

THE CONDEMNED SONS IN THE BLESSING OF JACOB (GEN. 49:3-7)
THE PROBLEM OF CURSES IN THE BLESSING

BY

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ABSTRACT

THE CONDEMNED SONS IN THE BLESSING OF JACOB (GEN. 49:3-7) THE PROBLEM OF CURSES IN THE BLESSING

by
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It is almost inconceivable that Jacob begins condemning his first three sons in the blessing at his death bed. Many scholars have long endeavored to solve the problem from the social and political circumstance in the late period of redaction. It is a more reasonable attempt to find the solution in the stream of the story in Genesis, the repeated blessing stories in Genesis. As is widely known, Genesis is the book of blessing.

Blessing is the base of the inter-relationship in the Old Testament. The Old Testament emphasizes God as the final source or agent of blessing and curse. On the other hand, the Old Testament illustrates the belief that the spoken words themselves have the active power to produce the desired effect without any external agent as well.

The blessing stories in Genesis ordinarily contain curse together. Yet, the excluded sons are not the cursed sons. The curse contains the hope of the blessing at the same time. Genesis emphasizes that the God's promise for Abraham continues in the line of blessing of the descendants of Abraham without ceasing. However, when God chooses one to succeed the blessing to the next generation, it does not automatically mean a rejection or curse of the other sons.

A similar paradigm repeatedly appears in the blessings of Genesis. One son inherits the promise and all the brothers share the benefits. Joseph inherits the father's blessing and the other brothers will participate in the blessing together. They are blessed as a unit. The Jacob's curse on the first three sons plays an important role: the instrument of discipline and precaution, various courses for ultimate blessing, and the role of arbitrator of the potential rivalry and conflict among brothers.

Keywords

Genesis 49, Jacob's Blessing, Blessing, Curse, *brk*, *arr*, Firstborn son, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Joseph, Twelve tribes.

OPSOMMING

DIE VERVLOEKTE SEUNS IN DIE SEËNING VAN JAKOB (GEN. 49:3-7) DIE PROBLEEM VAN VERVLOEKING SAAM MET SEËNING

deur

Kwangbong Jung

November 2010

260 bladsye

Dit is amper onbegryplik dat Jakob sy eerste drie seuns begin veroordeel tydens die seen uitsprake op sy sterfbed. Baie geleerdes poog al lank om hierdie probleem in 'n sosiale en politieke konteks op te los. 'n Meer sinvolle benadering is om die oplossing te vind in die storie lyn van Genesis - die herhaalde verhale van seën. Dit is immers algemeen bekend dat Genesis die boek van seëning is.

In die Ou Testament is seën die basis van onderlinge verhoudings en word daar klem gelê op God as die finale bron of agent van seëning of vervloeking. Aan die ander kant illustreer die Ou Testament ook die oortuiging dat die gesproke woord in en opsigself 'n aktiewe krag het om die verlangde effek te hê sonder die betrokkenheid van eksterne agente.

Die verhale van seën in Genesis gaan gewoonlik met 'n vervloeking gepaard. Tog is die uitgeslote seuns nie die vervloekte seuns nie. Die vervloeking hou tegelyketyd ook 'n seëning in. Genesis beklemtoon dat God se belofte aan Abraham sonder ophou deur sy nageslagte beleef sal word. As God egter besluit om die seën van een generasie na 'n ander oor te dra beteken dit nie dat daar 'n outomatiese verwerping van of vervloeking op die ander seuns is nie.

‘n Soortgelyke paradigma word herhaaldelik in die seëninge in Genesis gesien. Een seun erf die beloftes en sy broers deel in die voordele. Josef het sy vader se seëning ontvang en sy broers het deel gehad aan die seën. Hulle is ‘n geseënde eenheid. Jakob se vervloeking van die eerste drie seuns speel ‘n belangrike rol: dit is ‘n instrument van dissipline en voorsorg, dui op die verskillende paaie tot uiteindelijke seëning, en op die rol van ‘n arbiter in die moontlike mededinging en konflik tussen broers.

Sleutelwoorde

Genesis 49, Jakob se seëning, Seën/Seëning, Vloek/Vervloeking, Eersgeborene seun, Ruben, Simeon, Levi, Josef, Twaalf stamme.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D. N. Freedman. New York, 1992
ABR	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by J. B. Pritchard. 3d ed. Princeton, 1969
Aq.,	Aquila
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
<i>Bar-Ilan</i>	<i>Annual of Bar-Ilan University</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BDB	Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Oxford, 1907
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemendum theologiarum lovamensium
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> . Edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolph. Stuttgart, 1983
BHT	Transliterated BHS Hebrew Old Testament
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BK</i>	<i>Bibel und Kirche</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>BT</i>	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAD	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> . Chicago.
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CBR</i>	Currents in Biblical Research
ConBOT	Coniectanea Biblica Old Testament Series

CSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
<i>ErIsr</i>	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
ESV	English Standard Version
FBD	Fausset's Bible Dictionary
GKC	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> . Edited by E. Kautzsch. Translated by A. E. Cowley. 2d. ed. Oxford, 1910
GNB	Geneva Bible
<i>HALOT</i>	Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden, 1994–1999
Holladay	<i>A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>IBHS</i>	<i>An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i> . B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor. Winona Lake, Indiana, 1990
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>IDB</i>	<i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . Edited by G. A. Buttrick. 4 vols. Nashville, 1962
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JB	Jerusalem Bible
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
<i>JBR</i>	<i>Journal of Bible and Religion</i>
<i>JCS</i>	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
<i>JETS</i>	Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society
JM	Joüon, P. <i>A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew</i> . Translated and revised by T. Muraoka. 2 vols. <i>Subsidia biblica</i> 14/1–2. Rome, 1991
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
<i>JRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>JSBLE</i>	<i>Journal of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis</i>

<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JTSA</i>	<i>Journal of Theology for Southern Africa</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>KB</i>	<i>Keilinschriftliche Bibliothek</i> . Edited by E. Schrader. Berlin.
KJV	King James Version
K&D	Keil, C. F., and F. Delitzsch, <i>Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament</i> . Translated by J. Martin et al. Edinburgh, 1857–1878. Reprint, Peabody, Mass., 1996
LXX	Septuagint
<i>Maarav</i>	<i>Maarav</i>
MT	Masoretic Text
NAB	New American Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEA	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
NEB	New English Bible
NET	NET Bible, Version 1.0
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDB</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of the Bible</i> . Edited by J. D. Douglas and M. C. Tenney. Grand Rapids, 1987
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> . Edited by W. A. Van Gemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids, 1997
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
<i>OLZ</i>	<i>Orientalistische Literaturzeitung</i>
OTE	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
<i>Or</i>	<i>Orientalia</i> (NS)
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>

Pesh.,	Peshitta
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
Symm.,	Symmachus (ancient Greek version)
<i>Tar. Jon.,</i>	<i>Targum Jonathan</i>
<i>Tar. Onq.,</i>	<i>Targum Onqelos</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.</i> Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids.
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.</i> Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. Grand Rapids.
<i>THAT</i>	<i>Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament.</i> Edited by E. Jenni, with assistance from C. Westermann. Stuttgart
<i>TWOT</i>	<i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament.</i> Edited by R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer Jr. Chicago, 1980
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit Forschungen</i>
<i>UT</i>	<i>Ugaritic Textbook.</i> C. H. Gordon. AnOr 38. Rome, 1965
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
Vulg.	Vulgate
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTM	JDP - Groves-Wheeler Westminster Morphology and Lemma Database
<i>ZAH</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Althebräistik</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>
<i>ZDPV</i>	<i>Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

ABBREVIATIONS FOR SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis	Gen.
Exodus	Exod.
Leviticus	Lev.
Numbers	Num.
Deuteronomy	Deut.
Joshua	Josh.
Judges	Judg.
Ruth	Ruth
1 Samuel	1 Sam.
2 Samuel	2 Sam.
1 Kings	1 Kings
2 Kings	2 Kings
1 Chronicles	1 Chron.
2 Chronicles	2 Chron.
Ezra	Ezra
Nehemiah	Neh.
Esther	Esther
Job	Job
Psalms	Ps. (pl. Pss.)
Proverbs	Prov.
Ecclesiastes	Eccles.
Song of Solomon	Song of Sol.
Isaiah	Isa.
Jeremiah	Jer.
Lamentations	Lam.
Ezekiel	Ezek.
Daniel	Dan.
Hosea	Hos.
Joel	Joel
Amos	Amos
Obadiah	Obad.
Jonah	Jon.
Micah	Mic.
Nahum	Nah.
Habakkuk	Hab.
Zephaniah	Zeph.
Haggai	Hag.
Zechariah	Zech.
Malachi	Mal.

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew	Matt.
Mark	Mark
Like	Luke
John	John
Acts of the Apostles	Acts
Romans	Rom.
1 Corinthians	1 Cor.
2 Corinthians	2 Cor.
Galatians	Gal.
Ephesians	Eph.
Philippians	Phil.
Colossians	Col.
1 Thessalonians	1 Thess.
2 Thessalonians	2 Thess.
1 Timothy	1 Tim.
2 Timothy	2 Tim.
Titus	Titus
Philemon	Philem.
Hebrews	Heb.
James	James
1 Peter	1 Pet.
2 Peter	2 Pet.
1 John	1 John
2 John	2 John
3 John	3 John
Jude	Jude
Revelation or Apocalypse	Rev. Apoc.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Significance and Problem

The blessing of Jacob, the first long poem in the Pentateuch, seems to play a role in the conclusion of not only the *toledot* of Jacob but also in the whole of the book of Genesis.¹ Also, with regard to the viewpoint that Jacob's blessing on the twelve sons foretold the destiny of the twelve tribes, it relates closely to the stories following in the rest of the Pentateuch and even the rest of the Old Testament. Accordingly, it is vital for a proper understanding of the subsequent history of Israel as well as the prior accounts in Genesis.

However, Genesis 49 is notoriously filled with abstruse verses. Reyburn says, "Chapter 49 is considered by many as one of the most difficult in the entire Old Testament. Many lines in verses 2-27 are burdened with textual uncertainties. There are many places where the meaning of the Hebrew is obscure, and the ancient versions do not agree among themselves."²

Genesis 49 has many text critical problems. No less than thirty five apparatus criticus exist in Genesis 49 according to BHS. These textual issues have created numerous interpretive problems. Genesis 49 consists of twenty five poetic verses (vv. 3-27) and eight prosaic verses (vv.1-2, 28-33). The majority of text critical problems is found in the poetic section that has ambiguous words and numerous hapax legomena.

¹ Robert E. Longacre, *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence: A Text Theoretical and Textlinguistic Analysis of Genesis 37 and 39-48* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1989), 23.

² William D. Reyburn and Euan McG. Fry, *A Handbook of Genesis*, (New York: UBS, 1997), 1075.

Jacob's blessing in Genesis 49 is difficult to come to grips with, not only because of rare words, but also because of the controversial nature of related Genesis passages in chapters 27, 34, and 35.

Like his father Isaac did with his two sons, Jacob blesses his twelve sons at the end of his life. The fact that Jacob begins by condemning his first three sons in the blessing seems to be strikingly odd. It is almost inconceivable that a father would pronounce curses on his sons at his death bed. The condemnation of the three sons occupies a longer portion than does the blessing of Jacob's other sons.³ Along with Jacob's blessings on Judah and Joseph, it plays an important part in the whole section of Jacob's blessing. The blessings of Judah and Joseph have received much attention from Bible scholars. However, the condemnation of the three sons has been largely ignored. So, any serious biblical study of the Book of Genesis needs to scrutinize the imprecatory verses about Reuben, Simeon, and Levi that contain both difficult words and theological issues.

Calling forth Jacob's imprecation, were the deeds of Reuben, Simeon, and Levi much more evil than those of Jacob's other sons? The deeds of the other sons were no better than those of the first three sons. Nevertheless, Jacob condemns only the first three sons. A study of Jacob's curse in Genesis 49:3-7 will aid us to understand not only the whole passage of Jacob's blessing but also the main theme of Genesis, "blessing."

In terms of the social and political circumstances in the late period of redaction, a number of Old Testament scholars have approached the problem searching for solutions. They have suggested various periods (e.g., Kings Solomon, Omri, Hezekiah, and Post-

³ Robert Davidson, *Genesis 12-50*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 301.

exilic) and various reasons (e.g., for justifying the kingship of the tribe of Judah, for keeping the purity of the Jews, and for sustaining the festival of the twelve leagues). However, none has proposed what seems to be the satisfactory solution.

The attempt to find the answer in the political and social situations of the poem is highly questionable because it is almost impossible to trace political and social situations back from this short poetic fragment. Such attempts are nothing more than doubtful conjectures. This fact explains why such divergent solutions have been proposed. Accordingly, it would be more reasonable to find a solution from Genesis itself, in the storylines of Genesis and the recurrent blessing stories in Genesis.

Genesis can be seen as the book of blessing⁴ and the story of blessing reaches the peak of Jacob's blessing on the twelve sons in Genesis 49. The blessing of Jacob cannot be treated independently of the previous blessing stories. Since it stands in line with the prior blessing narratives, it is to be understood so. The fact that like Jacob's benediction blessing stories in Genesis normally contains an element of curse is worth remarking. In finding an answer to the issue in Genesis 49, furthermore, looking into the characteristics and contents of blessing and curse in the Old Testament will be helpful.

1.2. The Research Question

Although the passage in Genesis 49:28 refers to Jacob's blessing on his twelve sons, why then does Jacob condemn his beloved sons, Reuben, Simeon, and Levi among his twelve sons at his death bed? How should the curses pronounced on Reuben, Simeon and Levi be understood in the context of Jacob's blessing of his sons (Gen 49:1-28)?

⁴ Claus Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church*, trans. Keith Crim (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 16, divides Genesis into four big blessing divisions and asserts that blessing is an important theme in Genesis.

1.3. Research Methodology

In order to interpret the meaning of Jacob's condemnation of the three sons, the passages in Genesis 49:3-7 will be investigated by a literary approach consisting of three methods: (1) structural analysis, (2) metrical analysis, and (3) content analysis.

(1) Structural analysis will display where the emphatic point is in the blessing of Jacob. It also will prove that Genesis 49 is a complicated literary work of an author. Parallelism between verses will be focused on in this method: the grammatical parallel (number, gender, tense, 'double-duty' elements etc.), lexical parallel (word-pairs, abstract//concrete), semantic parallel (antithetical and synthetic), and phonological parallel (the number of syllables or accent pattern etc.).

(2) Metrical analysis will be essential to interpret the blessing of Jacob because of the poetic attribute of the present passages. Even though some assert that the Semitic poetry must be understood in a syntactic sense, the blessing of Jacob evidently shows the metrical character. A syllable counting method will be adopted in determining the metrical pattern. The passages will be transliterated to examine metrical analysis.

(3) Textual problems in the present passages will be investigated by a textual critical method because Genesis 49 contains many textual issues. The ancient versions and commentaries will be used to compare with MT. The emendation of MT will sometimes be adopted as needed. A comparative linguistic method with the Ugaritic literatures will be used for the abstruse Hebrew verses.

This will be followed by a lexicological and semantic study to find out the etymology and meaning of the various words relating to the relevant meanings of "blessing" and "curse" in the Old Testament blessing.

In-textual⁵ and inner-textual⁶ comparative study constitute the next phase in this investigation. In-textual comparative study compares the blessing of the first three sons (49:3-7) with the blessing of the other sons in Genesis 49. Inner-textual comparative study makes comparison between the blessing of Jacob and the other blessing passages in Genesis such as Noah's blessing (Gen. 9:25-27), Abraham's blessing (Gen. 16, 17, and 21), Isaac's blessing (Gen. 27), and Jacob's blessing on Jacob's sons (Gen. 48). As a matter of its nature, "In-textual" and "Inner-textual" interpretation focuses on the final form of the biblical "text" unlike traditional biblical criticism (such as Source Criticism, Form Criticism, and Redaction Criticism) which focuses on its origin and development of the text.⁷ This is also supported by the tendency of other recent biblical criticisms, such as Canonical Criticism, Rhetorical Criticism, and Compositional Criticism.

All the aforementioned will be necessary to unravel interpretive difficulties in the segment of curse in Jacob's blessing.

⁵ In-textual means to interpret "smaller text unit" within "larger literary block." The term "In-textual" is proffered by some scholars: Siegfried J. Schmidt, *Texttheorie: Probleme einer Linguistik der sprachlichen Kommunikation*, 2d ed. (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1976), 150, uses the term "text unit" and "larger text block"; Teun A. Van Dijk, *Text and Context: Explorations in the Semantics and Pragmatics of Discourse*, Longman Linguistics Library (London and New York: Longman, 1977), 130-63, calls, "Micro-structure" and "Macro-structure"; Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Text* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), vii, uses the tem "smaller units" and "larger literary blocks."

⁶ Inner-textual means to interpret "'In-text' within its larger text block and/or the same book which is of the same writer and/or editor." Chien-Kuo P. Lai, "Jacob's blessing on Judah (Genesis 49:8-12) within the Hebrew Old Testament," (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1993), 51-52, asserts, Inner-textual "involves a synchronic and mutual reading."

⁷ Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 6, asserts, "inner-biblical exegesis starts with the received Scripture and moves forward to the interpretations based on it."

1.4. Chapter Layout

The chapter layout is as follows: Chapter 2 will investigate the history of previous scholarly studies on Genesis 49. At first, the interpretations of traditional Jews, church fathers, and reformers will be examined. Studies after the 18th century will be summarized according to the subject of the study on Genesis 49. Several important issues will be treated in a separate section, including genre, historical background, and the structure of Genesis 49.

Chapter 3 will be an exegetical study of the passage of the three cursed sons (Gen. 49:3-7). In this exegetical study, the passage will be analyzed metrically and structurally. Furthermore, content analysis will be done. This chapter partly provides the answer to Jacob's reproach, that is, how Jacob's expectation and love of first three sons is changed to disappointment and anger on the basis of their past behavior. Also, the results of Jacob's curse on the first three sons will be examined: Reuben will not excel and Simeon and Levi will be scattered in Israel.

Chapter 4 will inquire as to the lexicographical meanings of blessing and curse in the Old Testament. The Hebrew Bible adopts various words for the meanings of blessing and curse. It will focus on the two words “ברך” and “ארר” which Jacob uses for his sons in Genesis 49. This chapter will also examine the contents and characteristics of blessing and curse in the Old Testament. It will contain the answers to these questions: When the Hebrew Bible uses the words “blessing” and “curse,” what does the speaker expect to bring to the counterpart by the proclamation? What common factors appear in the blessing and curse of the Old Testament? What are the distinctive features of the Old Testament from the blessing and curse of the extra Biblical world?

Chapters 5 and 6 represent the heart of the dissertation. Chapter 5 will treat the

blessing passages in Genesis that contain an element of curse. Because Jacob's blessing in Genesis 49 is not an independent story, it must be understood in close connection with the previous narrative. Genesis shows that curse is ironically contained in the circumstance of the blessing. On the one hand, the hope of blessing is contained in the clear circumstance of the curse. Many biblical writers have already recognized the remarkable similarity between Genesis 49 and the previous blessings in Genesis such as Noah's blessing (Gen. 9:25-27), Isaac's blessing (27:27-29), and Jacob's blessing for the sons of Joseph (48:15-20). Chapter 5 will also investigate what responsibility the blessed sons bear for the other brothers and what role the father's curse plays.

Chapter 6 as a conclusive chapter will present the reason for and the role of Jacob's curse on the first three sons. The practical imprecation will be provided from this study.

CHAPTER 2

GENERAL SURVEY ON GENESIS 49

From early times many commentators have recognized the importance of Genesis 49 in the book of Genesis as well as in the Old Testament. In particular, the ancient features and unintelligible characteristics are enough to attract scholars' attention. Genesis 49 has been intensely studied by many the Old Testament scholars and many parts in Genesis 49 are still shrouded in intense controversy.

2.1. The History of Scholarly Research

2.1.1. Studies prior to the 18th century

2.1.1.1. Traditional Jewish interpretation

Along with Ruth, Jonah, Esther, and Tobit, the Jews traditionally regarded the story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50) as one of the most exciting parts in the Hebrew Bible.⁸ The general popularity related to the expositors' concerns with the stories, for example, as Genesis Rabba and the commentaries of Rashi, Ramban, and Rashbam. The Jewish interpretation of Genesis 49 reveals the tendency to change the words of curse or blame to moderate or neutral words. For example, in order to soften Jacob's harsh words against Reuben, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan adds another sentence, which says, "The sin that you committed do not (commit) again, and that which you sinned will be forgiven you."⁹

⁸ Friedemann W. Golka, "Genesis 37–50: Joseph Story or Israel-Joseph Story?" *CBR* 2.2 (2004): 155.

⁹ *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, trans. Michael J. Maher (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 157.

Another way that Jews employed to solve the interpretive difficulties of Genesis 49 was to make the object of curse someone else other than Jacob's sons. For example, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan writes "Cursed was the city of Shechem" instead of "Cursed be Simeon and Levi's anger."¹⁰ Moreover, Jews made up an excuse for the blemishing deeds of Jacob's sons to ease the interpretive problem in Genesis 49. An example for this is that Targum Pseudo-Jonathan reads, "Judah, you confessed concerning the incident of Tamar; therefore your brothers will praise you."¹¹

Philo favorably interprets the prophecy on Issachar as follows, "Issachar is the symbol of the man who does good actions, for he put forth (Gen. 49:15) his shoulder to labor and became a man tilling the earth."¹² Philo interprets the riders on the horse in the prophecy on Dan in Genesis 49:17 as the Egyptians in the Testament of Moses.¹³

Differently from the Masoretic Hebrew Bible, Jubilee places Levi in the prominent place together with Joseph among Jacob's twelve sons. According to Jubilee, Jacob gave Levi all of his books and his father's books so that Levi would preserve and renew them for his descendants. To Joseph, Jacob gave a double portion in the Land.¹⁴

2.1.1.2. The interpretation of the church fathers

Church fathers were greatly interested in Genesis 49 because they regarded Genesis 49 as having not only a prophecy of Jacob's twelve sons but also God's plan of salvation in the last days. Like Jewish interpreters, they preferred to adopt typological or

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 158.

¹² Philo of Alexandria, *Legum allegoriae* I, II & III. in *The Works of Philo Judaeus, the Contemporary of Josephus*, trans. C. D. Yonge (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Pubs, 1993) 1:80.

¹³ Ibid. 2:103.

¹⁴ *Jubilee*, in *The Apocryphal Old Testament*, ed. H. F. D. Sparks (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 129.

allegorical interpretation. In interpreting Genesis 49, they demonstrated strong pastoral concerns: pedagogy for new converts, apologetics against pagans, and polemics against heretics. Unlike the Jewish counterparts, church fathers attempted not to justify the wicked deeds of Jacob's sons. Especially, they looked at Jacob's blessing typologically and connected it with both the work of Christ and the church. Obviously, they paid greater attention to Jacob's blessing on Judah out of which Christ came.

Rufinus of Aquileia (A.D. 345-410) taught that Reuben represents the Jews who had favorable conditions at first but were deserted in the end. Also, he compared Jacob's concubine who committed adultery with Reuben to the law of the Old Testament.¹⁵ Ambrose of Milan (A.D. 339-397) interpreted the couch Reuben went up as the holy flesh of Christ.¹⁶ Ephrem, The Syrian (A.D. 306-373), taught that the curse on Reuben would be removed by the promise of resurrection in Christ. He regarded Simeon and Levi as figures for Satan and death.¹⁷ Hippolytus of Rome (A.D. 170-236) devoted much space to the interpreting Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33. He understood the blessings in these two chapters should be applied to Christ and His church. Also, he interpreted that the prophetic warnings in those chapters should be directed against the adversaries and despisers of Christ.¹⁸

¹⁵ Rufinus of Aquileia, *The Blessings of the Patriarchs* 2.5. in Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers of Christian Church, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wage (Edinburg, T&T Clark: 1969), 3: 417-419.

¹⁶ Ambrose of Milan, *Seven Exegetical Works*. Fathers of the Church: A New Translation, vol. 65, trans. M. P. McHugh (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1972), 447.

¹⁷ Ephrem the Syrian, *Selected Prose Works; Commentary on Genesis*, trans. Edward G. Mathews, Jr. and Joseph P. Amar, ed. Kathleen McVey, *The Fathers of the Church 91* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 528.

¹⁸ Hippolytus of Rome, *On Genesis (49:4)*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf05.iii.iv.i.ii.i.html> (Accessed October 6, 2010).

2.1.1.3. Interpretation of Reformers

The reformers generally avoid using the typological interpretation as possibly unlike the methods of the Jewish and the Church Fathers. They generally sought a literal meaning in Genesis 49 as far as possible. Reformers also interpreted the blessing of Jacob in connection with the work of Christ as did the church fathers.

Marlorat (1574) interpreted that a lion (Gen. 49: 9) is Christ for his strength, and a Lamb for the meekness of his mind, and for the sufferance.¹⁹ Edwards (1695) wrote that Jacob spoke of the coming of the Messiah (v.10) and he prophesied of the division of the land of Canaan that would come to pass 215 years later. However, he did not believe that Jacob intended to declare to his sons the mystery of the incarnation of Christ, because they were unworthy of hearing it.²⁰

Though Luther's lecture on Genesis is well known, he does not show any specific concern with regard to the Jacob's blessing.²¹

Calvin reckoned that Jacob prophesied as God's representative and interpreter with the divine authority for the twelve sons' future. He shows a very different view from modern critical scholars regarding the question of why Jacob's prophecy in Genesis 49 coincides with some tribes' geographical distribution in the book of Joshua and Judges. While the moderns believe the blessing of Jacob is *vaticinici ex eventu*, prophecies after the fact, Calvin asserts that it results from the fulfillment of the prophecy of Jacob in

¹⁹ Augustin Marlorat, *A Catholic Exposition Upon the Revelation Of Saint John* (1574). The Digital Library of Classic Protestant Texts, <http://0-solomon.tcpt.alexanderstreet.com.wagtail.uovs.ac.za/cgi-bin/asp/philo/cpt/contextualize.pl?p.488.cpt.622795> (Accessed January 26, 2010).

²⁰ John Edwards, *A Discourse Concerning The Authority, Style, And Perfection Of The Old And New Testament*, Vol. 3 (1695), 456. The Digital Library of Classic Protestant Texts, <http://0-solomon.tcpt.alexanderstreet.com.wagtail.uovs.ac.za/cgi-bin/asp/philo/cpt/contextualize.pl?p.1183.cpt.1349373.1349382> (Accessed February 06, 2010).

²¹ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, vol. 8 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1966).

Genesis 49. When Joshua divides the land of Canaan between the twelve tribes, the land is not distributed according to the will of any person but according to the lot (Josh. 14:2; 19:21). The lot was the best instrument to reflect the will of God. Consequently, the decision by the lot in Joshua agrees with the prophecy in Genesis 49. According to Calvin, there is no doubt that this is why the tribes of Zebulun possessed the land near the sea shore according to the prophecy of Genesis 49.²²

2.1.2. Studies after the 18th century

The full-scale study of Genesis 49 began by critical scholars from the eighteenth century. The study on Genesis 49 has not been independently developed but progressed in close relationship with the studies of the surrounding chapters in the Old Testament: the deathbed episode (Chapters 48-50), the Joseph story (Chapters 37-50), the other patriarch's stories in Genesis and the Pentateuch.

The previous scholarly works relating to Genesis 49 are of bulky volume and its nature is remarkably controversial. In some respects, the previous scholarly opinions are clearly distinguished according to the current theme of the period concerning Genesis 49. So, by means of summarizing the history of the previous study according to the subject of the study on Genesis 49, it will be better to grasp the history of the scholarly views than to summarize according to simple chronological order.

2.1.2.1. Separating Genesis 49 from the surrounding chapters

The assumption that Genesis 49 was an insertion from the surrounding chapters was the most important starting point in the critical study on Genesis 49. In 1753 Jean

²² J. Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, trans. John King (Banner of Truth Trust: London, 1965), 438-441.

Astruc, a renowned French physician, discovered that Genesis 38, 39, and 49 use the divine name, Yahweh (49:18). Yet the surrounding chapters use the different divine name, Elohim. Hereupon, he conjectured that the chapters may be separated from the Joseph story.²³ Astruc's conjecture became an important starting point in the critical study of Genesis 49 and it has been popular in the scholarly world for a long time even until now²⁴ although many challenges are raised by some scholars against Astruc's separation.²⁵ Astruc's discovery introduced various subsequent critical ideas on Genesis 49 such as individual collections, the possibility of multiple authors, and quite late historical background.

A little later after Astruc's discovery, Hasse (1788)²⁶ and Heinrichs (1790)²⁷ suspected that Genesis 49 was not a prophecy from the mouth of Jacob. In the nineteenth

²³ J. Astruc, *Conjectures sur les mémoires originaux dont il paraît que Moïse s'est servi pour composer le Livre de la Genèse*, (Bruxelles: Paris, 1753), 263-267.

²⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox press, 1982), 365, asserts there is no evidence to connect Genesis 49 to the surrounding text 48:1-50:14. C. Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, trans. John J. Scullion, S. J. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1986), 250, says the poem is neither an original part of the Patriarchal narratives nor of the Joseph Story and he separately deals with Genesis 49 in the end of all chapters like a supplement.

Also, H. Gunkel keeps silent only on Genesis 49 in *Die Schriften des Alten Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977). Hugo Gressmann, *Die Anfänge Israels*, (vol 2, Mose bis Richter und Ruth) in *Die Schriften des Alten Testaments*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1922), 171-84, does not deal with this chapter in Genesis, but before Judges 5 with Deuteronomy 33.

²⁵ W. Rudolph, "Die Josefsgeschichte," in *Der Elohist als Erzähler: Ein Irrweg der Pentateuchkritik? An der Genesis erläutert*, eds. P. Volz and W. Rudolph, (Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1933), 146-51, asserts the use of a different divine name in Jacob's story cannot be the automatic evidence of its different sources. Yet, the writer of Genesis uses the divine name "Yahweh" in the place when the narrator himself says. On the other hand, the writer never uses "Yahweh" when the acting persons say. Even so, such a distinction cannot be reliable criterion because the divine name "Elohim" is used when "Yahweh" is expected in many cases and the opposite case frequently appears. See other scholars' objections, C. Houtman, *Inleiding in de Pentateuch*, (Kampen: Kok, 1980), 377-83; H. -C. Schmitt, *Die nichtpriesterliche Josefsgeschichte*, BZAW 154 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1980), 68-69.

²⁶ J. G. Hasse, *Neue Uebersetzung des Abschieds-gesangs Jakobs*, 1 Mos XLIX, *Magazin für die biblisch-orientalische Litteratur und gesammte Philologie* (1788), 5-16, quoted in R. De Hoop, *Genesis 49 in its Literary and Historical Context*, OTS 39 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), reprinted, (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2007), 4.

²⁷ J. H. Heinrichs, *De auctore atque aetate capituli Geneseos XLIX commentatio*, (Göttingen: I. D. G. Brose, 1790) quoted in De Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 4.

century, Kohler (1867) claimed that Genesis 49 is *vaticinium ex eventu*.²⁸ In 1898, Holzinger denied the identification of a collector of Genesis 49.²⁹ Under the strong influence of Astruc, many contemporary scholars began to consider isolating Genesis 49 from the surrounding chapters as the settled theory.

2.1.2.2. Genesis 49 as an Individual Collection

The period from the late eighteenth century through the early nineteenth century was an important turning point in the study on the Pentateuch as well as of Genesis 49. Up to that time Bible scholars only separated Genesis 49 from the surrounding chapters but they did not doubt a unified composition of Genesis 49 itself. However, in 1789 C. Ilgen classified the story of Joseph to two sources: *Sopher Eliel harischon* and *Sopher Eliel haschscheni*. He separated 49:29-33 from Genesis 49 and placed it in a group with several other passages (Genesis 47:28; 48:3-7; 50:12-13) because they belong to the same source (*Sopher Eliel harischon*).³⁰ In 1807, De Wette considerably extended the work of Ilgen.³¹ Today scholars regard these two scholars as the founders of modern biblical

²⁸ K. Kohler, *Der Segen Jakob's mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der alten Versionen und des Midrasch historischkritisch untersucht und erklärt: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des hebräischen Alterthums wie zur Geschichte der Exegese* (Berlin: J. Benzian, 1867) quoted in Joel Heck, "A History of Interpretation of Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33," *BSac.* 147, no. 585 (Ja.-Mr. 1990): 16-31.

²⁹ H. Holzinger, *Genesis, Kurzer Handkommentar* (Freiburg, 1898), 264, quoted in Heck, "A History of Interpretation of Genesis 49," 18.

³⁰ C. D. Ilgen, *Die Urkunden des Jerusalemischen Tempelarchivs in ihren Urgestalt als Beytrag zur Berichtigung der Geschichte der Religion und Politik aus den Hebraischen mit kritischen und erklärenden Anmerkungen, auch mancherley dazugehörigen Abhandlungen Theil I.* (Halle, 1798), quoted in Houtman, *Inleiding In De Pentateuch.* 79-80.

According to B. Seidel, *Karl David Ilgen und die Pentateuchforschung im Umkreis der sogenannten älteren Urkundenhypothese*, *BZAW* 213 (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1993). 253, Ilgen asserted that Genesis had been compiled from seventeen documents (*Urkunden*) that could be attributed to three authors.

³¹ W. M. L. De Wette, *Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (Halle, 1807), reprinted (Hildesheim: Olms, 1971). 142-168.

criticism.³²

At the same time, Vater also was not convinced of the unity of Genesis 49 in his commentary (1802-5) and he presented the possibility of another author on Genesis 49. Vater believed Genesis 49:29-33 to be an example of the existence of another writer.³³

Renan also believed that Genesis 49 does not contain a unified passage (1855).³⁴ Land understood the present features of Genesis 49 to have been formed through gradual progressive steps and Genesis 49 as a collection of oracles (1858).³⁵

These critical views on Genesis 49 blossomed out in the form of the Documentary Hypothesis of Wellhausen. The Documentary Hypothesis had a major impact on the study of Genesis 49. Wellhausen believed the Pentateuch must be classified in four documents (J, E, D, and P) instead of that of Ilgen and De Wette which credited Jacob's story to two sources. In connection with Genesis 49, Wellhausen saw Genesis 49:1-27 as belonging to JE though he is not convinced. However, it certainly does not belong to E and the possibility of belonging to J is low. Also, Wellhausen asserted that Genesis 49:29-33 belongs to P. However, he is not convinced that Genesis 49:28 belongs to P or JE.³⁶

After the Wellhausen study, many critical scholars basically followed Wellhausen's documentary Hypothesis although they did not agree with minor questions. Most critical scholars agree to classify the frame of Genesis 49 (v.1a and vv. 28b-32) as

³² J. W. Rogerson, *W. M. L de Wette, Founder of Modern Biblical Criticism An Intellectual Biography*, JSOTSup 126 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 266; Houtman, *Inleiding In de Pentateuch*, 84-7.

³³ J. S. Vater, *Kommentar über den Pentateuch*, (Halle: Waisenhaus, 1802).

³⁴ Ernest Renan, *Histoire generale et Systeme compare des Langues Sémitiques* (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1855), 112.

³⁵ J. P. N. Land, *Disputatio de carminé Jacobi Gen. XLIX* (Leiden: J. Hazenberg, 1858), 100-110.

³⁶ J. Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bucher des Alten Testaments*, (1876/7), reprint (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1963), 52-53.

belonging to P and the main body of Jacob's blessing (49:3-28a) as belonging to J.

Gunkel maintains that the poem belongs to J document because 49:3-4 shows a close connection with Genesis 35:22 which belongs to J document.³⁷

Dillmann regards Genesis 49 as a collection but he is convinced of a single author. According to Dillmann, Genesis 49 is not a simple collection of circulated fragments because some parts in the utterances to Reuben, Judah, and Joseph are very intimately connected to one another.³⁸

Von Rad suggests that Genesis 49 is a collection of aphorisms and it belongs to J document. He asserts that Genesis 49 cannot be called a composite poem because the poem does not show inner or outer common unity at all. The various past, present, and future aspects appear in Genesis 49.³⁹

Skinner strongly denies a single author of the poem and stresses it is simply a collection because each tribe's historical background is very different.⁴⁰

Eissfeldt agrees that Genesis 49 is different from the surrounding chapters. He assigns Genesis 49:1a and 28b to P as do other critical scholars. He consequently asserts that Genesis 49 may have been edited in the P period to which the framework belongs.⁴¹ However, even though he agrees with the Wellhausian analysis of the Pentateuch (J, E, and P), Eissfeldt classifies Genesis 49:38 together with Genesis 35:21-22; 38; 39 in L document which projects nomadic lifestyle and originates in the period of David and

³⁷ H. Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. M. E. Biddle (Macon, Georgia: Mercer Univ. Press, 1997), 453.

³⁸ A. Dillmann, *Genesis*, trans. W. M. Stevenson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1897), 2:449.

³⁹ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), 416.

⁴⁰ J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, ICC. ed. S. R. Driver, G. A. Briggs (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963), 510.

⁴¹ Otto Eissfeldt, *Die Genesis der Genesis: Vom Werdegang des ersten Buches der Bibel*, (Tübingen: J C B Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1958), 16-17.

Solomon.⁴² He observes that the prophecy to Judah (Genesis 49:8-12) cannot be separated from the affairs of Tamar in Genesis 38. He presents the possibility in which the prophecy to Judah was originally a negative story like that of Deuteronomy 33:7 and it was inserted later.⁴³ He supposes that other sons including Joseph also may be inserted in the later period. Also, Eissfeldt supposes another possibility: that Genesis 49:8-27 contains a completely different document which does not belong to any other sources.⁴⁴

On the one hand, some scholars classify Genesis 49 according to the names of the third Patriarch (Jacob or Israel) as well as the divine names because the names “Jacob” and “Israel” are inconsistently used in the Joseph story (Gen.47 -49).⁴⁵ They believe the J editor used “Israel” and E editor “Jacob.” Other scholars extended the criterion upon the Third Patriarch’s names and combined that with the names “Reuben and Judah.” That is to say, the name “Israel” was used with “Judah” and the name “Jacob” with “Reuben.” Redford maintains that the Joseph story can be divided to the Israel-Judah layer and the Jacob-Reuben layer. He supposes that the latter layer is extended in the later period from the previous one.⁴⁶ The idea of Redford was succeeded by Dietrich,⁴⁷ Kebekus,⁴⁸ and

⁴² Ibid, 10-2. According to Eissfeldt, L is basically a *Yahwistic* document and it may be the oldest document in the Pentateuch.

⁴³ Eissfeldt thinks that the passage in Deut. 33:7 also refers to the Tamar incident (Gen. 38).

⁴⁴ Ibid., 67-68.

⁴⁵ George W. Coats, “Redactional Unity of Genesis 37-50,” *JBL* 93, no.1 (Mar. 1974): 18. However, Rudolph, “Die Josefsgeschichte,” 149-51, said that it cannot be a criterion to divide Genesis 49 to different documents because “Israel” is sometimes found in the place of “Jacob.”

⁴⁶ Donald B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph (Gen. 37–50)*, VTSup 20 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970), 190.

⁴⁷ Walter Dietrich, *Die Joseferzählung als Novelle und Geschichtsschreibung*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany: Neukirchener, 1989).

⁴⁸ N. Kebekus, *Die Joseferzählung*, (Münster, 1990), 209-225.

largely extended by Schmitt.⁴⁹

2.1.2.3. Genesis 49 as tribal sayings

In 1914 Gressmann expanded the idea that Genesis 49 is a collection from various sources and he first used the term “tribal sayings” (*Stammensprüche*) in reference to Genesis 49 in his commentary.⁵⁰ According to Gressmann, Genesis 49 is a very different song from the song of Balaam (Number 23-24) because the former song is related to the individual tribes but the latter is related to the whole nation. For that reason, he thinks Genesis 49 can be called “tribal sayings.” Gressmann asserts that the poem in Genesis 49 was originally independent sayings which were orally handed down over a long time. The original sayings were very short and were added to during the passing down from generation to generation.⁵¹ He calls the original portion “poetry of the people” (*Volkspoesie*) and the extended portion “artistic poetry” (*Kunstpoesie*). Gressmann asserts that the prophecy on Judah was the only saying reworked later, but other parts in Genesis 49 were preserved in the original forms.

Also, Gressmann sorts tribal sayings into the three major forms according to the content and form. He says the first form is the descriptive form (*Beschreibende*). It usually takes the present form to manifest the poet’s present condition. The second form is the wish form (*Wunschform*). It is closely related to the descriptive form and usually used to express the poet’s emotion and hope. The last form is the oracle (*Orakel*). It usually takes the future form. This form is used only twice in Genesis 49 (the curse on Reuben and the promise to Judah). In conclusion, Gressmann maintains that these three

⁴⁹ Schmitt, *Die nichtpriesterliche Josephsgeschichte*, 68-69.

⁵⁰ Gressmann, *Die Anfänge Israels*, 171-184.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 181.

forms describe each tribe's geographical location and the living conditions.⁵²

In the 1930s Noth focuses on the study concerning the early history and the tribes of Israel. His study is connected with the study of twelve tribes in Genesis 49. He tries to describe precise historical realities in which the tribal list reflects.⁵³ Noth stresses that Genesis 49 is important to the study of a tribal list.

Noth sets a hypothesis in which the twelve tribes of Israel in the period of the Judges formed a confederation, that is, an amphictyony, which was a union of cities centered around a common temple in ancient Greece and Italy. According to Noth, the amphictyony was formed by only six members in the early stage, known as the Leah group, but through developing stages it grew to twelve members.⁵⁴ He presents several important passages, Genesis 29:31-30:24, 49:1-27, and Numbers 26:4-51, in relation to the origin of twelve tribes of Israel. Although the members of the tribal lists in the passages are changed, the above passages show that the number twelve is always maintained. For example, the lists of Genesis include Levi and Joseph. However, Numbers omits Levi and divides Joseph into two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim.

Noth was largely impressed by the fact that the number twelve was continually preserved in these passages. The number twelve plays an important role in his subsequent study. Noth believes the number twelve is not a unique phenomenon only in ancient Israel but also the essential key of every amphictyony.⁵⁵ He presents several examples from the Old Testament: the Ishmaelite tribes (Gen. 25:13-16), the Edomite tribes (Gen. 36:10-14)

⁵² Ibid., 179-180.

⁵³ M. Noth, *Das System der zwölf Stämme Israels*, 2nd ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1966), 46.

⁵⁴ M. Noth, *History of Israel*, trans. Stanley Godman (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), 86, finds further support for the importance of Shechem in Deut. 27:1-26; Josh. 8:30-35.

⁵⁵ Noth, *History of Israel*, 8.

and the Horitic tribes (Gen. 36:20-29) forming twelve members in each case.⁵⁶ Also, Noth proclaims that he found similar cases outside of the Old Testament. According to Noth, numerous amphictyonies existed in ancient Greece and Italy, and most of them consisted of twelve members as with ancient Israel.⁵⁷ Noth gives an example, Italy's Das System which was constituted with twelve members.⁵⁸ Hence, Noth concludes that the confederation of twelve tribes of Israel in the period of Judges was an amphictyony like those in ancient Greece and Italy. Noth explains the number twelve may be connected with the sacrificial rites of the twelve months in a year. Another important pillar which supports Noth's hypothesis is the central shrine of the Israelite amphictyony. Noth maintains that the Ark played a central role in the tribal league. Shechem was the first resting place of the Ark. He got the idea from Joshua 24. Noth thinks Joshua 24 is the basic source for the knowledge of amphictyony in Israel.⁵⁹

Noth's hypothesis instigated the view by which Genesis 49 may be relegated to the genre of tribal sayings. Kittel expanded the work of Gressmann. In 1959 in his dissertation Kittel agrees with the theory of Gressmann as a rule and he assigns Genesis 49 to the genre "tribal sayings." However, he analyses tribal sayings in a different way from the analysis of Gressmann. Through his traditional historical analysis Kittel asserts

⁵⁶ Some scholars say they cannot find the proofs which of those tribes were twelve members in the OT passages presented by Noth. Cf.) L. James, "An Evaluation of Martin Noth's Idea of Amphictyony as Applied to Israel," *Restoration Quarterly* 19 no. 3 (1976): 167.

⁵⁷ Noth was not the first scholar who found the similar system existed in the outside of the OT as the system of the twelve tribes of Israel. Noth also recognizes Ewald's assertion. See. H. E. Ewald, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel bis Christus*, 3rd ed. (Nabu Press, 1864). 1:528 in Noth, *Das System*, 43. n. 1.

⁵⁸ However, N. P. Lemche, "The Greek 'Amphictyony' – Could it be a prototype for the Israelite society in the period of the Judges?" *JSOT* 4 (1977): 48-59, asserts many amphictyonies in ancient Greek and Italy did not have only twelve members, but various numbers. For example, *Dorian Pentapolis* had five members, and *duodecim populi* had thirteen members etc.

⁵⁹ Noth, *The History of Israel*, 86-89.

that tribal sayings can be classified in four forms according to the content and structural element. First, the individual sayings: they are generally short and concise and show no sign of revision. Kittel says Genesis 49:13, 19, 20 belong to this category. Second, the sayings consisting of several elements: they are joined with several sayings, but they still preserve their character. Kittel thinks the prophecy of Joseph (49:22-26) belongs to such a kind. Third, the structured sayings: artistic interest is the distinctive feature of this kind of saying. Kittel shows Genesis 49:3-4, 8, 16, and 19 as an example because these passages show word play. Finally, the editorially reworked sayings: editors removed the original character of the sayings and reworked them according to their theme. For example, Genesis 49:7, 8-11, 18-19, 20-21 and 23 belong to this category and they originated in the Deuteronomistic editor.⁶⁰

Gunneweg⁶¹ and Zobel⁶² upgraded the theory of tribal sayings. They especially have an interest in *Sitz im Leben* insofar as Genesis 49 is “tribal sayings.” They believe that they can find contemporary social and political information from when tribal sayings were composed. Their idea becomes an important basis for critics to assume the historical background of Genesis 49. Gunneweg supposes that the life setting of Genesis 49 was the theophany festival of the amphictyony. He asserts that Genesis 49 is characterized with word plays or animal comparisons, and these charters were the self expression of each

⁶⁰ Hans J. Kittel, “*Die Stammessprüche Israels: Genesi 49 und Deuteronomium 33 traditionsgeschichtlich untersucht*,” (Ph.D. diss., Berlin Kirchliche Hochschule, 1959), 66-106.

⁶¹ A. H. J. Gunneweg, “Über den *Sitz im Leben* der sog. Stammessprüche,” *ZAW* 76 (1964): 245-255.

⁶² H. J. Zobel, *Stammesspruch und Geschichte: Die Angaben der Stammessprüche von Genesis 49, Deuteronomium 33, und Richter 5 über die politischen und kultischen zustände im damaligen ‘Israel,’* BZAW 95 (Berlin: Alfred Topelmann, 1965).

tribe in the festival of amphictyony.⁶³

The theory “tribal sayings” becomes popular in the scholarly world and it opens the door for other related critical studies on Genesis 49.

2.1.2.4. Genesis 49 in the relationship with Deuteronomy 33, and Judges 5

The possibility that Genesis 49 is connected to Deuteronomy 33 and Judges 5 has been recognized since ancient times.⁶⁴ When the theory of tribal sayings was widely accepted in the scholarly world, it was natural that scholars showed a strong interest about the relationship between the three chapters wherein tribal listing appears. Consequently, many scholars think the comparative study with Deuteronomy 33 and Judges 5 is essential to the study of Genesis 49.⁶⁵ The study of relationship between the three chapters usually focuses on the priority and the reciprocal influence between them.

In 1897 Dillmann compared Genesis 49:13 and Judges 5:16 and concluded that Genesis 49 used “The Song of Deborah” as a source. He asserts that these three chapters are closely connected with one another. Dillmann presents the sequence of the three chapters: Judges 5 is composed in the earliest age; followed by Genesis 49, and

⁶³ Gunneweg, “Stammesprüche,” 247-249. His main idea manifestly comes from the Noth’s amphictyony hypothesis.

⁶⁴ John Edwards, a reformer, wrote in *A Discourse Concerning The Authority, Style, And Perfection Of The Old And New Testament, Vol. 3* (1695), The Digital Library of Classic Protestant Texts, writes, “Thus Gen. 49 may be explained out of Deut. 33. The Blessings and Prophecies of Jacob concerning the Tribes receive Light hence, and also from the particular Histories in Joshua and Judges concerning the Actions of the several Tribes.” <http://0-solomon.tcpt.alexanderstreet.com.wagtail.uovs.ac.za/cgi-bin/asp/philo/cpt/contextualize.pl?p.1183.cpt.1349527.1349542>. (accessed February 1, 2010).

⁶⁵ C. J. Allen, *Genesis*, Broadman Bible Commentary. (Nashville, TN.: Convention Press, 1969) 1: 297. “Inevitably Jacob’s poem must be compared with the victory of Deborah in Judges 5, and the uniformly benign blessing of Moses in Deuteronomy 33.” W. Reburn & E. M. Fry, *Genesis*, 1075. “The “Blessing” given here by Jacob should be compared with the “blessing” of Moses in Deuteronomy 33 and with the Song of Deborah in Judges 5.” Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 220-221. “... the two parallels, Deut. 33 and Judg 5...”

Deuteronomy 33 is the last one. The main base of his supposition was that Genesis 49 includes the secular view and Deuteronomy 33 shows theological character.⁶⁶

In 1910 Gunkel presented the possibility that Moses consulted and quoted from the Blessing of Jacob when he wrote Deuteronomy 33.⁶⁷

Zobel was the first scholar who studied intensively the connection between Genesis 49, Deuteronomy 33, and Judges 5. The title of his 1964 dissertation was “Information of the tribal Sayings in Genesis 49, Deuteronomy 33, and Judges 5 about the Political and Cultic Condition in Israel.”⁶⁸ The theory of tribal sayings was a *fait accompli* to Zobel. He only wanted to find out the social and cultural condition from the tribal sayings in these three chapters. Zobel first supposed that tribal sayings came from the time of a vivid tribal awareness. Consequently, tribal sayings preserved historical information of the vivid time. Zobel points out that the vivid tribal age is the period of Judges.

