From Fratricide to Forgiveness:
The Ethics of Anger in Genesis

by

Matthew Richard Schlimm

Graduate Program in Religion
Duke University

Date: ____________________________

Approved:

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James L. Crenshaw, Supervisor

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Ellen F. Davis

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Anathea Portier-Young

___________________________
Randy Maddox

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J. Robert Cox

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the
Program in Religion of
the Graduate School
of Duke University

2008
ABSTRACT

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2008
The photograph found in §8.7.2 (Fig. 5) of the Lion Orthostat from Hazor is from www.holylandphotos.org Copyright © 2008 by Carl Rasmussen. Used with permission.

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Abstract

In the first book of the Bible, every patriarch and many of the matriarchs have significant encounters with anger. However, scholarship has largely ignored how Genesis treats this emotion, particularly how Genesis functions as Torah by providing ethical instruction about handling this emotion’s perplexities. This dissertation aims to fill this gap in scholarship, showing both how anger functions as a literary motif in Genesis and how this book offers moral guidance for engaging this emotion.

After an introductory chapter outlining the goals, methods, and limitations of this study (ch. 1), this dissertation draws on works in translation theory, anthropology, and cross-cultural psychology to lay a theoretical framework for analyzing emotion described in another language by another culture (ch. 2). Next, it appropriates the findings of cognitive linguistics to analyze the terminology, conception, and associations of anger in the Hebrew Bible (ch. 3). The following chapter evaluates the advances that have taken place in the field of Old Testament ethics in recent decades, supplementing them with insights from philosophical, literary, and critical theorists to formulate an understanding of ethics and narrative that aligns with the contours of Genesis (ch. 4). The next chapter employs a rhetorical-literary approach to examine how texts in Genesis provide a conversation with one another about anger and its moral perplexities (ch. 5). Various themes from this study are then collected and summarized in the concluding chapter (ch. 6).

This dissertation concludes that understanding Genesis’ message about anger requires laying aside traditional Western assumptions about both emotion and ethics.
Genesis does not, for example, provide a set of ideal principles for engaging anger. Rather, readers who experience Genesis’ narratives view anger from a variety of perspectives and in different lights, gaining wisdom for diverse encounters with anger they may face. They acquire a deep sensitivity to human frailty, an acute awareness of anger’s power, and a realistic range of possibilities for engaging this emotion.
To Melanie Joy
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>Anchor Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOAT</td>
<td>Alter Orient und Altes Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ArBib</td>
<td>The Aramaic Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AsTJ</td>
<td><em>Asbury Theological Journal</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>BA</td>
<td><em>Biblical Archaeologist</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BaghM</td>
<td><em>Baghdader Mitteilungen</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAR</td>
<td><em>Biblical Archaeology Review</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bib</td>
<td><em>Biblica</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BibInt</td>
<td><em>Biblical Interpretation</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Title</td>
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<tr>
<td>BN</td>
<td>Biblische Notizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BR</td>
<td>Biblical Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BZ</td>
<td>Biblische Zeitschrift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAD</td>
<td>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1956-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBQ</td>
<td>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC</td>
<td>Continental Commentaries</td>
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<tr>
<td>ChrCent</td>
<td>Christian Century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTJ</td>
<td>Calvin Theological Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DJD</td>
<td>Discoveries in the Judean Desert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EgT</td>
<td>Eglise et théologie</td>
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<tr>
<td>ExAud</td>
<td>Ex Auditu</td>
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<tr>
<td>FC</td>
<td>Fathers of the Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>HTR</td>
<td>Harvard Theological Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HvTSt</td>
<td>Hervormde teologiese studies</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<tr>
<td>IBC</td>
<td>Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Critical Commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int</td>
<td>Interpretation</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRT</td>
<td>Issues in Religion and Theology</td>
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<tr>
<td>JAAR</td>
<td>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</td>
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<tr>
<td>JAOS</td>
<td>Journal of the American Oriental Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>JBL</td>
<td>Journal of Biblical Literature</td>
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<tr>
<td>JBQ</td>
<td>Jewish Bible Quarterly</td>
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<tr>
<td>JETS</td>
<td>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>JNES</td>
<td>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>JNSL</td>
<td>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</td>
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<tr>
<td>JQR</td>
<td>Jewish Quarterly Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>JR</td>
<td>Journal of Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSJ</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSOT</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSOTSup</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSP</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</td>
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<tr>
<td>JSS</td>
<td>Journal of Semitic Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>KAT</td>
<td>Kommentar zum Alten Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCL</td>
<td>Loeb Classical Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LHBOTS</td>
<td>Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIB</td>
<td>The New Interpreter’s Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NICOT</td>
<td>New International Commentary on the Old Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NJPS</td>
<td>Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRSV</td>
<td>New Revised Standard Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBO</td>
<td>Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBT</td>
<td>Overtures to Biblical Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTL</td>
<td>Old Testament Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proof</td>
<td>Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RB</td>
<td>Revue biblique</td>
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<tr>
<td>RBL</td>
<td>Review of Biblical Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RelArts</td>
<td>Religion and the Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RelEd</td>
<td>Religious Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>RevScRel</td>
<td>Revue des sciences religieuses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSR</td>
<td>Religious Studies Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBLSBL</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature Studies in Biblical Literature</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBLSCS</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>SJOT</td>
<td>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>ThTo</td>
<td>Theology Today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTC</td>
<td>Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TynBul</td>
<td><em>Tyndale Bulletin</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VT</td>
<td><em>Vetus Testamentum</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>VTSup</td>
<td>Supplements to Vetus Testamentum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBC</td>
<td>Word Biblical Commentary</td>
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<tr>
<td>WW</td>
<td><em>Word and World</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>ZAH</td>
<td><em>Zeitschrift für Althebräistik</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>ZAW</td>
<td><em>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</em></td>
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Richard Schlimm is one of the most supportive people I know. Our conversations are always a highlight of my week. He has helped me through many difficult times, and my deep admiration for him only continues to grow.

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Value of Studying Emotion

In a recent article in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Robert Fuller writes, “There is no such thing as emotion-free religiosity.” He argues that emotions are integral elements of the human religious experience that should not be ignored, even if scholars of religion have sometimes neglected them. In presenting his argument, Fuller joins a consensus growing across the humanities that although the emotions were formerly overlooked (even in fields like psychology), the feelings that individuals experience and the beliefs ascribed to them constitute a fascinating field of study.

In biblical studies, analyses of human emotion in the Hebrew Bible were relatively scarce prior to the 1990s. Less than a decade ago, Paul Krüger observed, “The

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2 While this article begins by noting that emotions played a role in discussions of religion by previous critical thinkers such as Freud (guilt), Schleiermacher (absolute dependency), and Otto (the numinous), the conclusion stresses that “the study of religion has failed to keep abreast of recent scholarship in the natural and social sciences” leading to “a regrettable paucity of truly interdisciplinary understandings of religious thought and feeling” (ibid., 46).

3 As Ronald L. Koteskey, “Toward the Development of a Christian Psychology: Emotion,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 8, no. 4 (1980): 303-313, esp. 303, puts it, “Strangely enough, emotion has been outside the mainstream of both psychology and Christianity.”

4 Zacharias Kotzé, “Research on the Emotion of Anger in the Old Testament: Recent Trends,” *HVTS* 60 (2004): 843-863, notes that the study of human emotion has been especially neglected. While many have studied divine emotion, and although there are a variety of studies examining Hebrew terms like ה̣וּנּ, וְיֹרָה, לָלָל, and יִרְאוּ, “few have attempted a detailed description of distinct emotions” (ibid., 856). The earliest academic works to treat emotion in the Hebrew Bible include H. W. Robinson, “Hebrew Psychology,” in *The People and the Book*, ed. A. S. Peake (Oxford: Claredon, 1925), 353-382; A. R.
subject of emotions in the Hebrew Bible is a most neglected theme and deserves an extensive treatment.”⁵ Thanks in part to scholars like Krüger,⁶ a shift has taken place. A growing number of interpreters have undertaken intriguing projects leading to fruitful results. Prominent scholars like Gary Anderson, Mark Smith, and Jacqueline Lapsley, as well as many others, have investigated various aspects of emotions in the Hebrew Bible.⁷

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Furthermore, at the 2007 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, the Character Ethics and Biblical Interpretation Group held a session on “Whither the Bible and ethics? What directions should future engagement between the Bible and ethics take?” The three presenters, myself included, focused on the topic of human emotion in the Hebrew Bible. While there is need for methodological refinement in this under-explored subfield, it is clear that analyses of emotion are becoming an important area of research among interpreters of the Hebrew Bible.

There are several reasons why emotions were overlooked for much of the twentieth century. First, as Lutz and White observe, literature on emotion is filled with theoretical tensions that affect how emotions are described, tensions between “materialism and idealism, positivism and interpretivism, universalism and relativism,

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9 See below, esp. §2.4, §3.1, §3.2, §3.4.

10 This neglect of the emotions is primarily a twentieth-century problem. Although many Stoics preached the avoidance of at least certain types of emotions, they did not fail to direct attention to them. Quite to the contrary, their writings discuss the emotions extensively. The bulk of Seneca’s Moral Essays, for example, is a discussion of anger (Seneca, “De Ira,” in Seneca: Moral Essays, ed. John W. Basore; 3 vols.; vol. 1 [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1928], 106-355). Similarly, while one can accuse Victorianism as being repressive, it actually dealt with emotions extensively and suggested that they should be experienced, with the exception of those emotions considered unethical, such as lust. On the rise of dispassion in the United States in the twentieth century, see esp. Peter N. Stearns, American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style (New York: New York University Press, 1994). Chapters 2-3 of ibid. focus on the Victorian era.
individual and culture, and romanticism and rationalism.” In light of so many perplexing issues, the academic study of emotions seems fraught with difficulty from the outset. Second, a hallmark of Western assumptions about the emotions is that they are irrational. As such, scholars have not seen them as a particularly important or fruitful area of exploration. Individuals have set emotions in contrast to reason, seeing the former as private and subjective, with the potential for displaying characteristics that are primitive, immature, animalistic, and even pathological. Third and consequently, as Niko Besnier remarks, academic style calls for muted emotions. When the very medium by which academics express their thoughts tends to minimize the expression of emotions, it is hardly surprising that emotions have not been at the forefront of research. Fourth and closely related, traditional academic research has emphasized the importance of serving as a detached observer. Such an emphasis has led to ignoring and even “tidying up” the emotions. Fifth, modern Western societies place great emphasis on efficiency of labor and advances in technology. Within such cultures, emotions are often


12 See the extended discussion in §2.4, which discusses both the roots of the notion that emotions are irrational and the present status of that claim in various fields. See also Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), esp. 230-232, for an excellent discussion of why emotions may seem irrational even if they are not.


15 Lutz, *Unnatural Emotions*, 43.
seen as an impediment to achievement. They thus do not receive priority in many research agendas. Finally, scholars have traditionally tended to ignore or at least disregard the body in fields outside of science. The lack of attention to the emotions in academic study can be seen as part of this broader trend of giving insufficient attention to issues of the body and embodiment.

The times have changed, due to several factors. First, several scientists and scholars working in the fields of neuroscience, psychology, and philosophy have questioned the traditional notion that emotions are irrational. Those studying emotions have begun to see conventional ideas about the irrationality of the emotions as simplistic and problematic. Second, the emphasis on serving as a detached observer has given way to alternate models. In many fields, for example, publications call for researchers to strive for empathy rather than cool detachment. Finally, many disciplines now


recognize embodiment as integral to critical study.²⁰ One implication of the body’s critical importance is that scholars cannot ignore the emotions, which lie at the intersection of body and mind. In biblical studies and beyond, these shifts have allowed many to see the value of studying emotion.

1.2 Genesis and Anger

To find fertile ground for continuing the study of emotion in the Bible, one needs to look no further than the Bible’s first book. Few themes in Genesis are more significant and more understudied than human anger. Genesis has two bookends, which expose readers to the opposite extremes of what can happen with anger. In Genesis 4:1-16, readers receive their first glimpse of life outside Eden. There, anger takes center stage as Cain becomes enraged when God ignores his offering while regarding his brother’s. God intervenes and speaks to Cain about his anger, which is quite remarkable given that the divine word in Genesis is reserved for the most significant of developments, including the creation and salvation of the world.²¹ But in sharp contrast to divine words elsewhere,


In biblical studies, a new volume is forthcoming on issues of embodiment: Tamar Kamionkowski and Wonil Kim, eds., Bodies, Embodiment and Theology of the Hebrew Bible [Tentative Working Title], LHBOTS (T & T Clark, Forthcoming). An essay summarizing some of the findings of this dissertation will appear therein, describing anger in Genesis as a feature of embodied religious-ethical experience. See also Krüger, “‘Nonverbal Communication’ in the Hebrew Bible,” 141-164, esp. 141-143.

²¹ Divine speech obviously plays a key role in the creation of the world (Gen 1-2), and there are also many passages where God’s word issues promises and covenants. A number of these passages refer to the salvation or blessing of the world, particularly: Gen 6:7-8; 9:8-17; 12:1-3; 15:5; 17:4-21; 18:17-21;
God’s speech in chapter 4 falls flat. Cain refuses to heed God’s warning. He kills his brother after Abel has done nothing wrong. Fratricide represents one extreme of what can happen with anger.

In the final chapter of the book, readers encounter the opposite extreme, forgiveness. There, Joseph and his brothers forgive one another after a long history of jealousy, anger, deception, and abuse. Jacob is at death’s door, and Joseph’s brothers fear that Joseph is harboring anger against them and plotting to kill them after their father’s death, much as Esau planned to do with Jacob (50:15; cf. 27:41). So Joseph’s brothers claim that their father has ordered Joseph to forgive them (50:16-17). When Joseph hears their words, he weeps. The brothers offer themselves as Joseph’s servants (50:18; cf. 32:18, 20), but Joseph instead speaks graciously with them and reassures them that he will provide both for them and for their children. It is a moment of reconciliation offered just before the book closes, letting readers see Joseph as an anti-Cain—a brother who has all the power and all the reasons to harm his brothers but instead turns away from anger and, despite the inherent difficulties, offers forgiveness. Whereas Cain suggested he never was and never should have been his brother’s keeper, Joseph shows himself in precisely that role, providing protection and provisions for his brothers in a foreign land.

While Genesis frames its post-Edenic narratives with two contrasting outcomes of anger, fratricide and forgiveness, it avoids simplistic moral reasoning that demands from its readers that they respond to being angry with someone by forgiving that person.

Rather, between these two bookends, it offers many other episodes that give readers resources for dealing with this emotion. Many of Genesis’ most significant plots revolve around anger that is either explicitly named or implicitly present in the text:

- In Gen 4:5-8, Cain’s anger (הירחא, לַעֲשָׂ֥יָהוּ) leads to the Bible’s first death and the first explicit mention of sin.
- In Gen 13:5-12, the anger between the herders of Abram and Lot (implicit with יִפְשִׁ֖יִם) leads to their separation, on which several subsequent events depend.
- In Gen 16 and 21, Sarai/h’s anger, implied by her actions, leads to the expulsion of Hagar from the household.
- In Gen 26:12-22, one of the few narratives featuring Isaac as an adult, anger (implied with יִפְשִׁ֖יִם) and jealousy (תְּנִית, סָרָב) on the part of the herders of Gerar lead to the forced migrations of this patriarch.
- In Gen 27, Jacob deceives his father and steals his brother’s birthright, which enrages Esau (משה; יָֽשָׂ֥וּר; רָאָ֖שׁ) and causes Jacob’s flight and subsequent residence with Laban (esp. 27:41-45).

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22 As explained in §3.2.3 below, the Hebrew Bible refrains from explicitly calling women angry. Nevertheless, the interactions between Sarai/h and Hagar closely match the way angry actions are portrayed throughout the Hebrew Bible, suggesting that at least on implicit levels there is some degree of anger between them.

23 As explained in §3.3.1 below, jealousy is closely related to anger throughout the Biblical Hebrew. It may even constitute a particular type of anger. Thus, it is appropriate to include instances of jealousy in this study. These cases include the jealousy the Philistines have toward Isaac and his wealth (26:14); Rachel’s jealousy toward her sister and her fertility (30:1); and Joseph’s brothers’ jealousy toward him, his dreams, and his preferential treatment (37:11). Note also that the Hebrew for Cain, יָֽשָׂ֥וּר, has close phonological similarities with תְּנִית (to be jealous). Cain obviously is both angry at and jealous of his brother, who has received divine favor, whereas Cain has not.
In Gen 30:1-4, barren Rachel is jealous (אֲרָעָה) of Leah’s fertility, and the text says specifically that Jacob becomes angry (יָרָה) with Rachel after she demands children.

In Gen 31:35-32:1 (31:35-55 Eng.), an enraged (יָרָה) Jacob and Laban contend fiercely (יָרָה) with one another, eventually agreeing to a legal separation.

In Gen 33, a tense interchange transpires between Jacob and Esau where the anger of 27:41-45 is not far in the background.

In Gen 34 (cf. 49:5-7), Dinah’s brothers become furious (יָרָה; יָרָה; יָרָה; יָרָה) with Shechem and consequently slaughter both him and the inhabitants of his city (esp. 34:7; 49:6-7).

In Gen 39:17-20, an angry Potiphar (יָרָה) imprisons Joseph after he hears his wife’s allegations.

In Gen 40:2; 41:10, Pharaoh’s anger (יָרָה) leads to the imprisonment of two of his servants.

In Gen 37, 44, 45, and 50, various interactions occur between Joseph and his brothers where jealousy and anger (יָרָה; יָרָה; יָרָה; יָרָה; יָרָה) play important roles (esp. 37:11; 44:18; 45:5; 45:24; 50:15).

The recurrence of significant episodes involving anger suggests that it is an important motif, meriting close attention.

However, critical interpreters of Genesis have tended to ignore this emotion.

Much has been written about topics in Genesis that are closely related to anger, such as
sibling rivalry, family conflict, election, inclusion and exclusion, and deception.24 Yet, these studies typically give anger the briefest treatment, if any at all. To name a prominent example, David Petersen’s 2004 presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature focuses on family conflict in Genesis, examining the strife between the herders of Abram and Lot (Gen 13), Jacob and Laban (Gen 31), and Jacob and Esau (Gen 27, 33). When one examines what the text says about characters in the midst of these conflicts, it is clear that they are angry. There is רָע (strife) between the herders of Abram and Lot, which as shown in §3.3.7 below, has close associations with anger. Meanwhile, the terminology for anger is used explicitly to describe the conflicts Jacob has with both Esau and Laban (Gen 27:41-45, cf. ch. 33 for Esau; Gen 31:35-36 for Laban). Although

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The theme of election in Genesis has been treated perhaps most prominently by Joel S. Kaminsky, Yet I Loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), esp. 15-78. See also E. Fox, “Stalking the Younger Brother: Some Models for Understanding a Biblical Motif,” JSOT 60 (1993): 45-68.

The idea of election is not far removed from issues of inclusion and exclusion among the chosen, which is analyzed in some of the sources above (e.g., Steinmetz, From Father to Son), as well as Mark G. Brett, Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity (Old Testament Readings; London: Routledge, 2000); R. Christopher Heard, Dynamics Of Diselection: Ambiguity In Genesis 12-36 And Ethnic Boundaries In Post-Exilic Judah (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001); Roger Syrén, The Forsaken First-born: A Study of a Recurrent Motif in the Patriarchal Narratives (JSOTSup; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993); and Naomi A. Steinberg, Kinship And Marriage In Genesis: A Household Economics Perspective (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

Meanwhile, the theme of deception is treated by Susan Niditch, Underdogs and Tricksters: A Prelude to Biblical Folklore (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987); and Michael James Williams, Deception in Genesis: An Investigation into the Morality of a Unique Biblical Phenomenon (Studies in Biblical Literature 32; New York: Peter Lang, 2001).
anger is key to understanding what the protagonists in these stories actually experience, and although this emotion is portrayed in all three cases as the potential cause of violence and great physical harm (which Petersen focuses on), anger is never explicitly mentioned in Petersen’s study.25 Given the critical importance of emotion to religious experience, and given the way anger resurfaces throughout Genesis, this motif merits a thorough study.

1.3 The Primary Aims of this Project

This dissertation aims, first and foremost, to understand what the book of Genesis conveys to its readers about anger. How does one understand what Genesis expresses about this emotion without being biased by modern Western accounts of this emotion? How does Genesis make use of language to speak about anger, and what cultural associations are evoked by this language? Why does Genesis return to the emotion of anger so many times on so many occasions? What impact does this emotion have on the

25 Like Petersen, “Genesis and Family Values,” 18-20, Steinmetz, From Father to Son, 28-29 gives exceedingly little attention to anger when reflecting on family conflict in Genesis. Both writers talk about separation as a response to conflict, but they fail to note that separation is (as shown in §3.2.4 below) an extremely common outcome of anger in the Hebrew Bible. Their analyses would be enhanced by a consideration of conflict and separation in relation to anger.

Even when one turns to the literature on Cain and Abel, one is surprised by how little attention anger receives. A few of the sources that do deal with this emotion are André LaCocque, Onslaught against Innocence: Cain, Abel, and the Yahwist (Eugene, Oreg.: Cascade Books, 2008), 15; C. John Collins, Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2006), 215; and Johannes Hemleben, “Der Brudermord als Stufe des Sündenfalls,” in Brudermord, ed. Joachim Illies (München Kösel-Verlag, 1975), 156-161, esp. 158, although even here the treatments are fairly brief. Others have focused more on Cain’s jealousy than on his anger, such as André Wénin, “Adam et Éve: La jalouseie de Cain, «semence» du serpent: Un aspect du récit mythique de Genèse 1-4,” RevScRel 73, no. 1 (1999): 3-16; and Angela Y. Kim, “Cain and Abel in the Light of Envy: A Study in the History of the Interpretation of Envy in Genesis 4.1-16,” JSP 12 (2001): 65-84. Focusing on anger in this text is somewhat understandable (see §3.3.1 on the relationship between jealousy and anger), although one would expect anger to receive greater attention.
moral life? What dangers does it present? Is it possible to avoid anger? What resources does Genesis give readers for engaging this emotion in others and in themselves? Above all, how does Genesis function as ἄγνωστον (instruction, direction, law), offering moral guidance about anger for its readers?

The driving thesis of this dissertation is that this emotion appears in Genesis not merely to embellish storylines or add color to characters, but rather to express a multifaceted message about the ethical significance of anger. The text does not give readers simplistic instructions about what to do with anger, but rather is quite realistic about the limitations individuals face and the paradoxes presented by this emotion. Genesis presents anger as an emotion that arises from one’s moral sensitivities in response to the perception of wrongdoing. At the same time, the text also presents anger as a great threat to the moral life. Genesis warns readers about the dangers of anger, but it never suggests that one can lead a life free from anger. Instead, it portrays every patriarch and many of the matriarchs as having significant encounters with this emotion, presenting them with dilemmas that defy easy resolution. It depicts anger as an inevitable part of a world marked by profound limitations. It also invites readers to imagine ways of alleviating anger. It suggests that generosity may ameliorate the worst outcomes of anger, and it illustrates the possibility of reconciliation after anger has caused harm. At the same time, it is painfully realistic about how difficult, threatening, and short-lived attempts at ending anger may be.

