this trend might suggest that God's will was made alterable by human action through the sins of Adam and Eve and that God's interactions with his chosen was an attempt to return to the perfect state of Eden, a failed endeavor until the story of Joseph. Conversely, a literary understanding might instead emphasize the trends of Genesis, identifying how as God's presence slowly decreases, so must the agency of the patriarchs. And the methodologies of Baden and Collins would search beyond these themes, in favor of the narrative's historical context.

The hybrid theological and literary approach presented in this thesis suggests that for Abraham, chosenness was a partnership, for Jacob, a shift toward aligning a person's actions with God's will, and for Joseph, an inevitable outcome that, regardless of the action of any person, could not have deviated from complete adherence to God's will. The implications of these individual relationships became evident when considered alongside one another: God's dynamics with Abraham, Jacob and Joseph are intentionally distinct, and are meant to

demonstrate how the synergies between God and his chosen are evolving to align the desires and actions of the earthly and divine.

This conclusion suggests itself as an extension of Childs's stance, that a religious community and its literature shape one another. In my mind, the influence of a faith community is an integral part of a text's history and the force of the canon is as powerful as the words within it. The akedah is suspenseful because of the sequence of events preceding this harrowing demand; Jacob's deception does not complicate his name Israel if understood in the proper context; and Joseph's relationship with God presents as an alignment because of the patriarchal narratives which preceded his. When these independent narratives interact with one another, they reveal that they are inextricably intertwined, inform us about one another and the entire Hebrew Bible, and collectively divulge a paramountly important history.

When reading scripture, contradictions borne of multiple authorship should never be ignored but neither should the influence of a community which deemed that scripture sacred. Academic and theological inquiry are not a dichotomy and, when considered together, are powerfully edifying. The works of scholars like Baden and Collins are momentous and laid the groundwork for my interpretation and, as a Christian studying Judaism, Childs's book deeply resonated with me. I came to understand that exegesis cannot occur until the contradictions of a text are explained and thus resolved, and the existence of hypotheses such as the DH are the necessary tools to accomplish this. Childs's stance acknowledged this, proposed that theology is history, and suggested that the binary of historical critical and religious interpretation can work together. The former is what makes room for the latter and is why exegesis can occur at all.

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