Zobel classifies tribal sayings into three main groups. The first group is the profane sayings. They mainly occur in Genesis 49. Their distinctive features are remarkably short in length and not theologized in the content. They form a base of tribal sayings. The second group is the *Yahwecizing* sayings. They mostly appear in Deuteronomy 33. This group’s sayings show the completely developed form and they refer to tribes not to individuals. The final group is the sayings which are hard to distinguish whether they speak of a tribe or of an individual such as in Genesis 49:10-12,

⁶⁶ Dillmann, *Genesis*, 2:447.

⁶⁷ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 453.

⁶⁸ Zobel, *Stammesspruch und Geschichte: Die Angaben der Stammesspruche von Genesis 49, Deuteronomium 33, und Richter 5 uber die politischen und kultischen zustande im damaligen ‘Israel,’* BZAW 95 (Berlin: Alfred Topelmann, 1965).

15, 23, and 24.⁶⁹ Zobel also mentions the priority of three chapters. He suggests Judges 5 was composed first among the three chapters.⁷⁰

Westermann asserts that the tribal list in Genesis 49 predominates over that of Deuteronomy 33 because the latter was developed or adapted in the form of wish and blessing. In other words, Deuteronomy 33 was largely theologized. On the contrary, the list of Genesis 49 is secular, that is, it was not developed.⁷¹ He also believes that Judges 5: 8-14 shows the original *Sitz im Leben* of tribal sayings and its situation is not the war but the convention of twelve tribes. Westermann stresses such a “tribal saying” under the specific situation was generalized in those of Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33. Accordingly, he concludes Judges 5 to be the original one, Genesis 49 the second, and Deuteronomy 33 the last one.⁷²

Albright studied the old Hebrew poems in comparative linguistics with the ancient Ugaritic poems and completed the time table of the old Hebrew poems.⁷³ According to Albright’s work, Deuteronomy 33 and Genesis 49 are composed in almost the same period, the eleventh century B.C. Albright suggests Deuteronomy 33 is a little prior to Genesis 49. The Song of Deborah (Judges 5) is composed in 1150 B.C.⁷⁴

Freedman studied the divine names in the early Hebrew poetry and estimated the

⁶⁹ Ibid., 55-61.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 61.

⁷¹ Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 221.

⁷² Ibid., 222.

⁷³ Cf. 2.1.2.5 for the detailed Albright’s study.

⁷⁴ W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (London: the Athlone Press, 1968), 42-54.

age of the Hebrew poems. Freedman's conclusion is not greatly different from Albright's conclusion except in some poem's detail of chronological order.⁷⁵ He thinks the Song of Deborah (Judges 5) was composed in the twelfth century B.C., and Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 both from the eleventh century. However, Freedman supposes the age of Genesis 49 is a little earlier than that of Deuteronomy 33 because the latter does not include the divine name "Shadday."⁷⁶ Seebass also asserts that Gen 49 originated in the twelfth century prior to the Song of Deborah.⁷⁷

Sparks thinks that both Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 preserve northern lists and they were probably composed at the same time. Yet, they have been preserved differently. Sparks asserts that Deuteronomy 33 is prior to Genesis 49 in the last edition because Deuteronomy 33 does not include the tribe of Simeon. On the one hand, he supposes that the Song of Deborah is the oldest one among the three chapters (no later than the 9th century B.C.).⁷⁸

Macchi notices that the editor of Genesis 49 already knew of the existence of Deuteronomy 33 according to the prophecy on Judah and Joseph in Genesis 49. Since it is so, he concludes that Deuteronomy 33 came prior to Genesis 49.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ See Freedman's detailed explanation page

⁷⁶ D. N. Freedman, "Divine Names and Titles in Early Hebrew Poetry," in *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy*, (Winona Lake, IN., Eisenbrauns, 1980), 90.

⁷⁷ H. Seebass, "Die Stammespruche Gen 49:3-27," *ZAW* 96 (1984): 333-350.

⁷⁸ K. Sparks, "Genesis 49 and the Tribal List Tradition in Ancient Israel," *ZAW* 115 (2003): 333.

⁷⁹ J. -D. Macchi, *Israël et ses tribus selon Genèse 49*, OBO 171 (Fribourg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag, 1999), 41-54.

Table 1. The chronological order between Genesis 49, Deuteronomy 33, and Judges 5

Dillmann	Albright	Freedman	Sparks	Westermann	Seebass
Judg. 5	Judg. 5 (1150 B.C.)	Judg. 5 (12 th)	Judg. 5 (before 9th)	Judg. 5	Gen. 49 (12th)
Deut. 33	Deut. 33 (mid 11th)	Gen. 49 (11th)	Deut. 33 (8th)	Deut. 33	Deut. 33
Gen. 49	Gen. 49 (late 11th)	Deut. 33 (late 11th)	Gene. 49 (8th)	Gen. 49	Judg. 5

* Dillmann and Westermann does not provide specific dates.

2.1.2.5. Genesis 49 and archaeological discoveries

The successive archaeological discoveries in the Near East from the early twentieth century brought a turning point to the study of the Old Testament. Notably, three archaeological discoveries are closely related to the study of Genesis 49. The first one is the tablets discovered at Nuzi (1925), the Hurrian family records and legal documents between 1,500 B.C. and 1,400 B.C. The second one is the tablets discovered at Ras Shamra (1929) in the ancient Ugarit area between 1,500 B.C. and 1,200 B.C. The last one is the tablets discovered at Mari (1933) in the Middle Euphrates Valley. Their ages are estimated to be between 2,200 B.C. and 1,800 B.C.

The tablets discovered in Nuzi and Mari helped to extend our understanding of the social and cultural background in the period of the Pentateuch. They provided strong evidence with which the lifestyle and custom in the Pentateuch coincided with those of the society of ancient Near East around the fifteenth century B.C. Also, the accidental discoveries at Ras Shamra of northern Syria deepen our knowledge about the Canaanite culture and religion in the late Bronze Age. More than anything else, the most important

contribution of the discoveries at Ras Shamra was to add to our knowledge concerning North-West Semitic languages. Before the discoveries at Ras Shamra, when scholars needed to compare Biblical Hebrew with other close languages, they had usually used the relatively distant literatures from the Semitic Language like Mesopotamia and Egypt.⁸⁰ The discovery of the Ugaritic tablets completely changed this situation. The Ugaritic literature contributed to the understanding of Hebrew lexicography.⁸¹ Scholars have found many parallel pairs between Hebrew and Ugaritic words.⁸² Moreover, because most Ugaritic literatures took the shape of poetry, they were especially useful for the understanding of Hebrew poetry like Genesis 49.⁸³

Accordingly, many scholars of those days were immersed in the comparative study of Ugaritic literatures⁸⁴ and such a study opened a new way of understanding Hebrew poetry even though some scholars warned against the excessive attitude of relying on parallelism between Biblical literature and Ugaritic literature.⁸⁵ These

⁸⁰ Simon B. Parker, "Ugaritic Literature and the Bible," *NEA* 63, no. 4 (Dec. 2000): 228-231.

⁸¹ Bruce Vawter, "The Canaanite Background of Gen 49," *CBQ* 17 (1955): 1, asserts, "Roughly half the vocabulary of Ugaritic and biblical Hebrew coincides, and rule after rule of syntax is identical." Cf. H. L. Ginsberg, "Ugaritic Studies and the Bible," *BA* 8, no. 2 (May 1945): 58.

⁸² The number of parallel pairs varies according to scholars. M. Held said he found 60 Ugaritic pairs, S. Gevirtz – more than 60, Albright – nearly 100, Dahood – from 125 to 290, R. E. Bornemann – 680 Ugaritic pairs in Dahood, "Ugaritic Hebrew Parallel Pairs," in *Ras Shamra Parallels*, ed. Loren R Fisher, (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1972), I: 71-73.

⁸³ H. L. Ginsberg, "The Ugaritic Texts and Textual Criticism," *JBL* 62, no. 2 (Jun. 1943): 109-115, says, "Since Hebrew poetry is closer to the Ugarit texts than Hebrew prose, occasions for such emendations are likely to occur more frequently in the poetical than in the prose portions of the Old Testament." Also, Cf. G. B. Gray, *The Forms of Hebrew Poetry considered with special reference to the criticism and interpretation of the Old Testament*, (KTAV Publishing House, 1972).

⁸⁴ Ginsberg, "The Ugaritic Texts and Textual Criticism," 109, even asserts "the Hebrew Bible and the Ugaritic texts are to be regarded as one literature, and consequently a reading in either one may be emended with the help of a parallel passage in the other."

⁸⁵ J. C. De Moor and P van der Lugt, "The Spectre of Pan-Ugaritism," *Beitrage zur Orientalistik* 31 (1974): 3-26. Peter C. Craigie, "Ugarit, Canaan, and Israel," *TynBul* 34 (1983): 145-167, points out the negative aspect as well as the positive aspect of Ugarit. According to Craigie, because Ugarit's culture and civilization was not the branch of Canaan's culture and civilization, we must not overlook the difference of language, literature, and religion. Also, Craigie stresses that we cannot simply place two languages in

linguistic discoveries had a great influence on the study of Genesis 49. Modern commentaries usually attempt to find the answer to the complicated words in Genesis 49 in the parallelism with Ugarit.⁸⁶ Above all, the parallels with Ugaritic literature have considerably pushed the origins of Genesis 49 back at least to the period of Judges and they are certainly compatible with the Mosaic authorship.⁸⁷ However, the attempt to suppose the concrete date of the text on the basis of the linguistic study (morphology and lexicography) sometimes raises considerable question because it has been shown that those features – or comparable ones – did occur until the period of Exile.⁸⁸

Among many studies on the archaeological discoveries, the first study which is closely related to Genesis 49 is that of C. Gordon in 1940.⁸⁹ His study shows that the contents in the tablets at Nuzi harmonize with the customs of the Pentateuch in many ways. In connection with Genesis 49, Gordon presents a legal document suggesting that a son went to petition the court against his brother after their father's death. The court admitted validity of oral blessing which the dead father had left. According to Gordon, it is certainly strange that the oral will of the dead father was valid in court because the society of Nuzi documented even trivial dealings. Gordon finds three similarities in the tablet at Nuzi to the blessing of Jacob in Genesis 49: (a) an oral will, (b) legal validity, and (c) made to a son by a dying father. Consequently, he concludes that Genesis 49 is a

parallel lines because of the geographical distance between South Judea and north Ugarit, the variety of each society, and the periodic difference. Hereupon, he asserts we must study separately the languages of Ugarit, Canaan, and Israel as belonging to a single linguistic and literary unit.

⁸⁶ Cf. Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, Tyndale OT Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1967); Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis*, WBC, (Nelson/Paternoster, 1994). etc.

⁸⁷ Heck, "A History of Interpretation," 29.

⁸⁸ De Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 78

⁸⁹ C. H. Gordon, "Biblical Customs and the Nuzu Tablets," *BA* 3 no. 1 (Feb. 1940): 1-12.

kind of deathbed testament as is the case of the Nuzi tablets.⁹⁰ Gordon's study greatly influenced many scholars at that time and similar studies that followed subsequently.⁹¹

Speiser also wrote his article about the comparison between the blessing of Isaac in Genesis 27 and the documents at Nuzi.⁹² He asserts that the custom in the Near East is strikingly similar with the Patriarch's custom described in the Pentateuch. In connection with Genesis 49, Speiser asserts that the custom of inheritance in the ancient Near East did not follow the primacy of birthright but the father's discretion. He stresses that it agrees exactly with the custom of the Patriarch's inheritance in Genesis.⁹³ Accordingly, Speiser's study helps to grasp the scene in which Jacob deprives Reuben of the primacy of birthright at the deathbed in Genesis 49.

Albright compared early Hebrew poetry with Canaanite epics, and tried to find certain common stylistic phenomena between them. According to Albright, repetitive parallelism and paronomasia or wordplay commonly appear in the Hebrew poetry and Canaanite epics. By these common characteristics he estimates the dates of Hebrew poetry in the Old Testament and arranges them in chronological order. Albright finds that the repetitive parallelism frequently appears in the ancient Ugaritic poems. Consequently, if the same phenomenon is frequently found in a certain Hebrew poem, the poem may

⁹⁰ Ibid., 8.

⁹¹ For example, R. T. O'Callaghan, "Historical Parallels to Patriarchal Social Customs," *CBQ*, 6 (1944): 391-405; H. H. Rowley, "Recent Discovery and the Patriarchal Age," in *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), 271-305; T. J. Meek, *Hebrew Origins* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960); W. F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (Baltimore: Hopkins, 1967); J. Gray, *Archaeology and the Old Testament World*, (London : Nelson, 1962); Ignatius Hunt, *The World of the Patriarchs*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967).

⁹² E. A. Speiser, "I Know Not the Day of My Death," *JBL* 74 (1955): 252-256.

⁹³ Ibid., 256.

originate from a similar age to the Ugaritic poetry, that is, the fairly early age. On the other hand, if paronomasia frequently appears in a certain Hebrew poem, the poem cannot be an early one but rather a fairly late one because paronomasia was scarcely found in Ugaritic poems. According to Albright's array, Genesis 49 belongs to the eleventh century like the testament of Moses in Deuteronomy 33 even though Genesis 49 is a little later than Deuteronomy 33.⁹⁴

Also, under the guidance of Albright, Cross and Freedman wrote the combined dissertation, "A Study of Genesis 49; Deuteronomy 33; Judges 5; and 2 Samuel 22 (=Ps. 18), with special consideration of the early stages of Hebrew orthography and meter." Their study also reflected acquaintance with Ugaritic literatures. They also concluded that Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 are contemporary writings.⁹⁵

Freedman classified early Hebrew Poetry in three stages.⁹⁶ He asserts the first stage of early Hebrew poetry is Militant Mosaic *Yahwism* like Exodus 15, Psalm 29, and Judges 5. The name of Yahweh is predominantly used in this stage's poetry. He estimates the age of this poem as the twelfth century B.C. The second stage is Patriarchal Revival and this is characterized in that the divine name "*Yahweh*" is used in parallel with the divine name "*El*." Genesis 49, Numbers 23-24, Deuteronomy 33 belong to this category. Freedman attributes the dates to the eleventh century. The last stage of the early Hebrew poetry is Monarchic Syncretism. Most Hebrew poetry in the book of Samuel and Deuteronomy 32 belongs to this stage. Freedman supposes these poems date from the

⁹⁴ Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, 1-28, 42-52.

⁹⁵ F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry*. SBLDS 21 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975), 6-7.

⁹⁶ Freedman, "Divine Names and Titles in Early Hebrew Poetry," in *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1980).

twelfth century or thereafter. Freedman's conclusion is almost the same as that of Albright except that Genesis 49 is prior to Deuteronomy 33 although they are both composed in the eleventh century.⁹⁷

Robertson also believes the nature of early poetic Hebrew must be reconstructed by the comparative study which parallels with the Ugaritic poetry and the Amarna glosses. He presents several early forms in Genesis 49 with his own comparative study.⁹⁸

Dahood wrote successive articles associated with Genesis 49 and presented a new solution to the abstruse words in Genesis 49 by making comparison with similar Ugaritic words.⁹⁹ Vawter,¹⁰⁰ Coppens,¹⁰¹ Moller¹⁰² also tried to solve the enigmatic words in Genesis 49 through the comparative linguistic method. Today scholars agree that one cannot adequately study Hebrew poetry like Genesis 49 aside from the products of the archaeological discoveries.

2.1.2.6. Regional characteristic of Genesis 49

The idea that Genesis 49 is individual tribal collection arouses an interest in the geographical background of the individual tribal sayings.

In 1897 Dillmann asserts that the writer of Genesis 49 must be Judean because it

⁹⁷ Ibid., 77-129.

⁹⁸ D. A. Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence in Dating Early Hebrew Poetry*, SBLDS 3 (1972).

⁹⁹ M. Dahood, "A New Translation of Gen. 49,6a." *Bib* 36 (1955): 229; idem., "MKRTYHM in Gen 49.5," *CBQ* 23 (1961): 54-6; idem., "Is 'Eben Yisra'el a Divine Title?" (Gn 49, 24), *Bib* 40 (1959): 1002-7; idem., "Northwest Semitic Notes on Genesis," *Bib* 55 (1974): 81; idem., "Hebrew-Ugaritic Lexicography IV," *Bib* 47 (1966): 418; idem., "Comparative Philology yesterday and Today," *Bib* 50 (1969): 74; "The Value of Ugaritic for textual criticism," *Bib* 40 (1959): 168-169.

¹⁰⁰ Vawter, "The Canaanite Background of Gen 49," 1-18.

¹⁰¹ J. Coppens, *La benediction de Jacob*, VTsup 4 (Leiden: E J Brill, 1957), 97-115.

¹⁰² H. R. Moeller, "Four Old Testament Problem Terms," *BT* 13 (1962): 219-220.

includes praise to Judah.¹⁰³ In 1974 Labuschagne also maintains that Genesis 49 reflects the view of the southern kingdom contrary to Deuteronomy 33. The reason is that Genesis 49 presents Judah together with Joseph as the two objects of blessing while Joseph is the unique main object of the blessing in Deuteronomy 33.¹⁰⁴

However, recent scholarship maintains that many portions in Genesis 49 originate in the northern kingdom although the last edition of the poem comes from the southern Judean kingdom. Gervitz (1986)¹⁰⁵ and Rendsburg (1990)¹⁰⁶ assert the northern origin of Genesis 49 because of mainly linguistic reasons. They present several words which could have the roots in the northern kingdom for example, גַּרַם (v.14), נַעֲמֹה (v.15), אֲמֹרִי (v.21), and פֶּרֶת (v.22). They emphasize these words mostly occur in the northern contexts (Prov. 17:22; 25:15; Job 40:18) or have cognates of Phoenician and Ugarit. Gervitz and Rendsburg call these words Israelian Hebrew.¹⁰⁷

Sparks (2003) also asserts that Genesis 49 originates in the northern kingdom on the ground of the similarity of Genesis 49 with Deuteronomy 33. However, he allows several tribes are added by the southerners in the late period.¹⁰⁸

Macchi argues that the core of the list of Genesis 49 is an old northern tribal list

¹⁰³ Dillmann, *Genesis*, 2:449.

¹⁰⁴ C. J. Labuschagne, "The Tribes in the Blessing of Moses," in *Language and Meaning: Studies in Hebrew language and biblical exegesis* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 98.

¹⁰⁵ S. Gervitz, "Asher in the Blessing of Jacob (Genesis xlix 20)," *VT* 37 (1987): 159-160; idem., "Of Syntax and Style in the 'Late Biblical Hebrew'-'Old Canaanite' Connection," *JANES* 18 (1986): 25-29.

¹⁰⁶ G. A. Rendsburg, *Linguistic Evidence for the Northern Origin of Selected Psalms*, *SBLMS* 43, (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990), 23; idem., "Israelian Hebrew Features in Genesis 49" *Maarav* 8 (1992): 161.

¹⁰⁷ However, H. L. Ginsberg, *The Israelian Heritage of Judaism* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1982), 1-2, originally used the term.

¹⁰⁸ Sparks, "Genesis49 and the Tribal List," 330-3. Confer, idem. *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel: Prolegomena to the Study of Ethnic Sentiments and Their Expression in the Hebrew Bible* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998), 109-124, 267-272.

and he appoints it to the period of the reign of Omeri. The six tribes (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Joseph, and Benjamin) are added to the original list in the post exilic period because Jews show favorable views to northern Israel in this period. For that reason, Genesis 49 contains a favorable view of Joseph. He asserts that a similar view is frequently found in post exilic writings (cf. Elephantine papyri, Zech.10, Ezek. 37, I Chron. 5).¹⁰⁹

Peters also agrees with the hypothesis of the northern origin of Genesis 49. He observes that many northern prophets quoted historical and political allusions in their prophecies from Genesis 49. Thereupon, Peters concludes that Genesis 49 is rooted in northern Israel, especially in the reign of Jeroboam I and Ahab and it is edited in southern Judah later, in the reign of Hezekiah. Peters asserts that Deuteronomy 33 rather originated by the prophet of the southern Judah.¹¹⁰

2.1.2.7. Other related studies

As Rendsburg comments, there are no scholars who devote themselves to study Genesis 49 as much as Gevirtz did.¹¹¹ Many parts of Gevirtz's study in his lifetime are directly or indirectly related to Genesis 49.¹¹² He presents a fresh interpretation

¹⁰⁹ Macchi, *Israël et ses tribus selon Genèse 49*, 301-306.

¹¹⁰ J. Peters. "Jacob's blessing," *JSBLE* 6, no.1 (Jun. 1886): 113-114, assumes that the northern refugees brought numerous northern writings such as Amos, Hosea, and Song of Solomon to the southern kingdom when the northern kingdom fell. The northern literatures made the golden age of Hebrew Literature in the period of Hezekiah. He believes the Hebrew poetry and legends are indebted to the northern kingdom in many ways. The northern kingdom was literarily much more developed than the southern Judah.

¹¹¹ Rendsburg, "Israelian Hebrew," 161.

¹¹² The lists of Gevirtz's writings directly connected with Genesis 49: "Simeon and Levi in the blessing of Jacob (Gen. 49:5-7)," *HUCA* 52 (1981): 93-128; "The Issachar Oracle in the Testament of Jacob," *ErIs* 12 (1975): 104-12; "The Reprimand of Reuben" *JNES* 30, no.2 (Apr. 1971): 87-98; "A Father's Curse," *Mosaic* 4 (Spring, 1969), 56-61; "Naphthali in The Blessing of Jacob," *JBL* 103, no.4 (Dec. 1984): 513-521; "Asher in the Blessing of Jacob (Genesis XLIX 20)," *VT* 37 (Apr. 1987): 154-163; "Of Patriarchs and Puns: Joseph at the Fountain, Jacob at the Ford," *HUCA* 46 (1975): 33-54; "Adumbrations of Dan in

concerning the hard passages of Genesis 49 different to conventional interpretations.

Gevirtz often used emendation for the baffling Hebrew words in the linguistic parallelism with Ugarit. He also emphasized the importance of animal figures to solve the riddles in Genesis 49. Many parts of Gevartz's interpretation are quite reasonable and widely accepted. However, he sometimes uses excessive emendation in which he makes the passages harder than the original one in MT for no particular reason.

For example, most English versions read Genesis 49:5 **אָחִים כְּלֵי חַמָּס מְכַרְתִּיהֶם** **וְלֵוִי שְׂמִיעוֹן וְלֵוִי** as “Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords” (RSV, NIV, NLT, similar NAS), or “Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations” (KJV, similar NKJ, GNV). On the one hand, Gevartz reads it “Simeon and Levi are spent owls, Cashiered hawks are they.”¹¹³ Gevartz takes the reading in many other ancient versions (Targum Onqelos, Septuagint, and Samaritan versions) **כְּלֵי** as a verb “to be finished, spent, exhausted” instead of MT's reading **כְּלֵי** as a noun “vessels or weapons.” He asserts that the parallel usage is found in many OT passages for example, 1Sam. 29:20; 1Sam. 2:33; Job 4:9; Jer. 7:28. Also Gevartz supposes the word **אָחִים** is vocalized in error. Accordingly, it should be read as **אֶחָיִם** following C. J. Ball's suggestion.¹¹⁴ **אֶחָיִם** is found in Isaiah 13:21 and means “howling creatures” (RSV) or “a kind of owl” (NJV). Gevartz suggests **אֶחָיִם** means “eagle-owl.”¹¹⁵ Gevartz presents the most troublesome word, **מְכַרְתִּיהֶם** As “cashiered hawks” in the basis of the parallelism of

Jacob's Blessing on Judah,” *ZAW* 93 (1981): 21-37.

¹¹³ For further details of discussion on Gen. 49:5, See, 3.2.2.4.

¹¹⁴ C. J. Ball, *The Book of Genesis* (Sacred Books of the Old Testament; Leipzig, Baltimore and London, 1896), 107.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Godfrey R. Driver, “Birds in the Old Testament II: Birds in Life,” *PEQ* 87 (May-Oct. 1955): 134.

the animal metaphor with the previous word כָּלִי (Cf. Lev.11:16; Deut.14:15; Ezek. 21:11; Isa. 50:1; also, UT 49:1:13-15).¹¹⁶

For another example of Gervitz' interpretation, many English versions variously interpret Genesis 49:21 נִפְתָּלִי אֵילָה שְׁלֹחַהּ הַנִּתֵּן אִמְרֵי-שֹׁפָר, "Naphtali is a hind let loose, that bears comely fawns" (RSV), "Naphtali is a spreading terebinth putting forth lovely boughs" (NEB) or "Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words" (KJV). Gervitz presents new interpretation for this passage in the basis of the cognates in Akkadian and Ugarit and animal metaphors. He thinks that the Hebrew אִמְרֵי-שֹׁפָר is the counterpart in Ugaritic *imr spr*, and both will echo Akkadian *immir supfri*. Also, Gervitz suggests *'imre* the construct plural of a noun *'immar* is the cognate with Akkadian *immeru* "sheep" and with Aramaic *'immera*, Ugaritic *imr*, and Punic *'mr*.¹¹⁷ Consequently, Gervitz presents as follows: "Naphtali a mountain-ewe was born who gives birth to lambs of the fold."¹¹⁸

De Hoop wrote his dissertation on Genesis 49 in a massive volume¹¹⁹ and many articles related to Genesis 49.¹²⁰ De Hoop focuses on the study on overall structure of the poem and the setting of the poem in the larger surrounding story of Joseph. He analyses

¹¹⁶ Gervitz, "Simeon and Levi," 95-100. UT (= Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook, Analecta Orientalia* 38 [Rome: PIB, 1965]).

¹¹⁷ Cf. UT 49:11:28-29, further UT 51: VI: 42-43.

¹¹⁸ Gervitz, "Naphtali," 516-520.

¹¹⁹ R. De Hoop, *Genesis 49 in its Literary and Historical Context*, OTS 39 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), reprinted, (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2007).

¹²⁰ De Hoop, "The Meaning of *phz* in Classical Hebrew," *ZAH* (1997): 16-26; idem, "Genesis 49 and the Early History of Israel: A Reply to Johannes C. de Moor," *UF* 32 (2000): 675-706; idem, "Gen 49 Revisited: The Poetic Structure of Jacob's Testament and the Ancient Versions," in *Unit Delimitation in Biblical Hebrew and Northwest Semitic Literature*, ed. Marjo C. A. Korpel and Josef M. Oesch (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2003): 1-32; idem., "A Patriarchal Sin Reconsidered: Reuben's Act (Gen 35:22) Retold or: Rewritten Bible as Finding a Scapegoat," *OTE* 20 no.3 (2007): 616-631.

Genesis 49 by the so called “Kampen School method,”¹²¹ and concludes that Genesis 49 belongs to the same tradition as the surrounding chapters. De Hoop asserts that Genesis 49 is internally closely connected together by verbal repetition.¹²² He finds the blessings on six tribes start with the same pattern (— ל וְהָיָא): Zebulun (v.13), Issachar (v.15), Dan (v.17), Gad (v.19), Asher (v.20). Moreover, Genesis 49 is remarkably harmonized with the surrounding framed chapters. Thereupon, he concludes that Genesis 49 takes a carefully and intentionally crafted shape and it manifests the compositional unity of Genesis 49.¹²³

On the one hand, De Hoop prefers the synchronic reading method to the diachronic reading method. He thinks classic source criticism must be reevaluated in his method. According to De Hoop, Genesis 49 is not a simple total of the individual collections as the classical Documentary hypothesis which divides the text in J, E, JE, P. Rather, he supposes Genesis 49 is formed by two layers: the Pro-Joseph layer which originated in the northern kingdom and the pro-Judah layer which originated in the southern kingdom. The former applies the name “Israel” to the third patriarch and the latter applies the name “Jacob.” De Hoop thinks that the pro-Joseph layer is the basic document and it extends to the pro-Judah layer according to political circumstance in the late period. He suggests that Genesis 49 was completed in the period of the United Monarchy, especially that of King Solomon because Judeans needed to legitimize the position of Judah to reign over the great Israel at that time. It was also needed to

¹²¹ This structural approach is developed by P. van der Lugt and J. C. de Moor. It divides a text according to the literature’s structural unit at first and analyzes them from the smaller segments like the colon and poetic verse to the larger structural units like strophes, canticles and cantos,. See other studies which adopt the method of “Kampen school,” de Moor, “Fundamentals of Ugaritic and Hebrew Poetry,” *UF* 18 (1986): 173-212; W.T. Koopmans, *Joshua 24 as Poetic Narrative*, JSOTSup 93 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press,, 1990), 165-80; J. Kim, *The Structure of the Samson Cycle* (Kampen, Netherlands: J. H. Kok, 1993), 118-127; P. Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32*, OTS 37 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 99-102.

¹²² De Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 624-625.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 629.

legitimize the crown of Solomon to the rival older brothers.¹²⁴

Also, after analyzing the verbal system in the blessing of Jacob, De Hoop maintains that the blessing of Jacob must be a kind of prophecy because it shows future significance. He defines Genesis 49 as “Testament.”¹²⁵ Even though De Hoop’s conclusion is so different from those of contemporary scholars and classic source criticism, his study sheds a fresh light in the study of Genesis 49.

2.2. Main Issues in the Research of Genesis 49

Several major issues in Genesis 49 will be individually examined in this section. These issues have been disputed for a long time and most of them are still going on. They are usually not independent issues but they are intertwined with one another.

2.2.1. Genre

Determining the genre can be a good method in order to treat the whole characteristic of a piece of literature. It will help to grasp the main stream of the story. Traditionally Genesis 49 has been called “the Blessing of Jacob” according to the statement in verse 28. However, the obvious negative pronouncements to Jacob’s first three sons raised serious questions about the title of Genesis 49 from ancient times. Many interpreters have hesitated to call Genesis 49 “Blessing.” Instead, they have given various titles to Genesis 49 such as “the Deathbed Testament,” “Prophetic Sayings,” “the Last words of Jacob,” “Sayings,” and “Tribal Sayings.”¹²⁶ The three most widely accepted

¹²⁴ Ibid., 557.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 630.

¹²⁶ Spurrel - “Prophetic sayings of Jacob concerning the Twelve”; Sparks - “Sayings”; Wenham, Dillmann, Sarna - “The Testament of Jacob”; Bennetch - “The prophecy of Jacob”; Stigers - “Testament of the Future of the Sons of Jacob”; NRSV - “Jacob’s last words to his sons”; Pehlke, NIV, Dods - “The

titles of Genesis 49 will be examined in this section: Tribal Sayings, Deathbed Testament, and Blessing.

2.2.1.1. Tribal Sayings

In 1920 Gressmann first used the term “tribal sayings.” He suggested Genesis 49 is a collection which was independently circulated and gradually developed over a long period.¹²⁷ Gressmann’s theory gained strength by Noth’s hypothesis, “Amphictyony.” Thereafter, several scholars such as Kittel, Zobel, Gunneweg extended the theory of “tribal sayings.”¹²⁸ It had been widely accepted by many scholars without question for a long time. Recently scholars however raise serious questions on the theory and no longer like to use the term “tribal sayings.”

First, recently scholars normally deny the existence of the tribal sayings in Judges 5 and Deuteronomy 33. Westermann argues that he only found the early stage of “tribal sayings” in Judges 5.¹²⁹ Zobel mentions that he found nothing but several tribal sayings in Judges 5.¹³⁰ Also, Swenson-Mendez emphasizes that it is hard to find “tribal sayings” in Judges 5 as described in Genesis 49 even though many scholars like to compare Judges 5 with Genesis 49. Judges 5 is the poem composed in a particular war situation and it is impossible to call Judges 5 “tribal sayings” in a generalized meaning. She continues that Deuteronomy 33 is the only comparative text to Genesis 49 because it includes several tribal sayings, but it shows no connecting elements of poetry or prose between the individual sayings. It makes us suspect the existence of the genre of “tribal sayings” in the

Blessing of Jacob.”

¹²⁷ Gressmann, “Die Anfänge Israels,” 171-184. See, 2.1.2.3 for further detail Gressmann’s theory.

¹²⁸ See, 2.1.2.3 for detail theory of tribal sayings

¹²⁹ Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 251.

¹³⁰ Zobel, “Stammesspruch und Geschichte,” 44-52.

Old Testament.¹³¹

Beyerle mentions in his study that he cannot find “tribal sayings” in Deuteronomy 33 because no commonality exists between the individual sayings.¹³² The individual sayings in Deuteronomy 33 show very different factors, for example: Reuben as a wish, Judah as a prayer, Levi as a description ending in a prayer, Joseph as a blessing, and Zebulun and Issachar as a mixture of thanksgiving, psalm and hymn. Deuteronomy 33 does not have the common features that we can call “tribal sayings. He concludes that the genre of “tribal sayings” did not exist in the Old Testament initially.

Sparks also agrees with Beyerle:

“The various tribal lists in the Hebrew Bible do not constitute a uniform genre, nor do the individual tribal elements within the lists represent exemplars from a uniform ‘tribal sayings’ a genre.”¹³³

Genesis 49 is then a unique chapter in the Old Testament in which we can discover individual tribal sayings. However, it is also generally disapproved by the scholars. Wenham argues that the blessings on Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, and Joseph occupy two thirds of the whole poem of Genesis 49 and they are directly connected to each other and the previous chapters of Genesis. Also, the blessings concerning other tribes are short in length, merely one or two verses. Then he asks, “Can we accept that these short verses had been circulated and each tribe had preserved the negative poems about his own tribe like Reuben, Simeon, and Levi?” Moreover, we cannot imagine the poems including

¹³¹ K. Swenson-Mendez, “The Relationship of Judah and Joseph in Genesis 49” (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 2001), 202-204.

¹³² S. Beyerle, *Der Mosesegen im Deuteronomium: Eine text-, compositions- und formkritische Studie zu Deuteronomium 33*, BZAW 250 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), 274-275.

¹³³ Sparks, “Genesis 49 and the Tribal List,” 342.

curses and blames to some tribes had been regularly repeated at a national festival. Since it is so, he concludes we cannot find a collection like tribal sayings in Genesis 49 and we must regard the poem as a unit.¹³⁴

De Hoop also verifies that Genesis 49 is fairly far from tribal sayings by the analysis of verbs in Genesis 49.¹³⁵ According to De Hoop's analysis, most verbs in Genesis 49 use the future form and not past or present form. This form is fairly different from the general form of the tribal sayings which have the past form. De Hoop emphasizes, although many scholars have habitually interpreted the imperfect verses of Genesis 49 in the present meaning in most cases, Genesis 49 manifestly has a predicted character which is interested in the future rather than in the past.¹³⁶ He writes, "The scope of 15 strophes in 20 strophes is obviously the future even though references to the present and/or past are found."¹³⁷ Gunkel also seems to recognize the problem. He points out that the poem of Genesis 49 is similar in form to the oracles in the book of the Prophets. However, the verbs in Genesis 49 are used in imperfect tense in a different way than the usual Prophets' use, i.e. prophetic perfect. These imperfects in Genesis 49 are interpreted as present in most cases.¹³⁸ De Hoop concludes that tribal sayings do not exist in the Old Testament as a genre.¹³⁹

Consequently, recently many scholars prefer to use the more general term "sayings" rather than "tribal sayings." They assert that the term "sayings" includes

¹³⁴ Wenham, *Genesis*, 469-470.

¹³⁵ De Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 624-625.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 625. For instance, Gunkel, *Genesis*, 480-7; Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 247-248; Zobel, "Stammesspruch und Geschichte," 4-6.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 452.

¹³⁹ De Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 283-284.

various meanings such as prophecies, prayers, blessings, and curses.¹⁴⁰ Even though the theory of “tribal sayings” in which Genesis 49, Deuteronomy 33, and Judges 5 are involved was an established theory at one time and it is still supported by some scholars, much evidence strongly rejects the classification of Genesis 49 in the genre of “tribal sayings.” Strictly speaking, the genre “tribal sayings” did not exist in the Old Testament at all initially.

2.2.1.2. Deathbed Testament or Farewell speech

In 1892 Dillmann said that Genesis 49 should be called “the Testament of Jacob” because it contains curses as well. He asserts that “Blessing” is an inaccurate term for Genesis 49.¹⁴¹ The term “Testament” stresses the meaning of Jacob’s last will to his twelve sons at the deathbed.

In 1940 Gordon proposes in his famous article “Biblical customs and the Nuzi Tablets” that the patriarchs’ blessings in Genesis are of the kind of the testament of the court in Nuzi.¹⁴² Though Gordon does not show deep concern with Genesis 49, he laid a significant foundation of the view that Genesis 49 belongs to the “testament” genre.

Yet, the one who virtually suggests “Farewell Testament” as a genre in the Scripture is E. Stauffer, the New Testament scholar. He finds the Farewell Speech in the last speech of Jesus (John 17), the St. Paul’s epistles (1 and 2 Timothy, and 2 Peter), and the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs.¹⁴³ After Stauffer’s discovery, R. Brown emphasizes that the “Farewell Speech” already existed in the Old Testament as well as in

¹⁴⁰ Sparks, “Genesis 49 and the Tribal List,” 342.

¹⁴¹ Dillmann, *Genesis*, 2:444.

¹⁴² Gordon, “Biblical Customs and the Nuzi Tablets,” 8. See, 2.1.2.5. for further Gordon’s argument.

¹⁴³ Ethelbert Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, trans. John Marsh. (London: SCM Press, 1955), 344-347.

the New Testament. He presents several instances in the Old Testament: Gen. 48:29-49:33, Josh. 22-24, and 1 Chron. 28-29. Also, the whole book of Deuteronomy is a kind of “Farewell Speech of Moses.”¹⁴⁴

Nordheim is the scholar who arranges the “Farewell Speech” as a genre in connection with Genesis 49. He writes that Genesis 49 fully shows the character of testaments. According to Nordheim, “Testament” commonly has three distinct factors in structure. The first factor is the opening frame. This part usually possesses a title and the speaker’s name. The middle part is usually the longest part and it is filled with the dying person’s speech to the descendents. The dying person’s speech has three common contents: reminiscence of the past, instructions to his descendents on how to live, and prediction into the future when they will follow the instruction. The closing part generally contains the indication to the funeral.¹⁴⁵ Nordheim asserts that “Testament” is a sort of genre of wisdom. It is also closely related to didactic and exhortation speech. Nordheim emphasizes that “Testament” is a true literary genre in both the Scriptures.¹⁴⁶ Finally, he applied the three common characteristics of the genre “Testament” to Genesis 49. Nordheim asserts that he finds the mark of the genre “Testament” in 49:33. However, Nordheim said that he could not find the middle part’s characters of “Testament” genre in Genesis 49 but he found only the mixed characters. Nordheim answers to the question, “Why (does) Genesis 49 not show the most important characteristic of the genre of testament?” as follows; the biggest reason is that Genesis 49 was in the developing stage going to “Testament” genre.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel of St. John and the Johannine Epistles*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1965), 92-98.

¹⁴⁵ Eckhard von Nordheim, *Die Lehre der Alten I*, (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 229.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 239-240.

¹⁴⁷ E. Von Nordheim, *Die Lehre der Alten II*, 51.

De Hoop also asserts that Genesis 49 should be classified in the genre of “Testament” because “blessing” is too general term for the blessing of Jacob. He maintains the term “Testament” includes the meaning of blessing. However, as De Hoop himself recognized, the term “Testament” may be misunderstood. The title “Testament of Jacob” excessively emphasizes that Genesis 49 is just a farewell speech in Jacob’s deathbed.¹⁴⁸

On the other hand, Pehlke argues that it is hard to classify Genesis 49 in the genre of “Testament” because Genesis 49 does not have the common factors of the farewell testament. He asserts that Gen 47:1-49:33, the so called “deathbed episode,” never shows the most important common characteristics of a farewell Testament: the last instruction and the following blessing. However, all other farewell speeches (Joshua, Moses, and Jesus) also show the same common factors.¹⁴⁹ For example, 1 Kings 2:1-33, which is called the last will of David, fully displays the testament’s characteristics: David’s retrospect (the deeds of Joab, the Sons of Barzillai, and Shimei), Solomon’s duties (keeping God’s commandments as it is written in the Law of Moses), and the blessing (Solomon’s prosperity in all and continual kingship over Israel). Pehlke stresses in the citation of Thompson¹⁵⁰ that the comparison of Gordon between the documents of Nuzi and the blessings of Patriarchs is not appropriate because the case in the Nuzi documents is a legal document not a deathbed testament.

¹⁴⁸ De Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 73-74.

¹⁴⁹ H. Pehlke, “An exegetical and theological study of Genesis 49:1-28,” (Th.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1985), 50. Also, Swenson-Mendez, “The Relationship of Judah and Joseph,” 208, asserts, “Few of the sayings in Gen 49:3-27 could be said to advise the subject about how to live in order to create a specific future situation.

¹⁵⁰ T. L. Thompson, “The Background of the Patriarchs: A Reply to William Dever and Malcolm Clark,” *JSOT* 9 (1978): 2-43.

To conclude, it seems quite reasonable to call Genesis 49 “the Testament of Jacob” or “the farewell speech of Jacob.” Nevertheless, as some scholars point out, it is hard to classify Genesis 49 in the genre of “Testament” because the common features of “Testament” are obviously absent in Genesis 49. In addition, the term “Testament” is too broad and inclusive an expression to mark the whole character of Genesis 49. If Genesis 49 belongs to “Testament” genre, the connection with the previous blessing stories in Genesis will be lost. Also, the title gives too strong a nuance for which Genesis 49 is only “Jacob’s last will.” If Genesis 49 is sorted in the genre of Testament, it may blur the more important point of Genesis 49, “Blessing.” If one can find a term to show a clearer character of Genesis 49 than the term “testament,” it will be better choice to use than “testament.”

2.2.1.3. The Blessing of Jacob

Traditionally, Genesis 49 has been titled “The Blessing of Jacob” according to the designation of Genesis 49:28. However, because it contains the negative statements, interpreters have hesitated to call Genesis 49 “blessing” from the old times. Hippolytus entitled Genesis 49 “prophecy” not “blessing.” He thought that if one wants to classify Genesis 49 as blessing, it can only apply to some tribes not to all tribes.¹⁵¹ Ambrose of Milan distinguishes between prophecy and blessing, “Thus it really is more a prophecy than a blessing. For a prophecy is an announcement of events to come, whereas a blessing is the longed for bestowal of sanctification and of graces.”¹⁵² Hereupon, he does not want to place Genesis 49 in the likes of blessing.

¹⁵¹ Hippolytus of Rome, *The Blessings of the Patriarchs*, 12.

¹⁵² Ambrose of Milan, *The Patriarchs*, 2.7-9.

Such a view has been continued until today and most modern scholars do not want to name Genesis 49 “the blessing of Jacob.” Swenson-Mendez asserts that Genesis 49 obviously includes curses and the other statements are not blessings as well. She says, “Many of the poems seem simply to state an observable characteristic, neutral in value, about the subject (for example, Zebulun and Benjamin)...”¹⁵³ De Hoop also raises a question, “Does the genre of “blessing” exist in the Holy Scripture?”¹⁵⁴

Meanwhile, the biggest reason that critics do not want to call Genesis 49 “blessing” is based in their belief. That is, Gen. 49:28 belongs to P source together with 49:1 unlike the middle poetic portion which belongs to J source.¹⁵⁵ They believe P editor only named Genesis 49 “Blessing” in verse 28 according to his political and social necessity during that particular time.¹⁵⁶ However, Aalders refutes the supposition. He says if it is true that verse 28 comes from a completely different source, what is called, P, then, “Can there be any reason why the editor of this section should have taken these words from a completely different source and rather arbitrarily inserted them here?”

Aalders continues,

“It is difficult to understand why the redactor of the Pentateuch, who certainly would want to use an introductory statement for these “blessings,” would seek out such statements from an altogether different source from the material he had before him.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Swenson-Mendez, “The Relationship of Judah and Joseph,” 207.

¹⁵⁴ De Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 73-74.

¹⁵⁵ G. J. Spurrel, *Notes on the text of the Book of Genesis*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), 364, writes, “In this chapter is contained the so-called ‘Blessing of Jacob,’ a name which owes its origin to verse 28b, which however probably belongs, not to the ‘Blessing,’ but to the following narrative 28b-33, which comes from P.”

¹⁵⁶ Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 222, asserts, “A redactor has inserted the collection into a P context (vv. 1a, 28b); also, Vawter, *On Genesis. A New Reading*, (London. Geoffrey Chapman, 1977), 458.

¹⁵⁷ G. Aalders, *Genesis*, trans. William Heynen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 2:268.

Some scholars still prefer to entitle Genesis 49 “Blessing” according to the traditional view. Calvin assures that Genesis 49 is a kind of blessing even though it contains several negative statements. Calvin understands the negative statements in the precautionary measures. Because every Israelite already had such negative characters, God preliminarily wrote so that His people do not receive the negative affect from their wicked character. Accordingly, Genesis 49 can be counted as a kind of blessing on the whole of Israel.¹⁵⁸

Waltke also asserts that we should understand Genesis 49 as a “blessing” to the whole nation. He writes, though each blessing sometimes looks like anti-blessing, the curses to the individual tribes become a real “blessing” in the destiny of the blessing of the whole nation.”¹⁵⁹

Gunkel asserts that the poem of Genesis 49 was formed from the various fragments. Yet, he emphasizes that we can designate the poem in Genesis 49 in its entirety to the genre of “blessing-poem.”¹⁶⁰ Gunkel includes the blessing of Noah (Gen. 9), Isaac (Gen. 27), Moses (Deut. 33), and Balaam (Num. 23-24) together in this genre. He suggests these blessing poems originally played an important role in many national legends. He continues,

“This style was adopted in a later time by poets and utilized for larger independent poems. The theme of this new genre was Israel’s majesty and power, the fame of the people blessed by God.”¹⁶¹

He is sure that the genre of blessing-poem shows a close resemblance to the prophetic oracles. As evidence, Gunkel emphasizes that the genre of blessing-poem contains

¹⁵⁸ Calvin, *Genesis*, 442-444.

¹⁵⁹ Bruce Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zonderban, 2001), 603.

¹⁶⁰ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 450-451.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 452.

enigmatic speech and mysterious idiom like prophetic oracles. Gunkel maintains that Judges 5 also shows the same style as that of Genesis 49. “We will have to explain both as evidence that there was a literature of praise and reproach sayings concerning the tribes.”¹⁶² He supposes the genre of blessing-poem was publicly recited in several tribes’ worship festival or military confederacy.

Pehlke also argues that Genesis 49 is a kind of blessing although it contains curses on some tribes. He asserts that curses occur together with the blessing in the ancient Near East, for example, the Hittite treaties and the Kudurru inscriptions. Also, Pehlke asserts that the word בָּרַךְ contains the negative meaning in the Old Testament and the Scripture frequently shows curses in the scene of blessing for example, the curse on Canaan in the blessing of Noah, Ishmael in the blessing of Abraham, and Esau of the blessing Isaac.¹⁶³ Pehlke continues, “The use of the *baruk*-formula is analogous to the way *'arur* is used. This is usually taken to mean that both formulas originated from the same *Sitz im Leben*.”¹⁶⁴ Cursing used in the situation of blessing was not strange to the ancient people in the Near East. Consequently, it is not strange to call Genesis 49 a “Blessing.”¹⁶⁵

On the one hand, when we consider the entire story of the book of Genesis, Genesis 49 should be called as “the Blessing of Jacob.” Most scholars consent that

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Pehlke, “Genesis 49:1-28,” 60. Also, James Battenfield, “Hebrew Stylistic Development in Archaic Poetry: A Text- Critical and Exegetical Study of The Blessing of Jacob, Genesis 49:1-27,” (Ph.D. diss., Grace Theological Seminary, 1976), presents similar opinion. Yet, in my view, though the Old Testament sometimes uses בָּרַךְ in the negative meaning (cf. Job 1, 2, 1 King 21:10...), the word בָּרַךְ in Genesis 49:28 does not show the negative meaning because the next verse (v.28) says, “This is what their father said to them as he blessed them, blessing each with the blessing suitable to him.”

¹⁶⁴ Pehlke, “Genesis 49:1-28,” 59-60.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 61.

“blessing” is one of the main themes of the book of Genesis.¹⁶⁶ Also, Genesis 49 is the conclusion and the peak of the “blessing” theme. Accordingly, Genesis 49 cannot be studied apart from the stream of the entire story of Genesis.¹⁶⁷

As Sailhamer says,

“Jacob’s last words to his sons have become the occasion for a final statement of the book’s major theme: God’s plan to restore the lost blessing through the offspring of Abraham. The key to the writer’s understanding of Jacob’s last words lies in the narrative framework that surrounds them.”¹⁶⁸

The book of Genesis starts with the blessing of God toward all creatures and shows the continuity of the father’s blessing to the next generation. Genesis 49 is the concluding chapter of the “blessing” theme in Genesis. Longacre stresses that Genesis 49 is one of the highest points in the Joseph story, if not the peak in the whole book of Genesis.¹⁶⁹ He adds,

“At the close of Jacob’s discourse (v.28), the writer goes to great lengths to draw a line connecting Jacob’s words in this chapter to the theme of ‘the blessing’ that has been a central concern of the book since 1:28. He does this by repeating the word ‘blessing’ three times in the short span of v. 28, which literally

¹⁶⁶ Westermann, *Blessing*, 16, says, “No one can deny that in Genesis 12-50 and in the framework of Deuteronomy, blessing is one of the central concepts.” However, it is ironical that Westermann does not think the genre of Genesis 49 is a blessing in his commentary.

A. Ross, “The Curse of Canaan,” *BSac* 137 (1980): 224, says that Genesis, the book of beginnings, is primarily concerned with tracing the development of God’s program of blessing.

¹⁶⁷ Golka, “Genesis 37–50,” 157, asserts that Genesis 49 contains a part of the answers for the puzzles of Genesis 38 and this shows that chapter 49 is not an isolated story, but a part of the Joseph story (Gen.37–50).