In addition to explicating the ethics of anger in Genesis, this dissertation also seeks to provide a methodological model that is useful both for exegetes studying biblical emotion and for interpreters interested in biblical ethics. The foremost goal of such a
model is to understand the text on its own terms. Although exegetes have sought to understand the text in this way since its inception, both emotions and ethics constitute complex subjects of investigation that require particular interpretive moves to avoid a host of errors. As will be shown below, many modern interpreters have approached the text with preconceived ideas of emotion and of ethics that are incongruent with the text itself. This dissertation seeks to correct such errors in past studies, provide methodological resources for future studies, and explain how Genesis understands anger and ethics in contradistinction to modern preconceptions.

Another overarching goal of this dissertation is to open doorways for further interaction between biblical studies and the discipline of rhetorical criticism. For centuries, interpreters of the Bible have approached the text rhetorically. One thinks not only of interpreters from a previous time like Saint Augustine and Rabbi Judah Messer Leon, but also of interpreters in the last four decades who have heeded James Muilenburg’s call to move “beyond form criticism” to analyze the rhetoric of the biblical text. While there have thus been points of continuity between biblical scholarship and

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26 This language of “understand[ing] the text on its own terms” is not meant to suggest that a given text has a singular meaning. Every reader plays a role in the creation of a text’s meaning, and there are as many meanings of a text as there are readers. Nevertheless, there are moments when readings and interpretations are not supported by the text itself. A key goal of honest, critical interpretation is minimizing misunderstandings of what is posited within the text. If a field of meaning is opened by the text, then responsible scholarship will hopefully point toward interpretations that fall within that field.

the academic discipline of rhetorical criticism, biblical scholars have frequently overlooked fundamental concepts in this discipline, giving insufficient attention to some of the most prominent rhetorical critics. To help bridge the persistent gaps between biblical studies and rhetorical criticism, this dissertation turns to the field of rhetorical criticism for additional insights into the nature of language, text, narrative, and persuasion.

A final overarching goal of this dissertation is to contribute to the growing subfield of Bakhtinian approaches to the Bible. This dissertation seeks to understand the biblical text on its own terms. Doing so frequently involves laying aside modernist assumptions. To this end, the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin is an extremely useful conversation partner for biblical interpreters. His ideas about the nature of texts and truth stand in sharp opposition to Enlightenment concepts and categories, offering refreshing alternatives that frequently resonate deeply with the biblical text. He is not the perfect critic; many biblical scholars correctly maintain that his attitudes toward the Bible were (at least on occasion) mistaken and unfortunate. Nevertheless, his work constitutes a fascinating area of research that has proved quite useful for many biblical

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29 E.g., Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 30, insightfully observes:

Bakhtin considered sacred texts to be by nature monologic—to subsume all voices under the authoritarian voice—yet Rachel’s words of resistance in [Gen 31:35] suggest that the Bible is not an “ultimate word” that crushes all ideologically opposing voices but is, at least in parts, a dialogic, polyphonic text whose competing voices can be discerned, even within the same speech.
This dissertation aims to contribute to biblical scholarship by showing how Bakhtin is particularly useful to biblical ethics.

### 1.4 Methodological Overview

To achieve these goals, this project undertakes a multidisciplinary approach. The next chapter draws on works in translation theory (§2.1), anthropology (§2.2), and cross-cultural psychology (§2.2), seeking to answer the question, How can one best study emotion described in another language by another culture? The answers to this question are then brought into conversation with prevailing notions among biblical scholars, particularly with regard to the concept of linguistic relativity (§2.3) and the ways that biblical anger has been characterized in the past (§2.4).

The third chapter builds on the findings of the second, while also drawing heavily on cognitive linguistics, particularly prototype theory (§3.1-§3.2) and conceptual metaphor (§3.4). In so doing, it offers further evaluation of previous works on anger in the Hebrew Bible (esp. §3.1, §3.4). This chapter also describes the associations of anger in Biblical Hebrew (esp. §3.3) and delineates the specific nuances and meanings of particular terms for anger (§3.5). Understanding these terms and concepts lays the framework for better interpreting texts about anger.

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31 Rather than defining anger here in this introductory chapter, Chapter 3 gives definitions of the individual Hebrew terms (§3.5). The broader concept of anger in the Hebrew Bible is also explicated in Chapter 3 (esp. §3.2-§3.3).
Before interpreting these texts, however, some observations about ethics and narrative are in order. The fourth chapter examines the advances that have taken place in the field of Old Testament ethics in recent decades (§4.1), evaluating their usefulness for studying anger in the narratives of Genesis (§4.2-§4.3). Supplementing these works in biblical studies with theoretical insights from Mikhail Bakhtin, Paul Ricoeur, Jean-François Lyotard, Martha Nussbaum, Wayne Booth, and Kenneth Burke, this chapter then outlines an understanding of ethics and narrative that aligns with the contours of Genesis (§4.4-§4.6).

The fifth chapter employs a rhetorical-literary approach to analyze the texts of Genesis dealing with anger. This chapter examines how these texts provide a conversation with one another about anger and its moral perplexities. Various themes from this study are collected and summarized in the concluding chapter of this dissertation (§6). Finally, two appendices have been added. The first explains how the statistics mentioned in ch. 3 were derived (§7). The second provides an in-depth interpretation of the story of Cain and Abel (§8). Although this narrative is examined in §5.1, Gen 4:1-16 is a particularly dense text that has given rise to a great amount of debate. Unpacking the narrative and treating the various interpretive issues in §5.1 would distract from that chapter’s focus on anger. Nevertheless, these interpretive issues are important and need to be addressed to arrive at a full understanding of this foundational narrative.
1.5 Literary Approaches and Historical Criticism

Literary approaches and historical criticism constitute two of the broadest and most popular methods within biblical studies. As such, they merit an extra word at the outset of this study. As is well known, the field of biblical studies focused primarily on source and form criticism throughout much of the twentieth century. By the late 1960s, however, the methodological limitations of such enterprises were becoming increasingly apparent. In particular, the focus on getting behind the text (i.e., unearthing the sources and settings that gave rise to the text) led to a neglect of the content of the biblical text and the means by which that content is conveyed. To remedy this problem, literary and rhetorical approaches entered the scene, appearing in full force in the 1980s and beyond. A favored method of such approaches is closely reading the biblical text, seeking to understand the final form of the text on its own terms. This method has proved enormously useful for the fields of biblical theology and biblical ethics, and it will be utilized to approach the text of Genesis here.

Early on, many taking literary approaches were quite adverse to historical criticism, calling it idolatrous, stubborn, “senseless,” “futile,” and “incongruent with the text itself.” However, several scholars in more recent times have stressed the

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32 See, e.g., Muilenburg, “Form Criticism and Beyond,” 4-7.

33 The term “close reading” is here used in a broad sense, rather than the sometimes technical way it has been employed, for example, by practitioners of the so-called “New Criticism.”


35 One senses that many of these practitioners were seeking to carve out a place for themselves in an environment that was not always open to their alternative approaches. J. P. Fokkelman, who faced many difficulties early on (e.g., needing to self-finance the publication of Narrative Art in Genesis), writes the following:
importance of combining a literary approach with historical, sociological, and ideological methods. These more integrated approaches raise the question of how to relate the literary approach taken here with these other methods.

I was shocked to find, on the part of the historical-critical school, a persistent unwillingness or inability to engage with the text as a living entity. By raising its own ideal of objectivity to the status of an idol, this method of “higher” criticism had stubbornly ignored the intersubjective truth that meaning and sense are constituted on the ground where text and reader meet in a process of profound communication with one another that has a mutual effect on both parties. Historical-critical scholars, by contrast, do not tire of passing negative value judgments on the stories or the poems they interpret, without even bothering to account for the presuppositions or the criteria on which their evaluative comments are based. (J. P. Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis [2nd ed.; Sheffield, Eng.: JSOT Press, 1991, 1975], vii-viii)

Meanwhile, Meir Sternberg speaks of...

...over two hundred years of frenzied digging into the Bible’s genesis, so senseless as to elicit either laughter or tears. Rarely has there been such a futile expense of spirit in a noble cause; rarely have such grandiose theories of origination been built and revised and pitted against one another on the evidential equivalent of the head of a pin; rarely have so many worked so long and so hard with so little to show for their trouble. Not even the widely accepted constructs of geneticism, like the Deuteronomist, lead an existence other than speculative. (Meir Sternberg, The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading [Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985], 13)

More recently, Walter Brueggemann contends that historical criticism...

...is, on the face of it, incongruent with the text itself. The text is saturated with the odd, the hidden, the dense, and the inscrutable—the things of God. Thus in principle, historical criticism runs the risk that the methods and assumptions to which it is committed may miss the primary intentionality of the text. Having missed that, the commentaries are filled with unhelpful philological comment, endless redactional explanations, and tedious comparisons with other materials. Because the primal Subject of the text has been ruled out in principle, scholars are left to deal with these much less interesting questions. (Walter Brueggemann, Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997], 104, see also 103-105, 726-729)

36 For example, Heard, Dynamics Of Diselection integrates close readings of Gen 12-36 with an analysis of sociological and historical dynamics among fifth- and fourth-century Yehud. Pleins, The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible, meanwhile, analyzes Genesis along source critical lines, but does so in a way that is concerned with closely reading biblical texts, mining them for ethical insight. David McLain Carr, Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches (1st ed.; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), e.g., vii, also aims at integrating diachronic and synchronic study, seeking to “build bridges” between the two methods.
It is useful to begin by noting that even literary works opposed to historical-critical methodologies have tended to make room for comparative studies of ancient Near Eastern literature as a way of illuminating the biblical text. While parallels to Genesis’ creation and flood narratives are well known (e.g., Enuma Elish, Atrahasis, Gilgamesh), there are also several texts that provide useful points of comparison with Genesis’ texts dealing with anger. A number of narratives, for example, deal with anger and strife among brothers, akin to what one finds in Genesis. Such material provides interpreters with the types of cultural ideas and narrative forms in existence prior to and concomitant with the formation of Genesis, allowing readers to gain a better grasp of the conventions within the biblical text. In fact, not only textual evidence but also iconographic

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38 See the interesting proposal by Thomas L. Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, and Theological Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), ch. 8, that Genesis has parallels not only with ancient Near Eastern material, but also with materials from ancient Greece.


40 Simon Parker points out:

The best comparative studies … recognize that narratives in ancient literature are produced not only out of a particular culture but also out of a larger narrative tradition, and that comparison with other similar narratives in that tradition … reveals aspects of a text that might remain hidden or a matter of speculation in an analysis of one narrative alone. Comparative study may … lessen the subjective element in literary criticism by exposing what is traditional, conventional, or generic in a story. (Simon B. Parker, *Stories in Scripture and Inscriptions: Comparative Studies on Narratives in Northwest Semitic Inscriptions and the Hebrew Bible* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1997], 5)
artifacts can illumine the biblical text, as will be shown below with regard to Gen 4:7 (§8.7.2).

Although scholarship has access to texts from the ancient Near East that may have influenced the formation of Genesis in one way or another, none of Genesis’ composite sources has survived. While few dispute that the book has emerged from a lengthy process of composition involving multiple authors and redactors,\(^{41}\) there is great disagreement about who these writers were, how they interacted with one another, and which texts stem from which sources. What consensus existed in source criticism a generation ago has given rise to (in the words of those working within this subfield) “uproar” and “confusion.”\(^{42}\) While many valiant scholars have sought to create order out of this surrounding Genesis’ textual origins, there is admittedly a conjectural nature to such analyses.\(^{44}\) Given these limitations, one can see the value of closely

At the same time, the comparative scholar faces difficulty knowing the sources to which biblical authors had access. The greater the temporal, linguistic, and geographical distance between writings, the less likely they illuminate one another (Shemaryahu Talmon, “The ‘Comparative Method’ in Biblical Interpretation—Principles and Problems,” in Congress Volume; vol. 29 1978 [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978], 320-355). Given the paucity of Northwest Semitic narratives from Syria-Palestine (cf. Parker, Stories in Scripture and Inscriptions, 11), extrabiblical comparisons are not always as fruitful as one would like. Yet, within the Hebrew Bible, interpreters have access to other materials dealing with anger that frequently have relatively small temporal, linguistic, and geographical distances from Genesis. Thus, the discussion below (esp. ch. 3) relies on other materials in the Hebrew Bible to illumine Genesis not only for canonical reasons but also for reasons of historical proximity.

\(^{41}\) Even Brodie, who is skeptical of source criticism and deems “the theory of hypothetical sources (J, E, D, and P)” to be “increasingly unnecessary,” still understands a degree of evolution with various stages. See Brodie, Genesis as Dialogue, xiii, 6-19, 71-75.


\(^{43}\) These are the Hebrew words in Gen 1:2 that are traditionally translated “formless and void.”

\(^{44}\) Granted, literary-rhetorical criticism has a conjectural nature as well. Those familiar with the scholarly literature are reminded of instances when an interpreter makes much of a word-play that may be merely coincidental, or cases where an interpreter points to an elaborate chiastic structure that may in fact never have been part of the design by authors or compilers. For this reason, one need not go so far as those
reading biblical texts to determine what messages they elicit without tying such messages to hypothetical reconstructions of what the texts may have looked like in previous forms. Thus, to keep this project manageable, source critical discussions will not factor into the discussions below.

Although scholarship has become increasingly divided about many pillars of source criticism, scholars increasingly agree that whatever Genesis’ compositional history, it likely reached a “final form” in an exilic or post-exilic setting. A fruitful area of examination is how this book’s message about anger likely interacted with historical, sociological, and ideological forces in this period. One suspects that anger was not

45 Admittedly, the term “final form” is imprecise (as is the term “present form” in the preceding sentence). Here, such nomenclature refers to the form of the book after its composite sources were integrated and redacted. Following this formation, the book obviously continued to undergo fairly small changes through the transmission process, as well as the highly significant pointing by the Masoretes in the Middle Ages. Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage in Genesis*, was one of the earlier works (published in 1993) to argue that Genesis achieved its formation in the exilic and/or post-exilic period. Others have followed her lead. Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.* (trans. David Green; SBLSL; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 246-271, concisely surveys important works of scholarship while making the case that two key redactions of Gen 12-50 took place during the exilic period. Another key argument relating to the composition of the Pentateuch is the Persian Authorization Thesis (advanced perhaps most prominently by Peter Frei, whose work can be found in English in Peter Frei, “Persian Imperial Authorization: A Summary,” in *Persia and Torah: The Theory of Imperial Authorization of the Pentateuch*, ed. James W. Watts; SBLSS 17 [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001], 5-40; cf. Peter Frei and Klaus Koch, *Reichsidee und Reichsorganisation im Perserreich: Zweite, bearbeitete und stark erweiterte Auflage* [Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag, 1996]), which asserts that the Pentateuch took form under a federal arrangement between the Persian Imperial Administration and local communities, one that granted some autonomy to local peoples while ultimately reinforcing Persian rule. See James W. Watts, ed., *Persia and Torah: The Theory of Imperial Authorization of the Pentateuch* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), passim, for an excellent discussion of this thesis. Although there are many arguments connecting Genesis to post-exilic events, two final examples illustrate the range of opinions advanced. Heard, *Dynamics Of Diselection*, esp. 16-22, argues that Genesis displays tendencies similar to Ezra-Nehemiah (for which he relies heavily on the arguments of Kenneth G. Hoglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah* [SBLDS; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1992], esp. 207-247). However, Brett, *Genesis*, passim, makes nearly the opposite case, showing that Genesis subtly reacts against the exclusiveness found in Ezra and Nehemiah. While Heard and Brett differ greatly on whether Genesis reinforces or challenges the messages of Ezra and Nehemiah, both maintain that Genesis had taken form by this period.
uncommon during this period when Jewish populations wrestled with competing ideas about a variety of topics including self-identity, land ownership, cultural assimilation, and religious practices. It would be quite interesting to examine how Genesis’ message about anger interacted with the vexing dynamics of this period. Unfortunately, two factors make this area of research exceedingly complex and beyond what can be treated within this dissertation. The first pertains to evidence. There is not as much evidence from this time period as one would like, and the evidence that is available is frequently the subject of great debate. Second, study of this time period is fraught with political

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46 As Paul D. Hanson, *Old Testament Apocalyptic* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 91, puts it, “We are dealing with a period of deep divisions and unprecedented crises within the Jewish community, as an independent-minded people suddenly finds itself both subjugated by a pagan power (Persia) and splintered internally by contending parties.”

47 For example, the Murashu Texts from Nippur are one of the few pieces of extrabiblical evidence shedding light on the “exiles” in the fifth century. They show that Jewish populations worked as fisherman, farmers, shepherds, and even officials. Some scholars such as Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period* (trans. John Bowden; 2 vols.; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 2:373-374, interpret this evidence as pointing to positive living conditions free from oppression in the Persian and even the Babylonian periods. However, others such as Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 69, challenge this notion and argue that even if some Jews served as minor officials (basically functionaries), Jewish populations on the whole led a marginalized existence in exile.

Field archaeology is likewise open to very different interpretations. For example, on the one hand, Hans M. Barstad, *The Myth of the Empty Land: A Study in the History and Archaeology of Judah during the “Exilic” Period* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996), 42 (emphasis his), argues, “[W]ith the great majority of the population still intact, life in Judah after 586 in all probability before long went on very much in the same way that it had done before the catastrophe.” On the other hand, Ephraim Stern, “The Babylonian Gap: The Archaeological Reality,” *JSOT* 28 (2004): 273-277, esp. 273, maintains, “The results of … excavations and surveys [of dozens of sites] clearly affirm that Judah was almost entirely destroyed and that its Jewish population disappeared from most of the kingdom’s territory.”

Biblical evidence is similarly problematic and open to multiple interpretations. As Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 3-4, puts it, “The exilic period … represents a huge lacuna in the historical narrative of the Hebrew Bible.” Some (e.g., James D. Purvis and Eric M. Meyers, “Exile and Return: From the Babylonian Destruction to the Reconstruction of the Jewish State,” in *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, ed. Hershel Shanks [Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1999], 205) look at a text like Jer 29:5-7 and conclude that the conditions of the exiles were fairly positive, while others (e.g., Peter R. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration: A Study of Hebrew Thought of the Sixth Century B.C.* [OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968], 32) look at texts like Ps 137 and conclude that conditions were quite oppressive (though one should note that Purvis, Meyers, and Ackroyd are all fairly nuanced in how they articulate their positions).

These two factors lead to a wide variety of opinions about not only what Jewish populations experienced in the sixth and fifth centuries, but also whether one can even be certain of any conclusions made about this time period. These complicated issues cannot be treated within the scope of this dissertation, but they do constitute a promising avenue for future research.

\section*{1.6 Limitations of This Study}

To keep this project well defined, it has several limitations in addition to the ones just mentioned. First, this dissertation focuses on human anger rather than divine anger. It does so primarily because Genesis is not concerned with divine anger. While God is portrayed angrily in many books of the Bible, the book of Genesis contains no explicit, actualized references to divine anger. Although some parts of Genesis may imply that God is angry,\footnote{One thinks of the expulsion from Eden (ch. 3), God’s response to Cain (ch. 4), the outset of the flood narrative (ch. 6; cf. Zacharias Kotzé, “Conceptual Metaphors for Anger in the Biblical Hebrew Story of the Flood,” \textit{Journal for Semitics = Tydskrif vir Semitistiek} 14, no. 1 [2005]: 149-164), the story of Babel (ch. 11), the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (chs. 18-19), and possibly Jacob’s wrestling with “a man” (יָדִיב) at night (Gen 32:25-33 [32:24-32 Eng.]; cf. J. Bergman and E. Johnson, “םַיָּד, יָדִיב,” \textit{TDOT} 1:348-360, esp. 1:357).} none of them explicitly refers to the divine being in that way. The only time Hebrew terminology for anger is used of God in Genesis is in 18:30 and 18:32,
where Abraham, while requesting that innocent people be spared from impending destruction, asks that the deity not become angry with him for making this request. The text suggests that God obliges Abraham and does not become angry.\textsuperscript{50} All of the other explicit references to anger in Genesis pertain to humans.

A second limitation is that this dissertation focuses on the book of Genesis rather than on other texts of the Hebrew Bible. As illustrated above (§1.2), anger is a prominent motif in this book that merits careful study on its own right. Although a book like Proverbs joins Genesis in describing human anger on a variety of occasions, anger in Proverbs does not constitute a carefully arranged literary motif akin to what one finds in Genesis.\textsuperscript{51} Nevertheless, while the focus here is on the text of Genesis, other books of the Hebrew Bible are drawn upon when they shed light on the text of Genesis. The Hebrew Bible is by no means monolithic, and one should not automatically assume that what one text says is echoed in another text. At the same time, when one studies Genesis, the books elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible provide the closest linguistic, temporal, and geographic parallels in existence.\textsuperscript{52} Thus, Chapter 3 relies on the entire Hebrew canon (as well as related ancient Near Eastern sources) to understand better the cultural-linguistic concept of anger drawn upon by the writers of Genesis. Other chapters rely on the Hebrew Bible and ancient Near Eastern sources in similar ways.

\textsuperscript{50} Like Genesis, the book of Numbers appears in the Pentateuch containing significant portions of narrative material, a fair amount of which is concerned with anger. However, the majority of these texts speak of divine anger. Genesis, by contrast, focuses on human anger to the virtual exclusion of the divine. The only other book of the Bible to speak of human anger as frequently as Genesis is the book of Proverbs, which, as noted below, does not have the same literary qualities found in Genesis.

\textsuperscript{51} It lacks, for example, the type of inclusio structure found with Genesis, where anger is treated in both the first post-Edenic episode and the book’s penultimate episode.

\textsuperscript{52} Talmon, “The ‘Comparative Method,’” 320-355.
A third limitation of this study is that it does not utilize Western psychological theories to illumine biblical texts. Such approaches have been undertaken by a variety of scholars. For example, some see Esau as the equivalent of Jacob’s Jungian shadow. Others claim to have found Freud’s Oedipus complex present among the Patriarchs. Other examples could be given. These studies presuppose not merely that Jung, Freud, or another psychologist was correct, but also that the dynamics described by such a psychologist are universal, not limited by cultural constraints. Such presumptions are questionable, to say the least. As we shall see in the next chapter, it is not apparent that the Hebrew Bible’s understanding of anger aligns with Western conceptions of this


57 Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 11-34, attempts to address this issue by considering whether the Oedipus complex is universal. However, there are problems with this analysis; it is based primarily on the Trobriand Islanders, rather than a more global study.

58 Bryan J. Dik, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, Colorado State University, Personal Communication, Oct. 15, 2008.
emotion. When interpreters assume that the Western model of anger is universal and presupposed by the text itself, they limit their ability to understand the text on its own terms. If something as fundamental as anger can vary significantly from culture to culture, then interpreters should be wary about assuming that more complex and hypothetical psychological ideas, such as the Oedipus complex, reflect archetypal features of humanity. Therefore, the use of psychology in this study is limited to cross-cultural psychology and related fields. Such cross-cultural analyses, outlined in Chapter 2, point to principles and cautions interpreters should be aware of when interpreting the emotions of another culture.

Two final limitations should be mentioned. First, this dissertation does not undertake a folkloric approach to Genesis. Several have considered the narratives under consideration either by relying on Stith Thompson’s work or other studies of folkloric literature.59 The story of the founding of Rome, particularly Romulus’ fratricide, is often mentioned alongside Gen 4. While such studies have merit, this dissertation aims to understand the text of Genesis in its own right and in interaction with its surrounding culture, rather than turning to cultures with which the writers of Genesis had little or no interaction. Subsequent studies can compare the message found here with folklore in other cultures. Second, this study gives relatively little attention to the history of emotion.

interpretation. Because of the prominence of Genesis in the Bible, it has received extensive study over the centuries. To keep this project manageable, the focus falls on the text itself and recent criticism thereof.

### 1.7 Conclusion

Nearly all of the great classical philosophers wrote extensively about anger, seeing it as an essential topic when considering the ethical life. To cite a prominent example, in *Moral Essays*, Seneca writes that anger is the most harmful force known to humanity. He asserts that anger, “the most hideous and frenzied of all the emotions,” has...
done more to threaten the survival of humanity than even the deadliest plague.⁶²

Although Genesis uses different language and a different genre than Seneca, it likewise sees anger as a great threat to humanity—a permanent mark of the expulsion from Eden, the cause of the first recorded sin, and the force that brings death into the world. While Seneca’s Stoic response to the harmful nature of anger is well known, Genesis’ account of this emotion is not. The time has come to consider how the Bible’s first book characterizes anger. It has been overlooked long enough.

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2. Traversing Foreign Terrain: The Troubles of Translating Emotion

In biblical studies, translation is the bedrock of interpretation. Unfortunately, biblical scholars sometimes give insufficient attention to this foundational enterprise and consequently make unsound interpretive moves. This chapter examines the task of translation, first on a general level by drawing together insights from both accomplished translators and critical theorists. Attention then shifts to particular areas that need attention when translating terms for emotion. This discussion looks beyond biblical studies to the fields of anthropology and linguistics, outlining an approach that does justice to the variety of issues translators face. These findings are then brought into dialogue with broader issues of linguistic relativity, as well as the reigning assumptions within biblical studies. Finally, this chapter concludes by demonstrating how many biblical translators and interpreters have failed to understand biblical anger on its own terms, conflating modern Western conceptions of emotion with those of the biblical world. As a whole, this chapter points to the need for understanding anger in the Hebrew Bible as a foreign concept embodied in a set of terms that do not always align with modern Western language and concepts.

2.1 The Violence of Translation

Those working extensively with foreign languages have stressed the violent nature of translation. They have described translation as both damaging the original work and warping the target language. They express how the transference between languages
is never perfect. There are always losses. Despite great precautions, casualties invariably take place. One of the most well known individuals to speak of violence in translation is Saint Jerome. He compares the translator to a conqueror who invades the foreign, takes captive thoughts and meaning, and brings them back to Latin soil.\(^1\) One need not embrace the Roman imperialism reflected in Jerome’s remarks to understand that a degree of aggression accompanies translation. Over a thousand years after Jerome, Martin Luther, under heavy fire from his critics, describes himself as having only two choices, to demolish (\textit{tun Abbruch}) the German language or to depart from (\textit{weichen von}) the biblical word.\(^2\) In passages of greatest significance, he asserts that he chose to commit violence against his native tongue rather than stray from the original text.

In the modern era, Michel Foucault also portrays translation in violent terms. In his short essay “Les mots qui saignent,” he evokes the image of a catapult, speaking of translations that “launch one language against another…. They take the original text for a projectile and treat the translating language as a target.”\(^3\) George Steiner goes farther, understanding aggression and destruction to be integral elements of virtually all translations. He writes, “Unquestionably there is a dimension of loss, of breakage – hence…the fear of translation, the taboos on revelatory export which hedge sacred texts,


\(^3\) The French uses the language of \textit{choc}, which can refer to a collision or shock. Michel Foucault, “Les mots qui saignent,” 29 Aug 1964, 21-22, esp. 21. Translation mine.
ritual nominations, and formulas in many cultures. Jacques Derrida also connects translation with violence, but with an interesting twist. In *Des tours de Babel*, he asserts that YHWH has violently imposed translation on humanity while simultaneously forbidding it, making it both a human necessity and impossibility.

While many thinkers across the centuries have thus connected translation with violence, Antoine Berman offers one of the most systematic accounts of how such violence takes place. He describes a variety of “deforming tendencies” that creep into translation, rendering the final product a distortion of the original. He explains that translators (perhaps unwittingly) embellish works, which ironically leads to the loss of elements in the original. He observes the tendency to rationalize works in translation, rearranging elements to fit preconceived ideas of discursive order that stand at variance with the original. Abstraction, he notes, often accompanies rationalization, destroying the concreteness of the source text. Berman shows that original works are further effaced by the clarifications, explications, and illuminations that enter the translated work. The ambiguities, enigmas, and complexities of the original become buried. The limitations of language inhibit their full replication. Attempting to resemble the original, translators

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4 George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 297-300, esp. 300. In this work, Steiner emphasizes not only the aggression and losses of translation, but its constructive nature (see §3.6).


expand the source text, making it swollen and bloated. In the end, Berman observes, “The translating results in a text that is at once poorer and longer.”

Berman describes additional elements within the original work that cannot be perfectly replicated in the target language. These casualties of translation include the destruction of the original work’s iconic richness, its precise rhythms, its underlying networks of signification, its linguistic patternings, its vernacular networks, and its expressions and idioms. In the act of translation—and by implication, even in the act of interpreting foreign works—much is lost, far more than is typically realized. Every act of translation is an act of violence.

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8 Nietzsche argued that rhythm is the most challenging element to convey in translation, particularly in German:

What is most difficult to translate from one language into another is the tempo of its style…. There are some well-meaning translations that are nothing but involuntary generalizations of the original and as such can almost be considered forgeries. This is so because they failed also to translate the original’s courageous and cheerful tempo which helps us to be consoled for, if not to skip over, all that is dangerous in words and things. The German speaker is almost incapable of expressing this presto quality in his language and, as is fair to conclude, is incapable of many of the most delightful and daring nuances of unfettered, freethinking thought. (Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Problem of Translation,” in *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, ed. Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet; trans. Peter Mollenhauer [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992], esp. 69)

9 Berman, “Translation and the Trials of the Foreign,” 292-297. Much of the language above is used by Berman throughout this essay.
2.2 The Vulnerability of Terms Conveying Emotion

On the battlefield of translation, terms conveying emotion are particularly vulnerable to attack. Several anthropologists have reached this conclusion after extensive studies of terms for emotion in other languages. Jean L. Briggs’ *Never in Anger*, published in 1970, cleared the path for a great deal of subsequent scholarship by analyzing the appropriation of emotion by the Utku Eskimos in northern Canada. Briggs concludes that the “Utku do not classify emotions exactly as English speakers do; their words for various feelings cannot in every case be tidily subsumed under our words: affection, fear, hostility, and so on.” She states that her use of English terms to describe Utku words for emotion, even when accompanied by extensive commentary, entails the “risk of doing violence to the Eskimo ways of conceptualizing feelings.” Briggs’ basic point here, that the categories represented by emotion terminology do not transfer well between languages, is true of not just Utku and English, but virtually all languages. Not surprisingly, the difficulty of transference is greater when one compares the English language with languages outside the Indo-European family.

Studies after Briggs’ have compared emotion terms across languages, ranging from the most abstract to the most specific. They have concluded that the categories for emotion differ from language to language, whether one examines basic-level emotion

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11 Several sub-disciplines are involved in the study of emotions in other cultures, including cultural psychology, cross-cultural psychology, psychological anthropology, and ethnopsychoogy. For a concise explanation of these sub-fields and their differences, see R. A. Shweder, *Thinking through Cultures: Expeditions in Cultural Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 73-110.

terms (e.g., happiness, anger, fear, and sadness), superordinate-level terms (i.e., emotion), or subordinate-level terms (wrath, fury, revulsion, irritation, and hatred, to name some of the terms subordinate to their hypernym anger). With regard to the superordinate term emotion, Anna Wierzbicka shows that this word does not align especially well with similar terms in other languages. Even among Indo-European languages, she demonstrates, there are significant differences between the English emotion, the German Gefühl, the Polish uczucie, the French émotion, the Italian emozione, and the Spanish emoción, especially when one considers the level of cognition presupposed by each word. These words do not in every instance refer to the same thing, although there are obvious areas of semantic overlap. Incomplete lexical matches on the superordinate level raise questions not only about translation, but also about the appropriateness of categorizing terminology from other languages with the term emotion, which may not correspond to any terms in the native language.

Basic-level terms for emotions do not always align across languages either. Some of these terms, such as equivalents of sadness and fear, are said to be missing altogether.
in other languages.  Furthermore, ethnographers have also documented several languages that do not distinguish between the basic categories that English does. Some African languages, for example, do not differentiate anger from sadness. Meanwhile, for the Ilongot people in the northern Philippines the term *liget* refers not only to what we would call anger, but also to the passionate energy associated with difficult physical labor, as well as the youthful drive toward marrying and reproducing. It is even associated with headhunting. To name another example, a prominent emotion word among the Ifaluk people of Micronesia is *song*, which has some connections with anger, but is far more communal than individual. It is directly related to issues of social and interpersonal justice. Linguists often speak of collocations, that is, the contextual restrictions that words carry with them. The collocations of *song* disallow its use in ways unrelated to matters of injustice, in sharp contrast to the collocations of anger (e.g., “I became angry when my car broke down”). Whereas the Ifaluk see *song* as always

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16 See Russell, “Culture and the Categorization of Emotions,” 441, Table 444. In this excellent article on the state of cross-cultural analyses of emotion, Russell discusses basic-level emotion terms and the languages that lack an adequate counterpart. *Happiness* is missing in Chewong. Fore, Dani, Malay, and Ifaluk have no word for *surprise*. *Anger* overlaps with *sadness* in Luganda, Illongot, and Ifaluk. *Fear* is missing in Ifaluk, Utku, and Pintupi. In Gidjingali, *fear* is not distinguished from *shame*. *Sadness* is missing in Tahitian and Chewong, and it is not distinguished from *anger* in Luganda, Illongot, and Ifaluk. Finally, *disgust* is missing in Polish, Ifaluk, and Chewong, and it is not differentiated from *hate* in Samoan. See his discussion for qualifications, literature, and explanations.

17 For a review of various studies, see ibid., 430.


20 See Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Revised and expanded ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), 142. Silva uses the example of *strong* and *powerful* (borrowed from M. A. K. Halliday). Although these words have similar meanings, their collocations determine which is used when. Thus, one is unlikely to hear a native speaker say something like *He drives a strong car* or *This tea is too powerful*. On the other hand, both words can be used to modify *argument*. 

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justified, the Utku Eskimos that Briggs describes are at the opposite end of the spectrum, who neither have words for “justified anger,” nor conceptualize interpersonal anger as justified.\footnote{Briggs, \textit{Never in Anger: Portrait of an Eskimo Family}, 328-337. Briggs argues that for the Utku, anger is not justified in interactions with people over four years of age, although she does describe an occasion where the act of scolding (\textit{huaq}), which has potential connections with anger, was seen as appropriate (ibid., 257).} As all of these examples illustrate, terms for emotions do not always align well with their closest counterparts in other languages.

While the above examples come from languages that are not Indo-European, there are also examples within this family of languages where basic-level emotion terms do not transfer perfectly. Again, Anna Wierzbicka has led the way. She discusses the Italian word \textit{rabbia}. It refers to anger that is uncontrolled, intense, and explosive. In that sense, it corresponds with the English terms \textit{fury} and \textit{rage}. Even Italian expressions such as \textit{la rabbia delle vento} can be rendered literally \textit{the fury of the wind}. While there is thus a fairly close semantic match between the words \textit{rabbia} and \textit{fury}, there is also a key difference. The English word \textit{fury} is understood as a departure from normal emotional states.\footnote{Cf. \textit{Oxford English Dictionary Online}, s.v. “fury, n.” (Oxford University Press, 2007), §1. Cited Oct. 11, 2007. Online: http://www.oed.com.} It is extraordinary, not something most people experience on a fairly regular basis. The Italian \textit{rabbia}, however, is a very popular word used in everyday conversation. In Italian, \textit{rabbia} may be considered a basic-level emotion term, more so than \textit{fury}, which in English is a subordinate-level term, a hyponym of \textit{anger}.\footnote{Wierzbicka, “Everyday Conceptions of Emotion,” 31-33.}

As this example illustrates, not only basic-level but also subordinate-level emotion terms do not always transfer easily from one socio-linguistic system to another.
There are many lexical gaps on this level, in both non-English and English languages. With the former, anthropologists have documented a number of languages that lack words for *depression, anxiety,* and *guilt.*\(^{24}\) With the latter, the Korean word 쓸쓸한 느낌 refers to the specific type of sadness, emptiness, and loneliness that one experiences in autumn as life dies and days shorten.\(^{25}\) Another lexical gap in English is the Japanese word 甘え, which indicates a pleasant feeling of passive dependence on another (e.g., an infant with her mother).\(^{26}\) The literature on this topic contains many more examples of terms for emotion that lack adequate counterparts in other languages.\(^{27}\)

English, by way of circumlocution, can convey some of the concepts behind these words in other languages, but such circumlocutions do not take place frequently. Those in different cultures tend to have different conceptions of emotion and, at least potentially, different emotional experiences.\(^{28}\) Even when words can be found with dictionary definitions that roughly align (e.g., *rabbia* and *fury*), it is clear that most words carry with them an encyclopedic range of meaning and concepts, and these broader

\(^{24}\) Russell, “Culture and the Categorization of Emotions,” 431.

\(^{25}\) Sua Yoo, Ph.D., Duke University, Personal Communication, June 20, 2007. American English might begin to articulate a similar concept in describing “seasonal affective disorder,” but there are obvious differences (e.g., the English term suggests a medical condition more than a common sentiment in the general populace).


\(^{27}\) An excellent source for these examples is Russell, “Culture and the Categorization of Emotions,” 426-433. Another example he mentions is the German word *Schadenfreude,* which conveys an emotional experience of pleasure at another’s misfortune. While the English term “gloat” comes close to *Schadenfreude,* many see significant differences.

\(^{28}\) As noted below, cultures tend to construct rules governing which emotions are experienced when and how. These rules become connected with particular emotion terms.
associations frequently do not match. To use Max Black’s terminology, a “system of associated commonplaces” develops around particular words that is far more complex than their basic definitions.

Emotion terms tend to carry with them complex associative networks that convey an array of cultural assumptions about how emotions can and should work. Even if some emotional experiences are universal or nearly universal, societies differ greatly in the social norms they construct around these emotions. The norms of a given culture, which anthropologists collectively refer to as an “emotional style,” include assumptions about the following:

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30 Max Black, Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1962), 40-41. (Black most likely would not agree with all of the implications drawn here from his work; see below). Monroe Beardsley, “Metaphor,” in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan and Free Press, 1967), 5:286, conveys a similar idea when he talks about the difference between “literal meaning” and “marginal meaning,” though one should not conflate Black’s and Beardsley’s works. Both Black and Beardsley describe these terms in their discussions of metaphors. However, they are just as relevant for discussions of translation. As Leo Noordman, “Some Reflections on the Relation between Cognitive Linguistics and Exegesis,” in Job 28: Cognition in Context, ed. Ellen van Wolde (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 333, points out “Metaphors make it very clear that the meaning of a text goes beyond lexical meaning.” Or, if one prefers to abandon the terminology linked to discussions of metaphors, Langacker, “Context, Cognition, and Semantics,” 187-192, talks about a similar concept when he distinguishes between dictionary semantics and encyclopedic semantics.

31 As Catherine Lutz observes, “Each emotion concept is … an index of a world of cultural premises and of scenarios for social interaction; each is a system of meaning or cluster of ideas which include both verbal, accessible, reflective ideas and implicit practical ones … The discrete emotion concepts…have nestled within them a cluster of images or propositions.” See Lutz, Unnatural Emotions, 210-211.

1. Taxonomy: what types of feelings people experience
2. Ecology: which situations elicit which emotions
3. Semantics: what emotions imply (e.g., action tendencies such as fear implies flight)
4. Communication: how emotions can and should be expressed
5. Social regulation: which emotions are appropriate and inappropriate in which situations
6. Management: how to deal with emotions that cannot be expressed

As this list illustrates, an emotional style entails a series of essential and normative judgments, that is, a variety of assessments about the nature of reality and how one should act within it. Over the course of time, these judgments have become attached to the corresponding language of emotion, imbuing particular words with positive and negative connotations.

To come at the same point from a different angle, linguists have argued for decades that context is key to determining meaning. This observation is true of not

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34 An obvious reflection of emotional style within ancient Near Eastern discourse is found in a memo written by Adad-shum-usur, a seventh-century Assyrian exorcist-priest, who urges his king to refrain from mourning because the king is the image of the sun god. Here, one sees an obvious set of assumptions about the contexts and persons for whom mourning is and is not appropriate. See Jeffrey H. Tigay, “The Image of God and the Flood: Some New Developments,” in *Studies in Jewish Education and Judaica in Honor of Louis Newman* (New York, NY: KTAV Publishing House, 1984), 171.

only textual context, but also cultural context. As Leo Noordman explains, readers construct mental models of the content of a text.\textsuperscript{36} This construction involves not only what the text explicitly conveys, but also contextual information, cultural assumptions, and one’s perceived knowledge of the world. Thus, when a text mentions emotion, readers construct mental models of the emotion, relying not only on what the text directly states and what the textual context implies, but also on the basis of their cultural assumptions and their perceived understanding of how the world works.\textsuperscript{37} To understand an ancient text on its own terms, however, interpreters must set aside their modern assumptions about emotions, removing the blinders that obstruct the associated commonplaces inherent in the text’s original language.\textsuperscript{38} As much as possible,

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\textsuperscript{36} Noordman, “Some Reflections,” 332. See also Lutz, Unnatural Emotions, 85.
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\textsuperscript{37} There are four key factors that determine how minds understand such images. First, there are private factors, the personal and subjective experiences and understandings of the emotion that the reader-listener brings to a given text. Because of their subjective nature, these factors are often hidden from outsiders. Second, there are communal factors, the cultural associations that influence how the emotion is understood. Third, there are archetypal factors, which transcend the confines of individuals and cultures. Finally, there are contextual factors, which arise from the linguistic, textual, and situational context in which the term for emotion is found. These factors are borrowed from Michael A. Osborn and Douglas Ehninger, “The Metaphor in Public Address,” Speech Monographs 29 (1962): esp. 228-230.
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\textsuperscript{38} In his discussion of how to approach beliefs about emotions in other cultures, Shweder, Thinking through Cultures, 68-69, suggests that the anthropologist “honor and take ‘literally’ (as a matter of belief) [the other culture’s] alien reality-posits in order to discover other realities hidden within the self, waiting to be drawn out in consciousness.” His comments here stem from his postpositivist assumptions, which are not far removed from Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism. He maintains, “The objective world is incapable of being represented completely if represented from any one point of view, and incapable of being represented intelligibly if represented from all points of view at once” (ibid., 66; see also ibid., 27-72). This approach also has some similarities with the critical realist position advanced by Janet Martin Soskice, Metaphor and Religious Language (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), esp. 118-141.
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interpreters must draw attention to the various associations that particular terms carry with them in the source language.

These associations can vary significantly from culture to culture. In American English, for example, the word *fear* carries with it relatively few positive connotations. Individuals often try to conceal this emotion, as it frequently is a source of shame. In a number of languages of the South Pacific, however, the terms for fear have moral connotations, and the emotion is seen as something to be prized, even celebrated. A common practice in these cultures is to tell stories of one’s fear to others. Informing others of one’s fear is seen as a way of communicating that one is harmless and therefore deserving of respect. Words for fear in such languages carry with them a different set of associated commonplaces than those of fear-related words in English, which tend to be negative and point to weakness and inadequacy.

To consider another example of how terms for emotion can have vastly different associations in different languages, on the Micronesian atoll of Ifaluk, the rough equivalent of the word *happiness* is *ker*. This Ifaluk word, however, does not have many positive associations. Rather, it is viewed as amoral, if not immoral. As a result, this word’s associations differ greatly from those of the English word *happiness*, especially among those who believe that the pursuit of happiness is a fundamental goal that all of

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42 Incidentally, one wonders if יִתְרוּחַ, “fear of the LORD,” which carries many positive connotations in the Hebrew Bible, is closer to these conceptions of fear in the South Pacific than those reflected in American English.
humanity has the right to seek. As this brief example illustrates, words for emotion are linked to broader issues of ideology, morality, and worldview.

Research across the humanities has come to understand in new ways the extent to which words can be ideologically charged. In the last few decades, rhetorical critics have recognized that individual words and phrases have the capacity to function as ideographs, that is, to convey entire ideologies that bespeak how the world works and how reality is governed. Voloshinov, in a move that foreshadowed some of the work on ideographs, stresses the relationships between language and cultural values, arguing, “Each and every word is ideological.” Linguists and anthropologists have become increasingly aware of this point. A. L. Becker, for example, describes how messages trigger entire orientations: “Words [do not] represent the world; rather they specify a world.” In the case of emotion, the meaning of a particular word goes far beyond a denotative sense that indicates a perceived sentiment: the word encapsulates a series of connotations,

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43 Lutz, Unnatural Emotions, 44. While the English word pleasure has some similarities with these features of ker, Lutz’s text makes clear that there are also differences between pleasure and ker. Those who experience ker, for example, may cry if they are of a particular disposition (ibid., 115).


45 Voloshinov, “‘Language, Speech, and Utterance’ and ‘Verbal Interaction’,” 138. The author may have been Mikhail Bakhtin, writing under Voloshinov’s name. By “ideological,” he means reflecting cultural values.

collocations, and assumptions that reflect not only the emotional style of its culture, but also broader cultural values and ideologies. This point has been stressed by many anthropologists studying emotions, such as Catherine Lutz, who argues:

The pragmatic and associative networks of meaning in which each emotion word is embedded are extremely rich ones. The complex meaning of each emotion word is the result of the important role those words play in articulating the full range of a people’s cultural values, social relations, and economic circumstances. Talk about emotions is simultaneously talk about society—about power and politics, about kinship and marriage, about normality and deviance—as several anthropologists have begun to document.

As Lutz here intimates, terms for emotion are closely related to systems of value, and thus they are integral elements in a society’s discourses. They are, as Foucault puts it, “tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations.”