¹⁶⁸ John Sailhamer, *Genesis*, Expositor’s Bible Commentary, ed. F. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zonderban, 1990), 2:274.

¹⁶⁹ Longacre, *Joseph*, 23.

reads: ‘And he blessed them, each according to his blessing he blessed them.’¹⁷⁰

Accordingly, it is most natural to name Genesis 49 “blessing” in connection with the whole story of Genesis.

All in all, as Swenson-Mendez says, a specific genre which can satisfy all characters of Genesis 49 may not exist.¹⁷¹ Almost all genres show weakness. Accordingly, it is hard to classify Genesis 49 within a particular genre. Nevertheless, if we should define Genesis 49, the best choice would be, “the Blessing of Jacob.”

2.2.2. The Historical Background

The historical background of Genesis 49 is closely related with the other questions of Genesis 49 such as genre, author, and main theme. The historical background of the individual poem will be a significant matter to the one who grasps the view that this poem is a collection circulated over a long time.

The scholars present various opinions about the historical background of Genesis 49. The main reason is, as Skinner points out, nobody can present a decisive period to satisfy the whole poem of Genesis 49.¹⁷² Though it is an axiom in the scholarly world that a portion of the poem in Genesis 49 contains the oldest contents in the Old Testament, there is no agreement among scholars concerning the final editorial time and the historical background of individual poems. The time seems to span the beginning of the eighteenth century BCE, followed by the Hyksos period, the Amarna period, the pre-Monarchic period, the United Monarchy, the Northern Kingdom, the time of Hezekiah, or Josiah, the

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Swenson-Mendez, “The Relationship of Judah and Joseph,” 209.

¹⁷² Skinner, *Genesis*, 510.

Exilic and post-Exilic period.¹⁷³ The most convincing periods among them will be examined in this section.

2.2.2.1. The Traditional View (2000-1800 B.C.)

Genesis 49 speaks to the reader that Jacob spoke these words here. This statement has been received as a doubtless truth for a long time. However, since the eighteenth century critics have doubted the traditional view and searched the real historical background of Genesis 49. They think that Genesis 49 includes several incredible prophecies in the modern view, for example, specific geographical locations, Judah's kingship and superiority, and dispersion of the tribe of Levi among Israel. Nevertheless, some scholars, mainly in the conservative circle, still accept the traditional view.¹⁷⁴

Delitzsch asserts, "It is indeed originated with Jacob, who on his deathbed was inspired with a vision of the future settlement of the land."¹⁷⁵ G. Thomas also asks, "Who could reproach so severely the patriarchs of the tribes in the period of Judges?" He refutes the view of the period of Judges for the historical background of Genesis 49.¹⁷⁶

On the one hand, Gordon asserts that the social background of Patriarchs in the book of Genesis is identical to the ancient society in the documents at Nuzi (1500 B.C.).¹⁷⁷ Also, Speiser,¹⁷⁸ and W. F. Albright¹⁷⁹ show similar views by the comparative

¹⁷³ De Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 594.

¹⁷⁴ For example, Hensler Rosenmuller, Baumgarten, Hengstenberg, Keil, Lange, M. S. Terry.

¹⁷⁵ F. Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis*, trans. Sophia Taylor (Edinburgh: T.&T.Clark, 1894), 2: 370-2.

¹⁷⁶ W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), 469.

¹⁷⁷ Cyrus Gordon, "The Patriarchal Narratives" *JNES* 13 (1954): 56.

¹⁷⁸ E. Speiser, *Genesis*, AB (New York: Doubleday-Anchor, 1964), 1:370.

¹⁷⁹ Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, 265.

study of the archaeological products. Harrison argues that the circumstances of tribes in Genesis 49 are not connected in any form with those in the period of Judges. Besides, there are no specific reasons to so severely blame the tribes of Reuben, Simeon, and Levi in the period of Judges and the period of the Monarchy excepting the period of Moses. For that reason, he strongly opposes the view that Genesis 49 is written after the period of Judges.¹⁸⁰

All in all, Jacob was not willing to reproach the grown-up eldest son until his deathbed even though he knew of Reuben's adultery with his concubine (35:22). Simeon and Levi were also strongly refuted when Jacob reprimanded them concerning the incidents of Shechem. Genesis 34 closes with the blaming question to Jacob, "Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?"¹⁸¹ If Jacob prudently reproached his adult sons, then, who can reproach one grown tribe so severely? The blame in Judges 5 is a light blame to the tribes which did not participate in the war, not a poignant reproach to the tribe itself. Also, Moses who had powerful authority over Israel did not reproach a tribe but just blessed them. The only person who has authority to reproach so severely is Jacob, their father.

2.2.2.2. The period of Judges

This view is mainly supported by the scholars who held the theory of tribal sayings. According to this view, though Genesis 49 may partly possess ancient fragments, it is mostly a collection of sayings which circulated independently during the period of Judges, i.e., between approximately 1400 and 1000 B.C. The scholars who hold this view

¹⁸⁰ R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 974, 110-111.

¹⁸¹ J. Fleishman, "Why did Simeon and Levi rebuke their father in Genesis 34:31?" *JNSL* 26/2 (2000): 101-116, asserts that the question of Simeon and Levi means that the one who treats Dinah like a prostitute is Jacob. Their refutation is serious challenge to Jacob's authority as the head of the family.

present several pieces of evidence. For example, the geographical location of the tribe of Zebulun in Genesis 49 coincides with that of the period of Judges. Also, the scattered status of the tribe of Levi and the insignificant position of the tribes of Reuben seems to designate the period of Judges.

Wenham supposes, “This situation roughly mirrors the time of the Judges.”¹⁸² Westermann asserts, “It deals with Israel’s tribes in the land of Canaan in the period of the Judges.”¹⁸³ Pfeiffer also mentions that all the materials show before the time of Saul except the Judah passage, which is of the Solomonic age.¹⁸⁴ Zobel counts the poem as being from the late period of Judges.¹⁸⁵ Driver suggests that Genesis 49 is not connected to the age of Jacob, but the age of the Judges, or a little later.¹⁸⁶ Allen asserts that a radical nationalism appears in Genesis 49. Accordingly, it is the writing in the late period of Judges or the early period of the kingdom.¹⁸⁷ Seebass asserts that the Testament of Jacob predates the song of Deborah (Judg. 5) and probably originated in the 12th Century.¹⁸⁸ Davidson supposes that Genesis 49 is composed of fragments of the greatly different ages, that is, from the early stages of the settlement in the land of Canaan to the emergence of the kingdom of David, about 200 years.¹⁸⁹ Gunkel suggests it is the writing of the period of the Judges when nomads from the desert crossed Jordan and raided the land.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸² Wenham, *Genesis*, 470.

¹⁸³ Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 250.

¹⁸⁴ Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1948), 277.

¹⁸⁵ Zobel, “Stammesspruch und Geschichte,” 54-56.

¹⁸⁶ S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 11th ed. (London: Methven, 1920), 380.

¹⁸⁷ Allen, *Genesis*, 1: 297. However, Genesis 49 includes the tribes which are severely cursed. Can we say this is a radical nationalism? Rather, it breaks up the reproached tribes from the union.

¹⁸⁸ Seebass, “Die Stämmesprüche Gen 49:3-27,” 333-350.

¹⁸⁹ Davidson, *Genesis 12-50*, 301.

¹⁹⁰ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 485-486.

Freedman and Cross maintain that the contents of the blessing are completed long before the eleventh century and circulated orally, and edited in the final form during the period of the Judges.¹⁹¹

However, many objections were raised against this view because the situation of some tribes is completely different from the period of Judges.¹⁹² Stigers asserts that Genesis 49 does not show the geographical location of most tribes in the land of Canaan except the tribes of Zebulun. Even in the case of Zebulun, Genesis 49 does not emphasize the geographical location but what will become of a people.¹⁹³ Also, Pfeiffer says, strictly speaking, the order of the geographical location is different from the period of Judges.¹⁹⁴ Moreover, it is hard to find the clear reason to reproach the tribe of Reuben so severely during the period of Judges.¹⁹⁵ G. Thomas also asserts that the period of Judges is

¹⁹¹ Cross and Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry*, 77.

¹⁹² Genesis 49 alludes to coastal territory for the tribe of Zebulun (v.13) but Zebulun was actually allotted inland in Joshua 19:10-16. Also, the tribe of Issachar is a relatively brave tribe in Judges 5:15 “into the valley they rushed at his heels,” but Genesis 49 draws contrarily the tribe of Issachar “so he bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant at forced labor.”

¹⁹³ H. Stigers, *A Commentary on Genesis*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 325.

¹⁹⁴ Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 275.

¹⁹⁵ Many scholars who hold this view assert that the tribe of Simeon disappeared in the early period of Judges. However, the number of the tribe of Simeon is written in the book of Chronicles as an important tribe to help for David’s kingship with other tribes. (1 Chron. 12:26). “from the Simeon, mighty men of valor for war, 7,100.” Also, in the period of the king of Josiah, the cities in which sons of Simeon dwelt appear with the cities of sons of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Naphtali (2 Chron. 34:6). It is right that the tribe of Simeon was moved by the kingdom of Assyria with other northern tribes when the northern kingdom fell. Moreover, the portion of the tribe of Simeon appears in the recovered cities in Ezekiel (Ezek. 48:24 and Rev. 7).

See more recent studies about the tribe of Simeon. Nadav Na’aman, “The Inheritance of the Sons of Simeon,” *ZDPV* 96 (1980): 136-152; M. Kartveit, *Motive und Schichten der Landtheologie in I Chronik 1-9*, ConBOT 28 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1989), 125-135; Matthias Augustin, “The Role of Simeon in the Book of Chronicles and in Jewish Writings of the Hellenistic-Roman Period,” in *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Division A: The Bible and Its World* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1990), Zecharia Kallai, “Simeon’s Town List: Scribal Rules and Geographical Patterns,” *VT* 53 (2003): 81-96. Y. Levin, “From Lists to History: Chronological Aspects of the Chroniclers’ Genealogies,” *JBL* 123, no.4 (Wint. 2004): 612.

unsuitable for the historical background of Genesis 49 because the tribe of Levi won the respect of Israel as the tribe of priests at that time. How is it possible that such a cursed poet belongs to the tribe of Levi? He adds that the poem draws the tribe of Judah to be big among other tribes. However, the tribe of Judah did not show prominence in the period of Judges. Even Judah did not appear in the song of Deborah.¹⁹⁶

2.2.2.3. The period of the united Monarchy

The period of the united Monarchy is one of the most popular periods among scholars with the period of Judges. Usually, the scholars who believe that the poem portion in Genesis 49 belongs to J document hold this view. Several evidences look to support this period, that is, Judah's leadership over other tribes, the familiarity of the writer with the scattering of the tribe of Levi, and the resembling geographical location of tribes.

In 1864 Reuss asserts that the background of Genesis 49 is the period of David or Solomon.¹⁹⁷ Mazar thinks the background of Genesis 49 cannot be earlier than the beginning of the Monarchy based on the Joseph story and the story of Shechem in Genesis 34.¹⁹⁸ Lindblom suggests that all circumstances of the poem relate to the early period of David when he became a king in Hebron over the tribe of Judah but not yet over Israel because the tribe of Judah was esteemed and 49:8-12 was the center of the blessing of Jacob.¹⁹⁹ De Vaux considers that the final collection of the poem is based in the time of

¹⁹⁶ Thomas, *Genesis*, 469, 471.

¹⁹⁷ Eduard Reuss, *Die Geschichte der Heiligen Schriften Neuen Testamentes*, 3rd German edition. (Braunschweig: Schwetschke, 1864), 626.

¹⁹⁸ Benjamin Mazar, "Historical background of the book of Genesis," *JNES* 28, no. 2 (Apr., 1969): 82-83.

¹⁹⁹ Johannes Lindblom, *The Political Background of the Shiloh Oracle*, VTsup 1 (Leiden: E J Brill, 1953), 78, 87.

David, but the poem possesses much pre-monarchical material.²⁰⁰ Dillmann maintains the geographical and historical condition of Genesis 49 indicates the period of Judges, at least, no later than the divided kingdom except for the blessing for Judah (vv. 8-12) because the poem does not allude to the period of Saul and the blessings for Issachar and Dan (vv.14-18) place it in the pre-monarchical period. The final edition is accomplished in the period of the kingdom rather than the period of Judges because Genesis 49 does not show the jealousy between the tribes of Judah and Joseph, rather the two tribes are equally praised.²⁰¹

However, this view should answer the question if the blessing of Jacob is composed in the period of David and Solomon, why then does it not drop direct allusion to that period but just allusion to the period of Judges? In addition, the order of the geographical location of the twelve tribes is not fit to this period in strict sense.

2.2.2.4. The period of the Divided Kingdom

The period of the divided kingdom as the background of Genesis 49 is popular with scholars in these days. This view supposes that Genesis 49 is originally written in the northern kingdom and edited in the southern kingdom at a later period. This view is supported by the evidence that Genesis 49 depicts the tribe of Joseph as equally important as the tribe of Judah and many words in Genesis 49 show characters of northern Israel's dialect.²⁰²

Kalisch asserts that the background of Genesis 49 cannot be the period of David

²⁰⁰ R. de Vaux, *La Genèse* in *La Sainte Bible de Jérusalem* (Paris: 1951), 210.

²⁰¹ Dillmann, *Genesis*, 2:446.

²⁰² Confer 2.1.2.6. for further characters of northern Israel in Genesis 49.

or Solomon but the period of the divided kingdom because the tribe of Ephraim obviously plays a leading role with the tribe of Judah in the rival relation.²⁰³ Macchi asserts that main parts of Genesis 49 are the writings from the period of Omri.²⁰⁴ Peters also supposes that Genesis 49 is the poem composed in the northern kingdom between the period of King Jeroboam I and Ahab. The northern migrants brought the composition to southern Judah just after the fall of the northern kingdom. The library of King Hezekiah edited and enlarged the composition. Peters asserts that Solomon's Song is another example of the literary compositions in the northern kingdom.²⁰⁵

However, some momentous questions were raised against this view. Genesis 49 does not show the rivalry and antagonism which obviously existed in the period of the divided kingdom between two tribes.²⁰⁶

2.2.2.5. The Exilic or Post-Exilic period

This view is mainly held by the scholars who believe that the Joseph story (Genesis 37-50) is written during the Persian period or after that time. They think Genesis 49 is finally edited by P editor even if it partly possesses more ancient sources.

Maly mentions that even though the contents of the poem show the period of Judges and the kingdom, the whole poem in the final form is inserted in the Book of Genesis in the post-exilic period.²⁰⁷ Schmitt asserts that Genesis 49:1-12 is a literature of

²⁰³ Marcus. M. Kalisch, *Genesis*, (London: Longman, 1858), 497-498.

²⁰⁴ Macchi, *Israël et ses tribus selon Genèse49*, 301-306.

²⁰⁵ Peters, "Jacob's Blessing," 113-114.

²⁰⁶ Dillmann, *Genesis*, 2:446.

²⁰⁷ Eugene H. Maly, *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1967), 45.

the post-exilic.²⁰⁸ D. Redford regards Genesis 37-50 as a Diaspora novelette of the Persian period.²⁰⁹ Meinhold maintains that the Joseph story (Genesis 37-50) is very similar to the book of Esther because the deity hardly ever intervenes in the whole story. Accordingly, Genesis 49 is literature from the Persian period.²¹⁰ Macchi suggests that the poems concerning the tribes of Judah, Joseph, and Benjamin come from the Persian period because the tribes of Benjamin and Judah were closely connected at that time (Cf. Zech. 10, Ezek. 37).²¹¹ Golka thinks the two blessings on the tribe of Judah and Joseph resemble the double leadership which post-exilic prophecies describe “two sons of oil” in Zechariah 4:14 or Ezekiel 40-48. He asserts that this is the main character of the writing in the Persian period.²¹² Schorn also believes the background of Genesis 49 is quite late, i.e. post exilic period. Schorn assumes that the so-called Nehemiah Circle had primary concerns on ethnic and religious purity after returning from Exile. They would reject the Reubenite territories in order to keep their identity. For that purpose, they edited Genesis 49 together with Judges 5 and Deuteronomy 33.²¹³

However, modern scholars tend to date the age of Biblical writing as late as possible because it is easy to say the writer/editor knew all past events and entered them in his writing. This is convenient but hardly convincing. The majority of critical scholars

²⁰⁸ H. C. Schmitt, “Josephsgeschichte und Deuteronomische Geschichtswerk: Genesis 38 und 48-50,” in *Deuteronomy and Deuteronomic literature: Festschrift C H W Brekelmans*, eds. Vervenne, M. and J. Lust, BETL 133 (Louvain: Leuven Univ Press, 1997), 396-399.

²⁰⁹ Redford, *the Biblical Story of Joseph*, 220-225.

²¹⁰ Arndt Meinhold, “Die Gattung der Josephsgeschichte und des Esterbuches: Diasporanovellen I & II,” *ZAW* 87 (1975): 306-324; *ZAW* 88 (1976): 72-93.

²¹¹ Macchi, *Israël et ses tribus selon Genese 49*, 110-112, 185-189, 245-248.

²¹² Golka “Genesis 37–50,” 160.

²¹³ Schorn, *Ruben*, 116-136.

agree that the main part of Genesis 49 belongs to J not P. Also, many portions in the blessing of Jacob are either directly or indirectly cited by other authors in the Hebrew Bible considerably earlier than the Persian period (e.g., Ps. 80: 1, 12-13. etc.).

As many scholars recognize, it is almost impossible to guess the historical background of each tribe from these very short individual poems (one or two verses except Judah, Joseph, and first three sons).²¹⁴ If one presents the historical background of a certain tribe from this brief poem, it will be merely plausible from imagination and not from historical evidence. Many critical scholars have also recognized this problem but they unequivocally say that it is very hard to know but not entirely impossible. Westermann says the *Sitz im Leben* of tribal sayings is problematic. However, the comparative study between Genesis 49, Deuteronomy 33, and Judges 5:14-18 would help to find the answer.²¹⁵

Sometimes, a poem can be more easily understood if one knows the historical background of a certain tribe. For example, the blessing on Asher (v.20) is hard to understand without any historical background. However, Form critics are excessively taken with *Sitz im Leben* or the historical background in literature. The *Sitz im Leben* is core to the form critics and their study would be meaningless if the *Sitz im Leben* could not be established for a particular form. Schmithals says that forms without a *Sitz im Leben* are really not forms as form criticism uses it.²¹⁶ However, we should find the historical background of a literature from the text itself and not from the presupposition or

²¹⁴ Kittel writes in the end of his dissertation "There is no answer for the question about the origin of the collection as it is known today."

²¹⁵ Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 221.

²¹⁶ W. Schmithals, "Formen ohne *Sitz im Leben* sind keine Formen im Sinne der Formgeschichte," *ZTK 77* (1980): 169, quoted in Pehlke, 53.

theory of scholars.

Richter writes,

“Any *Sitz im Leben* has to be based on verifiable data found in the literature. If that is not possible--and there are cases where that is true, one remains within the realm of conjecture; and one should say so.”²¹⁷

De Hoop also asserts, “In the case of Genesis 49 form criticism seems to function rather as the Procrustian bed in which the text and exegesis has to be forced rather than as a supporting tool for exegesis.”²¹⁸

Thomas says that we need precise interpretation of what the text says at first. When we encounter difficult texts we can interpret it better based on what history has shown. Yet, past history is not always an essential factor in interpreting earlier prophecy as that prophecy might still be in progress.²¹⁹

Therefore, as far as we cannot find decisive evidence which may gain widespread acceptance as the historical background of this poem or as far as we cannot find the evidence to reject the statement which this poem itself says, it is reasonable to accept the testimony which this poem presents, “Jacob proclaimed this blessing before his twelve sons (49:1-2).”

2.2.3. The Structure

The order of Jacob’s sons in Genesis 49 does not simply follow the birth order in Genesis 29 and 30 as well as the order of Deuteronomy 33 and Judges 5 except for the

²¹⁷ Wolfgang Richter, *Exegese als Literaturwissenschaft: Entwurf einer alttestamentlichen Literaturtheorie und Methodologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), 146.

²¹⁸ De Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 67.

²¹⁹ Thomas, *Genesis*, 470.

first four or six sons.²²⁰ Moreover, many different types of the tribal lists exist here and there in the Old Testament.²²¹ This unusual order raises scholarly interest in the structure of Genesis 49. Many have presented various explanations regarding the structure of Genesis 49. Three most persuasive structures among them will be examined in this section.²²²

2.2.3.1. Tribes' geographical location

This group of scholars asserts that even though Genesis 49 is written in the geographical order of tribes, it is not simply in geographical order but a mixed geographical order with birth order. This position is mainly held by the scholars who believe Genesis 49 is an individual collection of tribal sayings. They want to confirm the geographical array of tribes in Genesis 49 in connection with the historical period which they suggest, i.e. the period of Judges.

Kittel argues that the contents of the tribal sayings are almost exclusively

²²⁰ Aalders, *Genesis*, 2: 110-111, 269, says "there is no apparent reason for this unusual order." He supposes the discord between chapter 29 and 49 may be due to the fact that the order of Genesis 29 and 30 is not the exact chronological order. However, he asserts it does not mean the order of Genesis 49 is the exact chronological order. Also, Carl. E. Armerding, "The Last words of Jacob: Genesis 49," *BSac.* 112, no. 448 (Oct. 1945): 320, suggests the possibility that the order of Genesis 49 may be the "natural birth order." Noth asserts the order of Genesis 49 is primary in comparison to the birth narrative (Gen. 32-33)."

²²¹ See the related studies concerning this subject. M. Noth, *Das System der zwölf Stämme Israels*; A. D. H. Mayes, *Israel in the Period of the Judges* SBT 29 (London: SCM Press, 1974); H. M. Orlinsky, "The Tribal System of Israel and Related Groups in the Period of the Judges," in *Studies and essays in honor of Abraham A. Neuman* (Leiden: Brill, 1962); G. E. Mendenhall, "The Census Lists of Num. 1 and 26," *JBL* 77, no. 1 (Mr. 1958); Zecharia Kallai, *The Tribes of Israel: A Study in the Historical Geography of the Bible* (Jerusalem: Bialik Inst., 1967); idem., "The Twelve-Tribe Systems of Israel," *VT* 47, no. 1 (Ja. 1997): 53-90; K. Sparks, *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel*: (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998), idem., "Genesis 49 and the Tribal List Tradition in Ancient Israel," *ZAW* 115 (2003).

²²² In addition to the three structures, Waltke, *Genesis*, 603, suggests the poetry of Genesis 49 is divided by the prayer into two parts. Jacob's petition (v.18) cuts across the whole poetry. Waltke asserts this petition comes from Jacob's fierce hostilities. However, it is controversial for whom Jacob petitions in v. 18: for the tribe of Dan or for the whole tribe?

regarding the tribe's geographical location.²²³ Dillmann also suggests that the order of the tribes reflects their place of settlement from the south to the north: Dan, Gad, Asher, and Naphtali.²²⁴ Spurrel also asserts that Genesis 49 follows the geographical order, concretely, from the south to the north.²²⁵ Skinner divides Genesis 49 into three parts according to geographical structure: a southern group (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah), a northern group (Zebulun, Issachar, Dan (?), Gad, Asher, Naphtali) and a central group (Joseph, Benjamin).²²⁶

However, no scholars in this group explain why Genesis 49 is so mingled together and is not written according to simple geographical order or only birth order. In addition, if we carefully examine the order, we cannot place it in any era in the Old Testament because the order is in many cases so different from any historical order.

2.2.3.2. Chiastic structure (Leah, Bilhah-Zilpah, Zilpah-Bilhah, Rachel)

This view understands that Genesis 49 has the structure of two emphases in the front and the rear (chiastic structure). According to this view, the tribes are grouped according to the mothers (Leah's sons – concubine's sons – Rachel's sons). Scholars who accept this view generally agree that the blessing of Jacob emphasizes two tribes, Judah and Joseph, at the same time. Strictly speaking, they think the weight of Jacob's blessing is inclined on the tribe of Judah.

Sarna maintains the blessing of Jacob is arrayed according to the mothers and each group is in chronological order. He concludes that chiastic pattern unifies the

²²³ Kittel, "Die Stammessprüche Israels," 131.

²²⁴ Dillmann, *Genesis*, 2:446.

²²⁵ Spurrel, *Genesis*, 364.

²²⁶ Skinner, *Genesis*, 511.

blessing of Jacob.²²⁷ Waltke agrees with the view of Sarna.²²⁸ De Hoop argues that Genesis 49 is carefully and intentionally constituted in chiastic structure.²²⁹

However, some questions arise against this view. Why the sons of Leah are mixed with the sons of concubines in the middle part of Genesis 49. Why this poem has such an unusual structure.

2.2.3.3. Joseph-centered Structure

This view tries to understand the structure of Genesis 49 in the Joseph story (Gen. 37-50). Accordingly, Genesis 49 centers around the blessing of Joseph like the surrounding chapters in the Joseph story even though the detail order of the Jacob's sons is arranged according to their mothers.

Sailhamer says the central concern of the book of Genesis is blessing after Genesis 1:23. He gives attention to the fact that the word בִּרְךָ appears three times only in the blessing of Joseph. Accordingly, "by framing Jacob's last words between v.1 and v.28, the writer shows where his interests lie."²³⁰

Kaminski finds that the Pentateuch usually shows a peculiar structure, that is, the less important sons are placed first and more important sons are placed at the end. He shows several examples: Ishmael's *Toledot* precedes that of Isaac, Esau's *Toledot* comes before that of Jacob, and the genealogy of Cain is placed in advance of that of Seth. The sons of Rachel in Genesis 49 are also placed at the end after other sons. It shows the sons

²²⁷ Nahum. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 331.

²²⁸ Waltke, *Genesis*, 603.

²²⁹ De Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 232.

²³⁰ Sailhamer, *Genesis*, 2: 275.

of Rachel have the most important place in the structure of Genesis 49.²³¹

Good asserts that Jacob did not simply praise Judah in his blessing. Rather, Jacob cleverly rebuked Judah as he did the previous three sons by the use of ironical word play.²³² Good suggests that Jacob intentionally reminded Judah of the past two incidents concerning him, i.e. the selling of Joseph to Egypt in Genesis 37 and the incident concerning Tamar in Genesis 38. In verse 8 which is conventionally understood as a laudation to Judah, Good asserts that Jacob reminds Judah of his malicious attempt to remove Joseph in Genesis 37 with this sentence. The expression in verse 8, “your father’s sons shall bow down before you,” originally appeared in the dream of Joseph. Also, He asserts שִׁילָה (v.10) means the name of Judah’s third son, זָרַח and Jacobs reminds Judah’s wicked deed to Tamar in Genesis 38 in this abstruse Hebrew word. Consequently, he removes Judah from the center of the blessing of Jacob.²³³

Goldingay also says,

“It seems that Judah is disqualified from leadership by his marrying out and his recourse to an apparent prostitute: in the realm of marriage and sex he behaves more like Reuben (and Shechem, who provoked Simeon and Levi’s sin) than Joseph.”²³⁴

This view should harmonize the emphasis on Joseph in Genesis 49 with the emphasis of other Scriptures on Judah as the tribe from which the Messiah comes. For all that, it looks a more plausible view than any other views that Genesis 49 has the Joseph centered

²³¹ Carol M. Kaminski, *From Noah to Israel: Realization of the Primaevial Blessing After the Flood*, JSOTSup 413 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2004), 62.

²³² E. Good. “The Blessing on Judah,” *JBL* 82 (1963): 427-432.

²³³ Calum M. Carmichael, “Some Sayings in Genesis 49,” *JBL* 88 no. 4 (Dec. 1969): 435-444, also agrees with Good.

²³⁴ John Goldingay, “The Patriarchs in Scripture and History” in *Essays on the Patriarchal narratives*, ed. A. R. Millard and D. J. Wiseman (Leicester, England: Inter Varsity, 1980), 10.

structure as a part of the whole Joseph story even though it does not mean that the blessing of Jacob is given only for Joseph.

2.3. Summary

The importance of Genesis 49 has been recognized in the study of the Old Testament from early times because of its abstruse characteristics as well as ancient features. While the Jewish interpretations show the tendency to change the strong curse on the Jacob's sons to moderate words, the church fathers and Reformers show the tendency in connection between the deeds of Jacob's sons and the deeds of Christ and the church.

The assumption that Genesis 49 is a completely different insertion from the surrounding chapters provided an important starting point for the critical study on Genesis 49. Soon, many began to doubt the viability of a single author and unified composition of Genesis 49. Gressmann used the term "tribal sayings" in reference to Genesis 49 at first. Kittel, Gunneweg, and Zobel upgraded the theory of tribal sayings. Many scholars have studied Genesis 49 in comparison with Deuteronomy 33 and Judges 5 in dealing with priority and the reciprocal influence between the three chapters.

The archaeological discoveries in the early twentieth century brought a great shock to the study of the Pentateuch. In particular, three archaeological discoveries bear a close relation to the study of Genesis 49: the tablets at Nuzi, Ras Shamra, and Mari. They helped to extend our understanding about the social and cultural background of the Patriarchs. The discovery of the Ugaritic literatures contributed to the understanding of the form of Hebrew poetry and Hebrew lexicography.

The concern regarding Genesis 49 has gradually moved from the entire poem to the individual sayings such as the geographical background of the individual tribal

sayings. While the former scholars attribute Genesis 49 to the southern Judean kingdom because of its emphasis on Judah, the later scholars maintain many portions in Genesis 49 originated in the northern kingdom although the last edition of the poem comes from the southern Judean kingdom.

Genre

It is important to designate the genre of Genesis 49 in order to grasp the whole characteristic of the poem. The genre “tribal sayings” has been widely accepted for a long time. Yet, the recent scholars raised questions regarding the theory because Judges 5 is the poem in a particular situation of war and Deuteronomy 33 shows no commonness between the individual sayings. In addition, Genesis 49 shows a single unit poem and does not contain a collection as with tribal sayings. Accordingly, the genre of “tribal sayings” does not exist in the related chapters.

“The Deathbed Testament” or “Farewell Speech” are suggested by some scholars for the genre of Genesis 49. However, the common features of “Testament” are absent in Genesis 49, especially regarding the middle part characters: reminiscence of the past; instructions to descendents; and prediction of the future. The term “Testament” is moreover too inclusive and gives excessively strong nuance which suggests that Genesis 49 is “Jacob’s last will.”

Although Genesis 49 contains several curses, other scholars prefer to name Genesis 49 “blessing.” The Old Testament frequently shows curses in the scene of blessing. Also, the curses to the individual tribes may become a real “blessing” in the destiny of the blessing of the whole nation.

Historical Background

There is no agreement among the scholars concerning the historical background of individual poems in Genesis 49.

Traditionally it has been believed that Jacob spoke here. However, modern scholars think Genesis 49 contains several incredible contents: the specific geographical location of some tribes, Judah's kingship, and the dispersion of the tribe of Levi.

The scholars who held the theory of tribal sayings mainly support the period of Judges for the geographical location of Zebulun, the scattered status of Levi and the insignificant position of Reuben. However, Genesis 49 draws the tribe of Judah too big though Judah did not show prominence in the period of Judges.

The period of the united Monarchy is supported by the scholars who believe that the poem belongs to the J document because of Judah's leadership, the writer's recognition for the scattering of Levi, and the geographical location of tribes. Yet, the poem does not make any direct allusion to the period of the united Monarchy but to the period of Judges.

The other scholars designate to the period of the divided kingdom. This view supposes that Genesis 49 was originally written in the northern kingdom and edited in the southern kingdom at a later period. Although this view provides the solution why two emphases exist in the poem, Genesis 49 does not show the rivalry and antagonism which obviously existed in that period.

The Exilic or the post Exilic period is one mainly held by the scholars who believe the Joseph story was written during the Persian period or after that time and Genesis 49 is finally edited by P editor. Yet, many portions in the blessing of Jacob are directly or indirectly quoted by many early authors in the Hebrew Bible.

Structure

Many have presented various explanations regarding the structure of Genesis 49 because the order of Jacob's sons in Genesis 49 is different from the birth order in Genesis 29 and 30 as well as the order of Deuteronomy 33 and Judges 5.

Geographical location This group's scholars assert that Genesis 49 is mixed with geographical order and birth order. This position is mainly held by the scholars who believe Genesis 49 is tribal sayings. Yet, it is still questionable why Genesis 49 is so mingled together and is not written according to simple geographical order or according to birth order.

Chiastic Structure This view understands that the structure of Genesis 49 has two points in the front and the rear. According to this view, the tribes are grouped according to mothers (Leah's sons – concubine's sons – Rachel's sons) and Genesis 49 focuses two tribes, Judah and Joseph, at the same time. Strictly speaking, the weight of the blessing is bestowed on the tribe of Judah. However, there are still questions: why this poem has such an unusual structure.

Joseph centered Structure This view understands the structure of Genesis 49 in relation to the Joseph story. Genesis 49 places the blessing on Joseph in the center like the surrounding Joseph story. Yet, this view should harmonize between the emphasis on Joseph in Genesis 49 and other Scriptures which focus on Judah as the tribe from which the Messiah comes.

In conclusion, the studies of the previous scholars mainly focused on the process of the formation of Genesis 49, the historical and political background, and the relationship with the surrounding chapters of Genesis 49. Archaeological discovery deepens an understanding about the lifestyle and custom of the patriarchal period and is

useful for the understanding of individual poetry in Genesis 49.

On the basis of the prior studies, this dissertation is concerned with the meaning and role of the individual blessing (especially, the first three sons) in Genesis 49. It will be important to grasp that the blessing of Jacob is not a simple collection from independent sayings but a composition crafted carefully and intentionally by an author or editor. This leads to compare the curse on the first three sons with the blessing on the other sons. It is also necessary to classify Genesis 49 within a certain genre before proceeding to the individual poem. “The Blessing of Jacob” is then the most apt name for Genesis 49 when we consider the entire theme of the book of Genesis. Finally, for the structure of Genesis 49, it is clear that Genesis 49 has the Joseph centered structure as a part of the Joseph story even though it does not mean the blessing of Jacob is given only to Joseph. The investigation may now proceed to the discussion of the passage of Jacob’s blessing on the first three sons.

CHAPTER 3

AN EXEGETICAL INVESTIGATION OF GENESIS 49:3-7

3.1. Introduction

Scholarly opinions and main issues concerning Genesis 49 were examined in Chapter 2. In the present chapter, the study will focus on the passages dealing with the first three condemned sons, Reuben, Simeon and Levi. As stated in the introduction, that Jacob begins condemning his first three sons on his deathbed seems striking. It is almost inconceivable that a father would pronounce curses on his sons at his deathbed. Granted although it is true that this poem is a tribal collection circulated amongst twelve tribes, it is hard to understand that only three tribes are severely reproached in the amphictyony.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Genesis 49 must be dealt with in close relation to the larger picture of the whole book of Genesis. The “Blessing” theme has flowed continually from the creation story in chapter 1 (v. 28) through all the chapters. The author/editor of Genesis intentionally put Jacob’s blessing at the end of the book. Longacre rightly asserts that Genesis 49 is the highest point in the theme of blessing in the book of Genesis.²³⁵ Like his father Isaac, Jacob blesses his twelve sons at the end of his life. When the author/editor calls Genesis 49 “Blessing” (49:28), it will not mean that because the majority of Jacob’s sons were blessed, the curses on the other sons are of no consequence. If some of Jacob’s sons were excluded from blessing, can we say “This is real blessing?” Only when all of Jacob’s sons are included in the blessing, can we say “This is blessing.” The passage in Genesis 49: 28 testifies that “All these are the twelve tribes of Israel. This

²³⁵ Longacre, *Joseph*, 23.

is what their father said to them as he blessed them, blessing each with the blessing suitable to him.” Jacob blessed all his sons with a suitable blessing for each son.

3.1.1.1. The scholarly solutions for the blessings on the first three sons

Many scholars have questioned why the first three sons are cursed in the blessing of Jacob.²³⁶ Those scholars have often looked outside of Genesis 49 for the reason. The scholarly solutions provided can be classified in four main groups.

First, some scholars have offered the answer that Genesis 49 does not belong to the genre “blessing” but rather it is a “deathbed testament,” or “prophetic sayings.”²³⁷ So then it would not seem strange that the poetry contains some curses. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, this idea cannot be the solution because Genesis 49 does not show the character of the genre of “testament.” Also, it raises another question namely “Why did the author/editor place the testament of Jacob in the structure of blessing (49:28)? Moreover, the solution does not fit the larger picture of the book of Genesis, “Blessing.”

Secondly, other scholars have attempted to find the answer in the course of formation or redaction of the poetry. They believe that the poem in Genesis 49 is not a single poem but has individually circulated for a long period and then collected at one

²³⁶ Some scholars maintain that Jacob condemned or cursed the other sons as well. Yet the curses on the other sons are unconvincing except for the curses on the first three sons:

Issachar - Gevartz, “Simeon and Levi in the Blessing of Jacob,” 114; “The Issachar Oracle in the Testament of Jacob,” 104-112; Skinner, *Genesis*, 513, S. Drivers, *Genesis*, 387, and Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 242.

Asher - Gevartz, “Asher in the Blessing of Jacob,” 154-163; Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 242, supposes the blessing on Asher was given as sarcasm.

Naphtali - K. Ellinger, “Naphtali,” *IDB*, 3:509, writes that the blessing on Naphtali is negative.

Dan - M. P. O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1980), 428

Zebulun - Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 242, asserts that Zebulun also received light blame.

Judah - E. Good, “The Blessing on Judah,” 427-432 argues that Jacob reproached Judah like the first sons. C. M. Carmichael, “Some Sayings in Genesis 49,” 435-444, agrees with Good.

Benjamin - O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 428.

²³⁷ Sarna, *Genesis*, 346, understands the word בָּרַךְ here “he bade farewell” as in Gen. 47:7, 10, for a discussion of the genre of Genesis 49, see the preceding chapter, 2.2.1.

time. Naturally it contains various elements like blessing, curse, wish, prayer, hymn, and thanksgiving psalms.²³⁸ Some scholars in this group assert that the original sayings on the first three tribes contain positive contents but they were changed to negative contents by an editor at a later period.²³⁹ Other scholars suggest that the three cursed tribes were not from the original lists but were added in the later period.²⁴⁰ However, these claims must be refuted because the poem shows an inseparable relationship with the surrounding chapters in Genesis. Also, the poem shows a cautiously and intentionally developed structure as a unit. Numerous pieces of evidence confirm that the poem is a single composition.²⁴¹

Thirdly, some other scholars have sought the reason from the redactor's political and social circumstances in the later period. For instance, some scholars think that the curse on Reuben came in the present poem after the tribe of Reuben disappeared in the history of Israel.²⁴² The other supposes that the political circumstance in the post exilic period would not include the territory of Reuben as part of the Jewish land in order to protect the purity of the Jews.²⁴³ The other still suggests that the poem was composed long after the tribe of Simeon was absorbed into that of Judah and after the tribe of Levi

²³⁸ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 416, asserts, "the aphorisms have no generally common feature at all." cf. Davidson, *Genesis 12-50*, 301; S. Beyerle, *Der Mosesegen*, 274-275.

²³⁹ Sparks, "Genesis 49 and the Tribal List," 331, asserts that Reuben was praised in the original northern list but the negative contents (v. 4) are added in the course of the redaction in Judah in the later period.

²⁴⁰ O. Eissfeldt, *Hexateuch-Synopse* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1922), 22-30, stated that the sayings on Reuben (Gen. 49:3-4) and on Simeon and Levi (Gen. 49:5-7) were not actually tribal sayings. Also, Macchi, *Israël et ses tribus selon Genèse 49*, 41-54, says the tribes of Reuben, Simeon and Levi are an addition from a later time because of the negative contents.

²⁴¹ For further details of the structural unity of Genesis 49, see 2.1.1. and 3.2.1. Also, De Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 624-630.

²⁴² Westerman, *Genesis*, 225, "This old and genuine tribal saying was reshaped on the basis of the tradition in Gen. 35:22 when the tribe of Reuben no longer existed."

²⁴³ U. Schorn, *Ruben und das System der zwölf Stämme Israels*, BZAW 248 (Berlin: W. De Gruyter, 1997), 116-136.

was scattered in Israel.²⁴⁴ However, these kinds of attempts which are rooted in the belief, *vaticinici ex eventu*, are quite obscure. As discussed in Chapter 2, it is practically impossible to grasp the concrete political and social circumstance of the redactor from this rather brief poem. Accordingly, the attempts are some doubtful conjectures not from historical evidence.²⁴⁵

Finally, some other scholars find reasons for the curse on the first three sons in the earlier parts in Genesis. They think that Reuben, Simeon, and Levi committed a terrible sin which is enough to be cursed by Jacob differently to Jacob's other sons.²⁴⁶ So to speak, Reuben committed adultery with his father's concubine (35:22) and Simeon and Levi atrociously massacred and plundered at Shechem (Chapter 34). Accordingly, such a severe judgment cannot be evaded from them. However, calling forth Jacob's harsh imprecation, were the deeds of Reuben, Simeon, and Levi much more evil than those of Jacob's other sons? Genesis says that the deeds of the other sons were no better than the deeds of the first three sons. Chapter 34 testifies that the other sons also participated in the invasion on Shechem. Lehming asserts that Simeon and Levi are not key actors in the affairs of Shechem but rather all of the sons of Jacob.²⁴⁷ Besides, Jacob's sons tried to kill and they eventually sold Joseph to Egypt despite Reuben's objection. Judah was the mastermind behind the selling of his brother (Chapter 37). They frequently lied to their

²⁴⁴ Some scholars suggest that the tribe of Reuben was also absorbed by Judah. According to their assumption, the Reubenites originally dwelt in the west of Jordan with other, so-called Leah tribes. cf. E.g., J. Pedersen, *Israel, Its Life and Culture*, vol. I-II, (London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1946), 15; H. H. Rowley, *From Joseph to Joshua*, (London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1952), 111; Adolphe Lods, *Israel From its Beginnings to the Middle of the Eighth Century*, trans. S. H. Hooke (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), 331; Martin Noth, *The History of Israel*, trans. Stanley Godman, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), 63-65; John Briggs Curtis, "Some Suggestions Concerning the History of the Tribe of Reuben," *JBR* 33 no. 3 (Jl., 1965): 247-249.

²⁴⁵ For further details, see 2.2.2.

²⁴⁶ Marcus Dods, *The Book of Genesis*, (New York: Armstrong and Son, 1887), 419.

²⁴⁷ S. Lehming, "Zur Überlieferungsgeschichte von Gen 34," *ZAW* 70 (1958): 228-250. Also, U. Schorn, *Ruben und das System*, 373-378.

father (37:32; 38:11) and fought each other (45:24). The deeds of the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah were also bad (37:2). Also, Judah committed adultery with his daughter-in-law (Chapter 38). Despite all of this, Jacob only condemns the first three sons. Since it is so, the above explanation does not appear tenable.

In spite of various attempts to explain it, the harsh curses on the first three sons still remain a mystery. Accordingly, the reasons for the curses in the blessing of Jacob can be found by an exegetical investigation and not by facts of the outside of the Scriptural text. Also, the relationship between blessing and curse in the Scripture will help to give an answer to the problem.

3.1.2. The significance of the “blessings” on the first three sons

Westermann asserts, “The first two texts, vv. 3-4 (Reuben) and vv. 5-7 (Simeon and Levi), diverge markedly from the others in form and content.”²⁴⁸ Davidson also writes that except for Reuben, Simeon and Levi together with Judah and Joseph, “Other sections express no value judgment at all, but are purely factual statements.”²⁴⁹ As some scholars recognize, the blessings on Reuben, Simeon and Levi occupy an important position in the blessing of Jacob not only because they are peculiarly cursed sons but also because they have several significant aspects (the length, the form, and the contents).

In view of the length, the condemnation of the first three sons occupies a longer part than Jacob’s blessings on the other sons. Along with the blessings on Judah and Joseph, the first three sons play an important part in the whole section of Jacob’s blessing. In fact, fifteen of the twenty-five verses pertain to Judah (five verses [49:8-12]), Joseph

²⁴⁸ Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 221.

²⁴⁹ Davidson, *Genesis 12-50*, 301.

(five verses [49:22-26]), and the first three sons (five verses [49:3-7]). Waltke asserts that this sixty percent ratio corresponds to “their importance in the preceding narrative and in the future narrative of the Primary History.”²⁵⁰ The blessings on the other five sons occupy barely one line each in length.

Wenham asserts,

“Longacre’s observations may be developed further in that another five verses of the Testament (vv3-7) concern brothers who are also mentioned by name in the Joseph story, i.e., Reuben and Simeon (37:21-22, 29-30; 42:22, 37; 48:5; 42:24, 36; 43:23)... Finally it should be noted that it is only the four sons whom Jacob concentrates on here, Reuben, Simeon, Judah, and Joseph, whose names are explained at their birth by reference to the divine name Yahweh (the Lord; 29:32-35; 30:24); by this device these four sons are marked out from birth as the key players in the drama that unfolds in Gen. 29-50.”²⁵¹

As to the contents, as Dillmann points out, the blessings of Jacob surprisingly show the absence of the connection with the present, except in the case of Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. Also, the blessings on many sons are no more than the simple interpretation of their names, for instance, Judah (v.8), Zebulun (v.13), Dan (v.16), and Gad (v.19).²⁵²

Also, in view of the forms, the saying pronounced on Reuben together with that of Judah (v.8) and Joseph (v.25, 26) are only spoken in the second person, contrary to the remaining blessings which were spoken in the third person. Gunkel asserts “Direct

²⁵⁰ Waltke, *Genesis*, 603.

²⁵¹ Wenham, *Genesis*, 469.

²⁵² Dillmann, *Genesis*, 2:447.

address occurs in especially passionate passages, also in prophetic style.”²⁵³

Accordingly, we must not regard the blessings on the first three sons as one of the ordinary twelve. Rather, the first three cursed sons play a pivotal role in the blessing of Jacob like the blessings on Judah or Joseph in which scholars have already shown extraordinary interest.

3.2. Exegesis of Jacob’s Blessing on Three Sons

It is essential to comprehend the contents of the Jacob’s blessings on the first three sons in order to solve the mystery of the curses on the first three sons. Because the blessing of Jacob is written in the form of poetry, it is necessary to analyze the structure of the poem at first. It is well known that analyzing the structure of Hebrew poems is one of the most difficult tasks. There is little agreement on it although Biblical scholars have long endeavored to comprehend the structure of Semitic poetry. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the first and foremost characteristic of systematical structure of the Hebrew poem is “parallelism.”²⁵⁴ Accordingly, it is inevitable to pay attention to the parallelism in the structure of the present poem and try to analyze the poem metrically. While scholars like Kugel assert that Semitic poetry must not be understood in metric and rhythmic but in syntactic sense,²⁵⁵ other scholars recognize the existence of meter in the Biblical Hebrew

²⁵³ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 454.

²⁵⁴ J. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 32, 301.

²⁵⁵ Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry*, 32, concludes either that “no meter has been found because none exists” or that “parallelism is the only meter of biblical poetry.” Also, Dennis Pardee, “Ugaritic and Hebrew metrics,” in *Ugarit in Retrospect: Fifty Years of Ugarit and Ugaritic*, ed. Gordon D. Young, (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 113-130, especially, 128.

W. Whallon, “Formulaic Poetry in the Old Testament,” *Comparative Literature* 15 (1963): 2, “Hebraic parallelism may... be considered a prosodic requirement analogous to the Homeric hexameter and the Anglo-Saxon alliteration.”

poem.

Herder asserts,

“And has not the Hebrew parallelism the simplest proportion and symmetry in the members of its verse, in the structures of its figures and sounds? The syllables were not indeed yet accurately scanned and measured, or even numbered at all, but the dullest ear can perceive symmetry in them.”²⁵⁶

The poems in Genesis 49 also evidence the metrical character.

On the one hand, Niccacci presents that four parallelisms exist in Hebrew poetry:²⁵⁷

1. Grammatical parallel: (number, gender, tense, ‘double-duty’ elements etc.).

Niccacci asserts that the order in the Grammatical parallel usually shows chiasmic: predicate-subject // subject-predicate. Also, the grammatical parallelism comprises two phenomena: negative (a) // positive verb (b); singular // plural; noun-finite verb (and object) // noun (participle and direct object)-finite verb.

2. Lexical parallel: (word-pairs, abstract // concrete etc.).
3. Semantic parallel: (traditionally called synonymous, antithetical and synthetic).
4. Phonologic parallel: both beginning with *mem*, and metrically similar, both having the same number of syllables and accent pattern.

Osborne also classifies the parallelism in Hebrew poetry according to the contents: synonymous parallelism, step (synthetic) parallelism, climactic parallelism, antithetical parallelism, introverted parallelism, and incomplete parallelism.²⁵⁸

The present poems will be analyzed according to these classifications of the

²⁵⁶ J. G. Herder, *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, (Burlington, Vt. E. Smith: 1833), 39. Also, similarly, Patrick Miller, “Meter, Parallelism, and Tropes: The Search For Poetic Style,” *JSOT* 28 (1984): 99-106.

²⁵⁷ A. Niccacci, “Analysing Biblical Hebrew Poetry,” *JSOT* 74 (1997): 77-78, 91-92.

²⁵⁸ Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1991).

parallelisms.

3.2.1. Reuben (49:3-4)

3.2.1.1. Translation

3A	Reuben, you are my firstborn,	רְאוּבֵן בְּכֹרִי אֶתָּה
3B	my strength, and the beginning of my vigor,	כֹּחִי וְרֵאשִׁית אוֹנִי
3C	Excelling of dignity and excelling of power.	יִתְרָ 259 שְׂאֵת וַיִּתְרָ עִז:
4A	Recklessness like waters, you will not excel	פָּחַז כַּמַּיִם אֶל־תִּתְרָ
4B	for you went up the bed of your father.	כִּי עָלִיתָ מִזְשֻׁכְּבֵי אָבִיךָ
4C	Then you defiled the couch of his concubine.	אִז חִלַּלְתָּ יְצוּעֵי עֲלָה:

3.2.1.2. Transliteration²⁶⁰ and metrical analysis²⁶¹

Three methods are popularly used for metrical analysis: syllable counting system, traditional stress system, and word counting system.²⁶² Each counting system has strong and weak points. The syllable-counting method will be adopted for determining metrical patterns of the present poems. The MT text will be used for syllable-counting. Although re-pointing to MT is used in the translation, the emendation will not be included in transliteration. Some scholars point out the necessity of the distinction between long

²⁵⁹ Speiser, *Genesis*, 364, a construct adjective; cf. The cognate Akk. Water.

²⁶⁰ The transliteration of BHT (Transliterated BHS Hebrew Old Testament, 2001, transliterated by Matthew Anstey) is used.

²⁶¹ Some scholars use this system. Cf. Freedman, "Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy: An Essay on Biblical Poetry," *JBL* 96, no. 1 (Mar., 1977): 12; Dahood, "A New Metrical Pattern in Biblical Poetry," *CBQ* 29 (1967): 574-579.

²⁶² Freedman, "Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy," 12; Duanel L. Christensen, "The Song of Jonah: A Metrical Analysis," *JBL* 104 no. 2 (1985): 220-222.

vowels and short vowels.²⁶³ However, such distinction will not be used in this metrical analysis because MT hardly ever reflects the actual pronunciation of words at the time of composition.²⁶⁴ Some scholars prefer the accent-counting system. Yet, syllables exist more than accents in a line. Accordingly, syllable counting has the advantage of avoiding the element of subjectivity. Although syllable counting is also not perfect at the present stage, it will be helpful to understand metrical patterns of the present poem.

		Total	
3A rəʔûbēn bəkōrî ʔattā ^h	3-3-2	7	
3B kōḥî wərēʔšîṭ ʔônî	2-3-2	7	
3C yéter šəʔēt wəyéter ʕāz	2-2-3-1	8	
4A páḥaz kammáyim ʔal-tôṭar	2-3-1-2	8	
4B kî ʕālîṭā miškəbê ʔābîkā ²⁶⁵	1-3-3-2	9	
4C ʔāz ḥilláltā yəṣûʕî ʕālā ^h	1-3-3-2	9	
		48	

The poem of Reuben shows a perfect metrical balance. According to the metrical analysis above, the metrical structure shows three plain distiches (7:7; 8:8; 9:9) in contrast to the contents analysis which is naturally divided into two tristichs in contents (v.3 Extolling; v.4 Denouncing). Consequently, although 3C and 4A do not show any

²⁶³ Christensen, “The Song of Jonah,” 220-222.

²⁶⁴ Freedman, “Strophe and Meter in Exodus 15,” in *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1980), 192.

²⁶⁵ Freedman, “Strophe and Meter,” 203, asserts that the Masoretic vocalization of second masculine singular forms of the suffixes attached to nouns and verbs (with final a) were not pronounced. If the final “a” is counted, this line will be metricaly unbalanced.

parallelism in contents, metrical parallelism appears impressively between 3C and 4A. Skinner also says, “The trimester measure is easily traced throughout by following the Hebrew accents.”²⁶⁶

3.2.1.3. Structural analysis

3A Introduction

3B Extolling

3C More extolling

4A Punishment

4B Cause – Reuben’s wicked deeds

4C Cause – Reuben’s detail wicked deeds

The poem on Reuben is divided into two tristichs in content. Verse 3 and verse 4 show obvious antithetical parallelism in the structure. The drastic contrast between verse 3 and verse 4 have the effect of showing Reuben’s destiny more tragically because of the contrast with what ought to have been his destiny.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁶ Skinner, *Genesis*, 515.

²⁶⁷ Walter R. Bowie, *Genesis*, Interpreter’s Bible, ed. George A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952), 819.

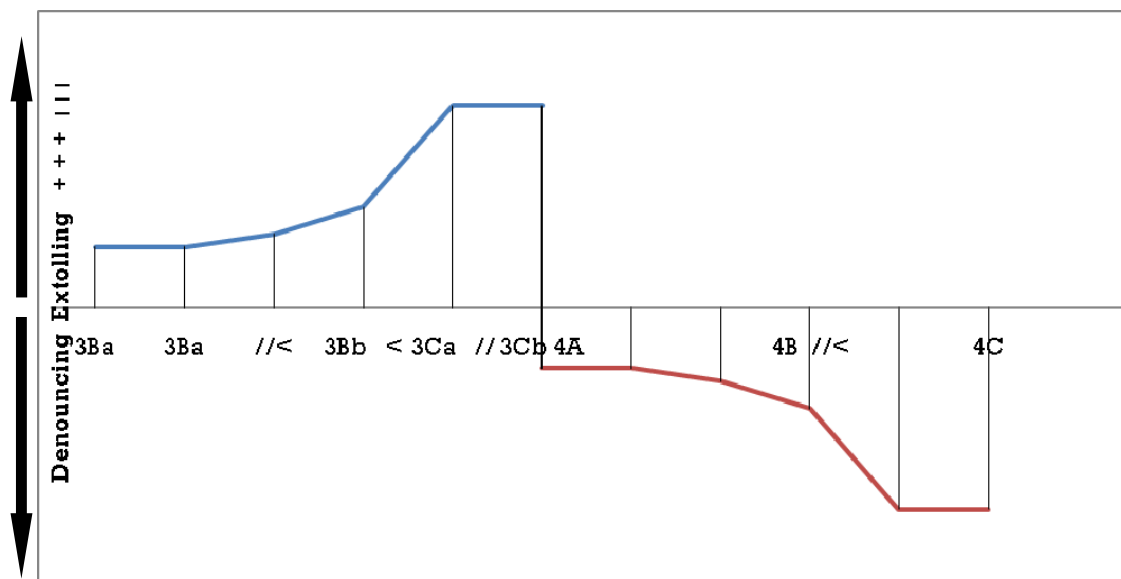


Fig 1. The structure of the blessing on Reuben

3A // 3B אַתָּה // בְּכָרִי רֵאשִׁית בְּכָרִי Deut. 21:17, Pss. 78:51, and 105:36.

אַתָּה // בְּכָרִי Job 40:16; Isa. 40:29.

3B אוֹנִי // כְּחִי Job 40:16; Isa. 40:26; 29 Step (synthetic) parallelism. my
might //< the beginning of my strength.

3C יִתֵּר // יִתֵּר Joel 1:4; Jer. 39:9; 52:15; Ezek. 34:18; Qoh. 2:13; Ex. 10:15;
12:10; 29:34; Lev. 10:12; Deut. 28:54; 1 Kings 20:30; 2 Kings 25:11; Jer.
27:19.

שָׂאת // עָז Semantic Parallelism. Deut. 28:50 (?)

3Ca // 3Cb עָז יִתֵּר // שָׂאת יִתֵּר Parallel. Excelling of exaltation // excelling of
power

3B // 3C Step (synthetic) parallelism. Might, strength //< Excelling

3C // 4A יִתֵּר // פָּחַז Antithetical parallelism.²⁶⁸ Gunkel asserts that two words

²⁶⁸ Although the noun פָּחַז only occurs here, the two words are a pair which shows the remarkable contrast between two situations. Accordingly, it can be called a parallelism.

are a powerful idiom which is a good example of the abstract for the concrete.²⁶⁹

4B // 4C Grammatical parallel (VO // VO).

4C עלה //< חלל you went up //< you profaned. Step (synthetic) parallelism.

These verbs cannot be found in parallel in other places but De Hoop mentions as an analogous parallelism. Cf. Amos 2:7.²⁷⁰

מִשְׁכְּבֵי אָבִיךָ // יְצוּעֵי עֲלָה parallel. The bed of your father // the couch of fellow wife.²⁷¹

3A // 4B רְאוּבֵן // אָבִיךָ This is an analogous parallelism from the etymology of the name Reuben, “Behold, a son (Gen. 29:32).²⁷²

3A // 4B בְּכָרִי // אָבִיךָ (Jer. 31:9).

An abundance of parallelism is a salient feature of the poem on Reuben. The parallelisms appear not only in couplet or triplet, but also between the different parts of this poem. De Hoop concludes that such composition techniques confirm that the text of Genesis 49 is “a carefully composed work of art.”²⁷³

²⁶⁹ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 454.

²⁷⁰ De Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 96, n. 95.

²⁷¹ The Massoretic Text is emended in this parallel. For further detail, see 3.2.1.4.

²⁷² De Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 96, n. 96.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 228.

3.2.1.4. Content Analysis

Verse 3

3A אֶתְּךָ Speiser asserts that the pronoun is appositional in “You, Reuben.”²⁷⁴ Yet, Westermann asserts this is predicative: “Reuben, you are my firstborn.”²⁷⁵ Gevirtz supposes אֶתְּךָ must be joined to 3B as the subject. He interprets it as “Reuben, my firstborn, you are my power.”²⁷⁶ Because Speiser’s supposition looks unnatural to Hebrew grammar and syntax and Gevirtz’s one violates balance between 3A and 3B, the interpretation in the sense of predicative appears tenable. “Reuben, you are my firstborn.”

3B אֹנִי “my power,” can also have another meaning: “sorrow, trouble” cf. *ben-’oni*, “son of my sorrow,” Gen. 35:18; Job 5:6.²⁷⁷ However, “my power” is more fitting than “my sorrow” in the text.

3C יָתֵר “outstanding,” “excelling.” Though used twice here, it is rare elsewhere in the Old Testament with this sense (Isa. 56:12 and Ps. 31:24). The word usually refers to the remnant or remainder of the portion less in quality but more in quantity.²⁷⁸ It shows Reuben had plenty of scope for dignity and power.

שָׂאָה Some scholars suggest different translation from the ordinary understanding.

²⁷⁴ Speiser, *Genesis*, 364.

²⁷⁵ Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 224.

²⁷⁶ Gevirtz, “The Reprimand of Reuben,” 88.

²⁷⁷ BDB, §248.

²⁷⁸ J. E. Hartley, “יָתֵר” in *TWOT*.

Gevirtz suggests **תשא** to mean “authority.” According to Gevirtz, parallelism of this word does not appear in the Scripture. Instead, he finds **תשא**<ר> // **ע** parallelism from the rabbinic sources and Qumran literatures.²⁷⁹ Gevirtz attributes the absence of *resh* in our text to haplography or the scribal practice of writing a letter but once when the same consonant both ended the preceding and began the following word. However, according to Millard’s study, *scriptio continua* was not a practice of early Hebrew scribes though the practice can be frequently found in Hellenistic writings.²⁸⁰

Gunkel renders **תשא** to **שא**. Its meaning becomes “the arrogant, destructive roaring of the sea and of Leviathan.”²⁸¹ Macchi also argues that **תשא** carries negative connotations in the Hebrew Bible. This word was used to designate a characteristic of God, Leviathan, and Babylon elsewhere (Exod. 15:2; Ps. 62:5; Hab. 1:7). It commonly provokes fear in others in each case.²⁸² Accordingly, he asserts that verse 3 also has negative meaning as does verse 4. However, none of these suggestions has gained widespread acceptance because **תשא** does not have a negative meaning in the view of parallelism with the next line.

The word **תשא** can also be Qal, infinitive of **נשא** which frequently occurs in the Old Testament (almost 600 times in Qal form and has three basic meanings: "to lift up,"

²⁷⁹ Gevirtz, “The Reprimand of Reuben,” 89-91. Also, Dahood, “Northwest Semitic Notes on Genesis,” 81, agrees with the suggestion of Gevirtz.

²⁸⁰ A. R. Millard, “‘*Scriptio continua*’ in Early Hebrew,” *JSS* 15 (Spring 1970): 12-14.

²⁸¹ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 454.

²⁸² Macchi, *Israël et ses tribus selon Genèse 49*, 41-54. Sparks, “Genesis 49 and the Tribal List,” 339, comments, “Macchi’s reading turns the traditionally positive phrases, **יתר שא** and **ען ויתר**, into negative comments about the tribe, hence removing the tensions between 49,3 and 49,4 that might suggest a contrast between an older positive saying (v.3) and a redactional curse (v. 4). . . .”

"to bear, to carry," and "to take, take away").²⁸³ The Old Testament shows the similarly derived words from נשא, for example, נשא "the lifted one, chief (Gen. 23:6)," מִשְׁאָה "the uplifted cloud (Isa. 30:27)."²⁸⁴ Accordingly, שֵׂאֵת can be rendered as meaning "grandeur, pride, excellence, dignity." The most striking thing is that שֵׂאֵת is used to refer to the grandeur of God in Job 13:11, 31:23, and Exodus 15:2. Jacob describes here how the status of Reuben was extremely outstanding in majesty and power as his firstborn. Westermann mentions that the predicates extolling Reuben as the firstborn in verse 3 are striking and very forceful.²⁸⁵ Verse 3 ends with the status of Reuben being placed at the highest point.

Verse 4

4A The meaning of פָּחַז כַּמַּיִם is uncertain. פָּחַז is a hapax legomenon. This word is one of the most difficult problems in Genesis 49 as well as in the blessing on Reuben. Scholars from ancient times have presented many different interpretations. Even some suspects corruption of the text because of the troubled character. The presented interpretations are very diverse.

For example:

Unstable as water – KJV, RSV; Turbulent as water – CSB, NIV;

Wily (deceptively) as water – De Hoop,²⁸⁶ Rubin.²⁸⁷

²⁸³ W. C. Kaiser, "נשא" in *TWOT*.

²⁸⁴ BDB, §6337, 6349.

²⁸⁵ Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 224.

²⁸⁶ De Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 86

²⁸⁷ Aaron D. Rubin, "Genesis 49:4 in Light of Arabic and Modern South Arabian," *VT* 59 (2009): 499-502.

Uncontrolled as water – NJB, NAS

Bubbling over as water – Spurrel.²⁸⁸

Run riot as water – LXX

Pouring as water – Vulgate

Following your own direction as water – *Tg. Onq.*

Overflowing as water – Dillmann.²⁸⁹

Destructive as water – NET, Pehlke.²⁹⁰

Many scholars have placed excessive emphasis on the simile “like water” to solve the problem of פָּחַז כַּמַּיִם. Westermann asserts, “This meaning of the verb is not attested but only deduced from the כַּמַּיִם.”²⁹¹ However, the simile “like water” will not be a great help to understand the puzzling word פָּחַז.

Some searched for the answer from similar words from other extra biblical literatures by comparative linguistics. Spurrel asserts that the root of פָּחַז means in Arabic “to be boastful, to be gloried” and in Aramaic “to be lascivious.” Hence, he supposes it to mean “boastfulness like water.”²⁹² Greenfield thinks that the root פָּחַז denotes the sexual organ in post-biblical Hebrew and Aramaic texts. He asserts that the meaning “sexual organ” coincides with the adultery of Rueben.²⁹³ Rubin similarly finds

²⁸⁸ Spurrel, *Genesis*, 367-368.

²⁸⁹ Dillmann, *Genesis*, 2:453-454.

²⁹⁰ Pehlke, 120-125.

²⁹¹ Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 224.

²⁹² Spurrel, *Genesis*, 367-368.

²⁹³ J. Greenfield, “The Meaning of *phz*,” in *Studies in Bible and Ancient Near East Presented to Samuel E. Loewenstamm, on His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Y. Avishur and J. Blau (Jerusalem: E Rubinstein's Pub House, 1978), 35-40.

the root of פחז in Arabic and modern south Arabian. He presents “thigh, upper leg.”²⁹⁴

However, they do not present sufficient evidence of direct connection between the Hebrew פחז and the words of similar form in different languages. Therefore, these suggestions are inconclusive.

To solve this riddle the use of פחז and the simile “as water” in the Bible should be investigated.

The root פחז occurs three times in the Old Testament: Judges 9:4 (Ptc.), Jeremiah 23:32 (noun), and Zephaniah 3:4 (Ptc.).

וַיִּשְׁכַּר בָּהֶם אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ אַנְשִׁים רִיקִים וּפְחִזִים (Judg. 9:4)

And Abimelch hired with them reckless and *** men.

וַיִּתְּעוּ אֶת-עַמִּי בְּשִׁקְרֵיהֶם וּבְפְחִזֹתָם (Jer. 23:32)

And they (false prophets) led astray my people with their lies and with their ***.

נְבִיאֶיהָ פְחִזִים אַנְשֵׁי בְגָדוֹת (Zeph. 3:4)

Her prophets are ***, men of treachery (faithlessness).

In the above three cases, all פחז have a negative meaning. Both Zephaniah 3:4 and Jeremiah 23:32 apply this word to false prophets who led people astray. All prophets should seek carefully the will of God and show and lead the people. However, the false prophets failed because of the lack of faith, lies, and recklessness. The meaning for פחז in the sense of boasting would fit the context well. Also, Judges 9 shows that Abimelch

²⁹⁴ Rubin, “Genesis 49:4,” 500.

hired unscrupulous men. The parallel word ריקים usually means “empty, in vain” (2 Sam 6:20). פחזים is a repetition of ריקים and the meaning must be a synonym of “reckless.”²⁹⁵ However, one problem still remains, that is, nowhere else does the simile “reckless like water” occur in the Hebrew Bible except here.

The expression “כמים” is employed a total of twenty-two times in the Hebrew Bible.²⁹⁶

To pour out like water – eleven times (vb., שפך: Deut. 12:16, 24, 15:23, Pss. 22:15, 79:3, Lam. 2:19, Hos. 5:10); (vb., נתך: Job 3:24); (vb., בוא: Ps. 109:18); (vb., נגר: 2 Sam. 14:14, Mic. 1:4)

covered like water – twice (vb., כסה: Isa. 11:9, Hab. 2:14)

drinking like water – twice (vb., שתה: Job 15:16, 34:7)

passed away like water – once (vb., עבר: Job 11:16)

to overtake like water – once (vb., נשג: Job 27:20)

to surround like water – once (vb., סבב: Ps. 88:18)

to reflect (?) like water – once (no verb: Prob. 27:19)

making noise like water – once (vb., המה: Jer. 51:55)

to flow like water – once (vb., גלל: Amos 5:24)

??? like water – once (vb. פחז: Gen. 49:4)

²⁹⁵ R. G. Boling, *Judges: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (Garden city, N.Y: Doubleday, 1975), 171.

²⁹⁶ Searched in BibleWorks 7, search command (וכמים כמים) in WTT.

From what is arranged above, the simile “~ like water” is variously used in the Hebrew Bible. It is most frequently used with the meaning “pouring water out,” and twice with the meaning “water is covered” and “drinking water.” It is used only once with other meanings. Because the simile “~ like water” is used in such diverse ways, it is not altogether strange that the expression “recklessness like water” does not occur in other places of the Hebrew Bible except in Genesis 49. By reason of the multi-facet aspects of water, water has been used in the various similes in the extra biblical literature as well. Accordingly, the possibility is sufficient in that the simile “recklessness like water” is uniquely used in this place of Genesis 49.

Therefore, “Recklessness as water” would be a possible interpretation. It is clear that Reuben’s behavior is reproachable. Reuben’s behavior on his father’s bed must be regarded as a reckless deed, no matter what the motive.²⁹⁷ He acted carelessly as a result of the sexual drive like flowing water which is out of bounds. He should be discreet in his behavior. In addition, other usages of the root זָרַע in the Old Testament support this interpretation. The book of Judges writes that scamps who behave recklessly followed after Abimelech. Abimelech also acted recklessly together with his followers. He killed blindly his seventy brothers on one stone, and slaughtered all the men of Shechem (Judges 9). Also, Jeremiah reproves the false prophets because they were led astray by their lies and reckless prophecy. Zephaniah cries out because the false prophet is reckless.

²⁹⁷ Recently many writers explain that the adultery of Reuben is not a result of the sexual impulse of an indiscreet young man but rather resulting from negative family influences arising out of birth order, parental preference, and sibling rivalry. Reuben has watched his mother’s suffering from Jacob’s favoritism to Rachel from his childhood (Gen. 30:14-18). In Reuben’s deep affection for Leah, Reuben calculatedly commits adultery with Bilhah in order to defend the position of Leah after the death of Rachel. The explanation which is based on the psychological analysis shows the full practicability. Yet, it does not provide sufficient hermeneutic evidence to change the meaning of זָרַע. cf. Roger Syrén, *The Forsaken Firstborn: A Study of a Recurrent Motif in the Patriarchal Narratives*, JSOTSup 133 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993, 130-135; R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), 186; Brian Weinstein, “Reuben: The predicament of the firstborn,” *JBQ* vol. 36, no. 3 (2008): 196-200.

That is, they are faithless men. Their reckless prophecy is untrustworthy.

אֶל-הוֹתֵר The Hiphil of the verb יָתַר means generally to “remain over.” This meaning occurs only here, “preeminence, excel, abundant.”²⁹⁸ This line (4A) is the kernel of the blessing on Reuben. Jacob proclaims the grave judgment on Reuben in the center of the poem: “You will not excel.” Many scholars would find a reason why the tribe of Reuben did not show eminent character to lead brothers from this verse. The tribe of Reuben had hardly produced any famous leaders such as prophets, judges, and kings in history.²⁹⁹ Some scholars even assert that the tribe of Reuben disappeared as a tribe in the early period of the history of Israel, the period of Judges.³⁰⁰

עָלִיתָ 4B The expression “went up to the bed” often implied to “have a sexual relationship” in the extra biblical texts.³⁰¹

אִז חִלַּלְתָּ יְצוּעֵי עֲלֵה: 4C

This line may be interpreted literally as follows: “Then, you profaned my couch;

²⁹⁸ J. E. Hartley, “יָתַר” in *TWOT*.

²⁹⁹ Aalders, *Genesis*, 2: 271; von Rad, *Genesis*, 416; Wenham, *Genesis*, 472-473.

³⁰⁰ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 418; Cross, *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1998), 54, asserts that the tribe of Reuben disappears “no later than the war of Deborah in the eleventh century BC. Similarly, many critics agree that the Reubenites were already weakened at that time so much as they could not participate in the war of Deborah.

However, I do not share this view. Rather, I think that the Reubenites were condemned in the Song of Deborah because the Reubenites had sufficient power to help Deborah and Barak but they intentionally ignored the demand for the participation in the war. If their influence was slight, the tribe of Reuben was never condemned. Weinstein, “Reuben: The predicament of the firstborn,” 196-7, also asserts that the full witness of the existence of Reubenites in the east of Jordan until the ninth century BC exists. He mentions that according to 2 Kings 10:33, the Reubenites were attacked by the Aramean King Hazael during the reign of Jehu, (842-815 BC). Also, Ezekiel refers to the territory of Reuben although this reference may have been only geographical (Ezek. 48: 6, 7).

³⁰¹ Hamilton, *Genesis*, 645.

he went up,” or “Then, you profaned; he went up my couch.” However, the Hebrew of this line grammatically shows two problems. The first problem is the change of person, “you profaned ... he went up,” and the second problem is the ellipsis of “my couch” at the end of the line. Although some scholars mention ellipsis is a common poetic device,³⁰² the sentence still looks odd.

The sudden change of persons is the major problem in the end of the blessing on Reuben. From the ancient versions, exegetes have long endeavored to solve this perplexity in various ways. If the first puzzle is unraveled, the second problem would be solved along with the first problem. These are several potential solutions suggested by scholars:

Then, you defiled my couch. He went up. Apart from the sudden change of person, the simple parallelism of עלה in which the previous line (4B) appears makes no sense. Also, this shows structural incongruity with the previous line.

Then, you defiled (it), He went up my couch. Most English versions support this interpretation. Yet, the sudden change of persons is still a problem. Moreover, this solution cannot be admissible because חלל is never used intransitively in the Hebrew Bible.³⁰³

Then, you defiled my couch. You went up. LXX. Pesh. *Tg. Ong.*, *Tg. Jon.*, and RSV render to עלית. The alteration to the second person without any plain reason cannot be accepted, and it still looks unnatural.

Then, you defiled my couch. Vulgate omitted the stumbling word, עלה.

³⁰² Wenham, *Genesis*, 472.

³⁰³ Speiser, *Genesis*, 364; Skinner, *Genesis*, 515.

Westermann³⁰⁴ and NIV follow this interpretation. However, it is forbidden by rhythm with the previous line.

Then, you defiled the couch which he went up. Some commentators present עלה as relative pronoun.³⁰⁵ Although this attempt looks to solve the sudden change of person, it still remains an unnatural interpretation and shows structural incongruity with the previous line.

In view of parallelism with the previous line, עלה cannot be a verb. If עלה is to be regarded as a verb, it breaks the balance of the structural parallel of the whole poem. In addition, it cannot escape the difficulties of the sudden change of person. Accordingly, עלה must be a noun in the absolute state which modifies the noun couch (יצועי, in construct form) like the function of noun אבִיךָ in the previous line (4B), “the bed of your father.” This suggestion shows perfect parallelism with the previous line. Besides, this completely solves all problems encountered when עלה is interpreted as a verb such as the sudden change of person and the absence of the direct object of the transitive verb עלה. Also, the related passage 1 Chronicles 5:1³⁰⁶ shows the same consonant יצועי in the plural construct form.

These solutions have been presented by some commentators, such as Gevirtz, Dahood, and Reider.³⁰⁷ Although they do not agree about the minor method of

³⁰⁴ Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 218-219, 224.

³⁰⁵ Skinner, *Genesis*, 515.

³⁰⁶ 1 Chronicles 5: 1 quotes Genesis 49:4 almost verbatim: *hûʿ habbəkôr ûbəhallôlô yəšûʿê ʿābîw* (BHT).

³⁰⁷ See also, Abraham Geiger, *Urschrift und Übersetzungen der Bibel in ihrer abhängigkeit von der innern entwicklung des Judenthums*. (Breslau: J. Hainauer, 1857), 374 which renders בִּלְהָהּ, as “The couch of Bilhah,” De Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 86-91, which suggests “the concubine’s couch.”

emendation and the precise meaning, this approach seems quite probable. Several modern versions (NEB, NLT), and commentary³⁰⁸ accept the interpretation.

Gevirtz suggests feminine singular participle of עוּל “to suckle” (Arabic *Gawala*, “a pregnant suckler”). He presents that the similar evidences also exist in the Hebrew Bible, עָלוֹת “nursing women” (Gen. 33:13) in the fem. pl. ptc. form. Also, in 1 Samuel 6:7, 10, Isaiah 40:11, Psalms 78:71 even though the feminine singular participle form does not occur in the Bible. Consequently, he suggests, “Then, you defiled the couch of the suckler.”³⁰⁹

Dahood rendered יַעֲלָה as “female mountain-goat or doe.” He takes notice that doe figuratively means “concubine” in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Prov. 5:19), accordingly, “Then, you defiled the couch of the concubine.”³¹⁰ O’Connor also follows Dahood’s interpretation, “the couch of your father’s beloved.”³¹¹ Hamilton also approves this interpretation.³¹²

Reider’s solution also comes from Arabic. He renders עֲלָהּ which corresponds to Arabic, as “a woman’s fellow wife,” or “her husband’s wife.” He asserts that this solution suits the case of Bilhah extremely well. Finally, he suggests “Then, you defiled the couch of a fellow-wife.”³¹³

³⁰⁸ Hamilton, *Genesis*, 645-646.

³⁰⁹ Gevirtz, “Reprimand of Reuben,” 98.

³¹⁰ Dahood, “Hebrew-Ugaritic Lexicography, III,” *Bib* 46 (1965): 319; idem., “Northwest Semitic Notes on Genesis,” 81; idem., review of *The Torah: The Five Books of Moses*, *Bib* 45, no. 2 (1964): 282.

³¹¹ O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 170.

³¹² Hamilton, *Genesis*, 645-646.

³¹³ Joseph Reider, “Etymological Studies in Biblical Hebrew,” *VT* vol. 4 (Jul., 1954): 276. NEB follows Reider’s suggestion.

As Gevirtz mentions, any of these solutions “cannot now be determined with absolute assurance, but it is not unlikely.”³¹⁴ However, it is convincing that the last word **עלה** must be interpreted as a noun construct form owing to the parallelism with the previous line. Dahood’s solution can be taken as the most plausible answer because Dahood’s interpretation fits well in the context with minimum emendation.

“For / you / went up / the bed / of your father”

“Then / you / defiled / the couch / of his doe (concubine)”

3.2.1.5. The evaluation of the blessing on Reuben.

Jacob elevates Reuben more and more, as (my) firstborn (3A), (my) strength (3B), and the beginning of (my) vigor (3B) and places him at the peak, excelling in dignity and power (3C) among his brothers. However, in the situation that is expected of Reuben’s superior leadership, Jacob makes a diametrically opposed pronouncement against Reuben in verse 4. Also, Jacob’s negative announcement to Reuben goes from bad to worse, (you) will not excel (4A), (you) went up father’s bed (4B), (you) defiled the couch (4C). Jacob degrades Reuben by disclosing his disgraceful sin before his brothers. For such an antithetic structure some scholars suppose that Jacob’s announcement for Reuben was originally positive. In other words, only verse 3 was the original part. The negative part (v. 4) was added to the original part only at a later stage of development.³¹⁵ However, the blessing on Reuben shows antithetical parallelism in the structure between verse 3 and 4. If one pair is absent, the other loses the poetic power and flavor. The poem on Reuben maximizes the negative effect by intentional dramatic antithetic structure.

³¹⁴ Gevirtz, “Reprimand of Reuben,” 98.

³¹⁵ Sparks, “Genesis 49 and the Tribal List,” 331.

Although the greater dignity afforded the firstborn son compared to the younger brothers is a universal custom,³¹⁶ the status of the firstborn son in ancient society was considerably different from that of the modern industrialized and commercial society.³¹⁷ According to Mendelsohn's study, the preferential right of the firstborn son was generally more powerful in the agricultural and semi-nomadic society than in industrialized and commercial society.³¹⁸ Mendelsohn asserts, according to the documents of Ur III and the Hammurabi code, the Neo-Sumerian and Babylonian in the first dynasty, relatively industrialized and commercial communities, tended to reduce the role of the eldest brother in the family, and treat the eldest son as on equal footing with his younger brothers. On the other hand, Nuzi, Middle Assyria, Syria, Alalakh, Canaanites, and Israelite, which are the agricultural and nomadic society more than Babylonian is, preserved the custom of a privileged status to the first born son.

The mature firstborn holds particularly about the same rank as the father in the family.³¹⁹ A similar practice is also found in the Old Testament. In these customs, the firstborn son is the incarnation of the father (Gen. 49:3; Deut. 21:17), the successor and sequence of the family line (Gen. 4:7), and the heir to family property (Deut. 21:15-7; 2 Chron. 21:3). Also, the most severe plague to the Egyptians was to slay all the firstborn sons of Egyptians (Exod. 4:23; Ps. 78:51; 105:36; 135:8; 136:10).³²⁰ Sacrificing the

³¹⁶ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 18th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 2:1169.

³¹⁷ Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its life and Institutions*, trans. J. Mchugh (London: Darton, Langman & Todd, 1968), 53, writes that the same customs are found in Assyrian laws, at Nuzi, at Mari, and Ugarit.

³¹⁸ I. Mendelsohn, "On the Preferential Status of the Eldest Son," *BASOR* no.156 (Dec., 1959): 38-40.

³¹⁹ However, the firstborn daughter was not included in the privilege of the firstborn.

³²⁰ Losing a firstborn in ancient society was a considerably shocking calamity in comparison with

firstborn son was the greatest gift to the gods in the ancient society including Israel (1 Kings 16:34; 2 Kings 3:27; Psalms 89:23; Micah 6:7).³²¹ The “princes” of the congregation may be by primogeniture (Num. 7:2; 21:18).

The scripture shows many other examples about the special status of the firstborn son: Noah’s special blessing on Shem (Gen. 9:26-7); Abraham’s strong affection on Ishmael (Gen. 19:18, 17:20-21);³²² Isaac’s exceptional expectation on Esau (Gen. 27:1-4); Joseph’s demand on Manasseh (Gen. 48); Jesse and Samuel’s preference to Eliab (1 Sam. 16:5-6); and David’s partial favoritism on Amnon (2 Sam. 20-22) and Adonijah (1 Kings 1:6).³²³ Moreover, God often called Israel “My firstborn” (Exod. 4:22; Ps. 89:27; Heb. 12:23).³²⁴ The New Testament also succeeds to the idea of the preferential status of the firstborn son. Jesus is the firstborn Son of God (Heb. 1:6; Rev. 1:5). St. Paul understood the priority of Jesus and church in the concept of the preferential status of the firstborn son (Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15).

It is quite striking however that the firstborn was frequently excluded from the

losing a son in modern society; cf. George Rawlinson, *Exodus*, ed. H. D. M. Spence and J. S. Exell, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1950), 249-250. Also, B. Child, *Exodus*, (London: SCM Press, 1974), 161, asserts that the slaying of the firstborn is the culmination of the plague narrative.

³²¹ Bill T. Arnold, “בְּכֹרִית,” in *NIDOTTE*, 1:659, comments that first fruits of plant, animal, and man were devoted to God (Exod. 13:2; Lev. 2:14; Deut. 15:19; Num. 3:11-13; 8:14-17; Gen. 22:13-14). Also, Tsevat (*TDOT*, 2:126), writes “It is not only the best that belongs to God, but also the first.”

³²² Wenham, *Genesis*, 2:80, assert, “The verse (Gen. 21:11) speaks eloquently of the affection of Abraham for Ishmael, but nowhere does the narrative speak of Abraham’s affection for his wife.” Abraham lasts the good relationship with Ishmael even after the expulsion of Ishmael until the day of his death (Gen. 25:9). Cf. Kalman J. Kaplan and Matthew B. Schwartz, “Jacob’s Blessing and the Curse of Oedipus; Sibling Rivalry and Its Resolution,” *Journal of Psychology and Judaism*, 22, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 75-76.

³²³ According to several ancient interpretations (LXX, 4QSam^a, and Josephus’ *Antiquities of the Jews*), King David would not punish Amnon in spite of his heinous incest “because he loved him for he was his firstborn (2 Sam. 13:21, LXX).” David’s partial favoritism for Amnon was one of the biggest reasons that Absalom rebelled against David. Moreover, after the death of Amnon, David loves the next first born, Adonijah with partiality. This provides the source that Adonijah proclaims as a King after David by himself. 1 Kings 1:6 writes, “David did not sufficiently discipline him.”

³²⁴ Because Israel is the firstborn of Yahweh, she becomes “a kingdom of priests” and “a holy nation” (Exod. 19:7). FBD, s.v. “Firstborn,” §1248.

God's blessing and choice, contrary to ancient society's custom and human expectation.³²⁵ It reveals that God's choice is neither born of blood nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:13), and in his will God says "The last will be first, and the first last" (Matt. 20:16).

The poetry on Reuben distinctly shows how great were Jacob's expectations and love on Reuben as his firstborn son.³²⁶ At the same time, how great were Jacob's disappointment and the feeling of treachery. In the evaluation of Reuben's deeds, Reuben's sin was a serious challenge to the authority of the chief of the family.³²⁷ The authority of the chief was absolute in patriarchal society in order to maintain the social system. Reuben's behavior was a serious offence not only that it might break down the foundation of the family, but also that it threatened the existence of the family of Jacob.

From what has been discussed above, it is clear that Jacob's blessing on Reuben is a negative announcement. Nevertheless, several questions still remain. When Jacob heard the news of the adultery committed by Reuben with his concubine the first time, he hardly showed any response concerning the incidents. Why then should he be so harsh against

³²⁵ Cf. R. Syrén, *The Forsaken Firstborn: A Study of a Recurrent Motif in the Patriarchal Narratives*, JSOTSup 133 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

³²⁶ Some would give objection to the statement that Jacob especially loved Reuben as his firstborn. Evidently, the story of Joseph shows that Jacob loves Joseph more than any of other his children (especially, Gen. 37, 42, 48, 49) and implicitly considers him the first born because he was the first child of Rachel. However, Rachel could not conceive for a long time while her sister gave birth to six sons and one daughter (Gen. 30:20-21). While Jacob stayed in a remote and lonely alien country, as in the case with any firstborn son in the nomadic custom, Reuben had at one time been the pride and joy of his father until Rachel had Joseph.

³²⁷ Seebass, "Die Stammespruche," 343, gives another explanation about the incest of Reuben. He asserts that Reuben attempted to usurp the position of the head of family from Jacob. When Absalom revolted against his father, King David, he took possession of his father's harem, in order to show the people that he was now the king in Jerusalem. Also, David's demand for Michal, the daughter of Saul when he became the king of Judah (2 Sam. 3:13); the rejection of Solomon to the request of Adonijah giving Abishag the Shunammite for a wife (1 Kings 3:13-25). Several writers have similar view. Cf. Gevirtz, "A Father's Curse," 56-61; Dillmann, *Genesis*, 2:380; Driver, *Genesis*, 382; Gunkel, *Genesis*, 384; Hamilton, *Genesis*, 387; R. Alter, *Genesis*, (New York: Norton & Co, 1996), 200.

Reuben on his deathbed? Moreover, how can we harmonize this obviously negative announcement on Reuben with the blessing of the poetry of Genesis 49? Despite these negative contents, should Genesis 49 still be called “Blessing?” These questions will be answered in the next chapter.

3.2.2. Simeon & Levi (49:5-7)

3.2.2.1. Translation

5A Simeon and Levi are brothers,	שְׁמֵעוֹן וְלֵוִי אֲחִים
5B their circumcision knives are instruments of violence	כְּלֵי חָמָס מִכְרִיתֵיהֶם:
6Aa Let me not go in their council	בְּסֶדֶם אֶל־תֵּבֵא נַפְשִׁי
6Ab Let me not join in their assembly	בְּקִהְלָם אֶל־תִּחַד כְּבֹדִי
6Ba For in their anger they killed man	כִּי בְאַפָם הָרְגוּ אִישׁ
6Bb and in their pleasure they hamstrung oxen	וּבְרִצְנָם עִקְרוּ־שׁוֹר
7Aa Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce	אָרוּר אַפָם כִּי עָז
7Ab and their rage for it is harsh	וְעִבְרָתָם כִּי קָשָׁתָהּ
7Ba I will divide them in Jacob	אֶחְלַקֵם בְּיַעֲקֹב
7Bb and I will scatter them in Israel.	וְאֶפֶצֵם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל

3.2.2.2. Transliteration and metrical analysis

		Total		
5A	šim ^c ôn wəlēwī ʾaḥîm	2-2-2	6	} 15
5B	kələ ḥāmās mək̄ērōtêhem	2-2-5	9	
6Aa	bəsōdām ʾal-tābōʾ nap̄šî	3-1-2-2	8	} 17(15)
6Ab	biḥālām ʾal-tēḥad̄ kəḇōdî	3-1-2-3	9	
6Ba	kî ḥəʾappām hārəḡû ʾiš̄	1-3-3-1	8	} 16
6Bb	ûḇiršōnām ʿiqqerû-šôr	4-3-1	8	
7Aa	ʾārûr ʾappām kî ʿāz	2-2-1-1	6	} 14
7Ab	wəʿeḇrāṭām kî qāšāṭā ^h	4-1-3	8	
7Ba	ʾaḥalləqēm bəyaʿāqōḇ	4-4	8	} 16
7Bb	waʾāpîšēm bəyiśrāʾəl	4-4	8	
			—————	
			78	

The metrical structure shows five plain distiches. It is in accordance with the structure of the contents.

Compared with the poem on Reuben, the rhythmical balance is sometimes broken between strophes. The last two lines (7Ba, 7Bb) show a sudden change from the trimeters to a binary couplet without any sufficient reason.³²⁸

Metrical parallelism occurs between 6B and 7A.

If 7A is compensated for ellipsis, every couplet is composed of sixteen syllables in

³²⁸ Skinner, *Genesis*, 518.

spite of variation in the length of individual stanzas.

3.2.2.3. Structural analysis

5A Heading

5B Reproach It looks like no parallelism exists between 5A and 5B contrary to the other parts of the poem which shows precise parallel structure.³²⁹ It is likely that the headings of the poem stand independently from the body in many cases.

6Aa//6Ab Dissociation

Grammatical Parallel CVO – CVO, Lexical Parallel (my soul // my glory),
phonological Parallel.

6Ba//6Bb Cause

Grammatical Parallel CVO – CVO, Lexical Parallel (man // oxen),
phonological Parallel.

7Aa//7Ab Judgment

Grammatical Parallel VOC – VOC, Lexical Parallel (my anger // my rage),
phonological Parallel.

7Ba//7Bb Result

Grammatical Parallel VC – VC, Lexical Parallel (divide // scatter my glory),
phonological Parallel.

7A, 7B is the most important point of Jacob's blessing on Simeon and Levi both

³²⁹ Gevirtz, "Simeon and Levi," 95, also comments about this problem: "... in striking contrast to the precise parallelistic structure of the remainder of the poem, an absence of any clear or perceptible coupling of terms."

in content and structure.

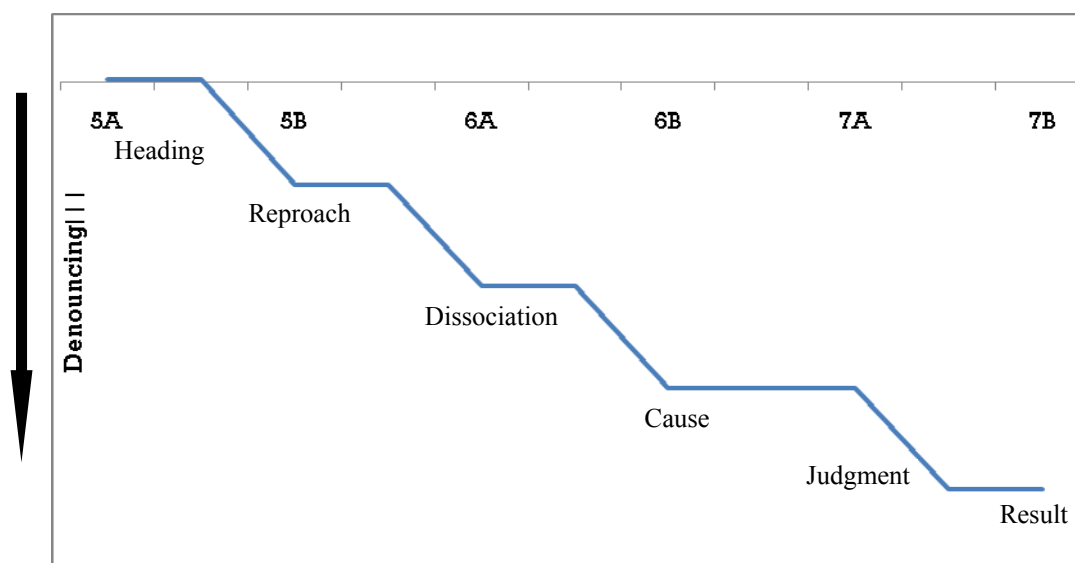


Fig 2. The structure of the blessing on Simeon and Levi

5Aa // 5Ab

בוא // יחד (Deut. 23:2, 3, 4, 9, Job 3:6), or חֲדָה // אָבָה (Job. 3:6, Prov. 1:10).

6Aa // 6Ab

נפש // כבוד (Psalms 7:6; 16:9; 108:2; also, Psalms 30:13; 57:9, כְּבֹדִי is used in the sense of נפש).

סוד // קהל (Psalms 89:6 and 8, בְּקֹהֵל קְדוֹשִׁים // בְּסוֹד קְדוֹשִׁים).

6Ba // 6Bb

אפ // רצון (Psalms 30:6).

איש // שור (Isa. 66:3).

עקר // הרג

7Aa // 7Ab

ארור is ellipsis in 7Ab.³³⁰

אפ // עברה (Psalms 7:7; 78:49; 85:4; 90:11; Amos 1:11; Hab. 3:8; Esther 9:5).

עז // קשה (Song. 8:6; Isa. 19:4).³³¹

7Ba //< 7Bb

פויץ //< חלק (Job 38:24).

יעקב // ישראל (Psalms 14:7; 22:24; 53:7; 114:1; 135:4; 2 Sam 23:1; Micah 3:1).

6Aa, 6Ab // 7Aa, 7Ab

פויץ // יחד, בוא, חלק (Prov. 14:35) Antithetical parallelism.

6Ba: 6Bb // 7Aa: 7Bb

אפ // רצון // אפ // עברה (Exod. 13:15; Isa. 27:7-8). The parallelism of the quatrain.³³² The lines are interlocked by means of the pattern A:B // A:C (Gen. 27:29; Isa. 28:23; 45:7).

1Aa: 1Ab // 7Ba: 7Bb

אפיצם : אחלקם // הקבצו : האספו Antithetical parallelism. (Ezek. 11:17; 20:34; 28:25; 29:13).³³³

³³⁰ Ellipsis occurred in poetry more frequently than in prose. Niccacci, "Analysing Biblical Hebrew Poetry," 92, says, "Word order and ellipsis are valid phenomena to identify poetry."

³³¹ Usually the parallel occurs in the adjective form of both words. However, קשה is not the adjective of קשה but verb (qal. pf. 3fs.). In parallelism with קשה, עז needs to be understood as the qatal form of the stative verb עזז not as an adjective. Yet, according to JM, §41b, 112a, the meaning in both cases is the same.

³³² S. Gevirtz, *Patterns in the Early Poetry of Israel*, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization, no. 32, 2nd ed. (Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press: 1963), 44.

³³³ Many scholars are sure that Jacob's judgment on Simeon and Levi is antithetic to Jacob's

This poem is arranged in five couplets. The blessing on Simeon and Levi shows a structural contrast to the blessing on Reuben (AB//B'A'). The blessing on Reuben announces the judgment first (4A) and follows the cause (4B, 4C). On the contrary, the blessing on Simeon and Levi announces the cause first (6B) and the judgment afterward (7A, 7B).

A large number of parallelisms appear in the blessing on Simeon and Levi as well. Especially, parallelisms show not only in the couplets, but also between the different parts of the poem. Moreover, according to De Hoop's analysis, many parallelisms exist between the blessing on Reuben and the blessing on Simeon and Levi as well. Besides, various parallelisms appear between our text and the blessings on other sons.³³⁴

3.2.2.4. Content analysis

Jacob proclaims for two sons jointly in a different way from the blessings on the other sons. The blessing on Simeon and Levi looks to be connected with the past event like the blessing on Reuben (the incident on Shechem, Genesis 34). However, the blessing on Simeon and Levi is different from that of Reuben in several points: Jacob addresses Reuben directly in the second person as "you," but speaks to Simeon and Levi indirectly in the third person as "they." Furthermore, the blessing on Reuben contains both a positive pronouncement with a negative pronouncement but the blessing on Simeon and Levi contains only a negative pronouncement.

Before examining the individual verses, one question should be answered first: Is

calling to the twelve sons in the introduction "Gather yourselves together!" cf. M. Daniel Carroll, "פְּרִי" in *NIDOTTE*, 3:585-588, "the combination of *pws* with the vb. *qbs* ... Yahweh's scattering of his people is not his final word."

³³⁴ De Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 232-236.

the poem in Genesis 49, the blessing on Simeon and Levi, directly connected to the story in Genesis 34? If yes, what kind of relationship exists between them? Many believe that the blessing on Simeon and Levi must be understood in close relationship with the story in Genesis 34. On the other hand, some scholars doubt the connection and assert that the blessing on Simeon and Levi is an entirely isolated poem from the event described in Genesis 34.³³⁵ Some critical scholars also assume that Genesis 34 was introduced into the prose account of Genesis by the redactor in order to provide a background to Genesis 49:5-7.³³⁶ Some scholars still present the possibility that a third tradition exists in Genesis 34 in addition to the other two traditions, that is J and E because the content of the poem in Genesis 49 is quite different from the tradition that existed in Genesis 34.³³⁷

One of the reasons why so many commentators have questions regarding the relationship between Jacob's blessing on Simeon and Levi in Genesis 49 and the story in Genesis 34 is that many differences exist in detailed statements.³³⁸ There are three large questions concerning this problem.

First, Genesis 49 declares that "they hamstrung oxen in their pleasure," as one of the most impressive reasons to pass judgment on Simeon and Levi. However, Genesis 34 remains entirely silent about this.³³⁹

Genesis 34 also asserts that all Jacob's sons joined in the attack on Shechem with Simeon and Levi. Lehming comments that Simeon and Levi are virtually not the key

³³⁵ Gevirtz, "Simeon and Levi," 94; Eduard Nielsen, *Shechem: A Traditio-Historical Investigation*, 2nd ed. (Copenhagen: G E C Gad, 1959), 282.

³³⁶ Lehming, "Zur Überlieferungsgeschichte von Gen 34," 228-250; A. de Pury, "Genèse XXXIV et l'histoire," *RB* 76 (1969): 29. However, Westermann, *Genesis*, II: 653, and Speiser, *Genesis*, 267, strongly oppose this assumption.

³³⁷ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 371.

³³⁸ For the differences between the story in Genesis 34 and the blessing on Simeon and Levi, see A. de Pury, "Genèse XXXIV et l'histoire," 5-49.

³³⁹ I will examine about this problem below. See page 115-118.

actors in the story of Dinah but rather all of the sons of Jacob.³⁴⁰ However, Genesis 49 imputes the crime to only Simeon and Levi.

Moreover, Jacob's reproach to Simeon and Levi was not directed at their violent vengeance itself in Genesis 34. Jacob just rebuked them for their reckless deed which could put the whole family in annihilable danger by the surrounding Canaanites (Gen. 34:30). Nielsen also points out that the blaming tone toward Shechem is far greater than the blaming tone used toward Simeon and Levi in Genesis 34. Yet, Genesis 49 does not mention anything about Shechem at all.³⁴¹ Besides, God remains silent throughout the events of Shechem in Genesis 34 and suddenly appears after the massacre at Shechem and protects Jacob's family including Simeon and Levi by causing great terror to the surrounding cities (Gen. 35:5). The state of affairs at Shechem in Genesis 34 seems not as wicked for God to scatter Simeon and Levi as punishment in Genesis 49:7. Simeon and Levi would defend the family honor.³⁴² Nevertheless, Jacob in Genesis 49 severely curses just on Simeon and Levi.

However, the above questions about the differences between Genesis 34 and 49 can be answered as follows. Though all Jacob's sons take part in the attack on Shechem, Genesis 34:25 says, "two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and killed all the males." Simeon and Levi must be the masterminds of the massacre at Shechem.