The preceding discussion has several key implications for a study of the biblical language for anger. Interpreters need to recognize that the categories of emotion in English do not necessarily align with the categories of emotion in the biblical text. Benjamin Lee Whorf, whose work is discussed in greater depth below, makes the following point about language in general, which is applicable to emotion terminology:

We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they

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48 Lutz, Unnatural Emotions, 5-6. See also ibid., 8, where she writes, “If … emotion is seen as woven in complex ways into cultural meaning systems and social interaction, and if emotion is used to talk about what is culturally defined and experienced as ‘intensely meaningful,’ then the problem becomes one of translating between two different cultural views and enactments of that which is real and good and proper.” She is equally articulate on ibid., 210-211, writing, “Each emotion concept is, as we have seen, an index of a world of cultural premises and of scenarios for social interaction; each is a system of meaning or cluster of ideas which include both verbal, accessible, reflective ideas and implicit practical ones.”

stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds—and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds.\(^{50}\)

Whorf’s point is essential for interpreters analyzing terms of emotion in the Bible. When English speakers fail to recognize the degree to which emotion terms can vary across cultures, they reify, as Wierzbicka puts it, “inherently fluid phenomena which could be conceptualized and categorized in many different ways.”\(^{51}\) English words such as *emotion, anger, fear,* and *happiness* do not necessarily align with universal brain functions. Rather, they are, in the words of James Russell, “hypotheses formulated by our linguistic ancestors.”\(^{52}\) By assuming that English terms are somehow universal or the best representations of reality, one can quickly enact violence when translating and interpreting foreign works because the networks of association presupposed by the source language are often missed. This type of interpretive practice subtly embodies neocolonialist discourse, wherein the Western model is assumed to be universal, and foreign conceptions are perceived as mere reflections of Western norms.\(^{53}\) Such unself-conscious appropriation of Western emotion categories serves only to reinforce Western ideologies about the self, the individual, and the perceived dichotomy between reason and


\(^{52}\) Russell, “Culture and the Categorization of Emotions,” 444.

emotion. Unfortunately, many analyses of anger in the Hebrew Bible make precisely this mistake.

2.3 Linguistic Relativity

Before turning to such analyses, it is necessary to discuss linguistic relativity, an idea that has much in common with the preceding arguments. The discussion above stresses that terms for emotion within a particular language have the potential to carry with them vast associations of thought. This claim is not far removed from the idea of linguistic relativity, which claims in its strong forms that language determines one’s thinking. In its weaker forms, it claims that language influences one’s thinking. Many of the anthropologists and linguists mentioned above have expressed sympathy for the weaker forms of linguistic relativity. Observing the significant differences between emotion terms in languages, they have argued that language and cognition influence one another.55

The stronger forms of this theory date at least as far back as Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), who saw the language and the mental framework of a people as inextricably linked:

The mental individuality of a people and the shape of its language are so intimately fused with one another, that if one were given, the other would have to be completely derivable


from it…. Language is, as it were, the outer appearance of the spirit of a people; the language is their spirit and the spirit their language.56

This type of argument found new heights of popularity in the 1940s, when factors in the American intellectual climate led to a constellation of ideas formulated by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf (giving rise to the term “the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis”).57 Three quotations illustrate the types of claims they made. In a fairly concise statement, Sapir argues, “Human beings… are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society.”58 Whorf elaborates: “the ‘linguistic relativity principle,’ … means, in informal terms, that users of markedly different [patterns of language] are pointed by [these patterns] toward different types of observations and different evaluations of externally similar acts of observation, and hence are not equivalent as observers but must arrive at somewhat different views of the world.”59 When discussing the Hopi (a Native American people) model of the universe, Whorf makes similar claims, arguing, “Every language contains terms that have come to attain cosmic scope of reference, that crystallize in themselves the basic postulates of an unformulated philosophy, in which is couched the thought of a people, a culture, a

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57 For these factors, see the discussion in John J. Gumperz and Stephen C. Levinson, eds., Rethinking Linguistic Relativity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3-7.


59 Whorf, Language, Thought, and Reality, 221. In the quotation above, I have substituted Whorf’s word “grammar” with the words “patterns of language” because “grammar” is a technical term for Whorf referring to “automatic, involuntary patterns of language….—a term that includes much more than the grammar we learned in the textbooks of our school days” (ibid.).
civilization, even of an era.” Whorf and Sapir, like Humboldt, drew close lines of connection between language and cognition, even going so far as to argue that language determines one’s orientation to reality.

By the 1960s, two decades after the thinking of Sapir and Whorf reached its highpoint of popularity, the intellectual climate in Britain and America had changed. With the rise of cognitive sciences, attention focused on universal features of the human mind. The work of Sapir and Whorf was called into question on the basis of empirical studies, at least with respect to perceptual terminology, such as words for colors. Max Black, meanwhile, assailed the basic postulates of this theory, arguing, “Whorf commits the linguist’s fallacy of imputing his own sophisticated attitudes to the speakers he is studying.” In this context of growing animosity toward notions of linguistic relativity,

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60 Ibid., 61.

61 As William M. Schniedewind, “Prolegomena for the Sociolinguistics of Classical Hebrew,” Journal of Hebrew Scriptures 5 (2005): esp. §2.3, points out, however, Humboldt and Whorf have differences. According to Schniedewind, Humboldt’s approach was more individualist while Whorf (and Sapir) added a social component.

62 For an excellent discussion, see Gumperz and Levinson, eds., Rethinking Linguistic Relativity, esp. 2-7.


64 Max Black, “Linguistic Relativity: The Views of Benjamin Lee Whorf,” The Philosophical Review 68, no. 2 (1959): 228-238, esp. 230. Black makes other criticisms, but this is perhaps the main problem Black has with Whorf. Later in the article, he reiterates this point, claiming, “The fact is that the
James Barr published *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, which launched a full, frontal attack on the ways that many biblical interpreters, especially within the biblical theology movement, simplistically and problematically made moves that aligned with the types of claims associated with Sapir and Whorf.65

Barr’s work has been exceptionally influential, and it continues to provide the basis for many of the reigning assumptions in current linguistic work on the Bible.66 It clearly opposes the strong forms of the linguistic relativity theory. Countering Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Barr maintains, “Theological thought of the type found in the NT has its characteristic linguistic expression not in the word individually but in the word-combination or sentence.”67 Barr argues that unless the word at hand is a technical term, it does not contain within it vast conceptual networks. Assigning words large theological frameworks (as Barr contends *TDNT* does) leads to terms becoming “overloaded with interpretive suggestion.”68 Barr’s argument raises important questions for studying emotion in a foreign language: Is it problematic to assume that cultural assumptions about emotion are reflected in individual linguistic signs for emotion? Does one not risk overloading words for emotion with “interpretive suggestion”?

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66 Even Brevard Childs—not always one to agree with Barr!—quickly recognized this work as drawing to a close an entire area of research in biblical scholarship. See Brevard S. Childs, “Review of James Barr, *Semantics of Biblical Language*,” *JBL* 80, no. 4 (1961): 374-377. See also Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning*, passim. This last work, whose revised edition was published in 1994, continues to rely heavily on Barr, arguably doing little more than updating Barr’s main points.


68 Ibid., 234.
On the one hand, Barr is correct that interpreters must guard against what he calls the “illegitimate totality transfer,” that is, the error of taking the sum total of a word’s potential associations and assuming that they can all be read into a particular appearance of the term.69 On the other hand, it would be foolish not to study the full semantic range of key terms and the types of concepts they frequently presuppose. It is necessary to understand the types of associations that words in the source language can have and compare them with associations in the target language. At one point, in a parenthetical remark, Barr essentially makes this point, conceding that individual words function semantically by carrying “emotional suggestion, reference to traditional patterns and ideas, references and values usually only in certain groups and speakers, and so on.”70 The types of references Barr mentions here deserve careful attention.

When one looks beyond *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, one sees that Barr is not opposed to careful lexical analyses of particular words, as his review of the second volume of *TDOT* illustrates.71 Thus, David Lambert correctly observes, “Barr pointed to the way in which linguistic data could be misused but never denied altogether the significance of philology for theology.”72 Moreover, Barr is aware that language at least dimly reflects the worldview of its time, and that interpreters must guard against

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69 Ibid., 218. Barr writes, “The error that arises, when the ‘meaning’ of a word (understood as the total series of relations in which it is used in the literature) is read into a particular case as its sense and implication there, may be called ‘illegitimate totality transfer.’” Furthermore, Barr’s work on the whole has many praiseworthy features, and it is used in various ways throughout this dissertation.

70 Ibid., 245.


imposing their modern presuppositions onto their definitions of biblical words. Thus, he faults Bauer’s lexicon for being “too content to give semantic indications which presuppose, and are intelligible only in terms of, a more modern intellectual and cultural Weltanschauung than that of the NT.”

Barr is more concerned with guarding against problematic linguistic moves than abandoning careful semantic analyses that examine the broader associative networks that particular words carry with them.

A key argument Barr makes is that the lexical gaps and lexical stock of a given language do not finally decide the types of thoughts one can form. Several individuals studying emotion and culture are quick to agree with him. At the same time, a number of these scholars argue that lexical gaps and lexical stock can indicate levels of prominence and conceptualization that particular emotions achieve or fail to achieve in various languages.

As Robert Levy pointed out thirty years ago in a landmark study that continues to be a model for ethnopsychological research, when a language has many words to describe a type of emotion (in Levy’s case, words for anger in Tahitian), the culture using that language tends to have considerable assumptions about that type of emotion. Levy calls such emotions hypercognated. In contrast, when a language has relatively few words for a type of emotion (in Levy’s case, words for sadness in Tahitian), the corresponding culture tends to have far fewer discussions and assumptions.

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74 Thus, Russell argues that even if an emotion term is missing in a given language, that culture can still express that emotion through phrases, metaphors, and nonverbal communication (Russell, “Culture and the Categorization of Emotions,” esp. 434). In biblical studies, Silva is quick to agree with Barr and the type of argument Russell makes (Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning*, esp. 27).

about that type of emotion. It is *hypocognated.*\(^{76}\) While vocabulary grids are not the only factor to consider, they should not be ignored either. They are an indication, though not the final one, of the degree of salience particular concepts achieve in a given culture.\(^{77}\) While they do not indicate what can *potentially* be conveyed in a given language, they can reflect what *habitually* is conveyed in a given language.\(^{78}\) Barr could have given additional attention to such points in his book.

On the whole, therefore, it appears wise to heed Barr’s warnings (e.g., with the illegitimate totality transfer), while taking a more balanced approach that recognizes that reflections, however dim they sometimes may be, nevertheless exist between language,

\(^{76}\) Levy, *Tahitians*, e.g., 284, 324; see also LeVine, “Levy’s Tahitians,” 477-478.


\(^{78}\) Cf. Lucy, *Language Diversity and Thought*, 7, 136-137. See also J. L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 185, which argues, “Certainly, … ordinary language is not the last word: in principle it can everywhere be supplemented and improved upon and superseded. Only remember, it is the first word.”

A key point made by Barr and others who are resistive to linking conceptualization with language is that concepts are transferable across languages. If language decisively determined thinking, then there would be particular concepts that particular languages could never express. That is not the case, Barr asserts. Rather, one has many tools for transferring concepts across such systems. Although Barr does not cite Roman Jakobson at this point, Jakobson’s thinking closely matches Barr’s: “All cognitive experience and its classification is conveyable in any existing language. Whenever there is deficiency, terminology may be qualified and amplified by loanwords or loan-translations, neologisms or semantic shifts, and finally, by circumlocutions” (Roman Jakobson, “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation,” in *Theories of Translation: From Dryden to Derrida*, ed. Rainer Schulte and John Biguinet [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992], esp. 147). Barr, building on the type of point that Jakobson makes, argues that because concepts can be expressed in any language, language does not definitively determine cognition (Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, esp. 265; cf. 49).

Interestingly, Humboldt makes the same point that Barr makes here, but with a very different conclusion. He writes, “It is not too bold to contend that everything, from the most elevated to the most profound, from the most forceful to the most fragile, can be expressed in every language…. Nevertheless these undertones of language slumber, as do the sounds of an unplayed instrument, until a nation learns how to draw them out” (Humboldt, “From the Introduction to His Translation of *Agamemnon*,” esp. 56-57). Implicit in this observation of Humboldt is the fundamental insight that every language has its limitations. While there are ways of counteracting these shortcomings (e.g., circumlocutions), they still exist. No language is ever perfect.

Obviously, there are a number of philosophical issues at stake in the preceding discussion. For more on those issues, see Lutz and White, “The Anthropology of Emotions,” 405-436; Shweder, *Thinking through Cultures*, 353-358.
cognition, and cultural values.\footnote{Some have debated whether cognition influences language or language influences cognition. The best approach appears to be avoiding entanglement in such chicken-and-egg arguments and positing instead a symbiotic relationship between the cognition and language (a position also advanced by Schniedewind, “Prolegomena for the Sociolinguistics of Classical Hebrew,” §5.1-5.5; Shweder, \textit{Thinking through Cultures}, esp. 74). The ways that words are used within one’s socio-linguistic system have bearing on the types of thoughts one is likely to have and understand. Conversely, the types of thoughts that a culture generates influence the ways its language is typically employed.} Such an approach is similar to the approach taken by many contemporary linguists, who make modifications to the theories advanced by Sapir and Whorf while retaining significant continuity with them.\footnote{E.g., D. Slobin, “The Development from Child Speaker to Native Speaker,” in \textit{Cultural Psychology: Essays on Comparative Human Development}, ed. J. W. Stigler, R. A. Shweder, and G. Herdt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Joel Sherzer, “A Discourse-Centered Approach to Language and Culture,” \textit{American Anthropologist} 89, no. 2 (1987): 295-309; Lera Boroditsky, “Does Language Shape Thought?: Mandarin and English Speakers’ Conceptions of Time,” \textit{Cognitive Psychology} 43 (2001): 1-22; Hill and Mannheim, “Language and World View,” passim; Hoffman, Lau, and Johnson, “The Linguistic Relativity of Person Cognition,” passim; Lucy, \textit{Language Diversity and Thought}, passim; Schniedewind, “Prolegomena for the Sociolinguistics of Classical Hebrew,” §2.4. George Lakoff, \textit{Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 328-337; Kövecses, \textit{Language, Mind, and Culture}, 34-35, 334-335; Rosaldo, \textit{Knowledge and Passion}, 20; Shweder, \textit{Thinking through Cultures}, 155; Russell, “Culture and the Categorization of Emotions,” 427. One example of the type of recent modifications to Sapir’s and Whorf’s thinking is that their talk of worldview has sometimes been replaced by discussions of ideology. Cf. Hill and Mannheim, “Language and World View,” 382.} John Gumperz, for example, in his introduction to \textit{Rethinking Linguistic Relativity}, observes that “the original idea of linguistic relativity is still alive, but functioning in a way that differs from how it was originally conceived.” He shows that “there have been a whole range of recent intellectual shifts that make the ground more fertile for some of the original seeds [of this idea] to grow into new saplings.”\footnote{Gumperz and Levinson, eds., \textit{Rethinking Linguistic Relativity}, 1-11, quotes taken from 12, 17, respectively. On these intellectual shifts, we can note the words of two prominent critics who suggest that language is not neutral but rather imbued with judgments and values. Stanley Fish, \textit{The Trouble with Principle} (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 14, writes, that there is “no vocabulary not already laden with substance and therefore no neutral observation language … on the basis of which nonbiased action can be taken.” Similarly, Kenneth Burke, \textit{Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose} (3rd ed.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 176-177, observes, “[S]peech in its essence is not neutral. Far from aiming at suspended judgment, the spontaneous speech of a person is loaded with judgments. It is intensely moral—its names for objects contain the emotional overtones which give us the cues as to how we should act toward these objects.” Burke is here building on previous work in which he argued that language serves as a “terministic screen” through which reality is viewed (Kenneth}
presence known in biblical studies. For example, the rise of modern rhetorical criticism has led to analyses of the interrelations between language and ideology. Likewise, Mikhail Bakhtin has become a very fruitful dialogue partner for biblical scholars, and much of his work has similarities with notions of linguistic relativity. One suspects that in the future, increasing numbers of biblical interpreters will take balanced positions that are open to examining the interrelations between language, cognition, and cultural values.

2.4 Imposing Western Assumptions on the Text: Irrationality as Senseless Violence

Past works examining biblical anger have given insufficient attention to these interrelations and have instead imposed Western assumptions onto characterizations of biblical emotion. In particular, there has been a strong tendency to argue that the Hebrew Bible portrays human anger as irrational. This characterization merits extended treatment both because of its popularity and because it strikes at the heart of the Euramerican conception of emotion. This section explains the close links that have been made between emotion and irrationality in Western discourse, shows how these links have been

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82 An obvious example would be studies that have shown how the term *exile* is related to broader ideological issues of who has rights to land. While these studies do not make explicit appeals to linguistic relativity, they do show how the linguistic term *exile* brings with it a host of ideological assertions regarding material concerns, particularly land ownership. See Carroll, “Exile! What Exile?,” 62-79; Davies, “Exile? What Exile?,” 128-138. Cf. Barstad, *The Myth of the Empty Land*.

imposed onto the biblical text by interpreters, and demonstrates the lack of textual evidence for such claims. It illustrates how biblical interpreters have committed violence against the texts they translate and interpret.

In ancient times, Greek and Latin writers such as Plato, Posidonius, and Seneca asserted that emotions, especially anger, were irrational. Plato claimed that the soul pulls the individual in two opposing directions, one way by “the rational” (λογιστικόν) part of the soul, and another direction by “the irrational and appetitive” (ἀλλογιστικόν τε καὶ ἐπιθυμητικόν) part of the soul. This irrational direction Plato associated with “affections and diseases” (παθημάτων τε καὶ νοσημάτων), thus linking irrationality with emotion.84 Three centuries later, the Stoic Posidonius (135-51 BCE) borrowed imagery from Plato and described the soul in terms of a charioteer and two horses. In Posidonius’ conception, the charioteer represents the “rational” (λογιστικό) part of the soul that must rule over the two horses, which represent “desire and anger” (ἐπιθυμίας τε καὶ θυμοῦ).85 While these horses can be trained to work in accord with reason, they are not, Posidonius maintained, naturally reasonable entities. Posidonius’ work thus reinforces Plato’s

84 Plato, Laws: Books 1-6 (trans. R. G. Bury; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1926), 396-399, §439C-D (both the Greek and its translation are quoted from this source). For more on these inner contrasting pulls, see Plato, Laws: Books 1-6, esp. 68-69, §644E-645A. It is worth noting that even for Aristotle, our true self is associated first and foremost with the intellect (νοῦς; Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics [trans. H. Rackham; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1934], esp. 616-619, §X.vii.8-9), although it has been argued that Aristotle’s point here is not his last word on the topic. See Richard Sorabji, Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation: The Gifford Lectures (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 190.

conception of the emotions as fundamentally irrational. A century after Posidonius, Seneca also associated emotion, particularly anger, with irrationality. Seneca maintained that anger involves three stages: first an involuntary reaction to an injury, second the judgment that the injury deserves retribution, and third the irrational, uncontrollable prompting to take vengeance. The third stage, Seneca says, “has utterly vanquished reason” (*rationem evicit*).[86]

While there thus are many antecedents to seeing emotions as irrational, they took new forms amid developments in the twentieth century. As Peter Stearns has persuasively argued, between 1920 and 1950 a new emotional style began to emerge in America that has continued to the present day, one marked above all else by dispassion, or to use the term popular since the 1960s, by being “cool.” With the growth of consumerism, corporate management, and the service-sector, the American middle class adopted an emotional style that places great stress on concealing emotional reactions, especially in the workplace where they could interfere with generating profits. Marked by an intolerance of emotions, this emotional style deems those displaying emotional intensity to be vulnerable, childish, and irrational. This emphasis on dispassion has translated into other spheres of life beyond the workplace. However, because emotions could not be completely excised from the human experience, American leisure was

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[86] Seneca, “De Ira,” esp. 174-175, §II.iv.1 (both the Latin and its translation are quoted from this source). One can note that both Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 390-391, §VII.iii. 7, and Seneca, “De Ira,” 106-109, §III.i.3-6, go so far as to associate anger with insanity and madness.

This tradition of associating irrationality with emotion continued in the early modern period with René Descartes, whose division of the mind and body played a key role in reinforcing the ascription of irrationality to emotion, particularly with his emphasizing the mind, not the body, as the true ground of being (*Cogito ergo sum*) (Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*, esp. 245-252). Though Descartes admitted that emotions are often present in the mind and even have positive qualities, he believed they were corrupted by their association with the body (R. des Cartes, *The Passions of the Soule* [London: A. C., 1650], 170 [Article 211]. Cited April 18, 2006. Online: *Early English Books Online* EEBO: http://eebo.chadwyck.com/).
reshaped to allow for emotional expression through contrived means such as sporting events, movies, television, rock music, and amusement parks, all of which further contribute to generating profits in a consumer society. Aside from these commercial avenues, however, people are largely expected to act as though they are unaffected by emotions. Ancient Western assumptions about the irrationality of emotion have thus become fused with discourses that serve vested interests in modern capitalist societies.

Catherine Lutz has also shown how characterizing emotions as irrational relates to broader issues of discourse and power in our society. She demonstrates that rationality, when viewed from a critical perspective, has less to do with operating in accordance with universal logic (if there is such a thing) and more with “the historically and culturally determined assessment of how a sensible, or fully mature, human ought to behave.” Within this rubric, rationality is closely related to dominant ideologies. Emotion, which is so frequently set in opposition to rationality, is used to label deviations from these ideologies. Lutz argues that the dichotomy within Western discourse between reason and emotion is related to an assortment of other dichotomies, shown in Table 1 below:

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87 Stearns, *American Cool*, passim. A key summary is found on pages 300-301, a discussion of the word “cool” on 1-2, a discussion of dating on (among other pages) 95-138, a discussion of reasons for the emergence of this style (which are not completely limited to economic ones) on 193-228, and a discussion of recreation on 264-284. Stearns also argues that this emotional style is a decisive break from the Victorianism of the preceding century, which, he shows, is not marked by the degree of repression that people sometimes assume it is (ibid., 16-57). For a study that corroborates with Stearns, see Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*. This work shows the intense emotional demands placed on workers in the service sector and the damage such demands can cause to well-being.


89 Ibid., 58-80, esp. 56-57. In the table above, the dichotomies are taken from Lutz’s prose, while the organization is my work.
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<td>rational/irrational</td>
<td>intention/impulse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>conscious/unconscious</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lutz explains how many of these dichotomies relate to one another:

When the emotional is defined as irrational, all those occasions and individuals in which emotion is identified can be dismissed…. In this society, those groups which have traditionally ‘been conceived of as passional beings, incapable of sustained rationality’ … include ‘infants, children, adolescents, mental patients, primitive people, peasants, immigrants, Negroes, slum dwellers, urban masses, crowds, and most of all, women’….. Emotion becomes an important metaphor for perceived threats to established authority. 90

In other words, the perceived connection between emotionality and irrationality serves to silence those outraged and angered by the injustices committed by power. Even when the marginalized are not expressing such anger, the characterization of them as emotional (and therefore irrational) serves to reinforce their marginalized status. Thus, when discourses describe women as more emotional than men, they appeal to a broader set of perceived dichotomies within Western discourse that reinforces the culturally inferior status of women.

One may try to rebut the above arguments by claiming that there is scientific evidence for seeing emotions as irrational. Such claims would be based on outdated assumptions and faulty scientific models. Ironically, the dichotomy between reason and emotion, so ingrained in Western consciousness, is fantasy, a mere invention that stands at odds with the most recent scientific findings. Research demonstrates that “the substrates of complex emotion and cognition overlap considerably. It is simply not

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90 Ibid., 62. Hochschild, The Managed Heart, esp. 172-173, makes a similar point with respect to the tendency to disregard female emotion by seeing it as irrational.
possible to identify regions of the brain devoted exclusively to affect or exclusively to
cognition.”