Besides, the conclusive point of Chapter 34 is in the last line, with Simeon and Levi's provocative question against Jacob's rebuke, "Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?" Leon R. Kass, "Regarding Daughters and Sisters: The Rape of Dinah,"

³⁴⁰ Lehming, "Zur Überlieferungsgeschichte," 228–250. Also, NET Bible translates, "(the rest of) Jacob's sons killed them and looted the city (Gen. 34:27)."

³⁴¹ Nielsen, *Shechem*, 282.

³⁴² Bowie, *Genesis*, 820.

Commentary 93 no. 4 (April 1992): 36, asserts that this last question of Simeon and Levi is the core of the story of Genesis 34. Also, J. Fleishman, "Why did Simeon and Levi Rebuke," 101-116; idem, "Towards understanding the Legal Significance of Jacob's Testament (Gen 49.7b)," in *Studies in the book of Genesis*, ed. André Wénin, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001), 541-559, maintains that Simeon and Levi actually reproach Jacob with this question. That is, the one who treats Tamar as a harlot is Jacob. Fleishman concludes that the final authority to decide on Tamar's marriage was Jacob, her father in a patriarchal society. Accordingly, like with Reuben's wicked behavior, Simeon and Levi also challenged the authority of the head of the family.

Wenham rightly comments about these problems:

"... those about Simeon and Levi are fraught with difficulty, and this has led to very diverse interpretations. However, the context does set limits to the interpreter's freedom; at least if we aim to recover the editor's understanding of the text. These verses must be set within the framework of the whole book of Genesis. It is plain then that just as v4 refers to Reuben's deeds mentioned in 35:22, so these verses must refer to Simeon and Levi's attack on Shechem (chap. 34). To suppose the mention of their hamstringing oxen refers to an entirely different incident is unlikely."³⁴³

Like the comment of Wenham, Jacob's blessing on Simeon and Levi must be understood in relation to the events in Genesis 34. Jacob pronounces the blessing on Simeon and Levi on the basis of past events in the same manner as the blessing on Reuben. Even though some differences appear between two records, the differences exist in the fully acceptable

³⁴³ Wenham, *Genesis*, 473.

extent if one understands the genre difference between them because the blessing of Jacob is written in the form of a poem, while Genesis 34 is a narrative.

Verse 5

5A Jacob jointly blesses Simeon and Levi. The word “אֶחָיִם” shows their close relationship of character as well as the physical close relationship (both are the sons of Leah). Speiser translates it as “a pair.”³⁴⁴

5B מִכְרֵיהֶם

This word is one of the most difficult problems in Genesis 49. Speiser calls the difficulty, “an old and stubborn puzzle.”³⁴⁵ The form lends itself to a variety of derivations.

1) “Ware” This translation is supported by Sarna,³⁴⁶ Cross and Freedman,³⁴⁷ and Speiser.³⁴⁸ Speiser supposes that the word מִכְרֵיהֶם comes from the root מִכַּר “to sell.” Accordingly, “weapons of violence are their merchandise.” This translation is possible but it is not in accordance with the context at all. Also, the narrator of Genesis 34 does not make any reference to “merchandise,” “traders” and “ware.”

³⁴⁴ Speiser, *Genesis*, 364.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 365.

³⁴⁶ Sarna, *Genesis*, 334.

³⁴⁷ Cross and Freedman, *Ancient Yahwistic Poetry*, 78-79.

³⁴⁸ Speiser, *Genesis*, 365.

2) “Counsels” Ullendorff³⁴⁹ and Barr³⁵⁰ trace the noun מְכַרְהָ to Ethiopic *mkr* “to advise.” Accordingly, Ullendorff translates it as “strong weapons are their counsels.” However, the suggestion is a little remote from the situation of the text. Also, the warrant of the parallelism between the vocabularies of Ethiopic and ancient Hebrew to solve biblical hapax legomena is still controversial among Biblical scholars.³⁵¹

3) “A sword” This translation is advocated by Margalith³⁵² and Gordon.³⁵³ Gordon asserts that מְכַרְהָ is borrowed word from Greek μάχαιρα. Margalith also mentions that Israelites did not have the straight and double-edged sword in the period of King Saul. It was only imported from those who lived at the seashore (1 Sam. 13:19-22). As a result the Israelites called it by its foreign name.³⁵⁴

However, this suggestion is very doubtful given several points. The book of Samuel mentions that the Israelites in the period of King Saul did not possess a blacksmith who was able to work with iron. They could not make or sharpen iron instruments such as plowshare, mattock, axe and sickle as well as swords and spears. Unlike with Margalith’s supposition, it does not mean that the Israelites had only a one edged curved Canaanite sword at that time while the Philistines had double edged straight Greek swords. Also, this solution work only under the assumption that this poem was composed after the period of the kingdom. If the poem is dated earlier than the period of

³⁴⁹ Edward Ullendorff, “The Contribution of South Semitics to Hebrew Lexicography,” *VT* 6 (1956): 194.

³⁵⁰ J. Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford University, 1968), 57, 270.

³⁵¹ Dahood, “MKRTYHM in Genesis 49:5,” 55, n.3.

³⁵² Othniel Margalith, “Mekerotehem Gen xlix 5,” *VT* 34 (1984): 101-102.

³⁵³ Gordon, “Homer and Bible,” *HUCA* 26 (1955): 60-61.

³⁵⁴ Margalith, “mekerotehem,” 102.

the kingdom, the hypothesis of Greek derivation encounters a bigger problem. Moreover, the interpretation “their sword is the armors of violence” is a little meaningless because the armors of violence already contain the meaning of a sword. This is meaningless repetition. Finally, but decisively, even LXX does not interpret the word as μάχαιρα.

4) “Cut a covenant” This translation was advocated by Andersen,³⁵⁵ and Wenham agrees with Andersen.³⁵⁶ He understands מִכְרַתִּיהֶם as a Piel participle of *kirat* in functioning as a noun parallel to “brothers.” He takes the two names as a heading to derive a bicolon of 2:2. כָּלוּ is a verb modifying “brothers” and not a noun in construct with “הַנְּסִים.” Consequently regarding “Brothers they destroyed, they treated violently their covenant partners,” Andersen comments that “the brothers” are not Simeon and Levi but Hivites who are considered as brothers of Israelites according to the covenant. Yet, such a word as *mkrt* with this meaning is not attested elsewhere.

5) “Wedding feast.” Young³⁵⁷ infers from the Akkadian noun *kirru*, a container for liquids used in sacred rituals. Young posits that the prefixed מִכְר before כְּרַתִּיהֶם is an enclitic *mem*. At this point, Young depends on the study of Greengus.³⁵⁸ The *kirru* was a flask which was significant in the libations of Mesopotamian marriage rites. The *kirru* is attested in international use in the second millennium, but later generations evidently failed to recognize the term. If this reading is correct, Young asserts that Jacob was

³⁵⁵ F. I. Andersen, “Moabite Syntax,” *Or* 35, no. 2 (1966): 106-107.

³⁵⁶ Wenham, *Genesis*, 649.

³⁵⁷ D. Young, “A Ghost word in the Testament of Jacob (Genesis 49:5)?” *JBL* 100 (1981): 335-342.

³⁵⁸ S. Greengus, “Old Babylonian Marriage Ceremonies and Rites,” *JCS* 20 (1966): 65. Cf. Baldwin, *Genesis* 12-50, 208.

indicting the brothers “not so much for the slaughter itself as for the desecrated rites and breached vows.” Therefore, Young proposes, “Their *kirru*-vessels (wedding feasts) are implements of injustice.”

Although Young’s suggestion is ingenious, it is weakened for other reasons. First, the enclitic ׀ in Young’s explanation is doubtful. Many scholars are not convinced of the existence of the enclitic ׀ in Biblical Hebrew.³⁵⁹ Also, Wenham points out that a wedding feast in the ancient Near Eastern society was usually held in the house of the bride not the house of the bridegroom.³⁶⁰ De Hoop is also opposed to Young because the meaning of *kirru* in these texts is unclear even it is in controversy.³⁶¹ Above all, Genesis 34 does not show any hint or reference about the wedding feast or *kirru*. Jacob’s sons promised to allow Dinah’s wedding after the circumcision of the Shechemites. However, they attacked and killed the Shechemites before the wedding feast. Accordingly, the wedding feast cannot be part of the picture of Genesis 34.

6) “Circumcision knife” is suggested originally by Dahood.³⁶² Also, Moeller,³⁶³ Peters,³⁶⁴ De Hoop,³⁶⁵ Beauchamp³⁶⁶ and Pehlke³⁶⁷ follow the suggestion of Dahood.

³⁵⁹ For a discussion of enclitic *mem* in the Hebrew Bible, J. A. Emerton, “Are there examples of enclitic *mem* in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions*, ed. Michael V. Fox, (Winona Lake, IN.: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 321-338; Horace D. Hummel, “Enclitic *Mem* in Early Northwest Semitic, Especially Hebrew,” *JBL* 76, no. 2 (Jun., 1957): 85-107; C. Cohen, “The enclitic-*mem* in biblical Hebrew: its existence and initial discovery,” in *Sefer Moshe*, ed. H. Cohen, A. Hurvitz, and S. Paul, (Winona Lake, IN.: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 231-260.

³⁶⁰ Wenham, *Genesis*, 473.

³⁶¹ De Hoop, *Genesis* 49, 104-105.

³⁶² Dahood, “MKRTYHM in Gen 49.5,” 54-56; idem., “Hebrew-Ugaritic Lexicography IV,” 418.

³⁶³ Moeller, “Four Old Testament Problem Terms,” 219-220.

³⁶⁴ Peters, “Jacob’s Blessing,” 101-102.

³⁶⁵ De Hoop, *Genesis* 49, 108-109.

³⁶⁶ Paul Beauchamp, review of *La Genise*, by R. De Vaux, *Bib* 44, no. 4 (1963): 373-374.

Dahood asserts that *מכרה* originates in the common root of *כרת* “to cut.” Also, the preformative *ma/mi* usually joins to names of instruments, thus, “cutter, knife.” Dahood asserts that “since the Shechemites did not practice this rite, they had to borrow the necessary instruments from the Israelites.”³⁶⁸ Finally, Dahood presents that “tools of violence are their circumcision-blades.” However, this suggestion is weakened by the fact that there are no other examples found in the Hebrew Bible where *מכרת* is used to mean circumcision knife.³⁶⁹

This review leaves us with three possibilities. First, the problem of *מכרתיהם* can be resolved by determining the root of the noun. Secondly, the form *מכרתיהם* may be suspected a simple compound word because of the initial syllable. Finally, the word might be interpreted in connection with the affairs in Genesis 34.

The crucial element of the wicked deeds of Dinah’s brothers in Genesis 34 is that

³⁶⁷ Pehlke, “Genesis 49,” 146-149.

³⁶⁸ Dahood, “MKRTYHM,” 55-56.

³⁶⁹ In addition, many other scholars present various solutions as detailed below.

Gevirtz, “Simeon and Levi in the Blessing of Jacob,” 93-128 – Cashiered hawks are they. Gevirtz’s argument was sufficiently handled in the previous chapter (Cf. 2.1.2.7). In the evaluation of his opinion, there are two major reasons which make his interpretation unlikely. That is, Gevirtz’s negation of the connection with Genesis 34 and his inordinate emendation. For example, Gevirtz reads *אֱהִים* as “eagle-owl” instead of the universal reading, “brothers.”

Vawter, “Canaanite background of Genesis 49,” 3-4 – instruments of violence from their very birth, on the basis of *T^{JER}* (from their youth) and *SYR* (by their nature). Yet, J. A. Emerton, “Some difficult words in Genesis 49,” in *Words and Meanings*. Ed. P. R. Ackroyd and B. Lindars (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1968), 81-83, rightly rejects Vawter’s translation because Vawter does not consider the possibility that the reading of Targum and Peshita comes from the different consonants as those of MT. Also, Nielsen, *Shechem*, 279, opposes the solution of Vawter.

Benno Jacob, *The first book of the Bible: Genesis*, trans. J. Ernest I and J. Walter (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV publishing, 2007), 896 – root *כרר* “relationship, relatives” which he finds matches well with *אֱהִים*.

Ben Shemesh, “In Arabia they call ...,” *ABR* 10 (1962): 13-14 – root *מכר* to denote “beguile,” based on the Arabic root. Accordingly, “tools of violence are their beguilements.” Also, D. -W. Thomas’s study, “The root *מכר* in Hebrew,” *JTS* 37 (1936): 388-389, “deal deceitfully.”

M. Cohen, “mekerotehem (Genesis xlix 5),” *VT* 31 (1931): 472-482 – “accumulate,” “their goods” in connection of the noun of the root *krh*.

they deceived with circumcision and massacred all the men at Shechem. Circumcision is a holy covenantal sign which God gave on the flesh of Abraham's seeds. Simeon and Levi used this as a trick to slay the Shechemites. Kass writes, "We wonder about the practice of deceit and the merely cunning exploitation of the holy rite of circumcision."³⁷⁰ In consequence, Jacob declares that he never wants to join or be pleased with such a sin.

The form **מִכְרֵתֵיהֶם** simply would be a feminine plural noun construct of the common root **כרת** "to cut." The plural ending can remain unchanged in the construct state. Consequently, **מִכְרֵה** might mean something like "knives." Also, Exodus 4:25 looks to support this interpretation. The verse shows that **כרת** denotes the act of circumcision. Therefore, in my view, Dahood's suggestion is the most plausible among numerous solutions.

"Their circumcision knives are instruments of violence."

Verse 6

6Ab **כְּבִדִי** This word has been in a bitter tug-of-war between two translations: **כְּבִדִי** "my honor," according to the Masorah Hebrew Text³⁷¹ and **כְּבִדִי** "my liver," according to the reading of LXX.³⁷² There are several important reasons that many English versions and writers prefer "my liver" to "my honor." First, the disagreement in

³⁷⁰ Kass, "Regarding Daughters and Sisters," 37.

³⁷¹ ESV, NAS, KJV, O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 428, De Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 110-111, supports this reading. Geiger, *Urschrift und Übersetzungen der Bibel*, 319 asserts that the translators of LXX intentionally rendered the word in order to avoid the possibility of confounding the human **כָּבֵד** with that of the divine.

³⁷² CSB, NIV, NLT, RSV, von Rad, Aalders, Westermann, W. G. E. Watson, "Hebrew 'to Be Happy' – An Idiom Identified," *VT* 31 (1981): 92-95, translates as "I," by the same token, Hamilton, *Genesis*, 649 (my being), Vawter, *On Genesis*, 459 (my spirit), Dillmann, *Genesis*, NET (my heart), Skinner, *Genesis*, 517 (my mind), and Gevirtz, "Simeon and Levi," (my belly).

gender between the predicate (qal. juss. 3rd. fem. sg.) and the subject (masc., sg.) seems to support the repointed reading of LXX. In addition, כְּבוֹדִי stands in parallel with נַפְשִׁי in the previous line (6Aa). כְּבוֹדִי appears in parallel with נַפְשִׁי or רוּחִי in Psalms 16:9; 30:13; 57:9; 103:1; 108:2; Lam. 2:11-12, in all cases with the suffix of the first person.³⁷³ Even though several examples of the parallelism between my honor and my soul exist in the Hebrew Bible, it is more natural to repoint to “my liver,” כְּבוֹדִי than “my honor” כְּבוֹדִי.

Gevirtz writes,

“What is clear is that the noun in question must designate a part of the body which, with 1 c. s. pronominal suffix, precisely as its parallel, my soul, serves as a periphrasis for the pronoun, "I" or "me," and is of feminine gender.”³⁷⁴

Gesenius states that the Hebrew Bible commonly indicates the whole person with a part of the body.³⁷⁵ Accordingly, both נַפְשִׁי in 6Aa and כְּבוֹדִי in 6Ab may be translated as “I” in the parallelism.³⁷⁶ Also, even though the word, “לֵב,” “רוּחַ” exists in the Hebrew Bible, the translations “my being,” “my heart,” “my spirit,” “my soul,”³⁷⁷ and “my mind” are possible because כֶּבֶד, the liver, often appears as the seat of the emotions in the

³⁷³ These passages show that the whole sentence becomes strange if “כְּבוֹדִי” is translated to “my glory.” So, many English versions translate it as an anthropological term like “my soul” or “me.” For example, Psalms 108:2, וְאֶזְמְרָה אֶת־כְּבוֹדִי ... “I will sing and make melody with all my soul!” (Ps. 108:2) – NIV, NAS, RSV, and NLT (all my heart).

³⁷⁴ Gevirtz, “Simeon and Levi,” 101.

³⁷⁵ GKC, §139 f, g. On the one hand, E. J. Bullinger, *Figures of speech used in the Bible*, 10th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 563, asserts that glory (כְּבוֹד) also may stand for the whole person.

³⁷⁶ GKC, §109 e.

³⁷⁷ The parallelism between “Soul” and “Spirit” – Job 7:11, Isa. 42:1; 26:9.

companionship of the heart which is the modern equivalent in the Hebrew Bible.³⁷⁸

תִּחְדָּר This word can be interpreted in three different ways:

a. If this verb is rooted in 3rd. fem. sg. impf. qal of יָחַד, it will be translated as to “be united.” This meaning shows perfect parallelism with תִּבְנֶה in the previous line (Deut. 23:2, 3, 4, 9; Job. 3:6.)

b. If the root of תִּחְדָּר is 3rd. masc. sg. pf. qal of חָדַד, it can be suggested as “rejoice” or “desire.” When the parallel verb תִּבְנֶה is translated in the root of אָבַד “desire,” it shows another perfect parallelism. In support of this translation, the Hebrew verb *hdh*, “to rejoice,” and Akkadian, *hadu*, “to be happy, rejoice” often occurs with *kabattu*, “liver” and *libbu*, “heart.”³⁷⁹

c. Dahood supposes that the Hebrew root *hdw/y* possesses the meaning חָזַה, “to see” based on the cognate with Ugaritic *hdy*. He reads תִּחְדָּר as a Niph. Juss. of *hdw/y*, “let not my liver be seen in their assembly.”³⁸⁰

Some scholars suggest that this line contains a play on words that is not apparent in translation. On the grounds of the other parallel verses with these words (Job 3:6 and Prov. 1:10), Gary Rendsburg asserts that Genesis 49:6 shows a double polysemy.³⁸¹ Watson also has a similar view.³⁸² “Let my soul not enter/desire their council; Let my

³⁷⁸ HALOT, s. v. “כָּבֵד”

³⁷⁹ Watson, “Hebrew ‘to be Happy’,” 93-95.

³⁸⁰ Dahood, “A New Translation of Gen 49.6a,” 229; idem., “The value of Ugaritic for textual criticism,” 168-169.

³⁸¹ Gary Rendsburg, “Double Polysemy in Genesis 49:6 and Job 3:6,” *CBQ* 44 (1982): 48-51.

³⁸² Watson, “Hebrew ‘to be happy’,” 93.

spirit not be united with/ rejoice in their company.”

Although I recognize the possibility that the double polysemy exists in this verse as Renderberg’s assertion, the translation “do not go in” and “be not joined” is more reasonable than “do not desire” and “do not rejoice” for the combination “תחד” and “תבא.” The reason is that 6A stands in antithetical parallelism with 7B “I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.” Consequently, if 6Aa is translated by the meaning “to rejoice” and “to be happy,” then the translation is not harmonized with the verbs in 7B. Gevirtz rightly comments about the problem, explaining that “coupling a verb of motion with a verb expressing joy may have seemed incongruous.”³⁸³

6Bb וּבְרִצְנָם This is another problematical word. There are several kinds of translations for רִצַּן. Dahood repoints בְּרִצְנָם of MT to בְּרִצְנָם. He supposes that this word is the infinitive construct of רִיצַּ (to hurry) followed by the plural suffix *-nm*. Then, “in a rush they hamstrung an ox.”³⁸⁴ Kugel translates this as “and in a good humor, hough an ox.” He comments that Simeon and Levi laugh over the killing.³⁸⁵ RSV translates “in their wantonness they hamstrung an ox,” similarly, Gevirtz says, “in their caprice.”³⁸⁶

According to N. Walker’s study on the noun רִצַּן, the root of רִצַּן has a two-sided meaning: “will” and “pleasure,” whether that be of oneself or another.³⁸⁷ The meaning “pleasure” is more fitting to this text than “will” by reason of the antithetical parallelism with “anger” in 6Ba. Also, this translation is supported by Psalms 30:6 in which the

³⁸³ Gevirtz, “Simeon and Levi,” 107-109.

³⁸⁴ Dahood, “Northwest Semitic Notes on Genesis,” 81.

³⁸⁵ Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry*, 32.

³⁸⁶ Gevirtz, “Simeon and Levi,” 110.

³⁸⁷ N. Walker, “The Renderings of *Rason*,” *JBL* 81 (1962): 184. Also, *HALOT*, §2207a

words אָה and רָצַח occur together.³⁸⁸

6B has come into question with the direct connection with Genesis 34. Two questions have been raised: First, the narrative in Genesis 34 mentions that Simeon and Levi killed all the men at Shechem, but in Genesis 49 writes of man in the singular form (אִישׁ). Second, Genesis 34 says that the sons of Jacob just took the cattle and herds as booty, not hamstrung oxen (עֲקָרוּ־שׂוֹר).³⁸⁹ Exegetes have proposed various solutions.

Probably to avoid a contradiction with Genesis 34: 28 some ancient versions change שׂוֹר to שׂוֹר “wall”³⁹⁰ and עֲקָרוּ to עָקְרוּ “they destroyed.”³⁹¹ However, few today make this claim because the verb עָקַר in the piel is only used to denote the laming of big animals, not the demolishing of a certain structure (cf. Josh. 11:6, 9; 2 Sam. 8:4 = 1 Chron. 18:4).³⁹²

Carmichael suggests, “They have slain a man (Hamor = Ass), and hamstrung an ox (=Jacob/Israel),” supposing that the poem on Simeon and Levi includes animal comparisons like the cases of the following poems in Genesis 49. שׂוֹר is a synonym of חַמּוֹר (the name of the chief of Shechem).³⁹³ Also, Numbers 23: 22 and 24: 8 refers to

³⁸⁸ “in his anger (בְּאַפּוֹ) is a moment, in his favor (בְּרַצוֹנוֹ) is life.” (Ps. 30:6)

³⁸⁹ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 418, says that “the hamstringing of the ox” in the blessing of Jacob goes beyond what is reported in the story.

³⁹⁰ *Tar. Onq.*, Pesh., Aq., Symm., Vulg., and KJV

³⁹¹ The meaning of the root is commonly found in Aramaic. Cf. Zeph. 2:4.

³⁹² W. Krebs, “... sie haben Stiere gelahmt’ (Gen 49: 6),” *ZAW* 78 (1966): 359-361. He mentions that a similar expression appears in Greek and in Arabic too. Cf. Delitzsch, *Genesis*, II: 372-373.

³⁹³ Carmichael, “Some Sayings in Genesis 49,” 436-437; *idem.*, “Forbidden Mixtures in Deuteronomy xxii 9-11 and Leviticus xix 9,” *VT* 45 no. 4 (1995): 433-448.

Jacob/Israel as having the horns of the wild ox. Accordingly, “they killed a man” means that Simeon and Levi killed Hamor, the chief of the Shechemites, and “hamstrung an ox” means that the two brothers made the house of Jacob vulnerable before the Canaanites and Perizzites (Gen. 34:30).

Vawter suggests that שׂוֹר (“bull”) is a direct parallel to “man” because “bull” in Ugaritic texts often refers to “male.”³⁹⁴ Miller also presents a similar solution on the grounds of the Ugaritic texts.³⁹⁵ Accordingly, it means metaphorically that “they injured man or hero.” The man or hero refers to Shechem or Hamor. However, these solutions seem to connect excessively to the present text from quite a different context to Ugarit.

Gevirtz argues for “in their caprice [they] tore out a bull.” He relies on the Mishianic Hebrew, “to tear loose,” and Aramaic, to “pull out.” He observes that the verbs עקר and הרג govern the same accusative רכב “chariot” in 2 Samuel 8:4, 10:18.

Consequently, Gevirtz supposes that עקר and הרג have figuratively the same meaning in the view of parallelism.³⁹⁶ However, Gevirtz’s suggestion, which takes the evidence of considerably late languages instead of those of the earlier languages,³⁹⁷ remains uncertain.

In sum, the singular noun “אִישׁ” and “שׂוֹר” could be understood in a collective sense. Also, there are no other possibilities beyond that עקרו denotes to hamstringing a large animal. Although the story in Genesis 34 reports that Jacob’s sons plundered the flocks and herds of the Shechemites, they might distinguish between the animals, and take just some of them and hamstring the rest because the Israelites were shepherds and “they were

³⁹⁴ Vawter, “The Canaanite Background of Genesis 49,” 1-18.

³⁹⁵ P. D. Miller, “Animal Names as Designations in Ugaritic and Hebrew,” *UF* 2 (1970): 178-179, 185.

³⁹⁶ Gevirtz, “Simeon and Levi,” 110-113.

³⁹⁷ Several biblical Hebrew’s examples (Josh. 11:6, 9; I Chron. 18:4) show the meaning “to hamstring.” Also, the usage in Greek supports “to hamstring.”

neither sedentary farmers nor cattlemen.”³⁹⁸ Also, they would prevent the surrounding Canaanites to use the oxen to pursue them.

Some scholars assert that the typical parallelism of poetry shows that the second line contains a more developed idea than the first line.³⁹⁹ However, the expression “hamstring an ox” is not a further developed idea than “slaying a man” in the second line. Yet, the expression “hamstring an ox” in the second line shows the atrocity of Simeon and Levi more intensely than does “slain a man” in the first line, for Jacob stresses the inhumanity of Simeon and Levi that caused even innocent animals to die by hamstringing. Therefore, the hamstringing custom usually appears during war time (Josh. 11:6, 9; 2 Sam. 8:4). When considering all the above factors, the reading of MT and LXX, “they hamstrung a bull” and “they killed man,” does not present the interpreter with too big a problem.

Verse 7

Verse 7 has a number of syntactical and other difficulties.

7Aa “אָרֶר אֶפֶם” Because the anger stands for the subject, some writers think that the curse on Simeon and Levi is toned down radically; Simeon and Levi themselves are not damned, but only their anger.⁴⁰⁰ However, is it possible to curse only someone’s anger and not the one who display it? Jacob’s curse takes aim directly at Simeon and Levi themselves. Accordingly, this expression of Jacob involves a metonymy of the adjunct.

³⁹⁸ Waltke, *Genesis*, 606.

³⁹⁹ James L. Kugel calls “A, and what’s more, B” (*The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981, 7-27, especially 13page).

⁴⁰⁰ Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 226. Also, See, Baloian, “anger” in *NIDOTTE*, 4: 337-385. Robin Parry, *Old Testament Story and Christian Ethics: The Rape of Dinah as a Case Study* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004), 180-181, asserts “Jacob’s attitude here seems to be in line with a prevalent Old Testament theme concerning the importance of controlling one’s anger.”

That is, Jacob curses Simeon and Levi themselves by cursing their fierce anger which is one of the most problematic factors of Simeon and Levi.

כִּי עָזָּר ... כִּי קִשְׁתָּהּ ...

O'Connor interprets כִּי as emphatic rather than as cause, "Cursed be their anger so fierce, and their rage so cruel."⁴⁰¹ The interpretation is fully possible in this context. However, כִּי is more generally interpreted as a causative particle.⁴⁰²

7Ab קִשְׁתָּהּ The root means an overly heavy yoke, which is hard to bear (Exo. 1:14; 1Kings 12:4).⁴⁰³ Accordingly, it can be translated as "to be harsh."

7B ... וְאַפְיָצֵם ... אֶחְלֶקֶם

Jacob completes the blessing on Simeon and Levi with the grave judgment suited to their cruel crime. Interestingly enough Jacob proclaims judgment upon Simeon and Levi as if he were God: *I will divide them ... I will scatter them...* He declares it as the divine representative.

Jacob judges Simeon and Levi by the use of two simple verbs: חֶלֶק and פּוֹץ. The first of these verbs is a Piel and the second is a Hiphil. The etymology of חֶלֶק has legal connotations similar to נָחַלָה, "give as a possession," "inheritance."⁴⁰⁴ The verb חֶלֶק means exactly "to assign portions" rather than "to separate something." It is also the word

⁴⁰¹ O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 171. Cf. Hamilton, *Genesis*, 650.

⁴⁰² J. Muilenburg, "The linguistic and rhetorical usages of the particle *ky* in the Old Testament," *HUCA* 32 (1961): 137-138.

⁴⁰³ A. S. van der Woude, "קִשְׁתָּהּ," in *THAT* 2:689-691.

⁴⁰⁴ *HALOT*, s.v. "חֶלֶק."

used for dividing the land in Joshua 13-21 where it serves as a motive word. The only other meaning appears in Lamentations 4:16, “scatter.” חלק differs from the many Hebrew roots for “divide” used in the sense of “to break into parts.” Jacob does not use the verb פרד which is commonly used in the Hebrew Bible “separate,” “divide,” or “scatter” (Gen. 10:5; 13:9; Ruth. 1:17; Deut. 32:8). Because of the parallelism with פוץ in the next line, some prefer to translate “scatter.”⁴⁰⁵ Yet, the meaning “divide” is more appropriate for the text. It shows the advance of the idea in poetic parallelism, from “divide” to “scatter.”

The second verb פוץ is frequently found in the OT (64 times, 37 times in Hiphil). According to Kaminski, more than one third of “פוץ” in the Pentateuch is used with a negative meaning. It usually involves three meanings: going into exile (Deut. 4:27; 28:64; 30:3; Neh. 1:8; Jere. 9:16; Ezek. 11:16), judgment (Isa. 24:1; Ezek. 29:12; 30:23) and defeated in a war (Num. 10:35; I Sam. 11:11; 1 Kings 22:17).⁴⁰⁶ Accordingly, scattering is one of the ultimate curses in the Mosaic covenant. On the other hand, the prophets use the verb פוץ most frequently in the Old Testament and they use the word so differently from the usage of the Pentateuch. That is, the prophets declare פוץ with the hope of gathering from the scattering in many writings of the prophets (Ezek. 11:17; 20:34, 41; 28:25; 29:13; 34:12-13; Jer. 23:1-2; Isa. 11:12).

Carroll asserts,

“The promise of restoration is expressed in the formulaic fashion by the combination of *pws* with the vb. *qbs*, gather. ... In other words, Yahweh’s

⁴⁰⁵ NIV, NLT, NAS, Vawter, *On Genesis*, 459 etc.

⁴⁰⁶ Kaminski, *From Noah to Israel*, 31-32.

scattering of his people is not his final word.”⁴⁰⁷

To sum up, the Hebrew words used in Jacob’s judgment on Simeon and Levi, חלק and פּוֹץ, mean basically the “dividing” and “scattering.” Nevertheless, they do not imply severe scattering. Rather, they contain hope of the restoration from gathering in many cases in the Old Testament. Therefore, Jacob’s proclamation on Simeon and Levi cannot be the final judgment.

On account of Jacob’s last words to Simeon and Levi, most commentators trace the fundamental reason why the sons of Simeon and Levi did not occupy the land of Canaan.⁴⁰⁸ For example, Pehlke concludes that Simeon and Levi will not have an inheritance of the land as will the other sons.⁴⁰⁹ Also, Freedman reads the preposition “–ֶ” as “from,” that is, “I will divide them from Jacob I will scatter them from Israel,” on the basis of the Ugaritic poetry (cf. Gen. 11:8; Ps. 60:8).⁴¹⁰ Consequently, Freedman asserts, “two tribes were banished from the league is based on a new interpretation of Gen. 49:7.” His interpretation considerably increases the effect of curse. It means that Simeon and Levi are scattered outside of Israel. Yet, Gesenius writes that when the verb חלק is followed by the preposition ׀ it becomes either locative “among” or partitive “of.”⁴¹¹ Accordingly, the interpretation, “I will scatter them in Israel” is more pertinent than Freedman’s suggestion.

⁴⁰⁷ M. Daniel Carroll R. “פּוֹץ,” in *NIDOTTE*, 3:587.

⁴⁰⁸ Vawter, *On Genesis*, 460; Drive, *Genesis*, 384; Dillmann, *Genesis*, 2:457-458.

⁴⁰⁹ Pehlke, “Genesis 49,” 159.

⁴¹⁰ Freedman, “Early Israelite History in the Light of Early Israelite Poetry,” in *Unity and Diversity: essays in the history, literature, and religion of the ancient Near East*, eds. Goedicke, Hans and Roberts, J. J. M. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 3-35.

⁴¹¹ GKC, §119m.

It is quite strange that Simeon and Levi will not have an inheritance of the land unlike other sons because of Jacob's curse on them. The land in the Old Testament has fairly special meaning beyond merely a territory as a dwelling place. The land in the Hebrew Bible shows various meanings to Israelites: Inheritance (Gen. 28:4; Lev. 20:24; Deut. 15:4), accomplishment of promise (Exod. 6:8, 33:1; Josh. 21:44), blessing (Gen. 13:15), rest (Deut. 12:9, 10; Josh. 1:15; 22:4), and restoration and salvation (Exod. 3:8; Jer. 30:10; 46:27).⁴¹² Does Jacob's proclamation on Simeon and Levi mean that they will not occupy the land among Israelites? The answer is "No" Jacob declares that Simeon and Levi are scattered in Israel, not out of Israel.

Most scholars believe that Jacob's judgment is closely connected to the scattering of Levi as the tribe of priest and Simeon's sharing the land of Judah.⁴¹³ However, the evidence for this conclusion is hard to find in the Old Testament. Although the land was not given to the sons of Levi, unlike their brothers, they received another inheritance: Yahweh himself (Deut. 10:9; Num. 18:20; Josh. 13:33). The inheritance given to Levi corresponds to the land of other tribes and it was a glorious privilege. It is hard to conclude that Levites' scattering for the priestly ministering among Israelites is derived from the curse on their wicked deeds.

Also, the tribe of Simeon shared the land with Judah. The book of Joshua does not explain the sharing of the Simeonites with the land of Judah as the result of the curse of their misdeed. The author of Joshua just comments, "because the inheritance of the sons of Judah was too large for them" (Josh. 19:9). There is no negative nuance on Simeon's sharing the land with Judah in the Old Testament.

⁴¹² W. Brueggemann, *The land: place as gift, promise, and challenge in Biblical faith*, (London: SPCK, 1978), 134, asserts that the land is the good news of the gospel.

⁴¹³ Drive, *Genesis*, 384; Dillmann, *Genesis*, 2:457-458. They suppose that the tribe of Simeon was finally absorbed into the tribe of Judah. Cf. Simeon is not mentioned at all in Deuteronomy 33. See 2.2.1.1, for further discussion of the tribe of Simeon.

Rather, Jacob's judgment on Simeon and Levi can be understood in Jacob's intention to prohibit Simeon and Levi from committing the inhuman crime by dividing and scattering them. Dispersion also means a loss of power of the tribes.⁴¹⁴ Yet, Jacob does not drive the brothers out of Israel but scatters them within Israel. Simeon and Levi are not deserted sons. They still have a portion in the blessing of Jacob. There are still open the door for Simeon and Levi to participate in the inheritance of Israel in spite of Jacob's severe reproach.

3.2.2.5. The evaluation of the poem on Simeon and Levi

From what has been examined above, it is clear that the poem on Simeon and Levi is filled with negative contents. Jacob's judgment on Simeon and Levi is due to their cruel violence in the affairs on Shechem in Genesis 34. The poem on Simeon and Levi shows the remarkable degrading structure little by little: reproach (5B), cause (6B), judgment (7A), and result (7B). Jacob declares as divine delegate that he will scatter the brothers among Jacob so that they will not commit together such a wicked deed again.

However, there are several further questions which need to be asked. Why would Jacob leave such a severe pronouncement on two sons at the death bed? How can this negative judgment harmonize with the big theme of Genesis 49, that is, the blessing of Jacob? If so, how can we answer the mechanism between the curse on the individual sons and the blessings on the whole? This point will be investigated in the next chapter.

3.3. Summary

The pronouncements on Reuben, Simeon and Levi occupy an important position

⁴¹⁴ Wenham, *Genesis*, 475; Dillmann, *Genesis*, 2:457.

in the blessing of Jacob not only because they are peculiarly cursed sons but also because they have significant aspects in the length, the form, and the contents. Because the blessing of Jacob is written in the form of poetry, analyzing the structure of the poem both metrically and in content is needed first of all. In particular, the parallelism between verses must be examined with special concern.

Reuben

An abundance of parallelism is a salient feature of the poem on Reuben. The metrical structure of the poem shows three distiches (7:7; 8:8; 9:9), while on the contrary, two tristichs in the structure of content shows obvious an antithetical parallelism (v.3. Extolling; v.4. Denouncing).

In verse 3 Jacob describes how the status of Reuben was extremely outstanding in majesty and power as his firstborn. In verse 4 the last line contains two grammatical problems. The first problem is the drastic change of person: “you profaned ... he went up.” The second one is elliptical “my couch” at the end of the line. Dahood’s interpretation fits well in the context with minimum emendation. “Then, you defiled the couch of the concubine.”

Jacob elevates Reuben continually in verse 3: my firstborn (3A), my strength (3B), the beginning of my vigor (3B) and finally places him at the peak, “excelling of dignity and power” (3C). Yet, when Reuben’s superior leadership is expected, Jacob declares diametrical pronouncement to Reuben, “you will not excel” (4A), “you went up father’s bed” (4B), “you defiled the couch” (4C). The poem highlights the tragic end of Reuben by intentional dramatic antithetic structure.

The preferential right of the firstborn son was more powerful in the agricultural and semi nomadic society than in industrialized and commercial society. The Old

Testament shows many examples of the special status of the firstborn son. (Gen. 9:26-7; 27:1-4; 1 Sam. 16:5-6; 2 Sam. 20-22). The poetry of Reuben shows how great Jacob's expectation and love on Reuben were as his firstborn son. At the same time, how great was Jacob's disappointment and the feeling of treachery from Reuben. Reuben's behavior was a serious offense not only that might break down the foundation of the family, but also that threatened the existence of the family of Jacob.

Simeon

The poem on Simeon and Levi is arrayed with five couplets in the structure of both the meter and the content. 7A and 7B is the most important point both in form and content. The blessing on Simeon and Levi shows a structural contrast to the blessing on Reuben (AB//B'A').

First of all, Jacob's blessing on Simeon and Levi must be understood in direct relation with the events in Genesis 34. Even though some differences appear between two records, the differences exist in the fully acceptable extent if one understands the genre difference between prose and poetry.

The difficult word **מכרה** in verse 5 might mean something like "knives."

Dahood's suggestion is the most plausible: "Their circumcision knives are instruments of violence."

Two questions have been raised concerning 6B. That is, the poem in Genesis 49 writes man in singular while the narrative in Genesis 34 mentions that Simeon and Levi killed all the men at Shechem. Moreover, Genesis 34 writes that the sons of Jacob just took the cattle and herds as booty, not hamstringed oxen in Genesis 49. However, the singular noun **איש** and **שור** could be understood in a collective sense. Also, concerning **עקר** although the story in Genesis 34 reports Jacob's sons plundered the

flocks and herds of Shechemites, they might hamstring the animals after taking just part of them so as to block the surrounding Canaanites from using the oxen to pursue them. Therefore, the reading of MT and LXX does not pose big problems.

In verse 7 some think that Simeon and Levi are not damned but only their anger because the anger stands for the subject. However, Jacob curses Simeon and Levi metonymically by the cursing on their fierce anger which is the most problematic factors of them.

Although the sons of Levi did not receive the land like other brothers, another inheritance was given to them: Yahweh himself. It is hard to conclude that Levites' scattering for the priestly ministering among Israelites is derived from the curse on their wicked deeds. Also, the tribe of Simeon shared the land with Judah. The book of Joshua does not explain the sharing of the Simeonites with the land of Judah as a result of the curse of their misdeed (Joshua 19:9).

Overall, Jacob intended that Simeon and Levi could not again carry out the same violent crime together by means of dividing and scattering the brothers. Yet, Jacob does not drive the brothers out of Israel but scatters within Israel. Simeon and Levi are not deserted sons. They still have a portion in the blessing of Jacob in spite of the Jacob's negative pronouncement.

However, there are several further questions which need to be asked. How can these negative judgments harmonize with the major subject of Genesis 49, the blessing of Jacob? Notwithstanding the severely negative pronouncement on them, is the blessing of Jacob valid for Reuben, Simeon and Levi as well? If so, how can we answer the mechanism between the curse on the individual sons and the blessings on the whole?

CHAPTER 4

THE MEANING OF BLESSING AND CURSE

4.1. Introduction

The passages concerning the blessings of Jacob on the first three sons are exegetically examined in the previous chapter. In view of the results so far achieved, Jacob obviously reproaches his first three sons on the basis of the past events even though Genesis 49 is named “the blessing of Jacob.” Reuben was excelling but he is no longer excel because of his reckless adultery with his father’s concubine. Levi and Simeon will be divided and scattered among the tribes because of their harsh cruelty. These negative pronouncements of Jacob on the first three sons hard to harmonize with the big theme of Genesis 49. In the previous chapter, it was demonstrated that the attempts to solve this outside of the Scripture were the cause of serious problems. Rather, more feasible hints will be found in the usages and characteristics of the blessing and curse in the Old Testament. Accordingly, it is necessary to demonstrate the lexicological and semantic meaning and the usage of blessing and curse of the Old Testament in the present chapter. Especially, it will be focused on the two words “ברך” and “ארר” which Jacob uses for his sons in Genesis 49.

As Evans rightly said, “Blessing and cursing are both key concepts in Scripture.”⁴¹⁵ Accordingly, it is not utterly strange that the Hebrew Bible adopts various

⁴¹⁵ M. J. Evans, “Blessing/Curse,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, eds. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove/Leicester: IVP, 2000), 397. Especially, Genesis, Deuteronomy, and Psalms in the Old Testament, the Gospels and Revelation in the New Testament treat “blessing” and “curse” as the central theme.

words for the meaning of blessing and curse: for blessing (חַנּוּן, צְלוּחַ, שְׁלוֹמִים, אֲשֵׁרִי, בְּרַךְ) and for curse (אֵלֵּהּ, קָלֵל, נִקְבָּ/קִבַּב, זַעַם, חָרָם, אָרַר). The fact implies that blessing and curse occur in the various contexts and the meaning spreads in quite a wide range. Those Hebrew words corresponding to blessing and curse are semantically equivocal. Each word emphasizes somewhat different facets of blessing or curse. However, they have been translated into the English words “blessing,” or “curse” in most cases.⁴¹⁶ For that reason, when the English words “blessing” and “curse” appear in the Old Testament, it must be kept in mind that subtly different Hebrew words could be used.

4.2. Word Study

4.1.1. Blessing

The Hebrew words for “blessing” are not as varied as the Hebrew words for “curse.” Two Hebrew verbs for “blessing” mainly occur in the Old Testament: בָּרַךְ and אֲשֵׁרִי.

אֲשֵׁרִי

אֲשֵׁרִי has chiefly been translated in most English versions as “happiness” or “bliss.” The word אֲשֵׁרִי occurs forty-four times in the Hebrew Bible and over half of them appear in the Psalter and Proverbs (thirty-four times). This word is found in the unique form אֲשֵׁרִי which is defined as the masculine plural construct of the noun אֲשֵׁר.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁶ The noun “curse” in English is semantically equivocal. Synonyms for curse, in addition to imprecation, are execration, malediction, anathema, ban, and oath. Also, “blessing” in English has several synonyms: benediction, greeting, praise, thanks, farewell etc.

⁴¹⁷ BDB, s.v. “אֲשֵׁרִי.”

Although the etymology of **אשרי** cannot be traced at present, scholars assume that the name “**אֲשֵׁר**, I am Happy,” Jacob's son by Zilpah (Gen. 30:13), is etymologically related to this word.⁴¹⁸ Accordingly, the basic meaning of **אשרי** can be estimated as “happy,” “fortune,” and “blessing.”

Many have been concerned with the relationship between **ברך** and **אשרי**. Yet, the relationship between the two words is not yet established among the scholars.⁴¹⁹ Some scholars suggest that **אשרי** focuses on a state of happiness different from **ברוך**; others that the meaning of **אשרי** is almost identical to **ברך**, especially, to the passive participle form **ברוך**.⁴²⁰ However, it is not to be denied that the Hebrew Bible uses the two words in some different way. God blesses someone or something with **ברך**, not with the term **אשרי**. By the same token, **ברוך** is applied to God as the object, but **אשרי** is never applied to God.

Cazelles suggests that **אוי/הוי** is the antipode to **אשרי** is as **ברוך** is to **ארור**. Also, **אשרי** was introduced to the Old Testament in a relatively later period, possibly, under the Egyptian influence, with its antipode **אוי/הוי**. Cazelles supposes that they are a weakened form of **ברוך** and **ארור**, having been substituted for the older form, “**ארור** and **ברוך**.”

⁴¹⁸ V. P. Hamilton, “**אֲשֵׁר**” *TWOT*. The name means “happy, fortunate one.”

⁴¹⁹ H. -J. Kraus, *BK*, X/1, 3, suggests that **אשרי** is “more secular” while **ברוך** is sacred-solemn. Sigmund Mowinckel, *Psalmenstudien V. Segen und Fluch in Israels Kult und Psalmendichtung* (Kristiania: Jacob Dybwad, 1924), 54, asserts that the **אשרי** psalms are used in the cult, particularly in the Jerusalem temple. Also, J. Deupont, “Béatitudes égyptiennes,” *Bib* 47 (1966): 185-220, assumes that **ברוך** is introduced in the Hebrew at a late period from Egypt. Also, Cazelles, *TDOT* 1:446-447, asserts similarly as Deupont.

O. Kaiser, “Beobachtungen zum alttestamentlichen Makarismus,” *ZAW* 82 (1970): 249, asserts the word **אשרי** is a proclamation of the living covenant of grace between God and man.

⁴²⁰ S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), 47.

However, Cazelles' supposition of the antipodal relationship between **אֱלֹהֵי** and **אֲשֶׁרִי** must be instantaneously dismissed because they do not occur together in the Old Testament. As Janzen rightly argues, **אֱלֹהֵי** occurs only in the prophets, and never in the Psalms. However, **אֲשֶׁרִי** occurs mostly in the Psalms and Proverbs but only four times in the Prophets (Isaiah).⁴²¹

On the other hand, Janzen convincingly presents the relationship between **אֲשֶׁרִי** and **בֵּרַךְ** by means of the difference of view point. So to speak, **אֲשֶׁרִי** is pronounced in the view of the bystander while **בֵּרַךְ** is pronounced in the view of the giver, invoker, or mediator.⁴²² Accordingly, the term **אֲשֶׁרִי** contains the speaker's envious desire. Yet, **בֵּרַךְ** does not have such an envious desire at all.⁴²³ For this reason, the Hebrew Bible does not apply **אֲשֶׁרִי** to God while **בֵּרַךְ** frequently appears with God as an object. Also, some Hebrew grammars look to support Jansen's explanation by the fact that they prefer to interpret **אֲשֶׁרִי** as a kind of interjection.⁴²⁴

שָׁלוֹם

This word does not frequently occur in connection with "blessing" in the Old Testament. The root of the verb **שָׁלַם** generally means "fulfillment, wholeness, harmony, and restored relationship."⁴²⁵ Yet, the noun **שָׁלוֹם** most frequently occurs as meaning

⁴²¹ Waldemar Janzen, "Ašre in the Old Testament," *HTR* 58, no. 2 (Apr., 1965): 221.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 224.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁴²⁴ GKC, § 93, I.

⁴²⁵ BDB, s.v. "שָׁלַם."

“peace” (KJV translates 172 times as “peace” in the 250 occurrences) in the Old Testament.⁴²⁶ Carr suggests that peace in the Old Testament means “absence of strife.” So, the word שלום is generally used for a greeting in the Old Testament (Judg. 19:20; 1 Sam. 25:6, 35).⁴²⁷ Nevertheless, several examples plainly show that שלום can be connected with the meaning of blessing (e.g., 2 Sam. 15:27; 1 Kings 2:6 shows that withholding שלום implies a curse). Nel concludes, “In the etymology the word *shalom* may mean “peace or blessing” by the unimpaired relationships with others and the fulfillment which is the result of God's presence in the covenant relationship.”⁴²⁸ In addition, even in the case where שלום clearly means “peace” it sometimes denotes the climax of blessing.⁴²⁹

צלח

This word occurs only in the form of Qal (25 times) and Hiphil (40 times). It basically means “be strong” (1 Sam. 10:6), “be successful” (Jer. 12:1) in Qal, and “enjoy success” (1 Kings 22:12) or “make something succeed” (Gen. 24:21) in Hiphil.⁴³⁰ Hence, the word צלח is manifestly connected with the meaning of “blessing.” Success and prosperity is one of the most frequent factors of blessing. In the Old Testament, someone's success is solely dependent on the hand of God, that is, the blessing of God.

ברך

⁴²⁶ G. L. Carr, “שלום” in *TWOT*.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Philip J. Nel, “שלם,” in *NIDOTTE*, 4:130-134.

⁴²⁹ Herbert C. Brichto, “The Problem of Curses in the Hebrew Bible” (Ph.D., diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1962), 6.

⁴³⁰ Holladay, s.v. “צלח.”

The Hebrew root of בֵּרַךְ has several different etymological meanings: “bless,” “kneel,”⁴³¹ and “pond.”⁴³² Etymological linkage between them is difficult to evaluate because of the scarcity of documents.⁴³³ Some assume that the meaning “kneel” derives from the custom of kneeling to receive the blessing from the superior as the expression to honor him (Ps. 95:6; 1Kings 8:54),⁴³⁴ others that “kneel” relates to the common custom where one places a child on one’s knees for blessing (Gen. 48:9-12; 50:23-24; Job 3:12).⁴³⁵ Pedersen suggests that the etymology of בֵּרַךְ for blessing is traceable to the meaning of reproductive power, fertility, and offspring.⁴³⁶ Plassmann that the meaning of בֵּרַךְ for “a pool of water” derives from the place where animals would kneel to drink.⁴³⁷ Similarly, Murtonen suggests it is “because blessing was brought about by rain and springs or wells in the agricultural and pastoral society.”⁴³⁸ Others argue that any evidence related etymologically between “to bless” and “to kneel” does not exist.⁴³⁹

The parallel Akkadian words, *birku* or *burku* occur in the meaning of “the knee or lap of human, and male and female’s sexual organ in euphemism.”⁴⁴⁰ The Akkadian verb

⁴³¹ This meaning occurs 24 times (Psalm 95:6; 2 Chron. 6:13; Gen. 24:11 in Hiphil) in the OT. Cf., BDB, 138-139.

⁴³² This meaning occurs seven times. Cf. BDB, 140.

⁴³³ Christopher Toll, “Ausdrücke für ‘Kraft’ im Alten Testament mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Wurzel BRK,” *ZAW* 94 (1982): 111-123.

⁴³⁴ G. H. Davies, “Kneeling,” in *IDB* 3:41-42.

⁴³⁵ William C. Williams, “בֵּרַךְ,” in *NIDOTTE*, 1:757.

⁴³⁶ Pedersen, *Israel*, 1:204, 518, takes a witness from Assyrian, *Tarbit birki-ia*, “the seed of my knee” which means a son.

⁴³⁷ J. Plassmann, *The Signification of beraka* (New York: Joseph F. Wagner, 1913), 32.

⁴³⁸ A. Murtonen “The Use and Meaning of the Words *lebârek* and *berâkâh* in the Old Testament,” *VT* 9 (Apr., 1959), 176.

⁴³⁹ Christopher W. Mitchell, “The meaning and significance of BRK, ‘to bless’ in the Old Testament” (Ph.D diss., Univ. of Wisconsin-Madison, 1983), 21.

⁴⁴⁰ “birku” *CAD*, B vol. 2, 255-557. However, some scholars insist that the close connection

karabu shows a similar sense to the Hebrew בָּרַךְ “to bless.”⁴⁴¹ The use of *brk* in Northwest Semitic languages shows a striking similarity to בָּרַךְ in the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁴² Ugarit *brk* also has three similar meanings as the Hebrew בָּרַךְ: knee, pool, and blessing.⁴⁴³

The Hebrew word בָּרַךְ for “bless” (including the noun בְּרִכָּה) occurs a total of four hundred and two times, more than a half of which appear in three books: Genesis–88; Psalms–83; and Deuteronomy–51.⁴⁴⁴ The verb occurs most frequently in Piel conjugation,⁴⁴⁵ which, Jenni maintains, has a factitive force. This indicates that the speaker focuses on “the imposition of an adjectival state of demonstrated success.”⁴⁴⁶ The Qal passive participle generally describes someone’s state, reflecting the speaker’s joyful attitude or an expression of praise to a specific condition.⁴⁴⁷ The verb בָּרַךְ is also used to express the various meanings such as “to bless,” “to greet,” “to congratulate,” “to give thanks,” “to praise,” and “to worship.”

between the Akkadian *birku* and the Hebrew בְּרִכָּה. c.f., Christopher Toll, “Ausdrücke für ‘Kraft,’” 113-115; J. Scharbert, “Fluchen und Segen im Alten Testament.” *Bib* 39 (1958): 1-26, asserts, “dass man gewöhnlich als ‘(durch ein Zauberwort) binden,’ ‘bannen’ erklärt, und mit arab. *’arra* = fort jagen, vertreiben.”

⁴⁴¹ *CAD* 8.192-198.

⁴⁴² Gerhard Wehmeier, *Der Segen im Alten Testament*, Theologische Dissertationen 6, ed. Bo Reicke (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt, 1970), 18-66.

⁴⁴³ Cyrus Gordon, “Ugaritic Textbook,” *Analecta Orientalia*, vol. 38 (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1967), 197-198.

⁴⁴⁴ Mitchell, 392.

⁴⁴⁵ Qal–74, Piel–232, Pual–13, Hiphil–1, Hithpael–7. Cf. S. Mandelkern, *Veteris Testamenti Concordantiae Hebraicae Atque Chaldaicae*, (Tel Aviv: Sumptibus Schocken Hierosolymis, 1971), 237.

⁴⁴⁶ Ernst Jenni, “Faktitive und Kausative von אָבַר ‘zugrunde gehen,’” *VTSup* 16 (1967): 143-157.

⁴⁴⁷ *HALOT*, s.v. “בָּרַךְ”

The usage of בָּרַךְ for “blessing” in the Old Testament can be divided according to the subject and the object of the verb into three big categories according to the subject and the object of the verb.

First, God *brk* man or man *brk* God.

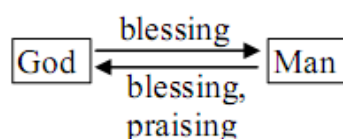


Fig. 3. *brk* between God and man

- a) Yahweh blesses man. A large number of God's blessings are expressed by the promises to man.⁴⁴⁸ e.g., God's blessings to Patriarchs: Abraham (Gen. 12:2), Isaac (Gen. 26:12), Jacob (Gen. 35:9); to Samson (Judg. 13:24); to Obed-edom (2 Sam. 6:11).
- b) Man blesses Yahweh. The blessing of man toward God may have various meanings: thanks, praise, joy, and admiration. For example, Melchizedek blesses God (Gen. 14:20); Abraham's servant blesses Yahweh (Gen. 24:48); David blesses Yahweh before the Congregation (1 Chron. 29:10, 20) and the sons of Israel blessed God (Josh. 22:33).
- c) In the case of בָּרַךְ with God as object, it can be used in the euphemism, “Curse against God.” A total of seven cases are found with this usage in the Old Testament:⁴⁴⁹ 1 Kings 21:10, 13; Job 1:5, 11; 2:5, 9; and Psalm 10:3.

⁴⁴⁸ Mitchell, 56. The subject of בָּרַךְ in piel is Yahweh who is the covenant God.

⁴⁴⁹ Duane L. Christensen, “Dtn 33,11 – A Curse in the Blessing of Moses?” *ZAW* 101, no. 2 (1989): 278, asserts that the ancient Hebrew felt the expression “to curse God” is inappropriate. Accordingly, they substituted בָּרַךְ for קָלַל.

Second, man *brk* man.

A person asks or wishes a blessing of God for another person. Also, בָּרַךְ in this category is frequently used to express greetings and farewells, thanks, congratulations, and respect to neighbors, family and friends.

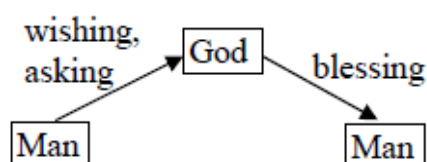


Fig. 4. *brk* between men

- a) Superior blesses inferior, for example Patriarchs bless their sons (Gen. 27:27; 48:20; 49: 25-26); King David blesses his people and household (2 Sam. 6:18; 20) and mother and brother bless Rebekah (Gen. 24:60).
- b) Equals to one another, for example Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, must not exchange to *brk* with anyone (2 Kings 4:29); someone blesses his neighbor (Prov. 27:14); and the Israelites bless the men who willingly live in Jerusalem (Neh. 11:2).
- c) Inferior blesses superior. This case appears relatively rare in the Old Testament, for example Jacob blesses Pharaoh (Gen. 47:7, 10); Joab blesses David (2 Sam. 14:22); the son of Toi blesses King David (2 Sam. 8:10) and King's servants bless David (1 Kings 1:47).

Third, God or man *brk* things (physical things: property, field, food, and animal and abstract things: names, wisdom, and deeds). בָּרַךְ is intended to affect the whole realm of life. Accordingly, it was not strange in the Old Testament that בָּרַךְ formula might be directed at the territory in which a person lived or at things necessary to his sustenance as well as at the person himself. In Deuteronomy 28:3-14, the blessing was pronounced on

the possessions and the necessities of life.

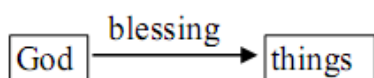


Fig. 5. God *brk* things

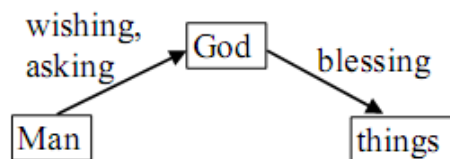


Fig. 6. Man *brk* things

- a) God blesses things, for example God blesses creatures (Gen. 1:22); God blesses the Sabbath day (Exod. 20:11); God will bless the bread and water of Israelites (Exod. 23:25).
- b) Man blesses things; for example people do not eat until Samuel blessed the sacrifices (1 Sam. 9:13). Jeremiah says that the day when his mother bore him is not blessed (Jer. 20:14). People blessed the glorious name of Yahweh (Neh. 9:5). David blesses the discretion of Abigail (1 Sam. 25:33).

In summary, בָּרַךְ in the Old Testament is directly or indirectly related to God in most cases: the subject, the object, or the agent of בָּרַךְ. In other words, it means God is the ultimate source of בָּרַךְ. This fact satisfactorily explains the reason that the majority of בָּרַךְ occurs in the optative form in the Old Testament. Accordingly, the relationship between God and the blessed person or the speaker of blessing is an important factor in the blessing of the Old Testament.

4.1.2. Curse

Various Hebrew words appear for the meaning of “curse.”

אלה

The verb occurs thirty six times in qal, hiphil, and noun אלה. BDB suggests that the basic meaning of אלה is “to make solemn oath,” “to swear.” Holladay suggests that the main meaning of אלה is “hurl a curse, imprecation.”⁴⁵⁰ Brichto maintains that the basic meaning of אלה is “curse,” “imprecation,” “sanction.”⁴⁵¹ While most versions and commentators have accepted ארר as the most representative word for curse, Brichto asserts, following Speiser, that אלה is most commonly used for malediction in the Old Testament, rather than ארר formula.⁴⁵² In comparison with ארר, Scharbert argues that the verb אלה is not generally used for absolute curses and imprecations, but for conditional curses,⁴⁵³ fulfilled when someone meets the condition of אלה.

Consequently, אלה occurs in the context of swearing an oath: to defend legal rights (Num. 5:21-28; Lev. 5:1; 1 Kings 8:31; Prov. 29; 24); for ratification of treaties (Ezek. 17:13; Hos. 10:4; Deut. 29:18; 30:7) and to punish an evildoer (1 Sam. 14:24; Gen. 24:41; Ps. 10:7).

קלל

The root קלל occurs 128 times in the Old Testament. The primary meaning is "to be light or slight."⁴⁵⁴ This verb is related to the meaning of “curse” in Piel and Pual conjugations (occurring forty three times). Yet Piel in קלל looks to still preserve the

⁴⁵⁰ Holladay, s.v. “אָלָה.”

⁴⁵¹ Brichto, “The Problem of Curses,” 42, 62.

⁴⁵² Ibid., 231.

⁴⁵³ Scharbert, “קָלַל” in *TDOT*, 13:42.

⁴⁵⁴ L. J. Coppes, “קָלַל” in *TWOT*.

basic meaning “to be light, to be small.” Accordingly, *qillel* implies “curse” as “to be treated lightly,” “to deprive someone’s status,” and “to make contemptible.”⁴⁵⁵

Both God and man appear as the subject of the verb *qillel*. God uses *qillel* to curse (or not) someone or something. For example God said to Noah after the Deluge, “I will never again curse (לְקַלֵּל) the ground (Gen. 8:21).” Man also curses (or not) someone or something with *qillel*. For example God promises to Abraham “... and the one who curses you (וַיִּקְלֵלְךָ) I will curse (אָרַר) (Gen. 12:3).” Also, Goliath curses (וַיִּקְלֵל) David (1 Sam. 17:43). Nehemiah publicly pronounces a curse formula (וַיִּאָקְלֵם) on those who married foreign women (Neh. 13:25).

The difference between קלל and ארר has been an interesting subject to Hebrew scholars. One of the most significant differences is the fact that the Old Testament sometimes applies *qillel* to God as the object while ארר never has God as the object. For instance, “You shall not blaspheme (קלל) God or curse (ארר) a leader of your people” (Exod. 22:27) or “He will curse (קלל) his king and God” (Isa. 8:21). However, although *qillel* often appears in conjunction with ארר and in contrast to ברך (Gen. 12:3; Num. 22:6; 12), it is not certain whether or not *qillel* is the complete antonym of ברך.⁴⁵⁶ Also, Scharbert points that ארר is used in the formal curse (Exod. 22:27; Mal. 2:2; Prov. 3:33) while *qillel* is used in informal curses (2 Sam. 16:5-8).⁴⁵⁷ Coppes writes that *qillel* is only used as a pronouncing formula but ארר is to put someone in the actual cursed status. For example in Genesis 12:3, “God said to Abraham, ‘he who curses (קלל) you’ (to

⁴⁵⁵ Scharbert, “קלל” in *TDOT*, 13:39.

⁴⁵⁶ קלל in qal is used in semantic antithesis to קבד, which means “be weight,” “be honored.”

⁴⁵⁷ Scharbert, “קלל” in *TDOT*, 13:43.

pronounce a formula), ‘I will curse (אָרַר) him’ (the actual cursed state).”⁴⁵⁸ Although Brichto argues that Piel and Pual forms of קָלַל is far from the meaning “imprecation” or “malediction.” Also, the meaning of קָלַל in Piel is near to the English word “embarrass” rather than “insult” as in the example in Genesis 8:21. Also, קָלַל in Pual means “unfavored” or “unfortunate.”⁴⁵⁹ He suggests that the verb *qillel* does not involve a spoken content: “while the verb אָרַר has a range of meanings far more specialized and significant than the general and ambiguous ‘curse.’”⁴⁶⁰

J. E. Hartley summarizes the difference קָלַל from other words for curses as follows:

“Our word should be distinguished from *`alâ* connoting oaths in general and curses as part of that larger category, from *`ārar* which describes the state of lifelessness (absence of blessing, Deut. 27:16), from *ḥāram* which signifies devotion to destruction or sacred use, and *qābab* which has to do with actually uttering the curse on something (used mainly in the Balaam narrative and Job).”⁴⁶¹

In summary, *qillel* is used by both God and man in the Old Testament. It is often used as the parallel word of אָרַר and counterpart of בָּרַךְ. However, it cannot be said that *qillel* always means verbal abuse, “curse.” The fact is that the piel form of קָלַל still preserves the basic meaning, “to treat lightly.” Consequently, Brichto rightly describes that *qillel* means “a wide range of injurious activity, from verbal abuse to material harm.”⁴⁶²

⁴⁵⁸ L. J. Coppes, “קָלַל” in *TWOT*.

⁴⁵⁹ Brichto, “The Problem of Curses,” 130-131. e.g., Isaiah 65:20, “And the one who does not reach the age of one hundred shall be unfortunate.”

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁴⁶¹ J. E. Hartley, “צָלַח” in *TWOT*.

⁴⁶² Brichto, “The Problem of Curses,” 189.

Accordingly, the precise meaning of *qillel* must be decided in each separate context.

נקב/קבב

These two words are controversially byforms.⁴⁶³ קבב occurs fifteen times in the Old Testament. The occurrences are concentrated in the story of Balaam (Num. 22:11, 17; 23:8, 11, 13, 14, 27). קבב frequently occurs in parallelism with ארר and as an anonym to ברכה in (Prov. 11:26). For example, Balaam uses קבב with ארר in parallelism (Num. 22:6; 23:7). The parallel use of קבב and ארר is still found in Job 3:8. Also, קבב occurs together with זעם (Prov. 24:24-5). From the above cases, it can be concluded that the meaning of קבב is an uttering used when one would imprecate his enemy.

זעם

The basic idea of זעם shows “intense anger.” This word appears eleven times in the Qal stem and once in the Niphal and twenty two times as a noun “זַעַם.”⁴⁶⁴ The verb זעם is related to the meaning “curse” in the respect that the divine wrath and curse is mixed in the Old Testament and the distinction is not easy between them (Isa. 66:14; Zech. 1:12; Mal. 1:4).⁴⁶⁵ Also, the rendering “curse” of זעם is based on the parallel with other

⁴⁶³ Robert P. Gordon, “קבב,” *NIDOTTE*, 3:860. However, J. Schabert, “‘Fluchen’ und ‘Segen’ im Alten Testament,” *Bib* 39 (1958): 1-26, asserts that the assumption which נקב is byform of קבב is wrong because the root נקב does not occur as a synonym with קלל or ארר in the Hebrew Bible. Also, he says that Lev. 24:11, 16 is which is the unique passage for the assumption is widely misunderstood. Yet, it will be impossible to determine the problem because the verb scarcely occurs in the Scripture.

⁴⁶⁴ Searched in Bible works 7 program (Command: זעם@v* and זעם@n* for WTM version).

⁴⁶⁵ B. Wiklander, “זעם,” in *TDOT*, 4:108.

verbs for curse. Most of them occur in the story of Balaam. In Numbers 23:7, Balak, King of Moab, says, “Come, curse (אָרַר) Jacob for me, and come, denounce (זָעַם) Israel.” In Numbers 23:8, Balaam replies, “How shall curse (נִקַּב) whom God hath not cursed (קָבַב)? Or how shall denounce (זָעַם) whom the Lord has not denounced (זָעַם)?” Also, the parallelism זָעַם/קָבַב appears in Proverb 24:24, “Whoever says to the guilty, “You are innocent,” peoples will curse (קָבַב) him and nations denounce (זָעַם) him.” In addition, the cases for obvious “curse” of זָעַם are found in a few passages (Isa. 30:27; Mic. 6:10; Prov. 22:14). When the subject of זָעַם is man, it too means “speak curses,” “do injury to some by cursing” (Prov. 24:24).⁴⁶⁶

חָרַם

The verb חָרַם occurs forty eight times in Hiphil and three times in Hopal in the Old Testament. Although this verb sometimes means an action for consecration (Lev. 27:28; Josh 6:18; Mic. 4:13), the Hiphil form occurs as a synonym with the verbs “destroy, kill” (2 Kings 19:11; Isa. 11:15; Jer. 50:21).⁴⁶⁷ In this case, חָרַם means “a ban for utter destruction,” “the compulsory dedication of something which impedes or resists God's work.”⁴⁶⁸ The book of Joshua shows manifestly these examples. The verb חָרַם applied to almost all the Canaanite cities and Joshua and Israelites completely destroyed them (e.g., Jericho – Josh. 6:21; Ai – Josh. 8:26; Makkedah – Josh. 10:28; Hazor – Josh.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ N. Lohfink, “חָרַם” in *TDOT*, 2:186.

⁴⁶⁸ BDB, s.v. “חָרַם.”

11:11). Also, the passages in Deuteronomy 7:2-6 applies אָרַם to the Israelite city that forsakes their God.

אָרַר

The verb אָרַר occurs sixty-three times in the Old Testament. Among the various uses of the Hebrew root אָרַר, the אָרַרְךָ formula, the qal passive participle of אָרַר, occupies a very special position in the Old Testament. The אָרַרְךָ formula occurs thirty-nine times in pronouncements of curses. Also, this verb is found twelve times as an antonym of בָּרַךְ (Gen. 9:25-26; Gen. 12:3; Gen. 27:29; etc.).⁴⁶⁹

The usage of the אָרַרְךָ formula can be classified into three categories:

First, the אָרַרְךָ formula appears as the declaration of punishments. This usage is an actual decree rather than an imprecation or prayer.⁴⁷⁰ For example, "Because you have done this, cursed (אָרַרְךָ) are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field (Gen. 3:14)."

Second, the אָרַרְךָ formula is sometimes used for the utterance of threats to discourage other's transgression, or to chastise someone.⁴⁷¹ For example, "Cursed (אָרַרְךָ) be the man who does not hear the words of this covenant" (Jer. 11:3). "Cursed (אָרַרְךָ) be the deceiver who has a male in his flock" (Mal. 1:14). In this case, the curse formula is used for the most effective means that the community separate from the evildoers (Deut. 27).

⁴⁶⁹ Scharbert, "אָרַר" in *TDOT*, 1:405-406.

⁴⁷⁰ S. Dean McBride, "Blessings and Cursings," in *NIDB* 478.

⁴⁷¹ Gevirtz, "Curse Motifs in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East," (Ph. D. diss., The University of Chicago, 1959), 258.

Third, the אָרִיר formula also occurs when the laws are proclaimed. Moses charged the people that “ten curse formulas” must be proclaimed in the land of Canaan (Deut. 27:16-25). For example, “Cursed (אָרִיר) be the man who makes a carved or cast metal image” (Deut. 27:15); Deuteronomy 28:16-19 etc.

In addition, the אָרִיר formula was used to express the prophet’s despaired emotion. Cf. “Cursed (אָרִיר) be the man who brought the news to my father” (Jer. 20:14, 5). Also, the אָרִיר formula was spoken as a prediction to the certain action or inaction which expected an inevitable consequence.⁴⁷²

Brichto asserts that the precise meaning of אָרִיר is closer to “ban from something” than “cursed.” For example, Josh. 9:23; Judg. 21:18; 1 Sam. 26:19; 2 Kings 9:34 (barred from proper burial); Mal. 2:2. He adds,

“When applied to earth or rain, it is a spell which bars fertility to men.

When applied to men (or animals), it bars them from the benefits of fertility or association with their fellow creatures. As applied to a night, it means the barring from the night of any illumination whatsoever.”⁴⁷³

The Akkadian *ar’ru* “to snare, bind” and the noun *irritu* “noose, sling” sound to support his assertion. However, although אָרִיר originally has the meaning “to ban or to bar from something,” many relevant passages bear a testimony that the אָרִיר formula is commonly spoken for “curse.” Scholars believe אָרִיר has two meanings: (1) to ban, and (2) to

⁴⁷² Brichto, “The Problem of Curses,” 123.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 122.

curse.⁴⁷⁴ The ארור formula was the most powerful decree declared by an authority or a community to those who have committed a serious transgression against an authority such as God, king, parents, and the community (Gen. 9:25; 49:7; Josh. 9: 23; 1 Sam. 14:24, 28). In consequence, it involves the meaning that the cursed one has been expelled or banned from a community relationship where he had enjoyed security, justice, and success.⁴⁷⁵ Also, it was believed that the ארור formula had influence on the whole realm of life such as one's possessions and sustenance (Deut. 28:15-68).

4.3. Blessing and Curse in the Old Testament

The contents and characteristics of blessing and curse in the Old Testament are related to the question: What does the speaker expect to bring to the counterpart by the proclamation of the blessing or curse? The characteristic is related to the question: What factors are common to blessing and curse of the Old Testament? What are distinctive features of the Old Testament from the blessing and curse of the extra Biblical world?

4.2.1. The contents of blessing and curse

What exactly is incorporated in “blessing” and “curse” in the Old Testament is still hard to define because the scope of specific contents is fairly large. It is natural that blessing and curse vary according to the standard of value of a society, the taste of the invoker, and the difference of the situations. Nevertheless, the Old Testament shows that the invokers expected some kind of common result when they speak blessing or curse.

⁴⁷⁴ Samuel A. B. Mercer, “Malediction in Cuneiform Inscription,” *JAOS* 34 (1915): 304.

⁴⁷⁵ Scharbert, “ארר,” in *TDOT*, 1:408-409.

4.2.1.1. Blessing

Pedersen defines the lexical meaning of בָּרַךְ as everything positive in life. He calls it life-power. He summarizes the content of the blessing as 1) descendants, 2) fertility of flocks and fields, and 3) defeat of enemies.⁴⁷⁶ Movinckel similarly defines blessing as consisting of all that man desires.⁴⁷⁷ Von Rad defines “blessing” as “a good gift.”⁴⁷⁸ Westermann views blessing as some aspect of the power of growth, fertility, and prosperity.⁴⁷⁹ Hempel asserts that every possible content of blessing is summed up in the word שְׁלוֹם, a state of complete prosperity, wholeness, and security.⁴⁸⁰ Brichto also presents שְׁלוֹם as the all-embracing expression for the content of blessing; it means “the absence of danger and disability, the presence of tranquility, security, good fortune and well-being in the highest degree; hence its use in greeting.”⁴⁸¹ Richards understands “blessing” in the relationship between parties whether a single individual or a group. He asserts blessing means positive relationship between two parties.⁴⁸² Homolka connects blessing with “promise.” He concludes that the overarching category through blessing is “participation in god’s saving action.”⁴⁸³

In summary, I want to sort the contents of blessing in the Old Testament into four

⁴⁷⁶ Pedersen, *Israel*, 1: 211-212.

⁴⁷⁷ Mowinckel, *Segen und Fluch*, 131.

⁴⁷⁸ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker, 3rd ed. (London: SCM Press, 1979), 1:148.

⁴⁷⁹ Westermann, *Blessing*, 43-46. He asserts the concepts of the blessing such as the Promised Land and God’s friendly approach were expanded in the later stages (J, P documents).

⁴⁸⁰ Johannes Hempel, *Die israelitische Anschauungen von Segen und Fluch im Lichte altorientalischer Parallelen*, BZAW 81(1961), 58-61, originally published in *ZDMG* 79 (1925): 20-110.

⁴⁸¹ Brichto, “The Problem of Curses,” 7.

⁴⁸² Kent Harold Richards, s.v. “Bless/Blessing,” in *ABD*, 1:754.

⁴⁸³ Walter Homolka, “‘Baruch’ and ‘Berachah’: Blessing in Judaism,” in *Aspects of Liberal Judaism: Essays in Honour of John D. Rayner*, eds. David J. Goldberg and Edward Kessler (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2004): 73-79.

categories.⁴⁸⁴ These four kinds of blessing repeatedly occur in the promise to Abraham, to Isaac and Jacob, in Deuteronomy, and in Psalms, and Prophets.

Children, offspring, seed.⁴⁸⁵ Although it is the common content of blessing of all over the world as well as biblical world, offspring occupies a special position in the line of the covenant of the Scripture. For example, the seed of the woman plays as a key in the primitive blessing (Gen. 1:28; 3:15, 16, 20). The seed is related to Christ who is the greatest blessing of God to man. God repeatedly promises offspring to Patriarchs as a blessing, for example to Abraham (Gen. 12:2; 7; 13:16; 15:4-5), to Isaac (Gen. 26:3-4, 24), to Ishmael (Gen. 17:10) and to Jacob (Gen. 28:3, 13-14; 35:11; 46:3).⁴⁸⁶ Though Abraham had abundant flocks, possessions, and servants by blessings from Yahweh, he was not really happy until he received his son, Isaac (Gen. 16:1-6). Furthermore, Yahweh blesses Elkanah and Hannah for additional children (1 Sam. 2:20-21), to David (2 Sam. 7:20-29), in Psalms 107:38; 127:3, “Children are a gift of the LORD; The fruit of the womb is a reward (NASB).”

Land. Land is also an important blessing in the Old Testament. To occupy land in the Old Testament has a special meaning beyond the general meaning that someone has a

⁴⁸⁴ The promise of blessing given to Abraham in Genesis 12 occupies a special position because the promise is continued in the subsequent history of Israel. See, H. W. Wolff, “The Kerygma of the Yahwist,” in *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions*, ed. W. Brueggemann and H. W. Wolff (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 41-66, argues that Genesis 12:1-4a play the central role in the theme of blessing (ברך) of the Old Testament. Cf. David Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch on blessing*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield academic press: Sheffield, 2004).

⁴⁸⁵ I place in one category though these three terms have slightly different meanings or emphases in the Old Testament.

⁴⁸⁶ Scholars perceive that the promise to Abraham must be included in the overall concept of blessing. Cf. M. A. Harbin, “Blessing and oracle: A study of the use of *brk* in prophetic formulae” (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1988), 83-84.

property. The land is one of the essential factors in the covenant of the Patriarchs. The land is closely connected to the status of safety and peace apart from the insecure status of the stranger and sojourner. All land fundamentally belongs to God and he gave it to his people as a gift (Lev. 25: 23). Accordingly, the Israelites should keep it with care. They must periodically give the land complete rest (Lev. 25:4). Losing land is the ultimate curse in the Mosaic Law. Adam and Cain lost the blessing of the earth after sinning (Gen. 3:23; 4:12). In other words, the Garden of Eden was the extension of the blessing of creation to Adam (Gen. 2:8-15). Also, God promises to give Abraham the land of Canaan as a blessing (Gen. 12: 7; 13:15; 15:7). The promise of the land is continued to the Abraham's descendents, to Isaac (Gen. 26:3), to Jacob (Gen. 28:13; 35:9, 11) and to the Israelites (Exod. 3:8, 17; Num. 14:8, 24; Deut. 4:1, 40; Josh. 1:13). One of the greatest blessings in the Jubilee was to restore and return to his deprived land (Lev. 25:13). Land is the essentials of Israelite history (2 Chron. 36:20-21).⁴⁸⁷ Also, when the Israelites return from being captive, the land is a key factor in the books of the Prophets (Isa. 49:8, 57:13, 60:21; Jer. 30:3, 31:16; Ezek. 36:28, 37:25, 48:29). Snyman asserts, "the land is a theme present in almost every book of the Twelve." (Amos 2:9-10; 3:2; 3:9; 9:13-15; Obad. 19-21; Zeph. 1:2; Hos. 1:2).⁴⁸⁸

Prosperity, fertility, honor, success. Prosperity and success are the most visible and representative contents of blessing. Pedersen defies that blessing is primarily the power of fertility and fruitfulness, that is, vital power.⁴⁸⁹ The Old Testament repeatedly emphasizes that one's success resulted from the blessing of God (Ps. 127:1-2; Gen. 39:2; 2 Sam. 8:6).

⁴⁸⁷ Brueggemann, *The land*, 121, 125.

⁴⁸⁸ S. D. Snyman, "The land as a *Leitmotiv* in the book of Amos," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 26, no. 2 (2005): 539.

⁴⁸⁹ Pedersen, *Israel*, 1:162-212.

Any honor and success cannot be expected without the blessing of God. For example, God gave this blessing after the creation in imperative form five times to all creatures (Gen. 1:22, 28).⁴⁹⁰ Also, God promised honor and prosperity to Abraham (Gen. 12:2)⁴⁹¹ and to Jacob (Gen. 35:11). The prosperity of Job was the result of Yahweh's blessing (Job 1:10; 42: 12-17), to David (2 Sam. 8:6, 14). Deuteronomy describes very concretely prosperity as the blessing of the Law (Deut. 14:29, 15:10, 28:12).

Peace, rest, deliverance. This last category may encompass all the above contents of blessing (offspring, land, and prosperity). Even though one possesses offspring, land, and prosperity, if he does not enjoy peace and rest, it cannot be called real blessing. The Scripture repeatedly shows the status of enjoying peace and rest as the ultimate blessing. Also, this category stands in the direct opposite place of the climax of curse of the Mosaic Law. Deuteronomy 28:64-68 writes that the Israelites will lose rest and peace because they will be defeated in the war and be captives, but no one will deliver them. The climax of the creation of God was on the seventh day, the Sabbath upon which God ceased and blessed all creatures (Gen. 2:1-3). God, man, and all creatures enjoyed perfect peace in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:8-25). Judah and Israel enjoyed the peace and rest in the golden age of Solomon (1 Kings 4:25). Also, the psalmists write six times in the association with salvation and blessing in the Psalms (28:9; 109:28; 115:12, 13). Isaiah views that the age of eschatological restoration will be a perfect peace world. (Isa. 11:6-9). Also, Isaiah declares that the effect of righteousness is peace and eternal assurance in quiet resting places (Isa. 32:17-18).

⁴⁹⁰ “And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion ...”

⁴⁹¹ Pedersen, *Israel*, 1:162-188, argues fertility is the main motif in the Abraham stories. God will multiply Abraham's descendents as the stars in heaven.

All in all, these four kinds of blessing do not occur separately in the Old Testament. Rather, the blessed one fully receives all four kinds of blessing together, not just part of the blessing. They are closely connected to one another. For example, all of them are found in the blessing of the creation (seed – Gen. 3:15; land – Gen. 2:8; fertility – Gen. 1:28; rest – Gen. 2:2), in the promise to Abraham (seed – Gen. 12:2; 15:4-5; land – Gen. 12:1; 13:15; fertility – Gen. 12:2, 3; rest–Gen. 12:17), in the blessing of the Law (seed – Deut. 28:11; land – Deut. 28:3; fertility – Deut. 28:10-13; rest – Deut. 28:7).

4.2.1.2. Curse

Stuart defines “curse” as “to predict, wish, pray for, or cause trouble or disaster on a person or thing.”⁴⁹² Gordon defines curse as “the invoking of a particular fate upon someone in the event of a contravention of expected standards of behavior.”⁴⁹³ Brichto summarizes the content of curse in “death, illness, childlessness, miscarriage, drought, pest, disturbance of corpses, and turnabouts in state: man becoming woman (like), the free man becoming a slave, etc.”⁴⁹⁴ Fee and Stuart classify into ten types of curses: death, disease, drought, dearth, danger, destruction, defeat, deportation, destitution and disgrace.⁴⁹⁵

In the same manner of the contents of blessing, the contents of curse in the Old Testament can be classified into four major categories. These four categories may not include all specific contents in the Old Testament. However, they are repeatedly found in most cases in which curse occur in the Old Testament. Especially, Genesis, Deuteronomy, and Prophets.

⁴⁹² Douglas Stuart, “Curse,” in *ABD*, 1:1218-1219.

⁴⁹³ Robert P. Gordon, “Curse,” in *NIDOTTE*, 4:491-492.

⁴⁹⁴ Brichto, “The Problem of Curses,” 7.

⁴⁹⁵ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, 184-185.

Disgrace, ridicule, humiliation. The cursed one will become a subject of laughter and a topic of talking. This very frequently appears in the Old Testament as curse. It is very interesting that Scripture considers the abuse by speech as important as physical abuse. The Mosaic Law declares that the one who trespasses the law will fall in the status of disgrace and ridicule (Deut. 28:37; 29:24). The warning to be disgraced by the curse of the Law is continued in the Israelite history (1 Kings 9:7-8; 2 Chron. 7:20-22; Jer. 24:9; Ezek. 14:8). Also, it was the main subject of the complaint and grief of the psalmists and prophets. The saints frequently became the laughing stock and the object of taunt among the people (Ps. 69:12; Lam. 3:13, 16). Job regarded the scorn and mockery of three friends as the severest curse in his suffering (Job. 30:9-10). The scattered Israelites became a byword of cursing among the nations (Zech. 8:13).⁴⁹⁶

Famine, drought, poverty. Famine is also an important instrument for curse. Famine is the reverse of fertility and productivity in the contents of blessing. In the primeval history, God declared to Adam that the ground would produce thorns and thistles for him because the ground is cursed by the sin of Adam (Gen. 3:17-18). Also, God said to Cain that when he cultivates the ground, it would no longer yield its crops for him because Cain was cursed from the ground (Gen. 4:11-12). Deuteronomy emphasizes that severe famine and drought shall be a significant mark of the curse of the Law (28:23-24, 38-40). During the reign of David the famine for three successive years was the result of Gibeonites' curse which must dissolve (2 Sam. 21:1-9). Famine was one of the important catastrophes in the prayer of Solomon after completion of the temple. (1 Kings

⁴⁹⁶ Above all, in the course of Jesus' redemptive suffering, it was a significant part to be mocked and insulted by the sinners, the Roman Soldiers, and the Jewish high priests (Matt. 27:27-31; 39-44; Luke 18:32).

8:35-38; 2 Chron. 6:26-28). Also, drought was a significant disaster in the Prophets (Jer. 14:1-6; Hag. 1:11; Amos 8:11).⁴⁹⁷

Disease, plague, miscarriage. Plague was an indispensable element for the content of curse in the Old Testament. The Law emphasizes that the various diseases will fall upon the one who transgresses the Law (Lev. 26:16; Deut. 28:20-22, 27-29, 35). Satan considered striking the body of Job as a more severe curse than to taking his property (Job 2:4-5). Prophets declare that Yahweh will strike his enemy with plague (Isa. 10:16; Ezek. 6:11, 14:19). David cursed Joab, “May Joab’s house never be without someone who has a running sore or leprosy or who leans on a crutch” (2 Sam. 3:29, NIV). Actually, invoking physical harm on the enemy has been used as a universal custom as well as the biblical curses. For example, curse tablets from Beisan which wished for the raider to be cripple.⁴⁹⁸ Mesopotamian curses are similar: “Upon his limbs a grievous illness, an evil plague, a painful sore, which the physician cannot soothe.”⁴⁹⁹ The same is found in the West-Semitic curses, “blindness.”⁵⁰⁰

Deportation, captivity, war. The Mosaic Law treats deportation as the ultimate and most severe disaster upon the one who transgresses it (Lev. 26:33; Deut. 28: 36-37, 63-68). The historical books in the OT conclude with the scattering of Jews and Israelites as retribution in accordance with curse of the Law (2 Kings 17: 6-18; 28:8-22; 2 Chron. 36:17-21). The Prophets also treat defeat in war as the harshest punishment of God (Isa.

⁴⁹⁷ Famine is used as an important means of curse to the wicked in the eschatological age in the Revelation and the discourse of the Mount of Olives (Matt. 24: 7; Rev. 6:5-6, 18:8).

⁴⁹⁸ H. C. Youtie and Campbell Bonner, “Two Curse Tablets from Beisan,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 68 (1937): 45.

⁴⁹⁹ Gevirtz, “Curse Motifs,” 163-164. (CH XXVIII r. 55-65)

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 166-167. (UM 1 Aqht 167)

3:25; Jer. 11:22; Ezek. 12:14-15; Hos. 10:14). War always exists in the list of eschatological disasters (Jer. 51: 20-28, Dan. 11:1-45, Zech.14:1-12). This curse means that the land will be deprived. Consequently, the cursed one will lose peace and rest which is the ultimate status of blessing in the Old Testament. They will be always afflicted with fear and anxiety (Deut. 28:65-67, Lev. 26:36-37).

All in all, these four kinds of curses generally occur at the same time in the Old Testament. All the contents of curses are closely connected to one another. For example, in the Solomon's prayer (drought, famine – 1 Kings 8:35, 37, plague – 1 Kings 8:37, war, captivity – 1 Kings 8:33, 46-47), in the Law's curses in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 (famine – Deut. 28:23-24, plague – Deut. 28:22, 27-29, defeat, deportation – Deut. 28:25, 49-50, 64-68), in the Prophets (Jer. 14:12; 24:10; 34:24; Ezek. 14:21).⁵⁰¹

4.2.2. The characteristics of blessing and curse

Blessing and curse is a universal custom which occurs in all human societies as well as in biblical society. Common characteristics can be seen in the Old Testament.

4.2.2.1. Blessing and curse are transmissible.

Blessing does not arrive only to the blessed one; those associated ones with the blessed one such as, family, friends, neighbors, community, even animals, and possessions, also enjoy the blessing. Blessing in the Old Testament flows as does water. It overflows from one to another,⁵⁰² in general cases, from the greater to the lesser (e.g., king's blessing to his people, father's blessing to his children, and lord's blessing to his

⁵⁰¹ "I will destroy them with the 'sword,' 'famine,' and 'plague,'" in Matthew 24 (famine – Matt. 24:7, war – Matt. 24:7, 9), Revelation (famine – Rev. 6:6, plague – Rev. 6:8, war, deportation – Rev. 6:3).

⁵⁰² Westermann, *Blessing*, 19, 21.

servants or animals). Because the ultimate source of blessing is God, every potential blessing flows down from God (James 1:17). For example: Laban shared Jacob's blessing (Gen. 30:27); the Egyptian Potiphar shared Joseph's blessing (Gen. 39:2-5); the whole house of Israel shared King David's blessing.⁵⁰³ Gray asserts, "When the King enjoys God's blessing this is reflected in the material prosperity and in the spiritual state of his land and subjects." (1 Sam. 16:18; 2 Sam. 6-7; Ps. 72).⁵⁰⁴ Lot shares Abraham's blessing (Gen. 19:29). All the families of the earth share Abraham's blessing (Gen. 12:3). God spoke to Abraham, "You shall be a blessing (וְהָיָה בְרָכָה)!" Abraham shall be a channel or source of blessing for others or a chief example of divine blessing.⁵⁰⁵

Like the blessing curse could also extend to associated ones. For instance, a curse upon one's parents was not different from a curse upon oneself because it remains effective in succeeding generations (Josh. 9:23; 1 Sam. 2:36; 2 Sam. 3:29). Also, a curse upon God or a king affects an entire people.⁵⁰⁶ The family members of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were swallowed up by the land though the family members do not look to revolt publicly against Moses (Num. 16:27-33). Also, the three sons of Saul were killed

⁵⁰³ Second Samuel 6:1-23 shows, when King David heard the news that God blessed the house of Obed-edom for the ark of Yahweh, King David decides to carry the ark in his palace by the faith that king's house should firstly receive Yahweh's blessing for the whole house of Israel. In chapter 7, King David asks God, "With your blessing shall the house of your servant be blessed forever" (2 Sam. 7:29). David's prayer is not just for his house but for all the Israelites. Also, Psalm 72 sings when the king receives blessing from God, this has closely influence on the prosperity and spiritual state of his land and people.

⁵⁰⁴ John Gray, "Blessing and Curse," in *Dictionary of the Bible*, 2nd ed. (T&T Clark, 1963), 109.

⁵⁰⁵ The precise meaning of this passage is in a controversy between the source of blessing and the example of blessing according to the understanding of Niphal conjugation of בָּרַךְ: All the inhabitants will be blessed in you, or all the inhabitants will bless themselves in you. Yet, each of the two means that the blessing of Abraham affects other's blessings. Cf. Keith N. Gruneberg, *Abraham, Blessing and the Nations: A Philological and Exegetical Study of Genesis 12:3 in its Narrative Context*. (Walter de Gruyter: Berlin/New York, 2003), 176-190; J. Janzen, *Genesis 12-50: Abraham and All the Families of the Earth*, ITC (Grand Rapids/Edinburgh, Eerdmans/The Handsel Press. 1993), 16. See also RSV; JB; NRSV footnote; JPSV; NEB /REB "pray/wish to be blessed as you are blessed."

⁵⁰⁶ Sheldon H. Blank, "The Curse, Blasphemy, the Spell, and the Oath," *HUCA* 23 (1950-51): 13.

on the same day with Saul, and the book of Samuel depicts the struggle between the house of Saul and the house of David in the viewpoint of the blessing or curse (1 Sam. 31:2, 2 Sam. 3:1). Because of Achan who broke the ban, the whole Israelite camp became devoted things (cursed things: אֶת־מוֹתְנֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל לְחָרָם). The thirty six innocent Israelites were struck down before the Canaanites in connection with the sin of Achan (Josh. 6:17-18, 7:1). Also, because of Jonathan, who broke Saul's ban (אֲשֶׁר־יֹאכַל לֶחֶם עֵרְוָה עִרְבָּה), all Israelites were forbidden to receive an answer from God (1 Sam. 14:24). Scripture also shows that the curse extends to the land: for Cain (Gen. 4:11), for the Israelites (Deut. 21:22).

4.2.2.2. Symbolism was often used for blessing and curse

Symbolism, such as instruments, ritual, and physical contact, is conspicuously practiced for the blessing and curse in the extra biblical world. They probably used symbolism to increase the efficiency of blessing or curse.⁵⁰⁷ Sometimes symbolism is also found for blessing and curse in the Old Testament. The examples for blessing: lifting up or laying of hands on those who receive the blessing (Gen. 48:14; Lev. 9:22; Num. 27:23); kiss (Gen. 27:27); the possessions of those who blessed were expected to have power (2 Kings 4:29) and the preference of the right hand used in blessing (Gen. 48:13); the priest sprinkles with his right finger the oil in his left hand seven times to cleanse the leprosy (Lev. 14:25-27). Some examples for curse: the priest laid his two hands on the head of the live goat and sent the cursed goat away to the desert (Lev. 16:21); the witnesses laid their hands on the sinners (Lev. 24:14); Joshua pointed out of the Javelin to Ai (Josh. 8:18); the victim removed the sandal from the feet of the cursed one (Deut.

⁵⁰⁷ A. D. Fraser, "The Ancient Curse: Some Analogies," *The Classical Journal*, 17, no. 8 (May, 1922): 458.

25:9), and the severance of the bodies of animals (Gen. 15:9-10; 1 Sam. 11:6-7; Jer. 34:18-29).

Sacred goods were treated as a blocker of curse or carrier of blessing; inauspicious goods can bring misfortune and expel fortune, for example, a ring, amulet, image, or plant. Babylonians placed holy objects in the house and at the outer-gate of the house to dispel evil spirits.⁵⁰⁸ The imprecatory tablet pierced by a nail or pin which may be believed to pierce the soul of the foe in like manner is often found in Greek or Roman tombs.⁵⁰⁹ Archaeological evidence shows that the hebrews also used blood in a similar way as a defense against evil spirits.⁵¹⁰ Various amulet ornaments of the Israelites like לחשים (v.20) are found in Isaiah 3 despite the opposition of the prophet.⁵¹¹ The men in the Old Testament also recognizes holy good and inauspicious goods, for example, Jacob made flocks conceive by using freshly peeled branches of poplar and almond (Gen. 30: 37-43). The iron horns of Zedekiah, the false prophet of Ahab (1 Kings 22:11; 2 Chron. 18: 10). The written words of the law are used like amulets (Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21).⁵¹² The Israelite custom of removing the unclean is practiced with cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet yarn (Lev. 14:6, 52). The money of the prostitutes cannot be brought to God because it is considered dirty (Deut. 23:18). The carcass fouls that which touches it (Lev. 11: 24-42). Israelites have clean and unclean animals, birds, and insects. (Lev. 11:1-47). The unclean one by blood and nocturnal emission must keep away from the camp (Lev. 15:3, 16, Deut. 23:10). Even the one who touched the unclean man or couch is infected

⁵⁰⁸ Mercer, "Malediction in the Cuneiform Inscriptions," 308.

⁵⁰⁹ Fraser, 458.

⁵¹⁰ Heinrich Zimmern, *Beitrage zur Kenntnis der babylonischen Religion*, Surpu, no. 26, (Leipzig, 1896), 1. 19-21, quoted in Mercer, "Malediction in the Cuneiform Inscriptions," 307-8.

⁵¹¹ Yamauchi, 196.

⁵¹² W. Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums* (Berlin, 1926), 179.

(Lev. 15:4-5, 10). Prohibition to wear cloth of wool and linen mixed together (Deut. 22:11).

Some scholars suppose that these factors for blessing and curse are evidences of the magic in the Old Testament in comparison with the practice of the outer biblical world.⁵¹³ This claim, however, is unnecessary. The evidence for magical concepts concerning biblical curse and blessing has been grossly exaggerated. Although the line between magic and religion is always difficult to define, scholars regard the element of “coercion” or “control” as a key element of magic.⁵¹⁴ In magic man commands or compels the gods. However, in religion man prays to the gods. For example, the Egyptian magician even threatened the gods by virtue of his magical power.⁵¹⁵ Further, Malinowski argues that magic is only interested in immediate and physical benefit whereas religion focuses on ultimate issues.⁵¹⁶ Also, Fensham indicates that the curses of the outside of the Old Testament were generally directed against a transgression on private property but the curses in the Old Testament are closely connected with the ethical obligation to God and neighbor.⁵¹⁷ For that reason, the supposition of magical factor in the blessing and curse in the Old Testament does not appear tenable.

⁵¹³ Pedersen, *Israel*, 1: 200-201, argues that physical contact for blessing, such as laying on of hands or kissing, is generally necessary for the proper transmission of the soul (200-201). Mowinckel, *Segen und Fluch*, 130-131, argues that the annual ritual played a decisive role to transmit blessing to the Israelites.

⁵¹⁴ Edwin M. Yamauchi, “Magic in the Biblical World,” *TynBul* 34 (1983): 175; H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel* (London: SCM, 1961), 27.

⁵¹⁵ Yamauchi, “Magic in the Biblical World,” 175.

⁵¹⁶ B. Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1948), 38.

⁵¹⁷ F. C. Fensham, “Common Trends in Curses of the Near Eastern Treaties and Kudurru-Inscriptions Compared with Maledictions of Amos and Isaiah,” *ZAW* 75 (1963): 173-4. Cf. *idem.*, “Malediction and Benediction in Ancient Near Eastern Vassal-Treaties and the Old Testament,” *ZAW* 74 (1962): 1-9.

4.2.2.3. God is emphasized as the only source or agent of blessing and curse

The Old Testament continuously emphasizes that only the Almighty God controls the destiny of individuals and nations. The authors of the Old Testament were clearly aware that only Yahweh was the source of both blessing and curse in contrast to many gods of neighboring countries.

The blessing and curse in the extra biblical literatures generally take the imperative form to deities. They sometimes threatened deities.⁵¹⁸ The extra biblical world believed it could control an individual's destiny by blessing and cursing as one wished. Yet, biblical blessing and curse is quite different. Most biblical benedictions or maledictions take the optative form. Even though the declarative forms appear in the Hebrew Bible, it is clearly expected that God is the background agent of the blessing or curse.

Biblical blessing and curse also show revocable examples.⁵¹⁹ For example, the fate of Hezekiah was changed by the prayer of Hezekiah even though it was already declared by the prophet (2 Kings 20). David expected to change the fate of the first baby born between Bathsheba and David (2 Sam. 12). Wisdom suggests that an undeserved curse will not alight upon its intended victim (Prov. 26:2).

Moreover, blessings in the Old Testament frequently predominate over curses in power. In the opposite direction, curse also often changed to blessing in the Old Testament. For example, God turned Balaam's curse into a blessing for the Israelites (Deut. 23:6; Josh. 24:10; Neh. 13:2). David responded to the cursing of Shimei that God will return good for Shimei's cursing (2 Sam. 16:12). God will change the blessing on Israel to curses (Mal. 2.2). Also, many passages in the Old Testament show that

⁵¹⁸ C. J. Bleeker, *Egyptian Festivals* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 43-44.

⁵¹⁹ Scharbert, "בִּרְךְ," in *TDOT*, 2:303.

repentance drives away a curse, as in Jonah 3:10, “they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity.” In 1 Kings 21:29, “Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days.”