Antonio Damasio, an internationally recognized neurologist, has played a
key role in demonstrating that the perceived dichotomy between reason and emotion is
false. Feelings, he shows, are actually integral to rationality. Over the course of two
decades, Damasio has studied several neurological patients who led normal lives until an
accident, surgery, or tumor caused brain damage, typically lesions on the prefrontal
cortex (PFC). In clinical tests, these patients score high on intelligence exams, but they
have difficulty reasoning with everyday decisions, frequently displaying morally
problematic behavior and an inability to maintain employment. Damasio finds that such
patients also lack the ability to experience emotion. With the inability to experience
emotion comes the inability for these patients to reason effectively, even though they
remain extremely intelligent. Emotions play a key role in making everyday decisions.

Another important study from the field of neuroscience is Joseph LeDoux’s *The
Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life*. Although
conventional Western assumptions link emotions with the heart and thinking with the
brain, LeDoux demonstrates that “emotional feelings involve many more brain systems
than thoughts.”

While LeDoux does not want to equate emotion and cognition, he sees
both of them (1) operating on unconscious levels, (2) interacting with each other, and (3)

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91 Davidson, Scherer, and Goldsmith, eds., *Handbook of Affective Sciences*, 5. Similar sentiments
have been voiced by Caleb R. Schultz, M.D., Department of Neurologic Surgery, Mayo Clinic, Personal


processed by the same mechanisms that make us consciously aware of them. Viewing emotion and reason as two completely separate entities fails to do justice to the evidence.

Studies in the field of psychology have collaborated the findings of those like Damasio and LeDoux. Keith Oatley, the former President of the International Society for Research on Emotions, has written an important essay entitled, “Do Emotional States Produce Irrational Thinking?” Nuanced and articulate, this essay demonstrates, “There is no basis...for assuming that emotions are distinctively and inherently irrational, while non-emotional thinking is inherently rational. This is...a relic of a folk theory which in this case was false.” Oatley argues that irrationality is not a defining characteristic of emotion. While individuals who are “emotional” can display signs of irrationality, so can those who are not emotional. He concludes, “The appropriate way to see emotions is not as irrational elements in our lives, but as a clever biological solution to problems with which we are often confronted.” Similar conclusions have also been reached in the field of philosophy.

The best ethnographic research reflects the findings of those like Damasio, LeDoux, and Oatley, recognizing that the opposition between thought and emotion is a

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94 Ibid., e.g., 19, 68-69.

95 Oatley, “Emotional States,” 130.

96 Ibid., 131. Oatley uses the term irrational to describe failing to use knowledge of the world to construct, in accordance with logic, the best plan of action and then implement it. Oatley argues that while emotion may cause actions based on insufficient knowledge of the world (or faulty conclusions based on sufficient knowledge), non-emotional thinking can cause the same type of actions. Individuals, he notes, rarely possess sufficient knowledge of the world to make error-free judgments. Within this rubric, he concludes, “human beings can hardly ever be wholly rational, because the world is largely unknowable.... We can, perhaps should, strive for rationality. But we attain it only in defined circumstances, which correspond quite closely to the technical” (ibid., 130).

97 Robert Solomon, The Passions (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1976), e.g., xviii, 241-252; Solomon, Not Passion’s Slave; Nussbaum, Upheavals of Thought, esp. 114-119.
Western construct that one should not presuppose is at work in non-Western cultures.  

Unfortunately, many biblical interpreters appear oblivious to this fundamental point. A number of scholars have consistently emphasized the irrationality of emotion in the Hebrew Bible, and thus imposed modern, Western misunderstandings on a text that is neither modern nor Western. One of the most prominent examples is Bruce Edward Baloian, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on “The Aspect of Anger in the Old Testament.”

On the whole, the published form of Baloian’s dissertation has many praiseworthy features. However, he goes farther than most in imposing Western assumptions about rationality onto the biblical text. Time and again, Baloian finds it necessary to use the categories of rational and irrational to characterize biblical anger. On the whole, he characterizes human anger as irrational and divine anger as rational. While it may be that Baloian is merely seeking to interpret biblical anger in terms that his Western audience would understand (i.e., with reference to rationality and irrationality), there are several occasions where he goes farther, nearly implying that (ir)rationality is a category used by the Bible itself. For example, at the conclusion of the book, when Baloian summarizes

98 An excellent review article mentioning these sources is Besnier, “Language and Affect,” esp. 420.


the Hebrew Bible’s portrayal of human anger, he writes, “The explicit demand of the Old Testament texts is to govern anger by the use of reason.”

Although Baloian’s work is a prominent example of the tendency to characterize biblical anger along the Western categories of rationality and irrationality, he is not alone. With respect to divine anger, Heschel, Fretheim, and Brueggemann all have extended discussions of the extent to which God’s anger should be seen as rational. With regard to human anger, Hans Walter Wolff characterizes emotional acts ascribed to the heart, (דב), as corresponding to “the irrational levels of [humanity]” (den irrationalen Schichten des Menschen). Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, in treating the various words for anger in the Hebrew Bible, concludes, “Anger characterizes the fool, the irrational, and the evildoer.” Similarly, the New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis claims in its opening remarks about יָרֵע that this word, when used of humans, can “indicate an irrational, out-of-
control anger.”

In a comparable move, Ellen van Wolde describes the prototypical function of anger in the Hebrew Bible by saying, “the irrational and destructive power of anger is all too apparent.”

One wonders what those like Baloian and van Wolde mean by irrational. Biblical Hebrew has no words that easily align with terms like rationality or irrationality. It has no true equivalents of reason or logic, nor is it deeply concerned with such concepts. Perhaps the closest concern is its focus on wisdom. But בּּיַּּעַּנַּה carries shades of meaning and associative networks that contrast sharply with reason. The Western term reason is concerned with logic, while biblical wisdom is concerned primarily with righteousness. In the Bible, wise decisions may or may not align with what Westerners call logic. As the books of Job and Qohelet illustrate, the pursuit of wisdom involves a fair amount of guesswork and in the end may lead to insufficient answers or escape humanity altogether. The biblical fool, meanwhile, is better

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106 Van Wolde, “Language of Sentiment.”

107 Baloian and van Wolde are mentioned because they, more than these other sources, devote extensive portions of their writing to human anger.

108 Granted, Biblical Hebrew does not have terms for theology or history either. But the Hebrew Bible does focus clearly on both divinity and the events of the past. The Hebrew Bible does not focus on reason or logic.

109 At times, biblical wisdom is also concerned with skill. See, e.g., Exod 35:10, 35:25, 36:1-2, 36:4, 36:8.

110 For more on how wisdom differs strongly with modern Western modes of knowledge, reason, and power, see Ellen F. Davis, Getting Involved with God: Rediscovering the Old Testament (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 2001), 91-103, esp. 194-198.

111 Many verses in these books emphasize the elusiveness and insufficiency of wisdom for humanity, such as Job 5:13; 12:2; 28:20-21; 32:13; 38:36-37; Eccl 1:13, 16-18; 2:14-21; 6:8-9; 7:16, 23; 8:17; 9:11, 15-16.
characterized by immorality than irrationality.\textsuperscript{112} If anything, the biblical concept of wisdom shares more in common with the Egyptian understanding of \textit{ma'at} than Western notions of \textit{rationality}\.\textsuperscript{113} The distance between Athens and Jerusalem should not be minimized.\textsuperscript{114} Using the Western categories of rationality to characterize emotion in the Hebrew Bible is akin to using the word \textit{democracy} as one’s primary rubric for characterizing the political and religious rulers of ancient Israel. It corresponds to the problematic equation of \(\varphi\) with \textit{soul}.\textsuperscript{115}

Whether one examines why people become angry or what they do when angry, biblical texts do not portray angry individuals as displaying flawed thinking or anything resembling \textit{irrationality}. With regard to anger’s various causes, the Hebrew Bible has few, if any, instances where people become angry for no apparent reason (see next chapter), a point that both Baloian and van Wolde note.\textsuperscript{116} Baloian suggests that while

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{112} As James Crenshaw puts it, the term \textit{nabal} (“fool”) “represents a moral rather than an intellectual judgment in the Bible” (Crenshaw, \textit{Defending God}, esp. 31). It is thus debatable whether \textit{fool} is even the best translation of this word.
  \item \textsuperscript{113} Miriam Lichtheim, \textit{Moral Values in Ancient Egypt} (Fribourg, Switzerland: University Press, 1997).
  \item \textsuperscript{115} The second example (soul) is more complex than the first (democracy). One could argue that pre-Platonic conceptions of “soul” have a fair amount in common with the biblical concept of \(\varphi\).
  \item \textsuperscript{116} Baloian, \textit{Anger in the Old Testament}, stresses that human anger has clear causes, such as frustration (29-37), pride (37-43), and a concern for justice (43-50). Likewise, van Wolde understands anger to arise prototypically not in a vacuum but in response to having one’s goals thwarted. See Ellen van Wolde, “Sentiments as Culturally Constructed Emotions: \textit{Anger and Love} in the Hebrew Bible,” \textit{BibInt} 16, no. 1 (2008): 1-24. One of the rare cases where readers are not told the cause of anger is in 2 Sam 24:1, where YHWH becomes angry with David and no reason is given in the immediate context. Even in this case, however, YHWH’s anger is not necessarily irrational. Readers do not know the reason for the anger, but that does not mean that there is none. The narrator’s decision not to share elements of the story should not be confused with these elements’ nonexistence.
\end{itemize}
anger usually arises for clear reasons, these reasons can be irrational, as is the case with “greed, irritation, pride, or the lust of war.” A chief example that he discusses is Uzziah in 2 Chr 26. As the text mentions (v. 16), Uzziah “grew proud” (בְּנַחֲמָה). Three verses later, it says that he became angry (מָעַר) when priests challenged his authority to burn incense in the temple. Baloian seems to be suggesting that Uzziah made an irrational judgment in seeing himself as having the authority to burn incense. Yet, kings both in the Hebrew Bible and throughout the ancient Near East saw themselves as “responsible for the organization and administration of the cult including cultic reform.” If Uzziah believes that as king he has responsibility over the cult, then are his actions really irrational? Burning incense in the temple by a non-priest is portrayed on several occasions as violating the divine will (Lev 2:16; Num 4:16; 1 Sam 2:28). But is it useful to equate violations of God’s will with irrationality? At least in the book of Isaiah, the divine will is not always portrayed as corresponding with human rationality or human ways of thinking (Isa 55:8-9). One wonders if similar assumptions are at work here. At best, Baloian’s separating emotion from reason is a detraction from what is at stake in the text itself. He easily could have associated this anger with the biblical category of sin. The use of the Western category of rationality, on the other hand, is unmerited and leads only to confusion.

117 Baloian, Anger in the Old Testament, 42.


119 Consider also Job 42:7-8, where God rebukes Job’s friends for their various thoughts that were not “what is right,” הַנְּבָע.
There are reasons to be cautious about categorizing not only the causes of biblical anger as irrational (as the above example illustrates), but also the actions that take place by angry individuals. Baloian and van Wolde both suggest that angry characters in the Bible frequently act irrationally. Following an ancient precedent (cf. 4 Macc 2:19), they both give the example of Gen 34:7, where Dinah’s brothers become enraged at what has happened to her and subsequently slaughter the Shechemites. Baloian criticizes the brothers because they do not “cool down, so that the heat (हम) of passion can cool and rational thinking can take hold.” Van Wolde, meanwhile, says that the brothers “lose all rational control and aim for but one thing: immediate revenge.”

Even with this example, where the action resulting from anger is extreme, one can question whether the description of this anger being irrational really fits. Obviously, the reason for the brothers’ anger is not irrational. Though interpretations of this chapter differ greatly, there is a clear logic to why the brothers become angry. Their sister has

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121 Van Wolde, “Sentiments as Culturally Constructed Emotions,” 10. The brothers’ revenge certainly is not immediate, contra van Wolde’s assertion. Rather, it is carefully calculated. Initially, they deceive the Shechemites. They demand that they become circumcised, meaning that Shechem experiences pain on the same bodily organ with which he raped Dinah. After a period of time, Simeon and Levi take the city when the men are still in pain and unable to defend themselves. The revenge is not immediate, but designed to inflict the maximum damage on the maximum number of people. Cf. Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 466-467.

122 There is considerable debate over how to translate the verb भिष्क in v. 2. For an overview, see Brett, *Genesis*, 101-103. On the one hand, it could refer to rape (cf. NRSV’s “lay with her by force”). On the other hand, it could mean simply “to disgrace.” This interpretation suggests that Shechem, perhaps by virtue of being uncircumcised (cf. v. 14), has brought dishonor upon Dinah and her family by sleeping with her. I am sympathetic with those like Susanne Scholz, “Was It Really Rape in Genesis 34? Biblical Scholarship as a Reflection of Cultural Assumptions,” in *Escaping Eden: New Feminist Perspectives on the Bible*, ed. Harold C. Washington, Susan Lochrie Graham, and Pamela Thimmes (Washington Square, N.Y.: New York University Press, 1999), 182-198, who argue that the text depicts rape. At the same time, I do recognize a degree of ambiguity in the text, which makes possible other interpretations, such as that offered by Lyn M. Bechtel, “What If Dinah Is Not Raped? (Genesis 34),” *JSOT* 62 (1994): 19-36.
been severely mistreated, and the entire clan has been disgraced. Even the narrator explicitly condemns Shechem’s treatment of Dinah (Gen 34:7), which is remarkable, given the rarity with which the narrator of Genesis offers explicit evaluations of events. Unless one assumes a position of extreme Stoicism, anger appears as a natural response to what Shechem has done. The brothers cannot be faulted for becoming angry.

What, then, should one make of the brothers’ actions? Is it fair to say that the behavior stemming from their anger is irrational? While many have joined Baloian and van Wolde in answering affirmatively, there are several reasons to be cautious about

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123 Gen 34:7 reads, “They were exceedingly angry, for he committed an outrage in Israel by lying with Jacob’s daughter, for such a thing ought not to be done” (NRSV). The language of “outrage” and the concluding clause “Such a thing ought not to be done” are clear and explicit condemnations on the narrator’s part. Frequently, evaluations from the narrator are more indirect, for example, spoken by characters within the story. Other times, they are missing altogether. Thus, Sternberg refers to the “scarcity of evaluation on the narrator’s part” (Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, esp. 54). Similarly, Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), esp. 184, draws the following conclusion:

The Bible’s highly laconic mode of narration may often give the impression of presenting the events virtually without mediation: so much, after all, is conveyed through dialogue, with only the minimal ‘he said’ to remind us of a narrator’s presence; and even outside of dialogue, what is often reported is absolutely essential action, without obtrusive elaboration or any obvious intervention by the narrator. Against this norm, we should direct special attention to those moments when the illusion of unmediated action is manifestly shattered.

The narrator’s statements that Shechem “committed an outrage” and “This should not happen” shatter the narrator’s typical silence. They forcefully demonstrate the narrator’s judgment, lest there be any ambiguity.

seeing the brothers’ actions as fundamentally irrational. First, Naomi Segal has questioned whether in fact one should “‘automatically’ judge rape as a much lesser crime than massacre.” Such judgment, she asserts, reflects patriarchal assumptions that fail to do full justice to the degree of trauma involved in the act of rape, ignoring the abuse of autonomy, body, and will that this act entails for its sufferers.125 Second, throughout the Hebrew Bible, many individuals, including God, maintain on a wide range of occasions that punishment must come not only against the evildoer but also against the entire community, presumably for its complacency in allowing the evildoing to occur.126 Levi and Simeon appear to display the same type of logic. Third, it is obvious from Gen 34:30 that if Simeon and Levi killed only Shechem and not all the male inhabitants of the city, the two brothers would soon face bodily harm over their punishment of the Shechemites’ chief prince.127 If any retribution is to take place, then those who punish Shechem must be willing either to kill or be killed. Finally, the last verse of the chapter clearly suggests that from Simeon and Levi’s perspective, their actions are defensible. When Jacob scolds his sons and points to the life-threatening consequences, the two brothers remain steadfast, asking, “Should he make a whore out of our sister?” (לְהַעֲמָד נְתוֹנָה אִשָּׂה). The narrator allows the episode to end with this question unanswered and unchallenged,


126 Thus, in Gen 18:16-33, God is portrayed as having few qualms about destroying all of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham bargains with the deity, eventually getting the divine being to agree not to destroy the cities if ten innocent people are therein. Even then, the text implies (or at least leaves open the possibility) that nine innocent people could be killed with the guilty.

127 If there is any truth in Jacob’s comment that the Canaanites and Perizzites may assemble against him in reaction to the slaughter, then certainly the Hivites, if they were not wiped out, would pose an even more likely threat.
suggesting there is some degree of logic in what the brothers assert.\textsuperscript{128} It is thus questionable, if not doubtful, that the brothers have “lost all rational control,” as van Wolde maintains.

The point of the preceding discussion is not that the just punishment for rape is the slaughter of an entire city. Rather, the point is that characterizing the brothers’ response as irrational fails to do justice to the text. The chapter as a whole raises a series of challenging questions for readers that become obscured when the brothers’ anger is quickly dismissed as irrational. At its heart, the text asks its readers, What is the proper response to sexual violence? What should one do when a family member has been disgraced and there are no good options for punishing the wrongdoer? How does one exact justice in the absence of possibilities commensurate with the offence? If one sides with Jacob and does little or nothing, then how does one reply to the brothers’ unanswered question? This chapter is more concerned with deep reflection on these types of questions than with tidy solutions. When readers dismiss the brothers’ action as driven by irrational anger, however, these enormously weighty and complex questions quickly lose their evocative power. Then, the story merely tells Western readers what they already know: emotions are irrational.

When considering claims that biblical emotions are irrational, it is useful to remember the words of Catherine Lutz: “In subtle ways, … the non-West has been constructed in the emotional image of the West—as emotionally almost indistinguishable

\textsuperscript{128} Granted, these words eventually are challenged in Gen 49:6-7, where Jacob condemns the anger of Simeon and Levi. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that Gen 34 concludes with the brothers’ question unanswered for much of the remainder of the book. Furthermore, one should note that in Gen 49:6-7, the brothers’ anger is condemned because of its intensity, not because of its irrationality.
from the West.”129 Edward Said makes similar points describing the Western tendency to cast the Orient in its own image, seeing Oriental concepts as “repetitious pseudo-incarnations” of Western ideals.130 Something quite similar takes place when biblical interpreters, rather than interpreting the text on its own terms with its own integrity, envision biblical anger under the darkness of Plato’s long shadow. Biblical anger may be linked to sin, but it is not linked to false dichotomies invented by the West. Imposing Western categories on an ancient Near Eastern text adds more casualties to the already violent act of translation. Rather than embodying careful exegesis, it exemplifies the problems with Orientalist discourse characterized by Said. As we shall see in the next chapter, biblical anger clearly has its set of associated commonplaces, but irrationality is not among them.

2.5 Conclusion

At several points, the preceding discussion noted that Mikhail Bakhtin has become a useful dialogue partner for biblical scholars. When considering one’s general orientation to language in the Hebrew Bible, Bakhtin’s colleague V. N. Voloshinov provides a useful model. The Russian linguist boldly rejects both abstract objectivism and individualistic subjectivism. In typical Bakhtinian fashion, he also steers away from a golden mean between the two, calling instead for a “negation of both thesis and

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129 Lutz, *Unnatural Emotions*, 218-219. Note also page 54, where she writes, “the Euramerican construction of emotion … unconsciously serves as a normative device for judging the mental health of culturally different people.”

antithesis alike.” He makes a case for a “dialectical synthesis” that sees language as a fundamentally social enterprise that cannot be abstracted from its context or reduced to the individual psyche. He asserts that “each and every word” fully integrates the ideological values and assumptions of its culture.\textsuperscript{131}

This general approach to language is quite helpful when considering the language used to express and describe emotion. Emotions are not objective entities whose qualities, divisions, and associative networks are self-evident to all peoples in all cultures. Nor are emotions so specific to individuals that interpreters must psychoanalyze particular characters. Rather, terms for emotions are given their meaning by the communities whose lives they characterize. They may have biological bases and individual groundings, but they are first and foremost social constructions. Contexts—cultural, linguistic, and textual—imbue terms for emotion with an array of meanings, associations, and implications. Language, the lifeblood of culture, carries the values attached to emotions.

Failing to recognize the social function of language can quickly lead to disastrous consequences. When interpreters extract emotion concepts from one socio-linguistic context and simplistically transport them to another, then the source text becomes a hollow shell filled by the values and assumptions of the target audience. Then words like \textit{irrational} enter commentaries, even though they do little more than distract readers from the text itself. Translators may never produce a casualty-free text—wounds and scarring will undoubtedly be present. At the same time, translators have the ethical responsibility

\textsuperscript{131} Voloshinov, “‘Language, Speech, and Utterance’ and ‘Verbal Interaction.’” The first quotation in this paragraph is from page 126, the second from page 138. Key summaries are found on 125, 139, and 140. See esp. 131 for a discussion that relates directly to emotion.
of avoiding the destruction of key elements in the text they translate. The Hebrew Bible has much to teach audiences today, but these audiences will learn little if they do not understand the text on its own terms.
3. Envisioning Another Landscape: Biblical Anger’s Associative Networks

Using the approach outlined in the previous chapter, this chapter critiques the most recent studies of anger in the Hebrew Bible. These studies tend to employ the methodology of cognitive linguistics, especially with respect to prototype theory and conceptual metaphor. This chapter assesses the usefulness of such methods and the accuracy of the conclusions that biblical scholars reach using them. It finds that while these methods have some promise, there are problems with how biblical scholars have employed them. As with characterizations of biblical anger as irrational, those using these approaches have tended to impose Western ideas about emotions onto the biblical text. This chapter presents an alternate approach to prototype theory and cognitive metaphor, reaching conclusions that explain anger in the Bible on its own terms. In so doing, it describes the associative networks of this emotion.

3.1 Prototype Theory

Cognitive linguistics is a cross-disciplinary field that draws on both cognitive science and linguistics, as well as related fields such as psychology. One important area of cognitive linguistic research is prototype theory, which examines the processes of categorization that take place within the mind. Prototype theory owes much to Wittgenstein’s discussion of “family resemblances” (*Familienähnlichkeiten*). Wittgenstein, while explaining the category of “language,” observes that frequently a mental category will not have a single defining quality that characterizes every member
of the category. Yet there are sufficient similarities between the various members to justify the categorization. In this sense, he observes, members of a category are much like members of a family: they may not all have the same “build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc.,” but these various characteristics “overlap and criss-cross in the same way” so that one can see clear resemblances between people in the same family.¹

Building on this idea, prototype theorists argue that individuals do not always have sharp categories that include and exclude membership on the basis of a definitive collection of essential and required characteristics.² Rather, the mind often operates with what have been called “fuzzy sets,” that is, “class[es] without sharp boundaries, in which there is a gradual but specifiable transition from membership to nonmembership.”³ In these cases, the mind tends to see several types of members in a set:

1. **Prototypical Members:** These members are the most **central** and the most **representative** members of the class.

2. **Non-prototypical but Established Members:** These members are seen as less **central**. They lack key features that make them representative of the set, but they are still clearly within the category.

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² An example of a sharp set would be integers. Members of this set are defined by whether or not they are fractions or include fractions. Whereas many technical categories are sharp categories, many conceptual categories are not governed by definitive characteristics such as these.

3. **Marginal members:** These members are deemed to have *peripheral* status, being considered members by some people but not by others.

The following chart (Table 2) lists several examples of members within prototypical categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Prototypical Member(s)</th>
<th>Less Central Member(s)</th>
<th>Marginal Member(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Kitchen Chair</td>
<td>Reclining Armchair, Wheelchair, Highchair</td>
<td>Barstool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>Football, Baseball, Basketball</td>
<td>Volleyball, Wrestling</td>
<td>Bowling, Ping Pong, Jumping Rope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canon</td>
<td>Books of the Torah</td>
<td>Judges, Obadiah, Proverbs</td>
<td>The Apocrypha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion</td>
<td>Love, Anger, Sadness, Fear</td>
<td>Anxiety, Bliss</td>
<td>Discomfort, Nostalgia, Vanity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As these examples illustrate, the prototypical members have key characteristics that allow them to be seen as the best representatives of a given category. When individuals are

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5 Eleanor Rosch, “Cognitive Representatives of Semantic Categories,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 104, no. 3 (1975): 192-233. See esp. 229-233 for a list of how members of each category were ranked.


Many other examples could be given from the field of biblical studies. It is very difficult, for example, to define “proverb.” Carol A. Newsom, “Spying out the Land: A Report from Genology,” in *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Ronald L. Troxel, Kelvin G. Friebel, and Dennis R. Magary (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2005), passim, does a fine job applying the findings of prototype theory to the study of biblical genres.

confronted with incomplete information about an object, they tend to assign to it features that are consistent with the prototypical members of its category.\(^8\)

As the final example in the chart above suggests, prototype theory has proven especially useful for those working with emotions. The term *emotion* is a notoriously slippery term. As Fehr and Russell put it, “Everyone knows what an emotion is, until asked to give a definition.”\(^9\) Some have even called for a technical redefinition of *emotion* that admittedly stands at variance with current usage.\(^10\) Those working with prototype theory have come to recognize that the inability to define *emotion* by outlining a list of universal characteristics results from its constituting a fuzzy set. They have also come to see the basic emotions, such as *love, joy, anger, sadness*, and *fear*, as likewise constituting prototypical categories. Thus, a large range of experiences can be classified within the basic-level term *anger* (e.g., *outrage, fury, aggravation, annoyance, abhorrence*), even if one has difficulty finding a definitive and complete list of characteristics that accounts for all of these types of experiences.\(^11\) They bear a family resemblance to one another without meeting a single set of defining criteria.

Prototype theorists have taken a farther step, describing prototypical scenarios in which particular emotions arise, as well as less representative scenarios in which they

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may take place. These prototypical scenarios are called *schemas*, *scripts*, or *stereotypes*. While descriptions of these scenarios vary, George Lakoff and Zoltan Kövecses have offered one of the most popular accounts of anger’s prototypical script. They argue that while there are many possible accounts of how anger operates, the prototypical one most prevalent in American English involves the following five stages:

*Stage 1:* The self is wronged.

*Stage 2:* The self experiences physiological symptoms and the desire for retribution.

*Stage 3:* The self attempts to control anger.

*Stage 4:* The self fails to control anger and exhibits angry behavior.

*Stage 5:* The self enacts retribution against the offender in order to assuage anger.

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13 Shaver et al., “Emotion Knowledge,” 1061. For an excellent discussion of script theory, see Russell, “Culture and the Categorization of Emotions,” 442-444. Kövecses, “Introduction: Language and Emotion Concepts,” esp. 10, describes prototypical accounts of emotional scripts this way: “The structure of most emotion concepts is seen as a highly conventionalized script from which deviations are recognized and linguistically marked in any given culture.”


Lakoff and Kövecses are not claiming that every instance of anger follows these five steps. Nor are they claiming that this account aligns with a universal psychosomatic process. Rather, they maintain that the above scenario is (perhaps on unconscious levels) understood within American culture as being the natural one against which other types of anger can be compared. It is a “folk theory” commonly assumed in how the American English language is used.

Lakoff and Kövecses argue that there are various terms that this language employs to describe deviations from the prototypical case. With *insatiable anger*, the variance from the prototypical scenario pertains to Stage 5: an act of retribution takes place, but the anger does not dissipate. In contrast, with *explosive anger*, Stage 3 (self-control) is bypassed, and the self moves directly from the physiological experience of anger (Stage 2) to the exhibition of angry behavior (Stage 4). To name a final example, with *cool anger*, there are no physiological effects (no Stage 2) and anger is controlled (no Stage 4).16

Ellen van Wolde has played a key role appropriating this work in biblical studies.17 She recounts Kövecses’ model of anger in American English. Then, she

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examines the prototypical model of anger in Japanese as an additional point of comparison. Drawing on the work of Keiko Matsuki,\textsuperscript{18} she describes how the Japanese language associates anger with various bodily locales: it begins in the belly, *hara* (not to be confused with the Hebrew *härā*), where it is controllable; can boil over into the chest, *mune*, where it can still be controlled; and reaches its height when it enters the head, *atama*, where control is lost. Van Wolde turns next to the Hebrew Bible’s prototypical account of anger. She argues that it consists of four stages:

- **Stage 1:** Report of an offence or offending event
- **Stage 2:** Anger takes over and burning heat immediately rises to the head
- **Stage [3]:** Loss of control and incontrollable fury
- **Stage [4]:** Act of retribution.\textsuperscript{19}

Van Wolde draws a sharp contrast between this script of anger and the Japanese model. Whereas there are Japanese terms like *hara* (“belly”) and *mune* (“chest”) to refer to controlled anger, van Wolde asserts that Biblical Hebrew sees anger moving immediately to the head ( returnUrl). Consequently, she characterizes biblical anger as “an overflowing, incontrollable fury.”\textsuperscript{20} Marshalling examples like Gen 34 (see §2.4), she claims that irrationality and uncontrollability are prototypical characteristics of anger in the Hebrew

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\textsuperscript{19} These stages are a direct quotation of van Wolde, “Sentiments as Culturally Constructed Emotions,” 13. See also van Wolde, “Language of Sentiment.” One should note that Lakoff and Kövecses’ model of *explosive anger* is essentially the same as the one presented here by van Wolde. See Lakoff and Kövecses, “The Cognitive Model of Anger,” 210-216.

Bible. She sees biblical anger as almost identical to American anger—only less controlled.

While van Wolde moves in the right direction by seeking to apply the findings of prototype theory to the Hebrew Bible, she makes several erroneous assumptions and interpretive moves. In particular, van Wolde here conflates the notion of anger in the Hebrew Bible with Japanese and American models. Simply because Japanese links facially located anger with a lack of control does not mean that Biblical Hebrew does. Cross-cultural studies have shown that many languages associate anger with the face and nose. Such an association need not imply a lack of control simply because it does in Japanese. Moreover, van Wolde’s use of biblical evidence is not comprehensive. Rather, it consists of illustrations that are not always compelling. For example, Gen 34 is one of her chief examples, and it does not show subjects moving immediately from anger to violent actions. Rather, it shows characters willing to wait in order to carry out angry actions in carefully calculated ways. Interpreters need a different approach than what van Wolde offers.

21 Van Wolde, “Sentiments as Culturally Constructed Emotions,” 12, 14, 16, 22; van Wolde, “Language of Sentiment.”

22 Thus, as she admits, her script of anger in the Hebrew Bible is the same as that offered by Kövecses for American anger, except that it lacks Kövecses’ “Stage 3” where the angry person attempts to control the emotion (Van Wolde, “Sentiments as Culturally Constructed Emotions,” 13).

3.2 The Prototypical Understanding of Human Anger in the Hebrew Bible

To arrive at a better understanding of the prototypical script of human anger in the Hebrew Bible, it is necessary to examine (1) what tends to cause anger, (2) who tends to become angry, (3) with whom or what they tend to become angry, (4) what they tend to do while angry, and (5) how this emotion tends to be evaluated. The discussion below focuses on human anger, rather than divine anger, for several reasons. First, as mentioned above (§1.6), Genesis contains no instances of actualized, explicit anger on the part of God. It is focused on human anger, as is this dissertation. Second, a number of studies have shown that emotion scripts vary depending on features like context. There are indications that the prototypical script for divine anger differs from human anger in the Hebrew Bible. For example, voices within the biblical text frequently censure human anger, but not divine wrath. Third and finally, many studies of divine anger have already been conducted. The need among present scholarship is for additional attention to human anger.


25 For an excellent overview of these sources, see Kotzé, “Research on the Emotion of Anger,” 844-847. For one of the most recent and most comprehensive sources, see Baloian, Anger in the Old Testament, 65-179, 192-210. Note, however, that Baloian prefers to characterize divine anger with the category of rationality.
3.2.1 Causes of Anger

A useful place to begin when discerning the prototypical script of human anger in the Hebrew Bible is anger’s causes. Many interpreters suggest that frustration is the primary reason for human anger in the Hebrew Bible. Thus, Baloian argues that frustration, along with pride and injustice, is a key cause. Van Wolde does not use the word *frustration* but clearly refers to this concept when she argues, “The sentiment of anger [in the Hebrew Bible] arises when someone or something interferes with the deity’s plans or with someone’s plans or with His/his attainment of previously set goals.” Krüger likewise sees frustration as the key cause of biblical anger, particularly when plans are thwarted. While these interpreters are not necessarily wrong in pointing to frustration as anger’s prototypical cause, there is a problem here. The word *frustration* is a vague word that can describe a variety of negative emotions. For example, one can feel sad or ashamed when something interferes with the fulfillment of a goal. The suggestion that anger is caused by frustration does not add a great deal of clarity to our understanding of the prototypical script behind anger in the Hebrew Bible.

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27 Van Wolde, “Language of Sentiment.”


29 Bryan J. Dik, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, Colorado State University, Personal Communication, Aug. 6, 2007.

30 The same is true of the claim by Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), esp. 1:259, that “With God, as with men, anger primarily refers to any sort of displeasure and the venting of that displeasure regardless of its particular causes.” This definition is likewise vague, as displeasure can result not only in anger, but also in fear, sadness, and shame.
Can the interpreter be more specific? On the one hand, there are many texts where the cause of anger is unclear, such as a number of Proverbs that talk of anger on a generic level and do not reveal anger’s precise cause. Hence, Prov 16:14 says simply, “The anger of a king is a messenger of death. The wise person will appease it.” Here, the discourse is not particularly concrete; it speaks of kings in general, not one in particular. Amid these generalities, the cause of anger is unknown. On other occasions, the text is more concrete, but the cause of anger still remains unclear. For example, Amos 1:11 denounces the anger of Edom and seems to be alluding to a particular historical incident. However, the text does not state what specifically sparked Edom’s anger. Even if biblical narrators are omniscient, they do not reveal all of their knowledge to readers.

While it is necessary to admit that the cause of biblical anger is unknown in many cases, the majority of texts do explain the basis for anger. In these cases, nearly every instance bears a point of commonality: anger results from a perceived wrongdoing. Here, the word perceived is crucial. It suggests that one must consider the perspective of the individual who is angry, rather than adopting an exterior perspective. For example, Potiphar becomes angry with Joseph because he perceives that Joseph has done something wrong, even though he is innocent (Gen 39:19).

31 Several of these texts speak of individuals who generally are angry or who are quick to anger. A number of these texts also speak of fools becoming angry. While internal factors such as foolishness can contribute to the likelihood of becoming angry, external environmental triggers play a highly significant role (and these texts do not adequately describe the external environment). Cf. Lutz, Unnatural Emotions, 102-103.

32 As Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative, 158, puts it, “We are never in serious doubt that the biblical narrator knows all there is to know about the motives and feelings, the moral and spiritual condition of his characters, but, as we have seen on repeated occasions, he is highly selective about sharing this omniscience with his readers.”
Within the broad category of *perceived wrongdoing*, there are many subtypes:

1. Many cases of anger stem from the perception of an interpersonal wrong, such as Jacob’s stealing his brother’s blessing (Gen 27:41-45).

2. On other occasions, the wrongdoing is less on the interpersonal level and more on the intertribal or international level, as when Saul becomes enraged at Nahash’s threat to gouge the eye of each male inhabitant of Jabesh-Gilead (1 Sam 11:1-6).  

3. Another very prominent cause of anger is the perception of insubordination, such as Vashti’s refusal to come to the king when ordered (Esth 1:12). In fact, biblical characters are so aware that perceived insubordination can cause anger that subordinates frequently request that their superiors not become angry when they initiate a line of conversation, as when Judah unwittingly approaches his brother in Egypt and asks that this high official not be angered by his speaking with him (Gen 44:18).

4. At times, people also become angry at religious wrongdoings, such as Moses’ anger when he descends Mount Sinai (Exod 32:19, 22).

5. Finally, there are other types of perceived wrongdoings that do not fit as easily under one of the other sub-categories, such as David’s anger at

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33 Baloian characterizes a significant portion of human anger in the Bible as battle rage. See Baloian, *NIDOTTE* 4:379. Many of these cases of intertribal or international anger do result in battle and can be seen in this light.
YHWH for killing Uzzah after he touched the ark of the covenant (2 Sam 6:8; 1 Chr 13:11).\textsuperscript{34}

### Table 3: The Causes of Anger

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Interpersonal Wrongdoing</th>
<th>Wrongdoing between Peoples</th>
<th>Insubordination/Inappropriate Requests\textsuperscript{35}</th>
<th>Religious Wrongdoing</th>
<th>Other Wrongdoing</th>
<th>Cause of Anger Unclear or Not Mentioned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

\textsuperscript{34} On a similar note, Bergman and Johnson, \textit{TDOT} 1:356, write, “The reason for human anger can be that someone has been treated unjustly…, that one sees how other men are exploited…, or that one’s fellow men manifest disobedience or unbelief in God…. [T]here are also some passages in the OT that speak of men becoming angry with God.” These remarks are on target, but more could be said about insubordination. Like Bergman and Johnson, Baloian, \textit{NIDOTTE} 4:380, points to injustice as a key motivation for anger. However, he is resistant to seeing a perceived injustice as always lying behind anger (ibid., 379).

\textsuperscript{35} Some individuals, especially prophets, are in an ambiguous position regarding issues of subordination. On the one hand, they represent God and therefore can expect others to be subordinate to them (e.g., Moses’ expectations with Pharaoh, Exod 11:8). On the other hand, those in positions of military or state authority sometimes see prophets as mere humans and therefore expect them to be subordinate to themselves (e.g., Namaan and Elisha, 2 Kgs 5:12). Cases of ambiguous insubordination are marked with an asterisk (*).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Interpersonal Wrongdoing</th>
<th>Wrongdoing between Peoples</th>
<th>Insubordination / Inappropriate Requests</th>
<th>Religious Wrongdoing</th>
<th>Other Wrongdoing</th>
<th>Cause of Anger Unclear or Not Mentioned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ınd / הוד</td>
<td>Gen 31:36; 34:7; 39:19; 45:5; 1 Sam 17:28; 20:34; 2 Sam 12:5; 13:21; Job 32:3, 5; Neh 5:6</td>
<td>Judges 14:19; 1 Sam 11:6; Neh 3:33 (4:1 Eng.); 4:1 (4:7 Eng.)</td>
<td>Gen 30:2; 31:35; 44:18; Exodus 11:8*; Num 16:15; 22:27; 24:10; Judges 9:30; 1 Sam 18:8; 20:7; 30; 2 Sam 3:8*</td>
<td>Exodus 32:19, 22; 1 Sam 15:11; Job 32:2</td>
<td>Gen 4:5-6 (inequality); 2 Sam 6:8 (killing of Uzzah); 19:42 (inequality); Jonah 4:1, 4, 9 (lack of punishment, graciousness); Ps 37:1, 7-8 (evildoers prosper); Prov 24:19 (general evildoing); 1 Chr 13:11 (killing of Uzzah); 2 Chr 25:10 (broken agreement)</td>
<td>Isa 7:4; 41:11; 45:24; Ps 124:3; Song 1:6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>סנה / סנה</td>
<td>Neh 3:33 (4:1 Eng.)</td>
<td>2 Chronicles 16:10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Deut 32:27; Prov 12:16; 17:25; 27:3; Job 5:2; Ecclesiastes 5:17; 7:9; 11:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>נשה / נשה (Hithpael)</td>
<td>Genesis 49:7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Isa 14:6; 16:6; Jeremiah 48:30; Amos 1:11; Proverbs 14:16; 20:2; 21:24; 26:17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>נשה</td>
<td>Genesis 40:2; 41:10; Exodus 16:20; Leviticus 10:16; Numbers 31:14; 1 Samuel 29:4; 2 Kings 5:11; 13:19*; Jeremiah 37:15*; Esther 1:12, 18</td>
<td>Genesis 40:2; 41:10; Exodus 16:20; Leviticus 10:16; Numbers 31:14; 1 Samuel 29:4; 2 Kings 5:11; 13:19*; Jeremiah 37:15*; Esther 1:12, 18</td>
<td></td>
<td>Isaiah 8:21 (inadequate provision by king and God)</td>
<td>Ecclesiastes 5:17; Esther 2:21</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>נשה</td>
<td>Genesis 45:24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Samuel 28:15 (disturbance, necromancy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>נשה</td>
<td>Genesis 27:41; 50:15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Genesis 49:23; Ps 55:3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 above lists all explicit references to human anger in the Hebrew Bible, categorizing these references according to their causes. As seen in this table, although biblical anger appears prototypically to be caused by a perceived wrongdoing, there are marginal examples of anger that do not meet this criterion. A key example is Dan 11:30, where Antiochus IV Epiphanes becomes enraged at “the holy covenant” after “ships from Kittim” come against him. In this instance, it is not clear how Antiochus perceived “the holy covenant” as involved in a wrongdoing (or even that he did). Prototypically, this case of apparently misplaced anger is a marginal example.

3.2.2 Objects of Anger

Given the preceding discussion of what causes human anger in the Hebrew Bible, one is not surprised that nearly every instance of human anger involves anger at a person or group of people, namely, the individuals who have committed the perceived wrongdoing. Thus, biblical anger can be described as both transitive and personal.36 Because most of the characters in the Hebrew Bible are males, anger tends to be directed toward males, though there are a few exceptions, such as Jacob’s anger at Rachel for making an inappropriate request (Gen 30:2; cf. Gen 31:35).

The instances where individuals are said to be angry at something other than a person or people are extremely rare and can be considered marginal members of this prototypical category. Dan 11:30 is again exceptional, being directed toward the holy

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covenant, rather than people specifically. Another exception is Num 22:27-30, where Balaam is angry at his disobedient donkey, though one should be quick to note that this donkey has some rather anthropomorphic qualities. There are also a few cases where anger is directed toward God. Most of these imply rather than make explicit that God is the object (Gen 4:5-6; 2 Sam 6:8; Isa 8:21; 45:24; Jer 15:17; Jon 4:1, 4, 9; 1 Chr 13:11). These examples are exceptions, rather than the norms. In almost all the other examples of anger in the Hebrew Bible, angry individuals direct their anger at other humans.

In the previous chapter, attention was drawn to the Ifaluk conception of anger (song), in particular its interpersonal qualities and its close connections with issues of right and wrong. With regard to the strong tendency for human anger in the Hebrew Bible to arise in response to a perceived wrongdoing and to be directed toward individuals, one can say that anger in the Hebrew Bible is more closely related to this Ifaluk understanding of song than to American English conceptions of anger. A number of Westerners conceive of anger as being triggered by impersonal events, such as technological devices failing to operate how one wishes they would. This Western

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37 It seems likely that Cain is angry both at YHWH for favoring Abel’s offering and at Abel for being favored. Cf. Bergman and Johnson, *TDOT* 1:356.

38 While it is possible that the verse refers to Jeremiah’s being filled with YHWH’s wrath against the people, the accusations he launches at YHWH in the following verse suggest that the prophet is filled with his own wrath against YHWH.

39 Contra the claim that “the OT never speaks of anyone becoming overtly angry towards God” (D. N. Freedman, J. R. Lundbom, and G. J. Botterweck, “דֶּרֶך, יָדֵי, מִשְׁמַר,” *TDOT* 5:171-176, esp. 5:176). In addition to the examples above, the complaint psalms obviously express anger toward God, at least on implicit levels (the typical terminology for anger is often missing).

40 Lutz, *Unnatural Emotions*, 155-182, esp. 178-182. One should note, however, that there are important differences between song and anger in the Hebrew Bible. For example, the former is marked by nonaggression whereas the latter is not.
understanding of anger contrasts sharply with the ethical and personal dimensions of the Hebrew Bible’s representations of anger.

3.2.3 Those Who Become Angry

The preceding discussion noted that biblical anger often arises in response to perceptions of insubordination. Not surprisingly, therefore, those who are angry in the Hebrew Bible frequently are those with power, status, and stature. There are even specific words for anger, primarily בּוֹרָב and רָע, that appear almost exclusively among officials and those with power. At the same time, the Hebrew Bible contains instances (albeit fairly small in number) where anger exists between equals, where inferiors are angry at their superiors, and where the power dynamics are unclear.41 Thus, anger in the Hebrew Bible is prototypically associated with those who have power, but power is not an essential characteristic of anger.

YHWH, who obviously has more power than humans do, tends to become angry more frequently than they do. According to Baloian’s calculations, roughly three-

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41 Some examples where the angry individuals seem to have roughly the same social standing as their objects include: Gen 45:5; Job 32:2, 32:3, 32:5. Some examples where an inferior is angry at a superior include: Gen 31:36; 1 Sam 20:34. These examples challenge the somewhat rigid language used by van Wolde to emphasize the hierarchical positions of those who are angry (although she mentions 1 Sam 20:34). She says, for example, that anger in the Hebrew Bible is ascribed “to YHWH and Elohim in relation to Israel, whereas it is never associated with Israel in relation to the deity” (van Wolde, “Sentiments as Culturally Constructed Emotions,” 16). A number of verses do express anger at YHWH, particularly 2 Sam 6:8; Isa 8:21, 45:24; Jon 4:1, 4:4, 4:9; 1 Chr 13:11; cf. Gen 4:5-6; Jer 15:17. Some examples where it is unclear whether the ones angry are socially superior to those with whom they are angry include: 1 Sam 11:6; Prov 22:24, 27:4, 29:22; 2 Chr 25:10.
quarters of the references to anger in the Hebrew Bible envision divine anger.\textsuperscript{42} In fact, some words for \textit{anger} appear exclusively or nearly exclusively in reference to divine anger, particularly \textit{יְרָע} and \textit{שָׁנַג}.\textsuperscript{43} However, one should be cautious about assuming that these words function similarly to \textit{סַב} (\textit{to create}), designating activity reserved for the divine. While that may be the case, there are other words from the same roots that refer to human anger, whereas \textit{סַב} in all its cognates refers to divine activity.\textsuperscript{44}

Throughout the Hebrew Bible, whenever an explicit reference is made to human anger, the one angry is always a male.\textsuperscript{45} Yet there are ways that the Hebrew Bible subtly allows for the expression of anger or anger-like emotion among women. Key examples from the book of Genesis are chapters 16 and 21, which do not use the typical terms for anger but nevertheless describe several distressing interactions between Sarai/h and Hagar. While the terminology for anger is missing, many of the fundamental characteristics of biblical anger are present here. Here, issues of wrongdoing (16:5; 21:9,

\textsuperscript{42} Baloian, \textit{Anger in the Old Testament}, esp. 189 asserts that 518 of 714 references to anger in the Hebrew Bible are references to divine anger, which is 72.5%. I disagree with some of the specifics of Baloian’s calculations. For example, he sees \textit{שָׁנַג} as referring to human anger only two times, whereas I believe it refers to human anger more frequently (see chart above). Nevertheless, his numbers provide useful ballpark estimates. Van Wolde, “Sentiments as Culturally Constructed Emotions,” 8, follows Baloian’s lead.