Blessing or curse is deliberately pronounced as the expression of God’s favor or anger in many situations of the Bible, especially, in situations of crisis or a time of important decisions.⁵²⁰ Consequently, it is certain that the Israelites had the faith that God continues to control both the blessing and curse in contrast to the custom of the outer Biblical folk who lived in fear of curses.⁵²¹

4.2.2.4. Spoken blessing or curse is autonomous or self-fulfilling⁵²²

Scholars disagree about the existence of the belief of active power of blessing and curse in the Old Testament. Pedersen,⁵²³ Mowinckel,⁵²⁴ and Hempel,⁵²⁵ advocated self-fulfillment of the spoken word in the Old Testament. Wehmeier asserts that self-fulfilling of blessing is an original concept in Israelite religion but it is scarcely found after it developed as an ethical religion. Yet the traces are still visible in the oldest strata such as Genesis 27; 32:22-32, and Numbers 32-33.⁵²⁶ Westermann also recognizes the idea of the

⁵²⁰ W. J. Urbrock, “Blessings and Curses,” in *ABD*, 1:756-9.

⁵²¹ M. J. Evans, “Blessing/Curse,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 1:399.

⁵²² The self-fulfilling of invoked blessing and curse is naturally connected with the effectiveness of the spoken word. Thiesten, 294, argues that blessing and curse are the representative examples concerning the effectiveness of the spoken word. Accordingly, no distinction is made between the self-fulfillment of the blessing and curse and the effectiveness of the spoken word unless the distinction is clearly required in the context.

⁵²³ Pedersen, *Israel*, 1:200.

⁵²⁴ Mowinckel, *Segen und Fluch*, 23-28.

⁵²⁵ Hempel, 55-66.

⁵²⁶ Wehmeier, 189-198.

automatic power of blessing in the earliest narratives (especially, J document).⁵²⁷

Blank argues,

“Apparently, then, no external agent was assumed and, apparently, the spoken curse was itself and alone conceived to be the effective agent. This is the significance of the habitual preference for the passive construction in the curse formula and the consequent absence of any reference to an external agent, demonic or divine. The curse was automatic or self-fulfilling, ...”⁵²⁸

The supporters of the existence of the spoken word’s effectiveness have presented many pieces of direct and indirect evidence from the Hebrew Bible.⁵²⁹

First, some passages of the Old Testament seem to support the self-fulfillment of the spoken word. Genesis stresses that God created all creatures by His word not by His concrete action. Psalm 33:6 condenses it in two lines, “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their stars.”

Also, Isaac’s blessing on Jacob (Gen. 27) shows that once blessing is pronounced, it cannot be revoked, even though it was done in error.⁵³⁰ Some scholar has opposed to

⁵²⁷ Westermann, *Blessing*, 53-59.

⁵²⁸ Blank, “The Curse, Blasphemy, the Spell, and the Oath,” 6. Cf. for other scholars’ similar assertions: J. Z. Lauterbach, “The Belief in the Power of the Word,” *HUCA* 54 (1939); P. Heinisch, *Das Wort im Alten Testament und im alten Orient* (Münster, 1922), 8-44; James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1922); W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament II*, trans. J. A. Baker (London: SCM. Press, 1967), 69; O. Grether, *Name und Wort Gottes im Alten Testament*, BZAW 64 (Giessen, 1934), 103-107; Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1960), 58-69.

⁵²⁹ Furthermore, several New Testament writers, such as R. Bultmann, Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, 56, and Luis Alonso Schökel, *The Inspired Word: Scripture in the Light of Language and Literature* (London: Burns and Oates, 1967), 348-367, extend the idea to the New Testament. R. Bultmann, “The Concept of the Word of God in the New Testament,” in *Faith and Understanding*, trans. Louis P. Smith, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 287, 297, asserts that the word of the Old Testament appears as the definitive standard in the New Testament. The main reason is that the authors of the New Testament regarded the word of the Old Testament as “possesses power.”

⁵³⁰ Pedersen, *Israel*, 1: 200-201, says that the irrevocable reason of blessing is that it has been

see this passage as an irrevocable example because this is just Isaac's trick on Esau so that he would bless Jacob instead of Esau.⁵³¹ However, this is unnecessary conjecture.

The story of Balaam provides a good example how Israelites as well as non-Israelites treated the spoken curse as effective. Though Balaam confesses in Numbers 23:20, "I have received a command to bless; God has blessed, and I cannot change it," curiously enough, a strong tension dominates through the whole story. If only God controls every blessing and curse and no one could change the will of God, it will not matter whether Balaam curses the Israelites, even if he does so several hundred times. However, God himself comes to Balaam in the night and commands him not to curse the Israelites. Moreover, God sends his angel to threaten Balaam with a sword not to curse Israelites but to speak only the word which God will give. On the one hand, Balak, the king of Moab, wants Balaam to curse Israel at all costs instead of increasing his military power. If the author/editor of Pentateuch considered that the spoken curse of Balaam does not have any effective power, why is it necessary to present this long episode (Numbers chapter 22, 23, 24)? The following Biblical authors also cite very importantly this story: Deut. 23:4, 5; Josh. 24:9, 10; Neh. 13:2; Mich. 6:5; 2 Pet. 2:15; Judg. 1:11; Rev. 2:14.

As an agent of Yahweh, Joshua declares a curse, (אָרֹר הָאִישׁ לְפָנַי יְהוָה אֱשֶׁר) against the one who would rebuild Jericho in the future (Josh. 6:26). The curse is realized in 1 Kings 16:34. However, the passage in 1 Kings does not imply that Yahweh executes the declared curse, but the curse gets achieved according to the word of Yahweh (יְהוָה כִּדְבָר). Joshua's expression לְפָנַי יְהוָה occurs with the curse formula only twice in the Old Testament (Josh. 6.26 and 1 Sam. 26.19). Blank argues that in none of these in God

created by the strength of the soul of the invoker. Yet, he does not precisely explain how the power of a man's soul could produce a blessing.

⁵³¹ Murtonen, 161.

considered the executor of the curse. Consequently, the curse formula with לפני יהוה means literally, “in God’s presence,” that is, “with His consent.”⁵³²

The repentance in the period of King Josiah could not cancel the severe curse upon Judah but only postponed it (2 Kings 22:19, 20).

Also, Wehmeier maintains that in the wisdom literature, God is depicted only as the indirect agent of blessing in the passages of individual retribution for example in Proverbs 11:11, “Through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is destroyed.”⁵³³

Moreover, the typical style of the blessing and curse formula in the Hebrew Bible implies the existence of the autonomous power of the spoken blessing and curse. The usual form of blessing and curse in the Old Testament is the passive participle of ברך and ארר. Blank asserts that it means “no external agent was assumed and apparently the spoken curse was itself and alone conceived to be the effective agent.”⁵³⁴ Gevirtz also, taking up Blank’s suggestion, argues that the curse formula in the Hebrew Bible relies upon the power of the spoken word.⁵³⁵

In addition, the formulae of blessing and curse in the Hebrew Bible usually take the optative form. However, they must be distinguished from a prayer or a simple wish.⁵³⁶ Prayer beseeches God, and God listens and permits the prayer as an agent. Also, blessing

⁵³² Blank, “The Curse, Blasphemy, the Spell, and the Oath,” 77.

⁵³³ Wehmeier, 224-227. Also, Wehmeier also asserts that the law’s retribution also becomes self-fulfilling after God activate them. Then, blessing and curse comes according to the inevitable retribution according to each action.

⁵³⁴ S. H. Blank, “Some Observations Concerning Biblical Prayer,” *HUCA* 32 (1961): 78.

⁵³⁵ Gevirtz, “Curse motifs in the Old Testament,” 256.

⁵³⁶ Blank, “The Curse, Blasphemy, the Spell, and the Oath,” 77; also, see, Homolka, “‘Baruch’ and ‘Beracha’.”

or curse must be more than a simple positive or negative wish. The formulae of blessing and curse are different from a simple wish in that they are based on a faith that it will be fulfilled. If blessing or curse is only a petition to God who controls everything, then what is different from a prayer or a simple wish? However, the Bible distinguishes blessing and curse from the prayer and simple wish. The spoken blessing or curse was regarded by itself and alone conceived to be the effective agent.

Moreover, the total absence of blasphemy in the Bible is the best explanation of the fear of the effective power of the spoken word.⁵³⁷ The blessing formula with God as the object occurs frequently in the Bible. Yet, the curse formula directed against God is never found in the Bible. Even the Hebrew Bible does not allow the possibility of a curse directed against God at all. Brichto also argues that even though “*qillel elohim*” is occasionally found in the Old Testament, it never means “to curse God.” He recommends the English “embarrass” as the closer term to the force of *qillel* than general English translation “insult.”⁵³⁸ The Hebrew Bible always changes all the curse words directed against God to “blessing.” For example, Job’s wife said in Job 2:9, “Curse God and die! (בָּרַךְ אֱלֹהִים וּמָת)” Blank suggests that the third commandment is probably related to this fear (Exod. 20:7; Deut. 5:11).⁵³⁹

Also, the Old Testament’s treatment of calling name gives a hint concerning the effectiveness of the spoken word. The Bible considers one’s name as a special tools. Calling a name influences not only one’s action but also one’s whole life. God directly gives or changes the name of the key figures in the Bible. It was not a simple expectation or desire from God to become according to his new name. For example, Genesis draws

⁵³⁷ Ibid., 83.

⁵³⁸ Blank, “The Curse, Blasphemy, the Spell, and the Oath,” 131, 175.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., 84. Cf. J. Morgenstern, “The Book of the Covenant Part III: The Huqqim,” *HUCA* 8-9 (1931-32): 28.

what Adam gives the names of all living creatures as a significant event in the Garden of Eden. When Adam names each creature, it becomes a meaningful existence to Adam (Gen. 2:19-20). Also, after God declares the punishment for the Fall, Adam instantly names his wife Eve, “the mother of all the living.” (Gen. 3:20). God directly named Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 17:5; 15), Israel (Gen 32:28), Jerubbaal (Judg. 6:32), etc.

Finally, the repeated expressions which God sends His word to work allude to the possibility of the active power of the spoken word in the Old Testament. These passages depict God using the word as His independent agent. For example, Isaiah 55:11, “So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” Psalms 107:20, “He sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction.” Leviticus 25:21, “I will command my blessing for you.” Also, the blessing and curse could turn back to the speaker like rebounding ball, for example, Psalms 7:16; 109:17; Proverbs 22:9; 27:14.

Those who oppose this view⁵⁴⁰ maintain that the supposition that the spoken blessing and curse have automatic power belongs to the neighboring society of Israel. Yet, such a practice is hard to find in the Hebrew Bible. Rather, the Old Testament predominantly reveals that only the God of Israelites is the source or controller of blessing and curse in the whole world. Also, the Hebrew prophets have vehemently opposed such a magical practice (Lev. 18:3; Isa. 2:6). They assert that the passages which seem to support the automatic power of the spoken word are actually fulfilled by the

⁵⁴⁰ Anthony C. Thiselton, “The Supposed power of words in the Biblical writings,” *JTS* 25 (October 1974): 283-99; G. W. Coats, “The way of Obedience: Traditio-Historical and Hermeneutical Reflections on the Balaam Story,” *Semeia* 24 (1982): 53-70; L. S. Ford, “The Divine curse Understood in Terms of Persuasion,” *Semeia* 24 (1982): 80-87; Scharbert, *TDOT* 2:303; A. Murtonen, 158-177; Mitchell, 35-39.

authority or power of the speaker (deity, king, prophet, and father) rather than by the automatic power of the spoken word itself.⁵⁴¹

However, it seems that modern scholars have excessively opposed the autonomous power of the spoken word. The intense opposition must be partly based on the emphasis in the modern Western concept that language merely conveys ideas.⁵⁴² However, the understanding of ancient Hebrew and its neighbors does not clearly make a distinction between word and object, idea and actuality. For instance, Hebrew דבר means both “word” and “thing.”⁵⁴³

Even though the objections of the later scholars against the autonomous power of the spoken words in the Old Testament can be partly accepted, the existence of abundant biblical evidence for the belief in the self-fulfillment of the spoken word cannot be denied. The Hebrew Bible emphasizes that only God carries all the blessings and curses in the world. At the same time, it illustrates the belief that the spoken words themselves have the active power to produce the desired effect without any external agent.

If so, where does the effective power of the spoken word come from? Pedersen suggests that the effective power of the spoken word is based on the speaker’s soul power.⁵⁴⁴ Other scholars think that it originated in the magical customs of ancient neighboring nations. The idea that the neighboring magic practice is closely related to the biblical concept of the active power of the spoken word is not, however, appear tenable. Some scholars maintain that the same emphasis, the creation of the cosmos by the words

⁵⁴¹ Thiselton, 283-99. Also, W. J. Urbrock, “Blessings and Curses,” in *ABD*, 1:756.

⁵⁴² Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology II*, 80-81.

⁵⁴³ J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford University Press, 1961), 129-140.

⁵⁴⁴ Pedersen, *Israel*, 1:190-201.

of the gods, appears in the myths of the neighboring countries such as Mesopotamia⁵⁴⁵ and Egypt.⁵⁴⁶ However, creation by the word in other myths occupies only a slight part in the whole creation myth. Actually, other pagan myths lay greater emphasis upon the direct action of the gods.⁵⁴⁷

After comparison with other ancient Near Eastern curses, Gevirtz concludes that most imprecations from Mesopotamia manifestly invoke the divine agency to fulfill the curse. However, the majority of the biblical curses consist of a passive form in which the agent remains undesignated. He concludes the biblical curse formula in Western Semitic is very different from that of the Eastern Semitic.⁵⁴⁸

Also, von Rad asserts,

“It has long been known that in this respect Israel shares in many ways in ideas found at various points in the religions of the ancient east. But this must not blind us to the fact that her ideas of the power of God’s word were entirely her own, and that in this very respect she evolved a magnificent and quite unique theological achievement.”⁵⁴⁹

Accordingly, it is reasonable to conclude that the idea of the self-fulfilling word is a peculiar Israelite idea distinguished from the magic concept of its neighbors.

⁵⁴⁵ “Enuma elish iv 22-26,” trans. E. A. Speiser, (*ANET*, 68) Marduk proves his kingship in heaven by speaking a word of power. “He vanishes a cloth, and then recreates it.”

⁵⁴⁶ “Hymns to the Gods as a Single God,” trans. John A. (*ANET*, 371), notes that Amon Re-Atum-Har-ashti, who spoke with his mouth and all men, gods . . . cattle came to existence.

⁵⁴⁷ Eva M. Thury and Margaret K. Devinney, *Introduction to Mythology: Contemporary Approaches to Classical and Word Myths*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). Cf. Enuma elish, “He created the four winds” (Tablet 4, 300-301). “He set up constellations” (Tablet 5, 406). “He made the crescent moon appear” (Tablet 5, 416), “He heaped up mountains. Opened up springs” (Tablet 5, 432, 433).

⁵⁴⁸ Gevirtz, “Curse Motifs,” 254-256.

⁵⁴⁹ Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology II*, 87.

To sum up, the Hebrew Bible stresses the sovereign God as the final source of blessing and curse. At the same time, it reveals the self-fulfilling character of the spoken word. It cannot be said that the origin of the effectiveness of the spoken word is in the magic of the extra biblical word. Rather, the concept of the active power of the word in the Old Testament is entirely Israel's.

4.2.2.5. Blessing is reciprocal

In the Old Testament society interpersonal relations are not possible without blessing. When a man meets another, they bless each other as a greeting; when they take leave, they bless as a farewell. They express the heart of thanks with blessing. Also, the Hebrew reveals their reverence to someone by blessing. They console someone who suffers misery by blessing. The Hebrew daily life cannot be made up without blessing one another, for example, 1 Samuel 13:10; 2 Samuel 19:40; Ruth 3:10; Nehemiah 11:2. The Hebrew Bible shows that social position counted for nothing in the relationship of the blessing; even inferiors may bless their superiors.

The reciprocal characteristic of the blessing could apply to the relations between God and man. God continuously blesses his people. At the same time, God was the biggest object of the blessing of Israelites (Gen. 24:27; 1 Kings 8:15; Ps. 134:1-2; 103:20; Ezra 7:27). In the relationship between Yahweh and the Israelites Yahweh blesses the Israelites and the Israelites return the blessing as an expression of "Thanks," "Praise," and "Respect." Strictly speaking, God demanded that the response of the Israelite corresponded to His rich blessing. The people who do not recognize the blessing from God inevitably go to serve other gods.

Such an example in which man blesses the deity was hardly found in the extra

Biblical literature.⁵⁵⁰ Pedersen and Mowinckel suppose that Hebrews thought that God could be strengthened by the blessing of man.⁵⁵¹ Few today make this claim. Scharbert's explanation is more likely, "The blessing was the most appropriate means of expressing gratitude and respect to a man or to God."⁵⁵² In this point, Richards' definition is right, "The primary factor of blessing is the statement of relationship between parties. Blessing is always based on the favorable relationship between parties."⁵⁵³

4.4. Summary

As blessing and cursing are both key concepts in the Scriptures, various words are used for the relevant meanings of "blessing" and "curse" in the Old Testament: for blessing (ברך, אשרי, שלום, צלח, חנן etc.), and for curse (ארר, חרם, זעם, נקב/קבב, זעם, קלל, נקב/קבב, זעם, ארר etc.). They exhibit somewhat different meanings of blessing or curse although all these Hebrew words translate to the English words "blessing" and "curse." The formulae ברך and ארר are most representatively used among them.

The word ברך in the Old Testament is used in close relationship with God: the subject, the object, or the agent of ברך. The Old Testament emphasizes that God is the ultimate source of ברך. Also, the Old Testament peculiarly applies ברך to God as object. It has various meanings according to context such as thanks, praise, joy, and admiration. The majority of ברך formula in the Old Testament exhibits in the optative form. The blessing of the Old Testament stands in good relationship between God and the blessed

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁵¹ Mowinckel, *Segen und Fluch*, 23-28.

⁵⁵² Scharbert, "ברך" in *TDOT*, 2:305.

⁵⁵³ K. H. Richards, s.v. "Bless/Blessing," in *ABD*, 1:754.

one or the speaker of blessing. Also, when a person uses בָּרַךְ to another person, it means not only that he asks or wishes a blessing of God for another person but also that he expresses greetings and farewells, thanks, and congratulations.

The word אָרַר basically means “to curse as ban or to bar from benefit.” It appears in various contexts: as the declaration of punishments, for the utterance of threats to discourage other’s transgression, or to chastise someone, for the law’s proclamation, etc. The אָרַר formula was the most powerful decree declared by an authority or a community to those who has committed a serious transgression against an authority such as God, king, parents, and the community.

The contents of blessing can be classified into four main categories: offspring, land, fertility and rest. Also, the contents of curse are also divided into four main categories: disgrace, famine, drought and deportation. These four are closely connected with one another.

The blessing and curse of the Old Testament can be summarized by several common characteristics.

First, blessing and curse is transmissible. They do not generally arrive only on the blessed one or cursed one. The associated ones also share the blessing or curse with the blessed one or cursed one, such as, family, friends, neighbors, community, even animals and possessions.

Second, symbolism was often used for blessing and curse in the Old Testament such as instrument, ritual, and physical contact. Symbolism is probably practiced to increase the efficiency of blessing or curse. Yet, the supposition of a magical factor in the blessing and curse in the Old Testament is unnecessary. The key element of magic,

“coercion” or “control”, does not appear in the Old Testament.

Third, the Old Testament emphasizes God as the final source or agent of blessing and curse. Only the Almighty God controls the destiny of individuals and nations while the extra biblical world believed that someone could control an individual’s destiny and natural phenomena by blessing and cursing as one wished.

Fourth, the Old Testament illustrates the belief that the spoken words themselves have the active power to produce the desired effect without any external agent as well.

(1) Some passages of the Old Testament support the belief for the spoken word’s effectiveness. (2) The typical style of the blessing and curse formula in the Hebrew Bible implies the existence of the autonomous power of the spoken blessing and curse. (3) The Bible generally distinguishes blessing and curse from prayer or simple wish. (4) The total absence of blasphemy in the Bible best explains the fear of the effective power of the spoken word. (5) The Old Testament’s treatment of name gives a hint concerning the effectiveness of the spoken word. (6) the repeated expressions which God sends His word to work allude the possibility of the active power of the spoken word in the Old Testament.

Fifth, blessing is reciprocal. Interpersonal relations in the society of the Old Testament are always founded on the blessing. Also, the reciprocal characteristic of the blessing could apply to the relations between God and man. The Old Testament draws that God does not one-sidedly bless his people. God was the biggest object of the blessing of Israelites.

All in all, in the study of the present chapter, it comes as clear the meaning of בָּרַךְ and אָרַךְ which Jacob used for his sons at his death bed. The blessing constitutes the foundation of the interpersonal favorable relationship in the society of the Old Testament as well as the relationship with God. On the other side, curse means to ban or bar

someone from the favorable relationship with friend, family, society and God. This now raises the necessity to return to the main concern of this dissertation, the blessing of Jacob in Genesis 49, and seek the reason that Jacob used the ארור formula for his first three sons instead of the ברך formula.

CHAPTER 5

CURSES IN THE BLESSING

5.1. Introduction

The meaning and characteristics of the blessing and curse in the Old Testament were investigated in the previous chapter. From what has been discussed above, blessing and curse was a foundation of human relationships as well as the divine relationship in the society of the Old Testament. Blessing and curse was a key to understanding the various relationships and events in the Old Testament.

Genesis is filled and connected with the stories of blessing. The book starts with the blessing of God on all creatures (1:22) and finishes with the blessing of Jacob as a highlight of the theme of blessing (49:28).⁵⁵⁴ Genesis shows that the blessing has been connected from father to the next generation in the form of promise. Ross asserts, “Genesis, the book of beginnings, is primarily concerned with tracing the development of God's program of blessing ... So throughout Genesis the motifs of blessing and cursing occur again and again in connection with those who are chosen and those who are not.”⁵⁵⁵

At this point, it is necessary to turn back to Jacob's blessings on the first three sons which contain severe curses. Strangely enough, the curses in the blessing were not

⁵⁵⁴ Westermann, *Blessing*, 16, divides Genesis in the major divisions and asserts blessing is an important theme in each division. “The primeval history (Gen. 1-11), which begins by introducing the concept of blessing at the climax of its first chapter (1:28), repeatedly notes that God continues to bless man. The Abrahamic cycle (chapters. 12-26) centers on the promise of blessing and its fulfillment in the birth of Isaac; the Jacob-Esau cycle (chapters. 27-36) treats the "procedure of blessing and its consequences...” Also, Westermann is aware that Genesis concludes with two lengthy blessing passages (chaps. 48 and 49).

⁵⁵⁵ Ross, “The Curse of Canaan,” 714.

unique in Jacob's blessing. Other blessings in Genesis such as the Noah's blessing (Gen. 9:25-27), Isaac's blessing (27:27-29), and Jacob's blessing for the sons of Joseph (48:15-20) exhibit similar cases which include curse in the blessing. To be exact, Genesis shows that curse is ironically contained in the blessing. On the one hand, the hope of blessing is contained in clear curse.

Many biblical writers have already recognized the remarkable similarity between Genesis 49 and the previous blessings in Genesis⁵⁵⁶ Jacob's blessing in Genesis 49 is not an independent story. It must be understood in close connection with the previous narratives. The previous blessings in Genesis will be examined in this chapter. In particular, the cursed sons like the first three sons of Jacob will be treated with more concern than the blessed sons.

5.2. Blessing and Curse in Genesis

5.2.1. The blessing and curse on Adam and Eve

The judgment of God in the Garden of Eden may be different from Jacob's blessing on his sons. Yet, the judgment of God on the first man and woman plays a prototypical role to subsequent blessings of the patriarchs. Patriarchs manifestly bless their sons as a divine agent having the authority of God.⁵⁵⁷ Accordingly, the judgment of God on Adam and Eve must be examined with the blessings of the patriarchs. Gunkel also asserts that Jacob's blessing on three sons in Genesis 49 is closely related to the curses in the Paradise narrative in Genesis 3 in many aspects.⁵⁵⁸

After Adam and Eve break the commandments of God by the temptation of the

⁵⁵⁶ Aalders, *Genesis*, 2:267; Wenham, *Genesis*, 469; Speiser, *Genesis*, 365.

⁵⁵⁷ Davidson, *Genesis 12-50*, 49.

⁵⁵⁸ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 450.

snake, God declares grave judgment against them. In Genesis 3, the snake, the woman, and the man are cursed as representative of their offspring rather than as an individual person. Hamilton asserts that the judgment on the snake is parallel with the judgment on Adam, also, the judgment on Adam parallels that of the woman.⁵⁵⁹ However, the curses in God's judgment commonly contain the blessing for restoration of mankind at the same time.

The Curse on Snake

The judgment of God against the snake contains two kinds of curses. God proclaims, "You shall go on your belly, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life" (v. 14). This curse may be a kind of parable. Nobody, both ancient and modern authors, thinks that snakes eat dust.⁵⁶⁰ Also, it is reasonable to think that the snake would be representative of someone or something else rather than of the reptilian snake itself.⁵⁶¹ This first judgment means that the form and status of the snake will be degraded. The Old Testament sometimes displays someone's extremely miserable status with the similar expression (e.g., Isa. 65:25; Mic. 7:17). Why is this kind of curse needed for the snake? It can be understood as a blessing to man. God intended the snake not to tempt men to sin any more by making the snake's status miserable.

Secondly, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (v.15). This second curse is more serious than the first one. It shows the ultimate defeat of the snake by the seed of the woman. Most critics would not interpret the seed of the

⁵⁵⁹ Hamilton, *Genesis*, 202-203.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁵⁶¹ Sailhamer, *Genesis*, 55.

woman as the messianic promise but they understand it as the conflict between the descendants of the women and the snake in a collective concept.⁵⁶² However, either one can be interpreted as a blessing and hope for humanity. Also, the enmity between the snake and the woman is a blessing because humans will not be tempted by the snake any more because of the enmity between them.

The curse on Eve

The judgment of God on the woman can be condensed to two curses. God firstly declares, “I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; you will give birth to children with pain” (Gen. 3:16b). The first curse means the woman will suffer pain during childbirth. Birth pangs are universally known for the extremity of human anguish. The Old Testament also displays identical understanding (Ps. 48:6, Isa. 21:3, 13:8, and Mic. 4:9). However, giving birth to children was regarded as a blessing in most cases not only in the Old Testament but also all around the world (e.g., Ps. 127, 128). St. Paul writes that women will be saved through childbearing (1 Tim. 2:15). In addition, the pain of childbearing can be understood as the fulfillment of the promise in which the head of the snake will be bruised by the seed of the woman in the curse on the snake. Sailhamer asserts, “In the pain of the birth of every child, there was to be a reminder of the hope that lay in God’s promise,”⁵⁶³ for example, Romans 8:22-24; Matthew 4:8.

Secondly, God adds to the woman, “And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you” (v. 16, NLT). It means the woman’s subjection to her husband though she would prevail over the man. This curse can be also understood as the blessing.

⁵⁶² זרעה and זרעך carry a single and collective meaning together. The Messiah, Jesus, gained complete victory over Satan (single). However, the church is still fighting and will be ended in a victory (collective).

⁵⁶³ Sailhamer, *Genesis*, 56.

In the reign of man woman can find the way to recovery from corrupted status. The Scripture teaches woman's submission to the man in a marriage can be a blessing. St. Paul says that the wife will be submitted to Christ through the submission to her husband (Eph. 5:22-24; 1 Tim. 2:11).

The Curse on Adam

Finally, God declares a curse on Adam. It can be also divided into two kinds of curses. First, "cursed is the ground because of you; in painful toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life" (v.17). "Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you" (v.18) and "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground" (v.19).

Some scholars assert that the cursed one is the ground not Adam. This claim, however, is unnecessary. God more effectively presents the curse to Adam than by cursing the ground, a fundamentally important factor to the life of man.⁵⁶⁴ The text shows that the curse on Adam is closely connected with eating. He will suffer toil and hard labor for food in his lifetime (3:19). The curse shows a reverse of the blessing in the creation and in the Garden of Eden. God said, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden" (2:16). The Garden of Eden was a plentiful and rich land. Yet, the cursed ground would from then on give thorns and thistles to Adam.

However, sweat and toil can be a blessing to the corrupted man in a sense (Prov. 14:23; Eccles. 3:13; 5:18; 19; Lam. 3:27). Toil and hard labor for food play a role that will prevent further depravity. If hard labor is not carried out by a man, before long he will be corrupted more and more. Also, man finds the meaning and motivation of his life by sweat and hard labor. Ultimately, hard labor for survival can be a way of salvation for a corrupt man.

⁵⁶⁴ Cf. Cursed be their anger (Gen 49:7) See, 3.2.2.4.

Secondly, God declares to Adam, “and you shall return to dust for you are dust” (v. 19). This sounds as the sentence of the death upon Adam. The death sentence comes from the warning of God in Genesis 2:17, “when you eat from it you will surely die.” Death is the eventual destiny of Adam. Various authors in the Bible also comprehend the death of man as the result of sin. For example, Paul says, “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12).

Nevertheless, this second proclamation against Adam cannot be understood as only a curse. The majority of the commentators understand the death to Adam can be a respite from his suffering.⁵⁶⁵ It is never a blessing that the corrupt man maintains terrible status without death. The fact that the text neglects to use the word “death” looks to support the above interpretation.⁵⁶⁶ Rather, the text seems to emphasize the meaning of the rest which a man returns to his native place, “you shall return to dust for you are dust” (v.19).

To sum up, the curse of God on both Adam and Eve can be condensed in a word “pain” (עֲצֻבוֹת). The pain of Eve is connected to childbearing. That of Adam is related to survival. Even though the curses on Adam and Eve are severe pain, it is not merely a curse toward the sinners. The proclamation of God against Adam and Eve certainly contains the retribution for their sin. However, the pain embraces hope and blessing for the restoration. Also, the curse on the snake contains the hope of salvation for humanity.

⁵⁶⁵ Hamilton, *Genesis*, 203-204; von Rad, *Genesis*, 95; Skinner, *Genesis*, 84; Westermann, *Genesis*, 1:266.

⁵⁶⁶ Vawter, *On Genesis*, 85.

5.2.2. Cursing of Cain

This story does not contain an obvious blessing. However, it is closely related to the subject of curse in the blessing because the story shows that God prefers one to another. Like the curse of God on Adam and Eve, this story also becomes a model for the subsequent blessing and curse of the patriarchs.

The story of Cain and Abel is known as “a compact but heterogeneous story marked by an elliptic and ambiguous use of language.”⁵⁶⁷ After expulsion from the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve gain two sons: Cain and Abel. Both of them brought offerings (מִנְחָה) to Yahweh from produce of their occupations. While God was pleased with Abel and his offering, he was displeased with Cain and his offering. Despite God’s caution, Cain killed Abel. After this fratricide, God passes grave judgment on Cain. The judgment of God consists of two kinds of curses.

First, “And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength” (4:11). It is quite strange that God does not put the heinous murderer to death immediately. Instead, God declares that Cain will be banned from the cultivated soil (אָרֶזֶר מִן־הָאָרֶזֶמָה). The earth is actually disgusted at Cain because it drank the blood of Abel from the hand of Cain. He will enjoy abundance and peace from the land no longer.

Second, “You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer (נֹדֵד and נֹעַד) on the earth” (v.12).

⁵⁶⁷ Ellen van Wolde, “The story of Cain and Abel: A narrative study,” *JSOT* 52 (1991): 25. It is well known that the story of Cain and Abel contains many hard questions. e.g., Why does God please to only one gift and not the other? What is the specific reason that the Cain’s offering is rejected by God? What is the exact meaning that God speaks to Cain in 4:6-7? What was omitted in Cain’s word to Abel in 4:8 of MT. Who is the man who threatens to kill Cain? How can Cain settle down on the land of Nod despite the curse of God? etc. However, this dissertation does not treat them if the questions do not show direct relation to the subject of blessing and curse.

This is a natural consequence of the first curse in which he will not have success from the land. He is going to lose his roots. In Cain's response, he regards this judgment as he departs from the face of God and his life is placed in a dangerous situation.

Most will expect this story to end here with God's severe judgment on the murderer. However, God's severe judgment on Cain is not the conclusion of this story. God continues to declare for Cain who appeals, "My punishment is greater than I can bear." Von Rad rightly observes that this story reaches "its most important point."⁵⁶⁸ In fact, this part is the conclusion of the Cain and Abel story. God promises Cain, "Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him (4:15). God promises sevenfold vengeance against the one who kills Cain. Also, God gives Cain a mark (אֹת) to assure His promise. Though many conjectural opinions are proposed regarding the concrete nature of Cain's mark given by God, it is beyond our knowledge. It can be said that it refers to "that mysterious protective relationship in which Cain henceforth will be held by God."⁵⁶⁹

To sum up, differently from the common assumption, the main character of this story is Cain. Lohr asserts, "The Hebrew story, in fact, is relatively uninterested in Abel."⁵⁷⁰ Abel acted but never spoke in the story. Abel was always introduced only as the brother of Cain while the name is used seven times in the story. Also, while the etymology of Cain's name is spoken, never is that of Abel in the story. As a matter of fact,

⁵⁶⁸ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 107.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ Joel N. Lohr, "Righteous Abel, Wicked Cain: Genesis 4:1-16 in the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint, and the New Testament," *CBQ* 71 (2009): 494.

this story is only about Cain and God.⁵⁷¹ Also, even after Cain's murdering and expulsion, the interest of the narrator goes on to Cain's descendants "as blessed and successful," the progenitors of "those who dwell in tents and have cattle" (cf. Abraham), "those who play the lyre and pipe" (cf. David), and those who forged "instruments of bronze and iron."⁵⁷² According to Lohr's recent study, the one-sidedly negative image of Cain is due to the development of Cain's character in the LXX and the use of the LXX by New Testament authors. However, "MT reveals a more elusive and ambiguous picture."⁵⁷³ Von Rad rightly concludes, "because of his murder he is cursed by separation from God and yet incomprehensibly guarded and supported by God's protection. Even his life belongs to God, and he does not abandon it."⁵⁷⁴

Cain's story shows that a righteous God never tolerates sin. God makes a poignant judgment on the murderer of the brother according to his wicked deed. The murder was banned from the fruitful ground and became a wandering fugitive. Cain left before God and his life slipped into a dangerous situation. However, the story did not finish with God's grave punishment on Cain. Rather, the conclusion of the story was an incomprehensible promise to protect Cain. The story manifests the fact that Cain is not just the expelled one even though he was cursed and left from the face of God.

5.2.3. Noah's Blessing and Cursing on his three sons

Noah's blessing on his three sons in Genesis 9:18-29 provides not only a conclusion to the account of the Deluge but also a literary bridge to the next genealogy,

⁵⁷¹ Anne-Laure Zwilling, "Cain versus Abel (GN 4, 1-16)," in *Analyse narrative et Bible: Deuxième Colloque International du RRENAB*, BETL 191 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005), 510.

⁵⁷² J. C. Bangsund, "Consolation of the firstborn in Genesis: A Lesson for Christian Mission," *World & World* 14, no. 2 (spring 1994): 173.

⁵⁷³ Lohr, "Righteous Abel, Wicked Cain," 485-486.

⁵⁷⁴ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 107.

the table of nations.⁵⁷⁵ The parallel between Noah's blessing and Jacob's blessing in Genesis 49 has been acknowledged by many writers.

Wenham writes:

“Noah's last words (9:25-27), beginning with a curse on Ham for his past behavior and ending with blessings on his other sons, also provide a parallel with 49:1-27, which likewise begins with Jacob cursing three sons for their past conduct before going on to predict a more glorious future for the other sons. In both cases, the comments of the dying patriarch foreshadow the future of their respective sons and their descendants: in Jacob's case the future of the Israelite tribes and in Noah's the destiny of the nations set out in Gen 10.”⁵⁷⁶

Noah's blessing and curse are notorious for being a difficult passage because they contain many unexpected statements. The story is comparatively brief. After the Deluge, Noah planted a vineyard and became drunk with wine and lay uncovered in his tent. According to the account in Genesis 9, Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside. However, Shem and Japheth covered Noah with a garment and so they did not see their father's nakedness. After awaking once the wine had worn off, Noah knew his sons' deeds and proclaimed both a blessing and curse on them.

The curse on Ham

First of all, Noah begins with the harsh curse on Ham. The curse must be due to Ham's disrespectful deeds against his father. Noah declares, “Cursed be Canaan! He will be the slave of slaves to his brothers” (v.25). It is hard to explain the reason that Noah's curse is directed towards Canaan, the youngest son of Ham, instead of towards Ham

⁵⁷⁵ Ross, “The Curse of Canaan,” 715.

⁵⁷⁶ Wenham, *Genesis*, 469.

himself. Various solutions have been presented but most of them remain as guess work. Some scholar asserts that Noah cursed only Canaan, the son of Ham, not Ham himself.⁵⁷⁷ Accordingly, Ham and the rest of Ham's sons are neutral, neither being blessed nor cursed.⁵⁷⁸ This does not, however, appear tenable. It is hard to accept that Ham is free from the father's curse purely because Noah only curses the son of Ham. Rather, Canaan is the representative of all the descendants of Ham. This is a sort of synecdoche similar to Jacob's curse on the anger of Simeon and Levi in Genesis 49 (Cf. 3.2.2). Generally speaking, it is more dramatically effective to curse one's son than oneself. Also, the fact that Noah curses the son of Ham instead of Ham shows that the emphasis of Noah's blessing is on their descendants rather than the three sons themselves. Noah's blessing has the characteristic of prophecy. Of course, it cannot be denied that Noah's curse against Canaan implies a curse on the Canaanites. Yet, Noah's curse on Canaan cannot be considered with the exception of Ham.

On the one hand, the expression "the slave of slaves" is frequently used as the superlative in the Biblical Hebrew, for example, the holy of holies, the lord of lords. Canaan will be the lowest slave of his brothers. He will be subjected to his brothers. Becoming a slave to someone is manifested as a curse. The status of Ham will be degraded under his brothers like the status of the serpent in Genesis 3 and the status of Reuben in Genesis 49.

The blessing on Shem

Noah declares a blessing on Shem. "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem." This is a very simple but connotative blessing. Strangely enough, Noah praises Yahweh

⁵⁷⁷ Robert I. Vasholz, "Genesis 9:19-25," *Presbyterion* 26 (2000): 32.

⁵⁷⁸ Aalders, *Genesis*, 2:211.

instead of Shem. That is the blessing on Shem: Yahweh named as Shem's God. Noah does not need to bless Shem further. Most commentators assert that the center of Noah's blessing is on Shem. Leupold manifests that "It is Yahweh who is called Shem's God. . . . Only in relation to Shem does God manifest His Yahweh qualities."⁵⁷⁹ Waltke also asserts that this is the first indication that God elects the line of Shem.⁵⁸⁰

Noah adds in the blessing on Shem, "Let Canaan be his servant" (v26). This statement of Noah is also unconventional. Noah simply repeats the curse on Ham in the blessing on Shem. Was it not enough to declare a severe curse on Ham, "Be the slave of slaves to his brothers?" Why did Noah need to repeat it in the blessing on Shem? Is this an expression of Noah's intense anger that he wishes for the curse on Ham to be fulfilled? This surely expresses the relation of Shem to Ham. This problem will be handled below because Noah repeats it in the blessing on Japheth.

The blessing on Japheth

The blessing on Japheth consists of three parts. First, Noah proclaims for Japheth, "May God enlarge Japheth." This is a pun on his name (יַפֶּתֿ . . . לְיַפֶּתֿ). This blessing indicates Japheth's great prosperity as well as the multiplication of his descendants.

Second, Noah adds, "and let him dwell in the tents of Shem" (v.27, NAS). One question has been raised concerning this blessing: "Who will dwell in the tents of Shem? Is it God or Japheth?" Most scholars feel that Japheth is more likely here as the subject of to "dwell" for several reasons. The subject of שָׁכַן is always *Yahweh* not *elohim*. Wenham asserts, "It is hard to construe God's dwelling with Shem as a blessing on Japheth."⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁹ Leupold, *Genesis*, 351.

⁵⁸⁰ Waltke, *Genesis*, 151.

⁵⁸¹ Wenham, *Genesis*, 1:202.

Consequently, the dweller in the tents of Shem will be Japheth. Then it means, “May Japheth enjoy the blessing along with Shem?” Aalders comments “To live in anyone’s tent involves sharing in that person’s lot. In other words, Japheth would share in the blessing of Shem.”⁵⁸²

This second blessing is a climactic expression of the first line. The blessing on Japheth cannot be completed with his own prosperity in material and descendants; when he participates in the blessing of Shem, Japheth’s blessing will be completed. Accordingly, it is right that the blessing on Japheth itself is not actually a blessing, or is at least neutral.⁵⁸³ Japheth’s well-being depends decisively on the blessing on Shem.

Finally, Noah adds the curse on Ham in the “blessing” on Japheth once more, “and let Canaan be his servant” (v.27). The Canaanites will be subservient not only to the Shemites but also to the Japhethites. Yet, several significant questions are naturally raised to Noah’s repeated curses on Ham. Are the above two blessings not enough on Japheth? Why does Noah cast a curse on Ham in another brother’s blessings? Is Noah repeating these insignificant words three times because he is not yet sober after being drunk? Most scholars agree with the assertion of Wenham that “This threefold repetition of the curse makes it unusually emphatic: there can be no doubt about its fulfillment.”⁵⁸⁴ However, is this really the case?

Most scholars are thoroughly aware of the blessing and promise in the curses on the snake, Adam and Eve. However, they seem to be unaware of the blessing and promise toward Ham in Noah’s blessing on the three sons. Most scholars regard Ham as the only

⁵⁸² Aalders, *Genesis*, 1: 211.

⁵⁸³ Günther Wittenberg, “‘... Let Canaan be his Slave.’ (Gen 9:26) Is Ham also cursed?” *JTSA* 74 (Mr. 1991): 48, n. 6.

⁵⁸⁴ Wenham, *Genesis*, 203.

cursed son. However, Noah's blessing and curse on the three sons does not show an extreme antithetic structure: one son is harshly cursed and the other two sons are exceptionally blessed. However, as many interpreters have pointed out, after coming out of the ark, Ham is greatly blessed by Yahweh with Noah and his two brothers (9:1-19). It seems unusual that Ham is shortly to become the object of a severe curse in the same chapter.

Although Noah begins the blessing with a harsh curse on Ham, he repeats the curse in the subsequent blessing for Shem and Japheth. Noah leaves open a certain possibility by this unconventional repetition. Is Ham really the only cursed son in Noah's blessing as the descendant of the serpent?⁵⁸⁵ The first declaration of Noah is certainly a severe curse against Ham: "Be slave of slaves to his brothers." However, the two declarations of Noah in the blessing of Shem and Japheth should not be understood as the simple repetition of the previous curse on Ham. The repeated declarations in other sons' blessings show the relation of Ham to Shem and Japheth. It means that in the prescribed relationship Ham will get a portion of the blessing given to his brothers, Shem and Japheth, thus through becoming a servant of his brothers.

Although Noah did not give a direct blessing on Ham, the youngest son of Noah will participate in the blessed tents of his brothers by the subjugation to Shem and Japheth. The Law also supports it. The slaves will eat the portion of the lord like the members of the family while foreigners, sojourners, and hired workers may not participate in it (e.g., Lev. 22:10-11; Exod. 12:43-45). Again, the passages in Genesis 17 assert that all of Abraham's slaves will participate in the covenant given to Abraham. All of Abraham's servants both he who is born in his house and he who is bought with money from a foreigner, even though they are not Abraham's offspring, must surely be circumcised. So

⁵⁸⁵ Cf. Waltke, *Genesis*, 150, asserts that the Canaanites succeed as the descendants of the serpent.

shall Yahweh's covenant be in the flesh (Gen. 17: 12-13). The blessing of Ham is also evident where Ham produces a rich offspring and obtained land among his brothers – two essential elements of the blessed life.⁵⁸⁶

In the enlarged territory of Japheth by the blessing of God, there will be a room for Ham who is the servant of Japheth. The God of Shem will also be the God of Ham who completely obeys Shem as if Japheth will dwell and share in the tents of Shem. The tents of Shem will be adequate for his brothers (it takes the plural form, באהלי־שם). The brothers of Shem, not just Japheth but also Ham, their servant, will dwell in the tents of Shem and enjoy the blessing together.

Noah's blessing on three sons does not sharply distinguish between blessing and curse. Blessing is mingled with curse as in with Adam, Eve, and Cain. Ham was severely cursed by Noah. Yet, the blessings on his brothers contain a portion for Ham when Ham sustains the servile relationship with his brothers. The God of Shem shall be the God of Japheth who lives in the tent of Shem. Also, He shall be the God of Ham who is subject to Shem.⁵⁸⁷

5.2.4. Abraham's two sons: Isaac and Ishmael

Though Abraham does not verbally bless his son, the text clearly distinguishes the blessed son from the other son. This story holds an important position in the theme of the blessing and curse.⁵⁸⁸ Wenham says, "This account of Isaac's birth and Ishmael's

⁵⁸⁶ Cf. 4.2.1.1 above.

⁵⁸⁷ All genealogies in Genesis emphasize all humankind on earth come from one root. Accordingly, all of them are brothers and family. The whole family will return to the root and participate in one blessing at the end.

⁵⁸⁸ St. Paul also uses quotations from this account as an important basis for his doctrine (Cf. Romans chapter 9, Galatians chapter 4).

expulsion is of decisive importance in the unfolding of the patriarchal promises.”⁵⁸⁹ The episode between Isaac and Ishmael is distributed in quite a long story of Genesis 16 and 21, in a genealogy of Genesis 25, and in a minor record of Genesis 17. In these passages, more attention will be given to Ishmael who seems to be “expelled” from the blessing of Abraham than to Isaac, “the blessed son.” The following questions are essentially raised in the story: does Genesis really exhibit only Isaac as the selected and blessed son, and Ishmael, as the cursed and forsaken son? Like the prior other blessings, does God not open the possibility of the blessing on Ishmael as well?

Genesis 16 and 21 are important in order to understand the Ishmael story. Critics normally suppose that the two chapters are a doublet because many similarities exist between them. However, Genesis 16 and 21 seem to play a respective role: the birth (16) and the expulsion of Ishmael (21).

Dozeman asserts:

“The two wilderness stories of Hagar are not doublets. Instead, Genesis 16 and 21 trace the transformation of Hagar from slave to founder of the Ishmaelites in a continuous story, which provides the prototype for Moses, who undergoes similar transformation in the wilderness to become founder of the Israelite nation.”⁵⁹⁰

Chapter 16: Ishmael’s Birth

In chapter 16 Hagar flees to the desert to escap Sarah’s mistreatment. The angel of Yahweh meets Hagar, prophesies the birth of a son, Ishmael. The birth story of Ishmael illustrates several significant points. First, the birth and the destiny of Ishmael are

⁵⁸⁹ Wenham, *Genesis*, 2:88.

⁵⁹⁰ Thomas D. Dozeman, “The Wilderness and Salvation History in the Hagar Story,” *JBL* 117, no. 1 (Spring, 1998): 33.

prophesied by the Lord. “Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael” (v. 11). In the Scripture the announcements of birth and destiny are only given to important persons in salvation history, for example, Isaac (Genesis 21),⁵⁹¹ Samson (Judges 13), Samuel (1 Samuel 1), and Jesus (Luke 1).⁵⁹² If Ishmael were merely the rejected son from the blessing of Abraham, the birth story of Ishmael would not be given in the story of Isaac.⁵⁹³ Besides, Genesis importantly provides the exact age at his death (25:17) and his genealogy (25:13-16). “These are the years of the life of Ishmael: 137 years. He breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people.” This sentence is same as the sentence adopted for the death of the patriarchs. Syrén asserts, “The genealogical material about Ishmael and Esau can be viewed as evidence of an intense interest in their lineage, and their consanguinity with Isaac and Jacob.”⁵⁹⁴

The promise for Ishmael in Genesis 16:9-11 starts with the same formula “וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מֵלֵאָדָּי יְהוָה” in three times, This generally occurs when an important promise or commandment is given in the Old Testament. In addition, the angel of the Lord promises, “I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude” (Gen. 16:10). This promise on Ishmael is not a minor blessing. Rather, it recalls the blessing given to Abraham in Genesis 15:4-5.

God also makes an announcement about the whole life of this important boy in verse 12. It can be divided into three parts: “The man shall be a wild donkey (פָּרָא אֲדָמָה); his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him,” “and he shall

⁵⁹¹ The names of Ishmael and Isaac are given by Abraham using exact identical words (Gen. 16:15 and 21:3)

⁵⁹² Waltke, *Genesis*, 254; S. Nikaido, “Hagar and Ishmael as Literary Figures: An Inter textual Study,” *VT* 51, (Apr., 2001): 219.

⁵⁹³ In fact, this is the first birth prophecy by the angel of God in the Bible.

⁵⁹⁴ Syrén, *The Forsaken First-born*, 129.

dwell in the presence of all his brethren (וְעַל-פְּנֵי כָל-אֶחָיו יֹשֵׁב) (KJV).

First, to become a wild donkey is not an insult.⁵⁹⁵ The wild donkey lives freely in the vast desert (the east and south areas of Canaan). Ishmael will enjoy his freedom in the solitary wilderness. However, he will not be satisfied with the life in the desert: freedom but poverty.

Secondly, he will fight against everyone to deprive the others' plentiful possession. Everyone will fight against him. Especially, the descendants of Isaac will be the main object of Ishmael's attack because Isaac occupied the blessing on Abraham.

Finally, Ishmael will not go far away from Isaac but will dwell in the presence of his brethren.⁵⁹⁶ He will continually try to deprive his brother of the blessing. Despite the continual conflict, Ishmael will dwell near his blessed brother and will deprive of the portion of the blessing of Isaac after all.