\textsuperscript{43} Bergman and Johnson, \textit{TDOT} 1:355-357; Baloian, \textit{Anger in the Old Testament}, 189.

\textsuperscript{44} Reference here is to \textit{סַב} meaning \textit{create} (\textit{BDB}, I), not its homophone \textit{סב}, which means \textit{be fat} (\textit{BDB}, II).

\textsuperscript{45} 1 Sam 1:6 is the one case sometimes mentioned as a reference to female anger in the Bible. The word used here is \textit{סב}, and as shown below, this word means \textit{to (be) trouble(d)} and is connected with anger only when a superior is troubled by an inferior. When Hannah, a barren woman, is troubled, she experiences not anger but anguish. (In Dan 8:6, a \textit{goat} [\textit{סב}] is angry, but 8:21 makes clear that the king of Greece is in view.)

This differentiation between male and female expressions of emotion is by no means confined to the Hebrew Bible. Kagan, \textit{What Is Emotion? History, Measures, and Meanings}, 152-166, observes that most cultures relate emotions differently to each gender. While cultural assumptions about the roles of women and men influence how emotions are conceived, Kagan suggests that biology plays a role as well.
11), jealousy (21:10; cf. 16:4-5; see below on the connections between jealousy and anger), authority and power (16:1-2, 9; 21:10), contempt (יָפָד, 16:4, 5), affliction (יָשָׁר, 16:6, 11), and mockery (רוּחַ, 21:9), together result in separation (16:6; 21:10, 14), a very common outcome of anger (§3.2.4). While the text may thus imply that anger exists among women, such an example is more on the margins of the prototypical category of biblical anger, lacking the particular terminology for anger.

### 3.2.4 Outcomes of Anger

Although anger can elicit a range of different behaviors, there are some that are especially prominent in the Hebrew Bible. The chart below (Table 4) classifies the outcomes of each explicit reference to human anger in the Hebrew Bible. In a number of these cases, more than one classification is possible. For example, nearly all of these outcomes involve an eventual separation of some sort, even if it is by death. Nevertheless, some obvious patterns emerge. Estrangement and violence are extremely common outcomes. Verbal confrontations and, to a lesser extent, punishments also emerge repeatedly. Other outcomes are more on the margins of this prototypical category, such as the odd reference to “tearing oneself in anger” (קָרַה יָדָיו) in Job 18:4.

46 Words used exclusively of divine anger (יָרֵעַ, יָרַע) are not listed here because the focus is on human anger. On an unrelated note, this method of working inductively from the textual evidence seems preferable to Krüger’s approach to describing the prototypical outcomes of anger, which takes as its point of departure an account of the prototypical responses to anger in Western culture and sees how the Hebrew Bible relates to them. See Krüger, “A Cognitive Interpretation of the Emotion of Anger in the Hebrew Bible,” 182.

### Table 4: The Outcomes of Anger

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Possible Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>לְאָכַל</td>
<td>Gen 27:45; 49:6-7; Exod 32:19, 22; Num 22:27; Judg 9:30; 14:19; 1 Sam 11:6; 20:30; 2 Sam 12:5; Isa 7:4; 14:6; 37:29; Ezek 23:25; 35:11; Amos 1:11; Ps 124:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>לֶאָכַל</td>
<td>Hos 7:16; Dan 11:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>לְאָכַל</td>
<td>2 Chr 28:9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>לְאָכַל</td>
<td>Gen 27:44; Isa 51:13; Prov 16:14; Job 19:29; Esth 3:5; 5:9; 7:7, 10; Dan 8:6; 11:44; cf. Prov 6:34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>לְאָכַל / לְאָכַל</td>
<td>Gen 4:5-6; 34:7; Exod 32:19, 22; Num 22:27; Judg 9:30; 14:19; 1 Sam 11:6; 18:8; 20:30; Ps 124:3; Neh 4:1 (4:7 Eng.); cf. Num 16:15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 4 is continued on the next page.)
Table 4: The Outcomes of Anger (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Possible Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>כתם / לוט</td>
<td>Deut 32:27; Job 5:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ענד</td>
<td>Num 31:14; Esth 2:21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>וינה</td>
<td>Gen 27:41; Ps 55:3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Previously, it was noted that Ellen van Wolde claims that a prototypical quality of human anger in the Hebrew Bible is its uncontrollability. She sees a direct movement from (1) the offence, to (2) “anger tak[ing] over,” to (3) a loss of control, to (4) an act of retribution. Based on the evidence compiled in the chart above, such claims of anger’s uncontrollability seem unfounded. Choosing to separate oneself from someone, deciding to engage someone in conversation (even if it is a harsh confrontation), or determining that someone deserves imprisonment are not the types of behaviors typically associated with a lack of control.
Are the cases of violence marked by a lack of control? Interestingly, the Hebrew Bible tends not to portray violence as immediately following anger as though the angry individuals have no control over their behaviors. Perhaps that is the case with the noun שׁעָד and the verb שׁעָד in the Hithpael, which usually refer to anger that displays a lack of restraint. However, these words are used only eleven times of human anger. In the Hebrew Bible as a whole, those who commit violence out of anger frequently exercise some level of control, rather than acting immediately. Thus, Esau decides to wait until after his father’s death before enacting violence (Gen 27:41-45). Similarly, when Moses witnesses the golden calf, his smashing of the tablets is immediate and perhaps uncontrolled, but his killing of others comes after he confronts Aaron and is apparently in accordance with what God has ordered him (Exod 32:27-28). Even with a despicable character like Haman, the text says specifically that he did not lose control while enraged (Esth 5:9-10, cf. 3:5-6). Of the 39 verses mentioned above where anger results in violence, there are only ten where the angry persons engage in behaviors that suggest a loss of control. In 19 of these verses, the angry individuals display signs of control.

48 In fact, it is the idolatrous people—not the angry Moses—whom the text describes as out of control (Exod 32:25).

49 Van Wolde, “Language of Sentiment,” is on shaky ground when she claims, “in the Hebrew Bible no mention is made of attempts to control the anger.” She bases her comments on the fact that Biblical Hebrew often portrays anger as fire. Fire, as is commonly recognized, can become uncontrollable, but it frequently is something that humans can and do control. In ancient times, fire was an everyday aspect of life that was controlled for the purposes of cooking. During war, uncontrolled fire was used to destroy enemy cities, but this type of scenario was not as frequently experienced. Built into the language of Biblical Hebrew is terminology portraying anger as that which can become uncontrollable, but it is not in essence uncontrollable. Hence, it is best to disagree with van Wolde’s argument that anger, by virtue of its metaphorical associations, should be seen as primarily uncontrollable.

50 Gen 49:6-7; Exod 32:19; Num 22:27; Judg 14:19; Isa 14:6; Amos 1:11; Ps 124:3; Esth 2:21; 2 Chr 28:9. Note that in Gen 49:6-7, from the perspective of Jacob on his deathbed, Levi and Simeon’s anger
contemplation, calculation, and/or confrontation prior to acting in violence.\textsuperscript{51} One thus can question van Wolde’s claim that “anger seems always to have the instant effect of destruction.”\textsuperscript{52} In the Hebrew Bible, human anger prototypically results in separation and violence, but it is not prototypically uncontrollable.

### 3.2.5 Evaluation

Because anger results so frequently in violence, the Hebrew Bible has a tendency to evaluate it negatively. Such evaluations are most explicit in Gen 4:6-7, Ps 37, and Wisdom Literature, especially Proverbs. Genesis 4:6-7 will be treated extensively below (§5.1, §8.6-§8.7). Here, one can simply note that in the first post-Edenic episode, God warns Cain of anger’s potentially disastrous consequences, associating it with sin (נָאָם). Meanwhile, Psalm 37 exhorts readers to avoid wickedness and wait upon YHWH, even when present circumstances may make alternatives seem better. Within this context, the first eight verses deal particularly with anger over the prosperity of the wicked. These verses reach their culmination in v. 8, “Let go of anger (זָאָם), and abandon wrath (נָאָם). Do not be upset (יָאָם, Hithpael). It leads only to evildoing (בָּאָם).”

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\textsuperscript{51} Gen 4:5-6; 27:45; 34:7; Exod 32:22; Num 16:15; 31:14; Judg 9:30; 1 Sam 11:6; 18:8; 20:30; 2 Sam 12:5; Dan 11:30; Esth 3:5; 5:9; 7:7, 10; Dan 11:44; Neh 4:1 (4:7 Eng.). There are also 10 cases where there is ambiguity about whether the person has lost control: Deut 32:27; Isa 37:29; 51:13; Ezek 23:25; 35:11; Hos 7:16; Job 5:2; Prov 6:34; 16:14; Dan 8:6.

\textsuperscript{52} Van Wolde, “Sentiments as Culturally Constructed Emotions,” 12.
Several proverbs also associate anger with evildoing and wickedness. Repeatedly, these sayings connect anger with foolishness, seeing it as a chief cause of strife. Not surprisingly, therefore, Proverbs urges people to be slow to anger or to turn it away. Proverbs such as 22:24 exhort individuals to avoid those who become angry. Here, Proverbs echoes sentiments found in the wider ancient Near East. Like much of Prov 22-23, Prov 22:24 displays signs of borrowing from the Instruction of Amenemope. The Egyptian text, likely from the Ramesside period, speaks repeatedly of the “heated man,” an angry individual who is portrayed as causing harm to himself and those who come into contact with him (see esp. chs. 2-4, 9-10, 12). Like Proverbs, the Instruction of Amenemope urges individuals to avoid those who are quick to become angry. Both the Hebrew Bible and other ancient Near Eastern texts understand anger not only to be caused by wrongdoing, but also to result in additional wrongdoing (cf. discussion of \[\pi\][\nu]: in §3.3.2).

When the Hebrew Bible gives an explicit evaluation of human anger, therefore, it prototypically is negative. However, several qualifications need to be added. First, anger

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54 References to foolishness include: Prov 12:16; 14:16, 17, 29; 17:25; 19:3; 27:3; 29:9; cf. Job 5:2; Prov 29:8; Eccl 7.9. References to strife include: Prov 15:18; 21:19; 26:17; 29:22; 30:33; cf. §3.3.7.

55 References to being slow to anger include Prov 16:32; 19:11; 25:15; cf. §3.3.9. References to turning it away include Prov 15:1; 29:8; cf. Prov 21:14; 29:11; Eccl 11:10.

56 COS, 1.47:115-122. For commentary, see Lichtheim, Moral Values in Ancient Egypt, 42-43.

57 While the Instruction of Amenemope presents a striking example, it is not alone in its attitudes toward anger. The Instruction of Ptahhotep specifically warns against anger on several occasions (Battiscombe G. Gunn, ed., The Instruction of Ptah-hotep and The Instruction of Ke'gemni: The Oldest Books in the World [London: John Murray, 1906], esp. 42-43, 46; §2-4, 25). As one author puts it with respect to Egyptian literature, “A quick temper is stigmatized from the earliest teaching (e.g., Ptahhotep 18:12) to the latest” (Bergman and Johnson, TDOT 1:349).
is not always seen negatively. For example, the anger of King Ahasuerus toward Haman appears justified and appropriate within the narrative framework of Esther (Esth 7:7-10). Furthermore, the character most frequently angry in the Hebrew Bible is YHWH, and a number of texts claim that even if divine anger is horrifying, it is also an appropriate expression of justice. Similarly, anger among rulers tends either to receive no explicit evaluation or to be seen positively. It appears to fall in a different sort of category than typical human anger.

This point leads to a second qualification. While human anger tends to be seen negatively when an explicit evaluation is given, most texts do not give an explicit evaluation. Anger is presented, instead, as a typical part of human existence. It is an emotion that inevitably arises in the course of everyday experience. Hence, many of the texts evaluating anger negatively do not advocate the outright eradication of anger, but rather being slow to anger (e.g., Prov 16:32; 19:11; 25:15) or guarding against the sin to which anger can lead (e.g., Gen 4:6-7). Baloian correctly observes, “It is assumed that

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58 K.-D. Schunck, “המבא,” TDOT 4:462-465, esp. 4:463-464, may overstate the case when asserting, “To the extent that a judgment is expressed, human chēmāh is always evaluated negatively.”

59 E.g., Ezek 7:8; Ps 7:12 (7:11 Eng.). Cf. Bergman and Johnson, TDOT 1:359-360.

60 E.g., Prov 14:35; 16:14; 19:12; 20:2; see also 1 Sam 11:6; 2 Sam 12:5. As noted above, a number of sources suggest that emotion scripts can vary, depending upon factors like context. See Fitness, “Anger in the Workplace,” esp. 148-149; Griffiths, What Emotions Really Are, esp. 177; Kövecses, Metaphor and Emotion, 13. This evaluative variance in the Hebrew Bible between typical anger and kingly anger is similar to variances elsewhere in the ancient Near East. In Egypt, great stress was placed on controlling anger in interpersonal settings. As mentioned above, the Instruction of Amenemope draws a sharp contrast between the “heated,” angry person and the “silent,” less emotional person, clearly commending the latter (COS 1.47:115-122). The king, on the other hand, is frequently portrayed positively as a lion enraged against his enemies, particularly in the Great Karnak Inscription and in texts associated with Ramesses III (Brent A. Strawn, What Is Stronger than a Lion? Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East [Fribourg: Academic Press, 2005], esp. 177).
people will become angry in their daily experience; the clear admonition is against a quick response.\(^{61}\)

One final qualification is in order. It is not always useful to categorize human anger with a simple *positive* or *negative* evaluation. Texts, particularly narratives, often communicate a great deal of complexity concerning the situations at hand. For example, consider Esau’s anger toward Jacob. This anger clearly causes the older brother to plan fratricide (Gen 27:41-45), and murder is condemned throughout the Hebrew Bible, including several times in Genesis (e.g., 9:5-6). In this sense, Esau’s anger is obviously negative. But on the other hand, both Esau and his dying father have been deceived and robbed of what is most precious to them. Only someone who is morally numb would fail to feel some level of anger toward Jacob and Rebecca for their actions.\(^{62}\) In this sense, anger is a natural extension of one’s moral sensitivities, which obviously are positive qualities. With situations such as this one, anger cannot be classified according to established dichotomies like *good* and *bad*, *right* and *wrong*, *positive* and *negative*. While anger may prototypically be associated with evildoing and generate many proverbial warnings, it cannot be quickly dismissed as inherently evil without overlooking the complexities of life.


3.2.6 The Prototypical Script

To summarize the above findings, it is useful to recall the three types of membership in a prototypical category: prototypical members (e.g., kitchen chair), established but non-prototypical members (e.g., swivel chair), and marginal members (e.g., barstool). Most of the components of anger have similar types of members:

- **Cause:** Anger almost always is caused by a perceived wrongdoing.
  - Prototypically, these perceived wrongdoings occur in cases of interpersonal wrongdoing including cases of perceived insubordination.
  - It is not unusual for these perceived wrongdoings to occur between groups of people or with respect to religious activities.
  - The case of Antiochus IV Epiphanes’ anger toward the holy covenant (Dan 11:30) is a more marginal member of this category: it is not clear that his anger is caused by a perceived wrongdoing.

- **Object:** Anger is almost always directed toward the person(s) responsible for the perceived wrongdoing.
  - Prototypically, these people are males.
  - At times, women are also the objects of anger.
  - The case of Balaam’s anger toward his donkey (Num 22:27-30) is closer to the margins of this category, as are instances of anger toward God.

- **Subject:** Those who become angry are almost always male characters.
  - Prototypically, they possess a degree of power.
At times, however, they possess the same or even less power than those with whom they are angry.

Instances where the text hints that female characters are angry (Gen 16, 21) are marginal members of this category.

Result: Anger almost always entails a separation of some sort.

Prototypically, it results in violence and then separation.

It is not uncommon, however, for separation to take place without violence, or for verbal confrontation and/or punishments to take place as well.

Job 18:4 speaks of “tearing oneself in anger” (מַגֵּז אֵל). While there is ambiguity about what this phrase means, it appears to suggest anger directed toward oneself rather than others, which would give this outcome a more marginal status.

Evaluation: Anger almost always involves something negative.

Prototypically, texts with explicit evaluations of anger encourage individuals to dissociate themselves from anger and angry people when they can.

There are also many texts that suggest anger is not entirely negative. For example, it can be, and often is, motivated by one’s moral sensitivities. There are obvious ethical dimensions of anger, given its prototypical cause.

Kingly anger appears to fall in a different category where anger is often seen as appropriate (cf. divine anger).
3.3 *Words that Commonly Appear with Anger*

This section examines the words that appear most frequently with words for anger. The findings here both confirm the above conclusions about anger’s prototypical script and shed additional light on the associative networks of anger in the Hebrew Bible. The words with the strongest tendencies to appear with terms for anger include: [1] עֵנָּה (jealousy); [2] words related to the more extreme forms of violence, particularly, קָILL (kill), שְׁמֵר (utter destruction), מִדְמַס (annihilate), and הָלָל (finish); [3] words derived from the root בֵּש (bad, evil, calamity); [4] פֶּרֶן (fire) and various related terms; [5] גָּזַע and עָגַע, both meaning pour out; [6] words referring to rulers (e.g., מֶלֶך, king); [7] רֵב (dispute), וּדָי (judge, contend), and other words referring to angry speech; [8] תָּשָּׁת (turn); and [9] qualifiers such as דָּמָא (very), לָעַר (length), and תָּקָע (shortness). Finally, [10] words for anger have a strong tendency to appear with one another.

### 3.3.1 Jealousy (עֵנָּה)

One of the more significant associated commonplaces of biblical anger is *jealousy* (עֵנָּה, כָּאָר, אָנָּה). Verses like Ps 79:5 are not uncommon: “YHWH, how long? Will you be angry (רָמַע) forever? Will your jealousy (עֵנָּה) burn like fire?” The statistical evidence linking *jealousy* with *anger* in the Hebrew Bible is remarkable. Of the 70 verses in

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63 See Appendix A (§7) for how statistics were calculated using BibleWorks. This appendix also contains a chart (Table 6) listing the calculations of each word or set of words mentioned in this chapter.
which  אַהֲרֵם,  אַשְׁרֵי, or אַשְׁרָי appear in the Hebrew Bible, 23 contain a word for anger.64 Thus, approximately one-third of the times that  אַשְׁרֵי and its cognates appear in the Hebrew Bible, they are associated with anger. As a point of reference, consider נְדָר / נְדָר / נְדָר (righteousness) and נְדָר (justice), which many interpreters have recognized as closely related to one another. The Hebrew Bible links אַשְׁרֵי with terms for anger with greater frequency (33% of the time) than it links נְדָר / נְדָר / נְדָר with נְדָר (21% of the time). In fact, words from the root אַשְׁרֵי are 15 times more likely to appear in a verse that refers to anger than in a verse from the Hebrew Bible as a whole. While American English may associate anger with jealousy, the ties between the two are not as strong as they are in Biblical Hebrew.65

Why is אַשְׁרֵי so closely related to words for anger in Biblical Hebrew? As shown above (§3.2.1), anger in the Hebrew Bible is closely related to perceptions of wrongdoing. The word אַשְׁרֵי refers to a particular type of perceived wrongdoing. It displays a strong tendency to refer to a perceived violation of who should receive or possess what. There are many variations on how this perception manifests itself, particularly with respect to who is jealous, with whom they are jealous, and the reason for their jealousy.66 Table 5 below explains. Whether jealousy is related to idolatry (first

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64 The terms for anger considered in these studies are: אַשְׁרֵי (nominal forms), נְדָר, נְדָר, נְדָר, נְדָר, נְדָר, נְדָר, נְדָר (Hithpael forms), נְדָר, נְדָר, נְדָר, נְדָר, נְדָר, נְדָר, נְדָר and נְדָר. The individual meanings of these terms are discussed at the end of this chapter (§3.5).

65 Although other scholars such as Freedman, Lundbom, and Botterweck, TDOT 5:173-174, have connected anger with jealousy, they do not offer the same degree of statistical evidence. The data presented here indicates that the English jealousy and the Hebrew root אַשְׁרֵי do not align perfectly. One could note, furthermore, that the biblical conception of אַשְׁרֵי can carry meanings of zeal.

66 There are several verses that do not disclose the reason for jealousy. Cf. Isa 59:17; Job 5:2; Prov 6:34; 14:30; 27:4; Eccl 9:6; Song 8:6.
row) or issues of theodicy (last row), there is the clear perception that others possess what they should not. Because anger in the Hebrew Bible also results from a perceived wrongdoing, one can consider jealousy to be a close cousin (if not a subset) of anger.

Table 5: Jealousy in the Hebrew Bible

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject:</th>
<th>Object:</th>
<th>Reason:</th>
<th>Verses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“[ ] is/are jealous…”</td>
<td>…because [ ]…</td>
<td>…has/ve received [ ]...</td>
<td>Exod 20:5; 34:14; Deut 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; 29:20; 32:16, 21; Jos 24:19; 1 Kgs 14:22; Ezek 5:13; 8:3-5; 16:38-42; 23:25; Zeph 1:18; Ps 78:58; 79:5; cf. Zeph 3:8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YHWH</td>
<td>other gods</td>
<td>worship and allegiance</td>
<td>Num 25:11-13; 1 Kgs 19:10-14; 2 Kgs 10:16; Ps 69:9; 119:139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humans, on YHWH’s behalf,</td>
<td>other gods</td>
<td>worship and allegiance</td>
<td>2 Kgs 19:31; Isa 9:7; 26:11; 37:32; 42:13; Ezek 36:5-6; 39:25; Joel 2:18; Zech 1:14; 8:2; Nah 1:2; cf. Isa 63:15; Ezek 38:19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YHWH, on Israel or Judah’s behalf,</td>
<td>Israel or Judah</td>
<td>unmerited or disproportionate harm</td>
<td>Gen 26:14; 2 Sam 21:2; Isa 11:13; Ezek 31:9; 35:11; cf. Eccl 4:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual(s)</td>
<td>other(s)</td>
<td>goods or property</td>
<td>Gen 37:1; 73:3; Prov 3:31; 23:17; 24:1, 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual(s)</td>
<td>other(s)</td>
<td>power, honor, or status</td>
<td>Gen 37:11; Num 11:29; Ps 106:16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual(s)</td>
<td>other(s)</td>
<td>sexual encounters</td>
<td>Num 5:12-31; cf. Gen 30:1; Ezek 16:38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Godly individuals</td>
<td>sinners</td>
<td>more than the godly</td>
<td>Ps 37:1; 73:3; Prov 3:31; 23:17; 24:1, 19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3.2 Evil / Calamity (רֶעֶשׁ, רֶעֶשׁ, רֶעֶשׁ)

As seen above (§3.2.5), biblical anger is prototypically viewed negatively. These negative associations are quite clear when one examines the frequency with which רֶעֶשׁ, רֶעֶשׁ, and רֶעֶשׁ appear in conjunction with terms for anger. Approximately 10% of the verses containing a word for anger also include רֶעֶשׁ, רֶעֶשׁ, or רֶעֶשׁ. The primary way that the idea of evil is connected with anger pertains to the cause of anger. These words are often
used to refer to a perceived wrongdoing. Verses like 2 Kgs 21:15 are not uncommon: “For they have done evil (עָשָׂהּ †חָשַׁם) in my sight, making me angry (יָטֵא אֱלֹהִים) since the day their fathers left Egypt, even to this day.” In the light of the associations between evildoing and anger, it is not surprising that the words לַעֲבֹד (to sin), וִיהָנָן (sin), לָעָבֵד (sinful), וַיַּהֲנָן (sin), נַעֲבֹד / נִשְׁפָּה (iniquity), and פֶּלְעוֹת (crime) also appear more frequently with a word for anger than in the Hebrew Bible as a whole. The words לָקֵשׁ / לַקֵּשׁ (to take vengeance / vengeance), רַגַּשׁ (to keep a grudge), and פַּעֲמָה (to [be] harm[ed]) are also linked with terms for anger, pointing to ways that angry individuals see themselves as being wronged or harmed. Anger’s connection with פַּעֲמָה (to [be] harm[ed]) furthermore points to connections between anger and sorrow in Biblical Hebrew. Being harmed can lead to a mixture of sadness and anger.