Chapter 17: Ishmael's Circumcision

Genesis 17 describes the circumcision of Abraham. The circumcision is defined as the mark of the covenant to Abraham in the Old Testament, "To be God to you and to your offspring after you" (Gen. 17: 7).⁵⁹⁷ The passages in Genesis 17 emphasize that Abraham is circumcised with his son, Ishmael (v. 23, 26) and how old Ishmael was when he was circumcised (v. 25). The passage emphasizes that Ishmael is the son in the covenant of Abraham. Syrén asserts, "Ishmael is now, to all intents and purposes,

⁵⁹⁵ NET Bible v.12, n. 36.

⁵⁹⁶ Hebrew "עַל-פְּנֵי" can be interpreted in several possibilities. Ishmael would live on the edge of society (KJV, GNB, LXX, cf. NASB "to the east of"), as an idiom "be at odds with" (cf. NRSV, NLT) or "live in hostility toward" (cf. NIV).

⁵⁹⁷ Circumcision was the criterion for participation in Passover (Exod. 12:43-49).

included in the covenant.”⁵⁹⁸

The promise for Ishmael is reaffirmed to Abraham in Genesis 17:20 and partly fulfilled in 25:13-16. “Behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation.”

Wenham discovers that the account of God is drawn in the well-ordered chiasmic structure in which Ishmael is central.⁵⁹⁹

19a Sarah will bear a son for you, Isaac

19b I will establish my covenant with him

20 But I will bless and multiply Ishmael

21a I will establish my covenant with Isaac

21b Sarah will bear him for you

Chapter 21: Ishmael’s expulsion

After the birth of Isaac, Sarah wants to drive away Ishmael with Hagar so that Ishmael cannot share Abraham’s inheritance with Isaac. Abraham decides to follow the advice of Sarah with trouble in mind. However, God promises twice that Ishmael will be a nation in Genesis 21. In fact, Abraham cannot agree to drive out Ishmael until God gives the promise for Ishmael. God promises, “And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring” (Gen. 21:13). Syrén comments on this sentence, “Thus Ishmael is, in effect, integrated into Abraham’s family and is seen to share in the promise made to the patriarch.”⁶⁰⁰

Again, God makes a promise to Ishmael after Hagar and Ishmael were casted out

⁵⁹⁸ Syrén, *The Forsaken First-born*, 38.

⁵⁹⁹ Wenham, *Genesis*, 26.

⁶⁰⁰ Syrén, *The Forsaken First-born*, 18.

of the house of Abraham. “For I will make him into a great nation” (Gen. 21:18). Many writers comment that the promise is given just to comfort Abraham and Ishmael⁶⁰¹ or to compensate for the forsaken son. However, it is not a small blessing in the level of compensation but an actual repeat of the blessing given to Abraham. It seems a natural conclusion that Ishmael is entitled to partake of the promises of Abraham that abundance of the descendants (Gen. 13:16; 15:4) and the making of a great nation (Gen. 12:2).

Moreover, God watched with deep concern for Ishmael in the wilderness and God was with Ishmael. It manifests, “God is still the guarantor of the promise even to the expelled Ishmael.”⁶⁰² Abraham apparently had become close to Ishmael after some time (perhaps after the death of Sarah) and two sons eventually join together in burying Abraham (Gen 25:9).

Scholars have recently found that Hagar was not just a maidservant but a second wife of Abraham. The Hebrew word אֲנִיָּה used in 21:10 to denote Hagar differs from the word שִׁפְחָה applied to her in 16:1. Waltke asserts, “the former identifies Hagar as married to Abraham; the latter, as a possession and laborer for Sarah.”⁶⁰³ Also, Fensham points out that Sarah used the Hebrew word גֵּרִישׁ the technical term in the Old Testament for divorce to drive Hagar away. He asserts that it shows “the fact that Hagar was regarded as a second wife of Abraham. A second wife as the mother of the children of the master had a higher social status than the servant girl.”⁶⁰⁴ If Ishmael was not in the legal position to threaten the inheritance of Isaac at all, Sarah would not attempt to drive out Ishmael in

⁶⁰¹ Aalders, *Genesis*, 2:36-37.

⁶⁰² Syrén, *The Forsaken First-born*, 49.

⁶⁰³ Waltke, *Genesis*, 294.

⁶⁰⁴ F. C. Fensham, “The son of a handmaid in Northwest Semitic,” *VT* 19, (Jul., 1969), 318.

spite of the possibility of encountering the objection of Abraham. Sarah certainly realizes the threat of the legal position of Ishmael. Accordingly, Ishmael as the son of the second wife was in a legitimate position to share the father's inheritance although he does not have an equal right with Isaac. Goldingay offers an interesting chiasmic structural analysis of the Abraham story (Gen. 12-22).⁶⁰⁵

12a The call. Blessing promised

12b Abraham in a foreign land: Wife-sister motif.

13–14 Lot in danger: Sodom.

15 Covenant

16 Hagar and Ishmael

17 Covenant

18–19 Lot in danger: Sodom.

20 Abraham in a foreign land: Wife-sister motif

21 Hagar and Ishmael.

22 The call: Blessing confirmed

According to the analysis, surprisingly, the pivot of the Abraham cycle seems to be chapter 16, the account of the birth of Ishmael. Magonet suggests that this is a false climax to mislead the reader.⁶⁰⁶ However, Goldingay argues that the author intentionally built the structure in this way to emphasize that Ishmael shares the centre of the story with Isaac.⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰⁵ John Goldingay, "The Place of Ishmael," in *The World of Genesis: Persons, Places, Perspectives*, eds. Philip R. Davies & David J. A. Clines, JSOTsup 257 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 146. He adopted the earlier work of J. Magonet, *Bible Lives* (London: SCM Press, 1992).

⁶⁰⁶ Magonet, *Bible Lives*, 23-32.

⁶⁰⁷ Goldingay, "The Place of Ishmael," 147.

To sum up, St. Paul quotes this relationship for his doctrine of the selection in Galatians.⁶⁰⁸ Under this strong influence, the view held in which Ishmael is the forsaken son in contrast to Isaac is predominant among both Christians and Jews. Yet, Genesis places the emphasis, at least, both on Isaac and on Ishmael. C. Amos asserts, “Isaac and Ishmael are being required to share centre stage.”⁶⁰⁹ Genesis shows the close parallels and many verbal links between what happens to Ishmael and Isaac’s experiences.⁶¹⁰ The promise on Ishmael is not a trifling blessing. He will be a partaker to the promises given to Abraham. However, as St. Paul’s assertion (Gal. 4:21-31) it will be fulfilled by the blessing on Isaac who was born following God’s promise.

5.2.5. Isaac’s Blessing on Jacob and Esau

Isaac’s blessing on Jacob and Esau is important to investigate the blessing theme in Genesis. The Isaac’s blessing provides clear comparisons with Genesis 49 together with Deuteronomy 33 as well as Genesis 9 and Genesis 12.⁶¹¹ Westermann points out that the oldest concept of blessing is visible in Genesis 27.⁶¹² Isaac’s pronouncement on Jacob and Esau is, literary critically, very complicated.

Though God foretells, “The older shall serve the younger” (Gen. 26: 21-26), Isaac would bless Esau, the first-born son. Yet, Rebekah forms a plot to snatch and give the

⁶⁰⁸ Wenham, *Genesis*, 2:88, asserts, “Gal 4:21–31. For Paul, the all-important point is that Isaac was born following God’s promise and in that respect anticipates the gentile believers in God’s plan, while Ishmael, born through human contrivance, is a forerunner of the Jews who sought salvation through works of the law.”

⁶⁰⁹ Clare Amos, “Incomplete without the Other: Isaac, Ishmael and a Hermeneutic of Diversity,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 20, no. 3 (July 2009): 249.

⁶¹⁰ Compare especially chapter 21 and 22.

⁶¹¹ Speiser, *Genesis*, 365.

⁶¹² Westermann, *Blessing*, 54.

blessing to Jacob. After all, Isaac gets deceived and blesses Jacob instead of Esau. Esau was not a son of the foreign woman like Ishmael but twin brother of Jacob. Also, Genesis does not record particular misdoings conducted by Esau as Cain does. Only did he neglect the birthright (בְּכֹרֶה) when he was young (25: 29-34).⁶¹³ The irrevocable character of Isaac's blessing is already treated in the previous chapter.⁶¹⁴

Isaac's blessing on Jacob

The Isaac's blessing on Jacob may be organized in the three parts. It shows something in common with the Noah's blessing on three sons. Its nearest analogies are the Jacob's blessing on Joseph (Gen. 49:22 and Deut. 33:13).⁶¹⁵

First, Isaac presents to Jacob two kinds of fertilities. "See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field that the LORD has blessed!" (v.27b). "May God give you of the dew of heaven and of the fatness of the earth and plenty of grain and wine" (v.28). Isaac provides Jacob the land and its abundance for food. This is one of the essential factors of the blessing in Genesis.

Second, Isaac provides to Jacob lordship over brothers. "Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you" (v.29a). Jacob will rule over people and nations as well as his brothers. The lordship's blessing seems not to be suitable for the disposition of Jacob. Rather, it is appropriate to Esau. Jacob was a peaceful and quiet man, living in tents (Gen. 25:27). It was said in Jacob's own words that he was a servant both of Laban for a long time (29:15, 18) and of Esau (32: 4). Also, Jacob as servant is an important concept in the following

⁶¹³ But what, precisely, did Jacob acquire in this transaction?

⁶¹⁴ See. 4.3.2.4.

⁶¹⁵ Skinner, *Genesis*, 371.

history (cf. Isa. 41:8; 44:1; 2; 21; 45:4). Strangely however, the blessing of lordship is given to Jacob.

Finally, Isaac concludes the blessing with this acquainted sentence: “Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you! (v.29b)” This is couplet of the blessing on Abraham in Gen. 12:3 and Balaam’s oracle on the Israelite in Num. 24:9. It manifests that the blessing on Jacob is not only for the blessed one but for everyone who supports and is delighted with him.

Isaac’s blessing on Esau

Isaac’s blessing on Esau can be organized in three parts as well. The blessing on Esau is more difficult grammatically and theologically than is the blessing on Jacob. Isaac’s declaration for Esau has been the subject of much inconclusive discussion. Some interpreters understand it as a real blessing. However, the majority of modern scholars hesitate to call it a blessing. Gunkel views Isaac’s pronouncement on Esau as a cursed pronouncement by contrast with the blessing on Jacob.⁶¹⁶ Von Rad agrees, “His second blessing is, to be sure, the opposite of what Jacob received.”⁶¹⁷ Waltke calls it “antiblessing as a parody on Jacob’s blessing.”⁶¹⁸ Yet, KJV interprets it as a sort of blessing. Also, De Hoop asserts that Isaac’s pronouncement on Esau must be understood as a real blessing because Isaac declared it by strong request of Esau for a blessing. Also, Ugaritic examples support that this is a sort of blessing.⁶¹⁹

The pronouncement on Esau must be understood as a blessing though it partly sounds like a sort of curse. It is hard to accept that Isaac pronounces a curse on Esau, his

⁶¹⁶ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 314.

⁶¹⁷ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 279.

⁶¹⁸ Waltke, *Genesis*, 381.

⁶¹⁹ De Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 297.

beloved first son who is victim of his brother's deception. Isaac is now very perplexed and angry with Jacob not Esau. Also, Isaac's pronouncement is given as a result of Esau's eager appeal for an alternate blessing.

The problem of whether it is a blessing or curse primarily derives from the interpretation of Isaac's first pronouncement on Esau. Isaac starts with the following sentence, "Behold, ... the fatness (בְּשֵׂבוֹנֵי) of the earth shall your dwelling be, and ... the dew (וּדְמַטֵּל) of heaven on high" (v.39b). The Hebrew preposition בֵּין can be interpreted in either way: Partative (i.e., some of) or Privative (i.e., away from).⁶²⁰ The preposition בֵּין can be interpreted in privative meaning in this case as most modern commentators assert, "Away from the fatness of the earth ... and away from the dew of heaven on high." This interpretation is well suited to the life of Esau, a wanderer like the destiny of Cain or Ishmael. This Isaac's first pronouncement on Esau is directly opposite to the blessing given to Jacob (of the dew from heaven, and of the fatness of the earth (Cf. v.28, v.39). Isaac intentionally leads Esau to compare the fertile land of Jacob by using the parody of the blessing on Jacob. Esau's dwelling place will be more arid and barren than the land of Israel. Esau will feel an insufficiency of food and envy the blessing given to his brother.

Secondly, Isaac declares for Esau, "By your sword you shall live" (v.40a). This second pronouncement on Esau is closely connected with the first one. Esau will live by war and plundering because of his unfruitful land. He will continually invade the land of his brother with the sword. The Israelite land, which has inherited a more plentiful blessing than has Esau, will be the main object of his attack. (Num. 20:18; 1 Sam. 14:47; 1 Kings 11:14–16; 2 Kings 14:7–10; Obadiah; Psalm 60:10–11).

If it is so, Isaac's pronouncement on Esau sounds more like a curse than a blessing.

⁶²⁰ *IBHS*, §11.2.11. e.

Though Isaac certainly pronounces an alternative blessing for Esau, how can they be understood as a blessing? If the fertile land is given to Esau like the blessing on Jacob, Esau will live in breaking off his relationship with Jacob through the satisfaction of plentiful food. However, Esau's barren land makes him unsatisfied about his circumstances and he lives by the sword. He will not depart from the vicinity of Jacob and continually invades the fertile land of Jacob to plunder the blessing on Jacob from jealousy. This blessing on Esau also reminds of the blessing on Ishmael (Gen. 16:22, 21:20).

Finally, Isaac concludes with this most important sentence for Esau, "and you shall serve your brother; but when you will roam (when the time comes), you shall break off his yoke from your neck" (v.40b). This last declaration shows some difficulty. The Hebrew word רוד occurs only here (Cf. Ps. 55:3 in uncertain⁶²¹). It may mean, "To go to and fro, be restless, unsettled."⁶²²

This last proclamation on Esau seems to be quite different from Noah's blessing on Ham. Ham shall share with Shem's blessing by serving his brothers. However, will Esau finally break the yoke of his brother from his neck? Will Esau not serve Jacob in the end? However, it should not be interpreted as Esau being completely liberated from the yoke of Jacob. Then, this proclamation on Esau directly conflicts with Yahweh's prediction (Gen. 25:23) and Isaac's first blessing on Jacob (27:29).⁶²³ Keil and Delitzsch assert that the rendering "shake" is best here rather than "break off" for the Hebrew verb

⁶²¹ Holladay, s.v. "רוד."

⁶²² BDB, s.v. "רוד." Also, W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986-89), 1:55, connects רוד with Arabic *rada* "walk about, prowl."

⁶²³ Aalders, *Genesis*, 2:100.

פֶּרֶק.⁶²⁴ He comments that it is “not freedom from the dominion of Israel, but only a repeated and not unsuccessful struggle for freedom.”⁶²⁵ Even though Esau will struggle against the oppression of Israel whenever the proper times will come, Jacob will be lord over him. Esau will bow down before Jacob as a servant as the prediction of the Isaac’s blessing on Jacob.

To sum up, Esau/Edom has only been negatively depicted by both Jews and Christians throughout the generations.⁶²⁶ However, the related passages in the Hebrew Bible actually do not depict Esau as a negative character, rather, as a sympathetic one who lost his inheritance by deception. Isaac’s blessing must not be understood in sharp contrast between the blessing on Jacob and the curse on Esau. The blessing on Jacob, the fertility and lordship, was peaked in the final blessing for everyone (v.29b). Many usually think that Isaac’s pronouncement on Esau shows a direct antithesis on the blessing on Jacob, that is, a curse. Yet, it seems rather a parallel of the blessing on Jacob. Isaac gave a main blessing to Jacob, also an alternative blessing to Esau. Esau will live by his sword because of his sterile land and will continually resist his brother’s oppression whenever the occasion arises. Nevertheless, Esau will ultimately serve his brother and consequently he will participate in the blessing on Jacob.

5.2.6. Jacob’s blessing on Manasseh and Ephraim

Although this case does not contain a curse in the blessing, it needs to be examined because Jacob gives a greater blessing to a son than his brother. Steinmetz asserts that the blessing on Joseph’s sons recalls earlier blessings in which a father

⁶²⁴ K&D, *Genesis*, 1:278.

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

⁶²⁶ Malachi writes in 1:2-3, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated .” Also, St. Paul quotes from Hosea in Romans (9:13). Both texts clearly mean Edomites and Israelites as a nation not Esau and Jacob as a person.

chooses one son who would receive the blessing.⁶²⁷ Jacob adopts Joseph's two sons, **Manasseh and Ephraim**, and blesses them at the end of his life. Unlike Joseph expects, Jacob adheres to give the greater blessing to Ephraim, the younger son. This blessing is ultimately for Joseph in order that he may inherit doubly as Jacob's successor. Jacob blesses two boys with the same blessing not with different blessing as in prior cases. It shows that **Ephraim and Manasseh are eventually blessed the same** despite the difference of order and quantity of the blessing between them. Wenham asserts, "Their equality is also implied by the comment 'he blessed Joseph'" (v.15).⁶²⁸

Jacob's blessing can be divided in three parts (48:15-16).

First, Jacob starts with recalling God who has been a leader and protector to himself as well as his fathers. God will be the same God to these blessed boys. Jacob proclaims, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the boys" (v.15). Jacob continues, "in them let my name be carried on, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac" (v.16). The blessing promised to Abraham will be continued on Joseph's two boys.

Secondly, Jacob continues, "and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth" (v.16). He blesses the multitude of Joseph's descendants in the earth. This is one of major blessings promised to the patriarchs (Gen. 15:5; 22:17; 28:14).

Finally, Jacob concludes his blessing on Joseph's two sons, "By you Israel will pronounce blessings, saying, 'God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh'" (Gen. 48:20). They will be the highest examples of the blessing on the Israelites. As the sons of Joseph

⁶²⁷ D. Steinmetz, *From Father to Son: Kinship, Conflict, and Continuity in Genesis* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1991), 128.

⁶²⁸ Wenham, *Genesis*, 465.

will receive the great blessing first and become a good model, other Israelites will be eager to receive the same blessing and all of them also will be blessed in the end.

5.2.7. Summary

Several blessing stories in Genesis often contain curses as well. Though the blessed son and the cursed son appear at the same time, it is not easy to split sharply between them. Blessing was mingled with curse in the many cases.

Painful toil may become a blessing to the corrupt Adam as a preventative means from further depravity. Even the death sentence can be a blessing of rest from his suffering. In the same manner, Eve's pain of childbearing can be understood as a blessing to fulfill victory in the seed of the woman. Also, the woman's submission to the man in the marriage can be a blessing of being saved (Eph. 5:22-24; 1 Tim. 2:11). Although Cain was cast out from the face of God because of his murdering, the incomprehensible promise of God follows Cain to protect him. God's interest continues in the writing of the blessed and successful story of Cain's descendants after Cain's expulsion. In the early part of Genesis these two judgments of God on sinners become a prototype of the consequent blessings of the patriarchs.

Ham finds the possibility of sharing the blessing of Shem with the curse to be the lowest slave under his brothers. Though Ishmael was expelled from the house of Abraham, God promises to grant for the most part of the blessing of Abraham. Also, God continues to be with Ishmael after his expulsion from the house of Abraham. Although Esau was deprived of the father's blessing by the deception, he receives an alternative blessing. He will get a portion of the blessing of Jacob though he will continually resist the oppression of his brother. Ephraim and Manasseh received the same blessing though a difference exists between them. On the one hand, the father's blessing commonly shows the climax

in a portion of the blessing for others as well as for the excluded brothers. For example, Isaac's blessing on Jacob, "blessed be everyone who blesses you!" (27:29). Jacob's blessing on Ephraim and Manasseh, "By you Israel will pronounce blessings" (48:20).

To conclude, Genesis emphasizes that God's promise for Abraham continues in the line of blessing of the descendants of Abraham without ceasing. However, when God chooses one to continue the blessing to the next generation, it does not automatically mean a rejection or curse of the other sons. Bangsund asserts, "God may choose one for (purposeful?) blessing without rejecting another. A person can be 'not chosen' without being rejected."⁶²⁹ Genesis teaches that the other sons will finally participate in the blessing of his brother. Accordingly, the Kaminski's suggestion: "main line" and "side line"⁶³⁰ is better than the common classification "the elect and blessed line" and "the forsaken and cursed line."⁶³¹ Then, how can be understood the curse on the first three sons in Jacob's blessing on the basis of the patterns of such a blessing in Genesis?

5.3. Curses and Blessing in Genesis 49

From what has been discussed above, we can conclude that the curses in the Jacob's blessing in Genesis 49 are not unusual at all. Rather, a similar intermingling repeatedly appears in the blessings of Genesis. The circumstances of the blessings in Genesis clearly show that one son inherits the promise and all the brothers share the

⁶²⁹ Bangsund, "Consolation of the firstborn," 173.

⁶³⁰ Kaminski, *From Noah*, 62. Also, Bangsund, *Consolation*, 176, proposes, "blessing and significant blessing."

⁶³¹ J. Scharbert, "Die Sinn der Toledot-Formel in Priesterschrift," in *Wort-Gebot- Glaube*, ed. H. J. Stoebe (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1970), 45, asserts, 'Promise Toledot and Separated out Toledot, Left out Toledot.' Also, Anderson, "Genealogical Promise," calls, "the elect and rejected genealogy."

benefits. Which son then inherits the main blessing from the father in the blessing of Jacob?

5.3.1. The main blessing in Genesis 49

As seen in the cases of previous blessings in Genesis, Jacob's blessing too contains curses on certain sons. Many scholars have recognized the fact that most of Jacob's sons except Judah and Joseph were not actually blessed by the father.⁶³² Jacob's pronouncements on most sons are mainly trivial material blessings, mild rebuke, and a simple wordplay on their names.⁶³³ Jacob's intention in his blessing for twelve sons is clear. So to speak, he would leave the main blessing to one son and all the brothers will participate in the blessing as with Isaac's blessing which allows Esau to participate in the blessing on Jacob.

Jacob already blessed Joseph in chapter 48. The blessing in chapter 48 takes the character of the preliminary arrangement to give Joseph the main blessing as his eldest son in chapter 49. The prophet Jeremiah proclaims, "I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn" (Jer. 31:9). The blessing of Joseph is the climax of the Jacob's blessing in Genesis 49.

On the one hand, many have believed Judah as the only core of Jacob's blessing or, at least, co-core with Joseph. However, many critical scholars believe that it is awkward that the praise for Judah suddenly appears in this place.⁶³⁴ Also, both structures of Genesis 49 and the story of Joseph strongly support the fact that Joseph receives the

⁶³² Spurrel, *Genesis*, 364, writes, "only two of the tribes are really blessed, viz. Judah and Joseph."

⁶³³ Salehamer, *Genesis 1-17*, 277.

⁶³⁴ Most critical scholars attribute the main reason to the redaction in the period of the King of David and Solomon.

greatest blessing from Jacob among the brothers.⁶³⁵ Also, some scholars present the possibility that Jacob’s blessing on Judah was declared in sarcasm as with the elder sons.⁶³⁶ Goldingay asserts,

“It seems that Judah is disqualified from leadership by his marrying out and his recourse to an apparent prostitute: in realm of marriage and sex he behaves more like Reuben (and Shechem, who provoked Simeon and Levi’s sin) than Joseph, as chapter 39 will now portray him.”⁶³⁷

The following table shows a brief summary of Jacob’s blessings on his twelve sons. The number in parenthesis is the number of the lines of each blessing.⁶³⁸

Table 2. Jacob’s blessings on his twelve sons

Name	Blessing	Evaluation
Reuben (7)	Reuben will no longer excel because of his adultery.	cursed
Simeon & Levi (10)	Simeon and Levi shall be separated and dispersed in Israel	cursed
Judah (17)	The leader of Israel will come out from Judah.	Positive or sarcasm ⁶³⁹
Zebulun (3)	Zebulun shall be a haven for ships and his border shall be at Sidon.	Slight blessing
Issachar	Issachar will settle in a fertile land but become a slave	Negative

⁶³⁵ See, for detailed discussion, 2.2.3.3 above. Kaminski finds in the Pentateuch’s peculiar structure that the less important sons are placed first and more important sons placed at the end.

⁶³⁶ Good, “The Blessing on Judah,” 427-32. Carmichael, “Some Sayings in Genesis 49,” 435-444. For further discussion, see 2.2.3.3.

⁶³⁷ Goldingay, “The Patriarchs in Scripture,” 12.

⁶³⁸ O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 429-430.

⁶³⁹ See, 2.2.3.3 above.

(6)	under forced labor.	
Dan (5)	Dan shall be a serpent in the way to bite the heel of horse.	Positive or condemn ⁶⁴⁰
Gad (2)	This blessing is just his name's repeated pun (four times in six words). Gad will attack the retreat of the raider.	Slight blessing
Asher (2)	Asher bread is fat and abundant and will provide royal food.	positive or mild rebuke ⁶⁴¹
Naphtali (2)	The meaning is uncertain. Naphtali is born a free-running doe, and gives beautiful words, ⁶⁴² or he is a free running doe, but settled down with young children (by the price of original freedom?). ⁶⁴³	Praise, mild rebuke, or straight comment ⁶⁴⁴
Joseph (19)	God is Joseph's protector and benefactor. God of the fathers will be the God of Joseph.	Positive
Benjamin (3)	He will be a ravenous predator like wolf.	Positive or Negative ⁶⁴⁵

The table shows that most sons of Jacob received an insignificant blessing, simple portrayal, and rebuke. It will then be necessary to examine what Jacob bestowed to Joseph in the blessing. Jacob's blessing on Joseph is notorious as being the longest, most obscure, and frequently untranslatable in the blessing of Jacob.⁶⁴⁶

⁶⁴⁰ O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 428.

⁶⁴¹ The meaning may be different according to whom Asher will provide his rich food. Many generally think that גלך (without the article) means the Canaanite king rather than the Israelite king.

⁶⁴² KJV, NAS, NET, Speiser, O'Connor, Dahood, and Westermann.

⁶⁴³ NIV, RSV, and NLT.

⁶⁴⁴ Wenham, *Genesis*, 483.

⁶⁴⁵ O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 428.

⁶⁴⁶ Skinner, *Genesis*, 529. Although I recognize that MT text contains multiple problems in text-critical issues, I will only treat those issues in this dissertation as far as they are directly related to my major theme.

The blessing of Joseph

Jacob's blessing on Joseph can be divided in three parts.

First, God is Joseph's benefactor who multiplies his possessions and descendants. Jacob begins, "Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; his branches run over the wall" (v.22).⁶⁴⁷ Some modern writers prefer this line to read as the animal metaphor, "Joseph is a wild ass (פֶּרֶד)." ⁶⁴⁸ However, this suggestion seems unnecessary.

The Hebrew Bible frequently uses the metaphor of luxuriant tree as the blessing of fertility and prosperity (Ps. 1:3. Cf. Ezek. 31:4; Hos. 10:1; 14:8). It is also an extension of the blessing of fertility in Isaac's blessing on Jacob. In addition, the ancient Hebrew psalmist understood this sentence in the botanical metaphor and cited in his psalm. "O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! ... It sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the River. Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?" (Ps. 80: 1, 12-13). Consequently, this blessing expresses the fruitful status of Joseph. The prosperity comes from the rich water supply of God. The tree besides a well will not worry to be dry by a famine.

Jacob continues, "by the God of your father who will help you, by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that crouches beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb" (v.25). Jacob declares three abundances for Joseph such as rain and dew from the heaven, fountain and river from the deep, and descendants of both animals and men. In fact, the blessings contain all kinds of success and prosperity in one's life.

⁶⁴⁷ Several commentators (NICOT, WBC, etc.) and English versions (NLT, NAB, etc.).

⁶⁴⁸ They provide several specious reasons: the Hebrew פֶּרֶד is never used to refer to a plant in the Hebrew Bible. Animal metaphor is one of the distinctive features of the blessing of Jacob but botanical metaphor is unique here. Also, animal metaphor is suitable for the contents (the attack of archery) more than botanical metaphor. Cf. Hamilton, *Genesis*, 2:683.

Second, God is Joseph's protector who makes a counterattack on Joseph's violent enemy. Jacob declares, "The archers bitterly attacked him, shot at him, and harassed him severely, yet his bow remained unmoved; his arms were made agile by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (from there is the Shepherd, the Stone (אבן) of Israel)" (v.23-24).⁶⁴⁹ Many critical scholars have applied this blessing to the circumstance of the tribe of Ephraim in the later period. However, this blessing is suitable to the meandering life of Joseph himself. Joseph's life has been a series of reversals. His overturned victory comes from the Mighty One who is with Joseph (Gen. 39:2; 3; 23). He is also a shepherd to Joseph, who is the stone of Israel.

Third, the blessing on Joseph is an enormous blessing which takes root deep in the blessings of the ancestor which is of unlimited bounties (v.26).⁶⁵⁰ Jacob declares, "The blessings of your father are mighty beyond the blessings of my parents, up to the bounties of the everlasting hills. May they be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown (קדקד) of the prince (נזיר) of his brothers." This final blessing is the peak of the blessing on Joseph. God was more than the simple protector and rich benefactor of Joseph. The blessing on Joseph is greater and more efficacious than that of the ancestors. In fact, by this blessing, Jacob puts Joseph in place as his father's successor.⁶⁵² The blessings of the patriarchs are connected to Joseph. The God who blesses the Patriarchs will be the God of Joseph.

⁶⁴⁹ The divine name, "The stone of Israel," is problematic because the name is only found here in the Hebrew Bible but generally, "the rock (צור) of Israel."

⁶⁵⁰ "The blessing of ancestor" may mean in both ways: the blessing which ancestors (as subject) bestowed or the blessing which ancestors (as object) received.

⁶⁵¹ Kristin M. Swenson, "Crowned with Blessings: The Riches of Double-Meaning in Gen 49, 26b," *ZAW* 120 (2008): 422-424, asserts that it is used with double-meanings: head and crown. It implies the status of Joseph among brothers.

⁶⁵² Dillmann, *Genesis*, 2:479.

Furthermore, Jacob oddly names Joseph “נזיר” among his brethren. The meaning of the Hebrew נזיר is uncertain because it does not appear much in the Old Testament (only six times, two in association with Joseph and three with Samson). The Hebrew נזיר is generally interpreted in two ways: the one who is consecrated to special acts (KJV, ESV, and NAS) and the prince (NIV, NET, and NLT).⁶⁵³ Dillmann maintains, the נזיר in the blessing on Joseph means “One separated and consecrated, not in a Levitical and ethical sense, Nazarene, but prince.”⁶⁵⁴ Jacob now proclaims Joseph as “the prince,” that is, the consecrated one to serve his brothers with his strong power and prosperity given by God of his fathers. Joseph’s position is responsible to serve his brothers. Swenson properly writes, “Its use here suggests that Joseph should be understood as responsible to his brothers in a kind of service to them. And the extraordinary blessings that Joseph receives may provide a clue to the service that he gives his brothers.”⁶⁵⁵ In addition, the blessing on Joseph will be enlarged not only to his brothers but also to his associates, like Potiphar, Joseph’s Egyptian owner (39:5), Pharaoh and all Egyptians (especially Gen. 41 and 47), and all surrounding nations (41:57).⁶⁵⁶

5.3.2. The relationship of the blessing on Joseph with other brothers.

According to the above results it is plain that the virtual blessing of Jacob is given to Joseph among brothers. However, Jacob does not finish the blessing on Joseph until he

⁶⁵³ Some assert that because the Hebrew נזיר was never used of kings, the kingship in the blessing of Jacob is given to Judah and Joseph only becomes the נזיר consecrated server. This claim, however, is unnecessary. The king of Israel was anointed as the agent of God to serve the people unlike neighboring absolute monarchy. Jacob’s blessing on Joseph depicts practically to anoint Joseph as the role of king. Cf. K. Swenson, “Crowned with Blessings,” 423.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁵ Swenson, “Crowned with Blessings,” 423.

⁶⁵⁶ Joseph’s name means “increase, enlarge” (Gen. 30:24).

concludes with the statement that the enormous blessing on Joseph is not just for Joseph himself but also for all twelve sons of Jacob. Golka maintains in the passages of Seebass, “Genesis 37-50 is not a story for a single hero but ‘an Israel-Joseph story,’ that is, about a father and his whole family story.”⁶⁵⁷

At this point, it is worth noticing certain differences between Jacob’s blessing and the previous blessings in Genesis. Jacob’s blessing shows the same pattern with the previous ones in many points, such as the existence of the blessed son and the excluded son, the portion of the blessed son for the other brothers, and the curse in the blessing. However, it cannot be denied that Jacob’s blessing shows slightly different aspects from the previous blessings in Genesis. The main difference is that the other sons in the prior blessings were expelled from the land and became wanderers when the main blessing was given to one son even though the door remained open to return and participate in the brother’s blessing. For example, Cain became a fugitive and a wanderer. Ham possesses no land for his serfdom to his brothers. Ishmael becomes a wild donkey in the wilderness. Esau will live by the sword because of his unfruitful land. However, none of the sons become wanderers or are expelled in Genesis 49. Even the harshest cursed sons, Simeon and Levi, will be scattered within Israel but not outside of the borders of Israel. Reuben is also deprived of his preeminent place over his brothers but he was not expelled from Israel in spite of his vicious incest.

When Joseph becomes the heir of the father’s blessing, naturally one would expect that other sons would be expelled and wander around the blessed son. The forsaken brothers will wait for the opportunity to get the portion of Joseph if they were in the previous examples. However, the sons of Jacob still seem to stay within the same

⁶⁵⁷ Golka, “Genesis 37–50,” 156. Cf. H. Seebass, *Geschichtliche Zeit und theonome Tradition in der Joseph-Erzählung* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1978).

fence after Joseph inherits the main blessing from father. If Joseph's brothers stay in the same house with Joseph, they will share the blessings on Joseph together.⁶⁵⁸ Waltke explains the reason for such a difference is because they stand at the beginning of another era, as it were, the turning point to become a nation from a family.⁶⁵⁹ Now, the age of the patriarchs will end in Jacob and the new age of the Israelites as a nation is launched with the twelve sons of Jacob. Jacob's blessing is not for an individual, but for a family, and more than that, for a nation. Dods writes, "a unit that God will bless, but this unit is now no longer a single person—as Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob—but one people, composed of several parts, and yet one whole."⁶⁶⁰

Jacob blesses twelve sons as a unit. But it also contains diversity. The different blessed tribes will hold various roles in one nation. Accordingly, the condemned portion can be a blessing in the blessed unit and all of them share the same blessing together as St. Paul recalls (1 Cor. 12:4-31; Eph. 2:21-2; 4:16). If the blessing on Joseph will be shared with the rest of the brothers, the reproaches upon Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, too, shall affect the other brothers. Jacob's twelve sons will carry on the blessing of the patriarchs under one name, Israel. Consequently, it cannot be said that the blessing of Jacob is not a true blessing because part of the twelve sons was condemned. All sons share the blessing of the father together in the name of Israel. Only there are differences among brothers according to their role and capacity.

5.3.3. Summary

Most of Jacob's sons were not actually blessed by the father except for Judah and

⁶⁵⁸ Cf. The cases of Japheth and Ham in 5.2.3.

⁶⁵⁹ Waltke, *Genesis*, 603, 615.

⁶⁶⁰ Dods, *The Book of Genesis*, 415.

Joseph. The blessings are trivial material blessing, mild rebuke, and simple wordplay of their names. Jacob wants to pass along the blessing promised to the patriarchs to one son and all brothers will participate in the blessing like prior blessings. Jacob's blessing for Joseph in Genesis 48 shows the character of the preliminary arrangement to give Joseph the main blessing as his eldest son in chapter 49. Also, structures of Genesis 49 and the story of Joseph support the fact that the blessing on Joseph is the climax of Jacob's blessing in Genesis 49.

Jacob's blessing on Joseph consists of three important blessings. First, God is Joseph's benefactor who multiplies his possessions and descendants. Jacob declares three abundances: rain and dew from heaven, fountain and river from the deep, and descendants of both animals and men. Second, God is Joseph's protector who makes a counterattack on Joseph's violent enemy. Joseph's upset victory in his eventful life comes from the Mighty One who is with Joseph. Third, the blessing on Joseph is an enormous blessing which takes root deep in the blessings of the ancestor which is unlimited bounty. The blessings of the patriarchs are connected in Joseph. The God who blesses the Patriarchs will be the God of Joseph. Furthermore, Jacob oddly names Joseph "נַזִּיר." Jacob proclaims Joseph as the consecrated one to serve his brothers with his strong power and prosperity given by God of his fathers. In addition, the blessing on Joseph will be extended not only to his brothers but also to his associates, for example, Potiphar, Pharaoh and all Egyptians, and all surrounding nations.

Jacob's blessing shows not only the same pattern with the previous ones in many points, but also it contains different aspects to them. No sons not even Reuben, Simeon, and Levi become wanderers or expellees in Genesis 49 unlike as in the cases of prior blessings. The chief reason is that they stand at the turning point of becoming a nation from a family. Jacob's twelve sons will carry on the blessing of the patriarchs under one

name, Israel.

Finally, the following questions must be answered. If all Jacob's brothers shall finally participate in the same blessing, why did Jacob pronounce so harshly upon his beloved sons? What role does such a severe reproach or curse play in the blessing of Jacob?

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND APPLICATIONS

The blessing of Jacob is not a simple collection of circulated fragments which were gathered over a long time but the composition of one author who writes with clear intention closely related to the previous narratives in Genesis. Exegetical study in chapter 3 manifests that the statement of Jacob on the first three sons must be a negative pronouncement: reproach, judgment, and curse.

The mystery and role of the severe curse on the first three sons in Jacob's blessing could be grasped by linguistic study of the blessing and curse and the earlier pattern in the blessings of Genesis. Jacob's curse on the three sons contains obvious reasons and roles for all Jacob's family as well as for the cursed sons.

According to the characteristic of the blessing in chapter 4, the blessing constitutes the basis of every relationship in the Old Testament. The Israelites could not imagine having either a sincere human relationship or a divine relationship without giving and receiving blessing. God willingly blesses his people. Also, He would be blessed by His people. The Biblical blessing and curse were not abstract and obscure things but concrete and clear things. Also, blessing and curse displays transmittable characteristic to neighbors. To be more specific, the blessing contains a portion for others from the beginning.

Genesis displays that God prefers the method of choosing one son or a minority as the agent of the blessing rather than all sons or majority inherit the blessing. Accordingly, the blessed son is responsible for the other brothers. The blessing contains a portion for the other sons. God's choice of one son for blessing does not automatically mean the

other son is cursed or forsaken. Rather, the stories emphatically depict that the other sons will participate in the brother's blessing together. The theme's peak can be found in Jacob's blessing toward his twelve sons. Though Joseph inherits tremendous blessing from his father, he will serve as "נזיר" to not only his brothers but also all nations with the boundless father's blessing. Jacob's blessing emphasizes that all twelve sons of Jacob will share the father's blessing together as a unit or a nation.

6.1. The reason and role of the curse in the blessing

If it is really the case that all brothers shall participate finally in the same blessing, why did a father pronounce so harshly upon his beloved sons? If the father considers one son as disqualified from the blessing, he could just as easily give the blessing to another suitable son and let him share the blessing of the other brother. Are there certain reasons to curse his son so harshly upon his death bed? What role does such a severe reproach or curse play in the blessing of father?

Some suppose because the three elder sons were in the position to threaten the kingship of Judah, the father's curse falls on them to open the door for Judah's kingship. However, as examined above, Joseph rather than Judah is the center of the blessing of Jacob. Others think the first three sons behave wickedly which fully deserves to be cursed like the prior examples of the expelled sons. However, some sons indeed carried out wicked behavior such as Ham, Cain, and Reuben. Yet the other excluded sons did not commit particularly wicked deeds for example, Cain, Ishmael, and Manasseh. Jacob's curse on the first three sons also cannot be explained only as the result of the past wicked deeds of three sons because the deeds of the rest of the brothers are not largely different from those of these three sons. Then, is there a reason for the harsh condemnation in the father's blessing?

First, the instrument of discipline and precaution.

A father's harsh curse on a son is not encountered for the first time in Jacob in Genesis 49. As a matter of fact, it is not hard to meet similar curses in Genesis. God always wants to bless his children and blesses them with delight. The relationship between God and His people is based on mutual blessing.⁶⁶¹ However, the Holy God never passes over the unrighteous deed of his children and judges them according to their wicked deeds. God has often used curse as the instrument of discipline to the wicked.⁶⁶² Whenever God proclaims the Law, the statements of curse and blessing were given together (Lev. 26; Deut. 11:29; 29:18; 30:7; Ezek. 17:13; Hos. 10:4). The patriarch's curses have a likeness to the curse of God on the sinners such as Adam, Eve, and Cain.

Accordingly, the father's curses in Genesis are not a curse in the strict meaning but discipline or precaution for the ultimate blessing. They must be distinguished from the father's curses in the Greek or Roman myths. The relationship between father and son in the pagan myths shows a lack of morality. The father's curses were cast to ruthlessly destroy sons in Greek myths. The sons naturally joined together to kill or castrate the brutal father.⁶⁶³ Father and son had poignant rival or hostile relationships in most Greek myths and they had to destroy the other to survive.⁶⁶⁴ However, the Biblical relationship between father and son is very different from the curses of the pagan myths. Although

⁶⁶¹ Cf. 4.3.2.5. above.

⁶⁶² Cf. 4.2.2. above, page 144.

⁶⁶³ Oedipus curses his two sons to die at each other's hands and Oedipus's sons kill each other in civil war (Polyneices and Eteocles). Uranus is castrated by his sons, Cronos and other Titans. Cronos devours the sons when they are born and Cronos' sons (Zeus and the Olympian gods) join together to hurl their father down to Tartarus. Cf. Robert Graves, *Greek Myths*, 2nd ed. (London: Cassell, 1955), 11-14, 20-43, 111-113.

⁶⁶⁴ Cf. Gevirtz, "Curse motifs," 212; John S. Bergsma and Scott Hahn, "Noah's nakedness and the curse on Canaan (Genesis 9:20-27)," *JBL* 124 (2005): 38; Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 12-27.

rivalry between brothers to receive the father's blessing exists in Genesis, the relationship between father and son last in the favorable relation. In Genesis, the father is responsible for handing over the forefather's blessing to the son, and sons look forward to the blessing from the father. It is reflected in the relationship between a gracious God and His people. Genesis does not show the cases of broken relationships between father and son or a son's enmity against his father on the ground that a father declares a curse on his son instead of a blessing. For example, no record of Ham's enmity exists towards his father after Noah's acute curse (Gen. 9:24-29). The cast out Ishmael restores a good relationship with Abraham which lasts until the death of Abraham (Gen. 25:9). Esau still respects Isaac after his blessing on Jacob (Gen. 28:8-9).⁶⁶⁵ The main difference from the father's curse in the pagan myths is that the Biblical father never proclaims a curse to destroy his sons but to discipline and prevent them from real potential curse in the future. The love of God is visible in the father's curse like God opens hope for blessing in the grave judgment to Adam, Eve, and Cain. In Genesis, the father's curse in the blessing plays a positive role in the life of the son himself as well as his descendants.

If Reuben is still preeminent over the brothers after his adultery with his father's concubine, it cannot be a blessing at all either to Reuben himself or to the other sons of Jacob. Jacob's curse on Reuben plays a precautionary role for the descendants of Jacob not to fall into the same adultery. Jacob declares for the Israelites not to lose their excellence in honor and power. Still, Jacob's curse on Simeon and Levi to scatter them in Israel is not to cast them out of Israel. Rather, by dividing and scattering them, Jacob makes the two violent brothers never use their brotherhood for such a brutal massacre. Also, Jacob prevents the danger of bringing calamity upon Jacob's whole family because of Simeon and Levi. If Jacob does not condemn and curse them harshly, Simeon and Levi

⁶⁶⁵ Esau takes another wife because of Isaac. The Canaanite wives did not please his father.

will stand at the head of a similar slaughter and other sons will participate in their violence again. As a result, Jacob's family might be fallen in the dangerous situation again (Gen. 34:30). Calvin understands that the censure and rebuke are actually "blessings" for the sons because these are benevolent for their future lives in the covenant.⁶⁶⁶

Second, various courses for ultimate blessing.

A man ordinarily define that blessing is some kind of good gift at all times. However, while it has been said that this is true in many cases, it does not cover all the instances of blessings in Genesis. The patriarch's blessings are usually focused on the next generation more than on the blessed sons themselves. The patriarch's blessings, especially Jacob's blessing (49:1), take the form of prophecy in many cases. Undoubtedly, when all is said and done, the Biblical blessing should contain visible and concrete contents which the recipients desired and enjoyed such as children, land, prosperity, and peaceful rest as listed in chapter 4.⁶⁶⁷ However, the course going to the blessing is not uniform to each son. Instead, God (or the patriarchs) declares different blessings according to the situation and capability of each son. When each blessing is realized, no son will be ignored, abandoned, or cursed, but every son will participate in the ultimate blessing: children, land, prosperity, and peaceful rest, though the differences exist among brothers.

Through the painful course of hard labor and childbearing, Adam and Eve will ultimately participate in the blessing. Ham will finally share with the blessing of Shem through the course of servitude under his brothers. Through infertility and insufficiency

⁶⁶⁶ Calvin, *Genesis*, 442-444.

⁶⁶⁷ Cf. 4.3.1.1. above.

of food, Esau will not be away from the blessing on Jacob and finally share with Jacob's blessing. In the same way, all twelve sons of Jacob will ultimately receive blessings from their father. However, the courses to reach the blessing are various to each son. Jacob's blessing was a mixed one not a single one. It looks to someone as a curse, to another as a rebuke, still to the other as a real blessing. Yet, every son will reach to the ultimate blessing together when each blessing will have been fulfilled.

Third, the role of arbitrator of the potential rivalry and conflict among brothers.

The father's blessing and curse plays an important role in settling the potential conflicts among brothers or their descendants. The relationship of brothers in Genesis was a series of eccentric conflicts. The twelve sons of Jacob were especially dissentious with one another. They are jealous, blame, sell and try to kill one another. Joseph even charged his brothers, "Do not quarrel on the way" (Gen. 45:24). Also, Jacob and Esau struggled together from the womb of mother. Their struggling lasts throughout their whole life. One cheated on his brother and the other would seek revenge and kill his brother over twenty years. The relationship between Isaac and Ishmael was bad from when they were young boys. Cain finally murdered his brother Abel.

Kaplan and Schwartz assert that in spite of God's arbitration, the disastrous ending between Cain and Abel is partly caused by the absence of a positive role which their parents could have played. This is in contrast with the peaceful outcome between Esau and Jacob in spite of Esau's fierce intention to kill Jacob.⁶⁶⁸ They seek a fundamental reason for the reconciliation between Esau and Jacob from the father's blessing. The reconciliation of Esau with Jacob must be based on the satisfaction about his present conditions. Esau recognizes that he himself is also fully blessed by God (Gen.

⁶⁶⁸ Kaplan and Schwartz, "Jacob's Blessing and the Curse of Oedipus," 75.

33:9). Also, the story of Ishmael and Isaac ends with surprising reconciliation and coexistence (Gen. 25:9-18) unlike the disastrous end of Cain and Abel. It can be said as a result of Abraham's positive role that he played between the brothers.

The role of the father's blessing as the arbitrator reaches the peak in the blessing of Jacob. Waltke maintains that Isaac blessed two sons secretly and separately and provoked animosity between the brothers. However, Jacob gathers all twelve sons before him and openly blesses them.⁶⁶⁹ Jacob uses the death bed blessing to point out the unique defects of each son and challenges of his own personal situation. This recognition of each son about his personal defect and situation diminishes the potential dangers of sibling rivalries and conflicts.⁶⁷⁰ Consequently, after the father's blessing, Joseph's brothers admit the leadership of the family to Joseph and bow down before him. They complete the story with the great reconciliation and co-prosperity among the twelve sons of Jacob (it looks impossible before Jacob's blessing).

6.2. Applications

This study leads us to the following practical implications.

First: God's endless love toward his children even in His grave judgment.

A righteous God strictly judges sinners and the unrighteous. However, the love of God is greater than the condemnation and punishment of the sinner. He places the hope of restoration in the curse. Accordingly, nobody can say that I am cursed and forsaken by God because of his terrible sin. God declared harsh pain and exile against Adam, Eve, and Cain. However, at the same time, incomprehensible blessing was involved in the divine curse. Such a hope in divine curse is not just for the Biblical people but for all of us too.

⁶⁶⁹ Waltke, *Genesis*, 604.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

Second: the responsibility of the blessed.

Both the blessing and curse are infectious by nature. The patriarchs bore the responsibility of inheriting the father's blessing to pass on to the descendants. The blessing in the Bible was bestowed to one son or minority at first and extended to all others. The blessed one is responsible in advance to transmit the blessing to others: descendants, parents, neighbors, friends, and all others. The heavier responsibility for blessing rests especially at the top with the father, leader, and teacher because blessing by nature over-flows from above and runs down below (Cf. God is the original source of the blessing). On the other hand, because curse also can be associated with others, one must be careful not to be the deliverer of the curse to his relatives. Christians have a bigger responsibility to deliver blessings to all nations like Joseph, נִזִּיר, the separated and consecrated one to special acts. St. Paul calls Christians as "to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints" (1 Cor. 1:2).

Finally: the humility of the blessed.

The father's blessing on one son contained a portion for the other brothers. The Scripture teaches that blessed son was not selected on the ground that he is better than the other brothers in his deeds and personality at all times (Cf. Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and Ephraim and Manasseh). The choice for the blessing among brothers was only according to the inexplicable will of God. Accordingly, the blessed son cannot but be modest before the other brothers. One is never arrogant before others like the poor, the disabled, and the sinners. (Cf. the parable of the righteous Pharisee (Luke 18:10-14).) Everything comes from God's blessing not from himself.

God blesses his people with pleasure. At the same time, God demands the

response of the Israelite corresponded to His rich blessing. The blessed Israelites should recognize that everything comes from the blessing of God and humbly returned the blessing in the form of “thanks,” “respect,” and “praise” to God, the only source of every blessing. *Soli Deo gloria!*

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