As is well documented, evildoing is not the only meaning for words from the root עָבֹד. They can also refer to calamity or destruction. This meaning is also present in many

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68 For נֵפָל / נֵפַל, see Jer 15:15; Ezek 24:8; 25:14, 17; Mic 5:14; Nah 1:2; Prov 6:34. For וַיִּקְרָא, which is often used synonymously with נֵפָל, see Lev 19:18; Jer 3:5, 12; Nah 1:2; Ps 103:9. For פַּעֲמָה, see Gen. 34:7; 45:5; 1 Sam 20:34; Prov 15:1; 2 Chr 24:18.

69 Although some contend that פַּעֲמָה refers to becoming angry, it most likely refers to being hurt or aggrieved (cf. 2 Sam 19:2-3 [1-2 Eng.]), to which anger is a common response. Hence, this word may imply anger, but it need not denote that, and should not be translated anger. Thus, Kotzé, “Conceptual Metaphors for Anger in the Biblical Hebrew Story of the Flood,” 162, incorrectly renders Gen 6:6 as “And YHWH was wroth [נֵפָל] because he had made man on earth and he was bitterly enraged [פַּעֲמָה].” If anything, the interrelationship between פַּעֲמָה and anger illustrates how sadness and anger are interrelated in the Hebrew Bible. The previous chapter noted that some of the emotion categories that are fairly bounded in one language are more fluid in other languages. Russell, “Culture and the Categorization of Emotions,” 441, Table 4, points out that anger overlaps with sadness in Luganda, Illongot, and Ifaluk. One could argue that there is some overlap in Biblical Hebrew as well.
verses that include terms for anger. In these cases, words related to anger are portrayed less as the cause of anger and more as the result. Jeremiah 25:7 is exemplary of this type of connection: “‘You have not obeyed me,’ says YHWH, ‘in order to anger me (עָנָן, qērē) with the work of your hands to your own destruction (חָרָם הַנֶּפֶשׁ).’” Scholars such as Klaus Koch have spoken of a “level of moral causality” between “what one does and what happens in life” in the Hebrew Bible. Anger is sometimes the mechanism of this causality: perceptions of evildoing (רָאָה) cause anger, which causes calamity (רָע). Gen 50:15 illustrates: “When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “What if Joseph has harbored anger against us (חֲרָמֵנוּ) and returns (שֹׁפֵךְ לְוֹ) to us all the evil (חָרָם) that we did to him?”

3.3.3 Extreme Violence (חָלָל, חָרָדָה, שַׁמְרָה, דָּוָה)

As seen above (§3.2.4), a prototypical outcome of anger is violence. However, the Hebrew Bible associates anger with levels of destruction and violence not frequently seen in ordinary American English conversation about anger. Many words referring to extreme forms of violence appear frequently with terms for anger. This correlation is present not only with the word הָרָדָה, meaning to kill. One also finds it with the terms

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70 Jer 25:6-7; 49:37; Zech 1:15; 8:14; Ps 37:8; 78:49; 106:32; Neh 13:18.


72 Words from the root הָרָדָה are three times more likely to appear in a verse containing a word for anger than to appear in the Hebrew Bible as a whole. See Gen 27:41; 49:6; Exod 22:23; 32:12; Isa 10:4; Ps 78:31; Job 5:2; Lam 2:4, 21; 3:43; 2 Chr 28:9. One should also note that in a Syrian Inscription from
which can refer to utter destruction, the complete extermination of others, and the killing of people that leaves no survivors. These terms entail what today is called genocide. The first of these words, כלא, appears in verses mentioning anger five times more frequently than in verses from the Hebrew Bible as a whole. It does not mean simply to destroy, as it frequently is translated. Rather, it refers to utter destruction. Those who suffer this fate are completely wiped out. The word appears in many military contexts and is not far removed from the second term, שחר, which means annihilation but is also connected with ideas of holy war. This word also has strong connections with anger. Daniel 11:44 illustrates these interrelations: “With great anger (מאת מלחמה), he will go forth utterly destroying (_dmiv,hl,.) and completely annihilating (yrIx,hl.)” The third term, הלק, has the basic meaning to (be) finish(ed). In many cases, this word is used to refer not to the completion of a task but to the ending of life. Like the English phrase, “He finished him off,” הלק can refer to killing, even massacres. It is five times more likely to appear in a verse mentioning anger than elsewhere. Most of the cases linking כלא, שעחר, and הלק with anger posit a causal relationship where extreme

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73 Deut 6:15; 7:4; 9:8, 19-20; Isa 13:9; Ps 106:23; Lam 3:66; Dan 11:44.

74 Verses linking שעחר with כלא are Jos 7:12; 11:20; Dan 11:44; 2 Chr 20:23. Verses containing a reference to both anger and שעחר are: Deut 13:18 (13:17 Eng.); Jos 7:1; 22:20; Isa 34:2; Dan 11:44. Verses referring to anger are approximately three times more likely to contain a reference to שעחר than verses in the Hebrew Bible as a whole.

75 See 2 Chr 20:23, where שעחר, כלא, and הלק appear together in immediate succession.
violence results from anger.\textsuperscript{76} This connection between anger and overwhelming violence has at least some contrasts with American English’s use of words for anger. For example, Pentagon spokespersons rarely, if ever, portray themselves or their troops as angry with a bloodlust that seeks the total annihilation of another group of people. Yet, battle rage is not uncommon in Biblical Hebrew or the inscriptions of the ancient Near East.\textsuperscript{77}

### 3.3.4 Fire (שָׁם)

Another key associated commonplace of biblical anger is שָׁם, fire. This word is approximately nine times more likely to appear in a verse referring to anger than in the Hebrew Bible as a whole.\textsuperscript{78} Biblical Hebrew contains many words related to שָׁם: [דָּבָר] (to extinguish), [שָׁמָה] (smoke), [חָמִית] / [חַמִית] (burn/burning), [דָּבָר] (to go out), [לָמָּה] / [לָמְדָה] / [לָמָּה] (to burn incense / smoke / dark smoke / incense). These words are five times more likely to appear in a verse mentioning anger. Of the 517 verses referring to anger, more

\textsuperscript{76} This statement is especially true of הָרָע, where there are no exceptions. With the case of הַרְע, most cases suggest this type of causal relationship: Exod 32:10, 32:12; Num 25:11; 1 Sam 20:7; Isa 10:25; Jer 49:37; Ezek 13:13; 22:31; 43:8; Zeph 1:18; Ps 59:14 (59:13 Eng.); 90:7; Job 4:9; Lam 2:22; Esth 7:7; Ezra 9:14; 2 Chr 12:12; cf. 2 Kgs 13:19; Ps 90:9. Sometimes, however, הָרָע is used of the cessation of anger: Dan 11:36; cf. Prov 22:8. Especially in Ezekiel, it can describe the expenditure of anger: Ezek 5:13; 6:12; 7:8; 13:15; 20:8, 13, 21; Lam 4:11. See also Jer 10:25, where God’s anger is a response to the destruction (שָׁם) of Jacob. Finally, one should note that although the anger causing such violence is frequently divine, it is not always (e.g., Dan 11:44).

\textsuperscript{77} Cf. the Great Karnak Inscription and texts associated with Ramesses III, which link Pharaoh’s anger with warfare. See Strawn, \textit{Stronger than a Lion}, 177.

than 10% contain or one of these related words. Why are anger and fire connected in the Hebrew Bible?

The most likely reason for these connections between fire and anger is that both are related to heat. The most common verb for anger in Biblical Hebrew is הָרָע (in the Qal, Niphal, and Hithpael stems; cf. also the nouns יָרָע, וַרְעָה). Both this root and its counterparts in Ugaritic, Akkadian, Arabic, and Aramaic carry the basic meaning burn. Another very common word for anger is הָרָע. The root from which this word most likely derives (םָרָע; cf. סָרָע) and its Semitic counterparts refer to being warm or being hot. Both הָרָע and הָרָע appear to be ways of metonymically referring to anger by mentioning a perceived physiological effect of this emotion, namely feeling hot.

Another reason for linking anger and fire is that the biblical text portrays both of them as destructive. A number of texts exploit this similarity, such as Jer 4:4: “Lest my rage (יָרָע) spread like fire (שָׁאָב) with no one to extinguish (בָּאָב) it.” This text makes clear with the particle that God’s anger is not literally seen as fire. There are other occasions, however, when the idiomatic expressions having to do with הָרָע (burning) and חָמָה (heat) are utilized with a degree of literalness that is not expected. Probably the

79 Freedman, Lundbom, and Botterweck, TDOT 5:171.

80 Schunck, TDOT 4:462.

clearest example is Num 11:1-3. At the beginning of these verses, one reads, “[YHWH’s] anger burned (אֵאַר), and the fire of YHWH raged against them (אָרְגָּנִית), consuming (שָׁפָט) those at the outskirts of the camp.” The context makes clear the fire described is not merely a figurative way of speaking about divine anger, but a literal way of describing the result of that anger. As in this case, most verses referring to fire and anger use the former to describe the latter’s effects. There is also a smaller number of verses where activities involving fire provoke YHWH’s anger, particularly the sacrificial burning of one’s child. More will be said about the connections between anger and fire below when discussing conceptual metaphor (§3.4).

3.3.5 Pouring Out (גָּנֵב, שֶׁפֶר)

Two words closely associated with anger in the Hebrew Bible (particularly exilic and post-exilic texts, esp. Ezek) are שֶׁפֶר and גָּנֵב. Both words can mean to pour out. Over twenty percent of the 112 verses containing a form of שֶׁפֶר also contain a reference to anger. If a verse contains a reference to anger, it is nine times more likely to contain the word שֶׁפֶר than the verses throughout the Hebrew Bible. Meanwhile, the word גָּנֵב only appears in 19 verses in the Hebrew Bible, but over half of them (10) refer to some form

82 Other passages, such as Exod 15:7; Ps 18:8-14 (18:7-13 Eng.; cf. 2 Sam 22:9-13); and Isa 30:27-30, may connect fire more directly with anger than one would expect.


of anger or wrath.85 Language about pouring out anger is not confined to the Hebrew Bible. A Syrian inscription from Zinjerli dating to the eighth century BCE (“Panammuwa I,” KAI 214:23) refers to the pouring out (ליזז) of anger (כח) as well.86 This phrase is likely an idiomatic expression shared among Israel’s neighbors.

To explain this idiom, it is useful to examine the different objects of these verbs in Biblical Hebrew. One might assume that the most common object of words meaning to pour out would be water. While יָדַע does take כָּל as its object on a few occasions (3% of the time),87 its most common object in the Hebrew is כָּל, blood (44% of the time).88 Its second most common object is a word for anger or wrath (19% of the time), typically חָרֵם, though sometimes נָעַם, רוּחַ, or רְפֵאָה.89 Other types of objects include psychosomatic terms, such as לֵי (life), רוּחַ (breath), כָּל (heart), עֲרָבָה (gall), and מַקֵּק (innards).90

86 KAI 1:38-39, 32:214-222, esp. 1:39, 2:215, 2:221. Note that there is debate over whether this inscription belongs to an independent West-Semitic dialect or to the North Syrian form of the Old Aramaic (ibid., 2:214).
87 Exod 4:9; 1 Sam 7:6; Amos 5:8; 9:6. In Deut 12:16, 24; 15:23; Ps 22:15; 79:3; Lam 2:19; and Hos 5:10, the verse contains יָדַע and refers to water as a point of reference but takes a different object. See also Judg 6:20, where the object is כָּל (broth).
89 Isa 42:25 (רַחּוֹן); Jer 6:11 (רַחּוֹן); 10:25 (רַחּוֹן); Ezek 7:8 (רַחּוֹן); 9:8 (רַחּוֹן); 14:19 (רַחּוֹן); 20:8 (רַחּוֹן); 20:13 (רַחּוֹן); 20:21 (רַחּוֹן); 20:33 (רַחּוֹן); 20:34 (רַחּוֹן); 21:36 (נָעַם; 21:31 Eng.) (רַחּוֹן); 22:22 (רַחּוֹן); 22:31 (רַחּוֹן); 30:15 (רַחּוֹן); 36:18 (רַחּוֹן); Hos 5:10 (רַחּוֹן); Zeph 3:8 (רַחּוֹן; 21:31 Eng.); Ps 69:25 (רַחּוֹן) (69:24 Eng.); 79:6 (רַחּוֹן); Lam 2:4 (רַחּוֹן); 4:11 (רַחּוֹן).
90 הָאָר (life): 1 Sam 1:15; Ps 42:4; Job 30:16; Lam 2:12; cf. Ps 22:14. These verses refer to sadness or distress. רוּחַ (breath): Ezek 39:29; Joel 2:28-29; Zech 12:10. In these verses, YHWH’s רוּחַ is poured out, and it is understood positively. כָּל (heart): Ps 62:8; Lam 2:11. These verses refer to the expression of sadness and distress. גַּלָּל (gall): Job 16:13. This verse, like the next one, refers to the slaughter and disemboweling of individuals in battle. מַקֵּק (innards): 2 Sam 20:10.
There are also several instances where the object of $pv$ is dust ($\text{ضم}$), dirt ($\text{ случай}$), the dirt of a siege ramp), stones ($\text{ין}$), or ashes ($\text{חמ$}$). The verb $tn$, meanwhile, draws a few connections to the pouring out of water, but refers most frequently to the pouring out of wrath and anger, especially $hmx$ and $\text{א$}$. It also is connected to the pouring out or melting of metals, and on one occasion with the pouring out of cries ($\text{ע$}$, Job 3:24).

With the objects of these verbs in view, several reasons emerge explaining why words for anger and wrath are associated with the terms $pv$ and $tn$. First, both $pv$ and $tn$ can carry emotional connotations, as when $\text{נ$}$ is the object of $pv$ and when $\text{ש$}$ is the object of $\text{ה$}$. Using $pv$ and $tn$ in conjunction with words for wrath aligns with these types of emotional connections. Second, anger in Biblical Hebrew is often associated with fire, as seen above. The fact that $pv$ can be used to describe the pouring out of ashes and that $tn$ can describe the melting of metals make them both natural candidates for describing the pouring out of anger. Many verses draw on this perceived interrelation between wrath, fire, and pouring out. For example, notice how Zeph 3:8bcd draws on several of the words associated with biblical anger: “For my judgment is to draw together nations, to gather kingdoms, in order to pour out ($pv$) on them my wrath

91 $\text{ضم (dust):}$ Lev 14:41. $\text{ случай (siege ramp):}$ 2 Sam 20:15; 2 Kgs 19:32; Isa 37:33; Jer 6:6; Ezek 4:2; 17:17; 21:22; 26:8; Dan 11:15. $\text{ין (stone):}$ Lam 4:1. $\text{ח$ (ashes):}$ Lev 4:12 (x2); 1 Kgs 13:3, 5. In these cases, the translation pour out does not work as well for $\text{ח$$. It is clear, nevertheless, that in these cases, as when liquids are the objects, it refers to causing the object to fall, typically into one location.


95 See also Ps 102:1; 142:3 (142:2 Eng.).
and all my burning fury (חרם), for all the land will be consumed (אסף) with the fire ( האש) of my jealousy (🏫).”

Third, in all of the cases where this association is present (including the Zinjerli Inscription), the anger described is divine wrath. With divine beings envisioned in the heavens, a natural way to associate divine anger against humanity is to describe it as being poured out, which vividly connects the heavens and the earth. Finally, both פז and words for anger are associated with killing and the shedding of blood, and some texts, especially those in Ezekiel, draw out this connection, including Ezek 14:19: “I send a plague upon that land and pour out (שפתה) my wrath (קרח) with blood (דם) upon it.” Whether as an act of intentional artistry or an unwitting utilization of preexisting connections within the Hebrew language, the words פז and נץ are often used with terms for anger.

3.3.6 Rulers (מלך, שר, מלך)

The discussion of anger’s prototype mentioned that anger frequently arises among those with power (§3.2.3). Additional evidence for this fact is found in the rate at which terms for anger appear with the words קIng (king / reign),はありません (chieftan), and משל (rule / ruler / dominion). Nearly ten percent of the verses mentioning anger contain at least one

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96 For other verses connecting the pouring out of anger with fire, see Isa 42:25; Ezek 21:31; 22:31; Zeph 3:8; Lam 2:4; 4:11.

97 See also Ezek 36:18. Other verses, while not using the word דם (blood), also connect poured out anger with death and destruction. See Ezek 9:8; 20:13; 21:31; 36:18.
of these words.\textsuperscript{98} Given the enormous popularity of these words, one should not
overemphasize the importance of this statistic.\textsuperscript{99} At the same time, there is significance
in the tendency of anger to take place among those with power.

### 3.3.7 Contend, Dispute, and Other Speech Words (רבד, היוד, ידוע)

As observed previously (§3.2.4), one of the common outcomes of anger is verbal
confrontation. Of the 517 verses in the Hebrew Bible containing a word for anger, over
one-quarter (26\%) of them contain a word derived from the roots רבד (speak), ידוע (say),
or ידוע (hear). On the one hand, this correlation is significant. It illustrates how anger
often arises in the course of conversation and how anger can lead to conversation. On the
other hand, when one examines all of the verses in the Hebrew Bible, roughly the same
percentage (27\%) of verses contain a word derived from one of these three roots. While
anger is frequently connected with speech, so are many other things in the Hebrew Bible.
As with למל, משמ, and משמ, the significance of this correlation should not be
overemphasized.\textsuperscript{100}

\textsuperscript{98} Frequently, the person who is angry is the one with authority (see, e.g., discussion of רבד in
§3.5.3.1). There are a number of cases, however, when anger is more indirectly related to the person with
authority. In Judg 3:8, for example, God is angry with Israel. The king (מל) of Mesopotamia is mentioned
as the means by which God enacts punishment against Israel.

\textsuperscript{99} There are 2,462 verses containing at least one of these three words. That means a randomly
selected verse from the Hebrew Bible has a 10.6\% chance of containing one of these words. Meanwhile,
45 of the 517 verses mentioning anger contain one of these words, a rate of 8.7\%.

\textsuperscript{100} Freedman, Lundbom, and Botterweck, \textit{TDOT} 5:172, claim in their opening statement about the
“Concrete Usage [of ידוע] in the OT,” “In the OT, anger is frequently expressed when someone has heard
something.” While there is a level of truth in such a statement, speaking and hearing are such common
enterprises in the Hebrew Bible that one should not rely too heavily on this fact.
When angry speech is in view, it is often depicted with words related to the roots מרד (dispute) and בְּרִי (contend). Approximately 8% of the verses containing מרד, בְּרִי, and מְרַוֵי make explicit reference to anger. Sometimes, these words are used as rough synonyms for anger. For example, Isa 41:11 reads:

Look! All who are angry (מְרֹא) with you shall be ashamed and humiliated. Those who contend with you (דֶּבִּיב) shall be as nothing and perish.

Words from the roots מְרַי and מרד frequently involve angry conversation resulting from a perceived wrongdoing, and thus they illustrate the interpersonal dimensions of anger. Often, מרד and מְרַי carry legal connotations (e.g., Jer 21:12), but not always (e.g., Prov 15:38). A verse containing a reference to anger is roughly four times more likely to contain these words.

The wordלחין (why) often finds itself in the context of angry speech for several reasons. First, angry individuals who perceive a wrongdoing often ask why the wrongdoing occurred. Thus, when David arrives at the Israelite camp prior to slaying Goliath, his brother Eliab perceives that David has neglected his responsibility of shepherding the family flock. He grows angry (לְחִין) and asks David, “Why (לְחִין) have you come down? With whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness?” (1 Sam 17:28). Second, given that people become angry not necessarily because of actual wrongdoings but because of perceived wrongdoings, others sometimes challenge their

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102 1 Sam 17:28; 2 Chr 25:15; cf. Eccl 5:6; 1 Sam 28:15.
reasons for becoming angry, asking why they are angry. Such is the case with God’s question to Cain (Gen 4:6). Finally, anger can trigger a series of events that others seek to avoid. In a couple of instances, people ask why such events should take place. Thus, when God is about to punish the people because of the golden calf, Moses makes the following plea with the angry deity: “Why (ъמָל) should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent (מֹכֵס) he brought them out to kill (לֹ֣כַה) them and to annihilate them (רָתְלָהֶּן) from the face of the earth? Turn (בַּרְשָׁ) from your anger (מִרְעָ) and change your mind (זְמַה לָךְ) from bringing harm (מֹנָה לָךְ) to your people” (Exod 32:12). In all, the word ţָל appears approximately three times more frequently in verses like this one that mention anger. It provides additional evidence that anger in the Bible does not automatically result in irrational violence (see §2.4, §3.2.4 above).

3.3.8 Turn (בַּרְשָׁ)

As seen in Exod 32:12, the word בַּרְשָׁ is often used to describe turning from anger. Remarkably, over 10% of the 517 verses containing a word for anger also contain a form of בַּרְשָׁ. While there are several ways this word is used in conjunction with anger, the

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103 Gen 4:6; Exod 32:11; 2 Sam 19:43 (19:42 Eng.); Ps 74:1.

104 Gen 27:45; Exod 32:12.

105 The following passages mention anger and use בַּרְשָׁ to refer to some type of repentance: 1 Sam 15:11; Isa 9:12 (9:13 Eng.); Jer 36:7; Joel 2:13; (see also בַּרְשָׁ in Exod. 32:12; 1 Sam. 15:11; Joel 2:13; Jonah 3:9; 4:2; Zech. 8:14). The following passages mention anger and use בַּרְשָׁ to refer to physical movement: 1 Sam 29:4; 2 Kgs 3:27; 19:28; Isa 37:29; Jer 32:37; Mal 1:4; Dan 11:30; Neh 9:17; 2 Chr 25:10; 28:11. The following instances do not fit as well into one of the preceding categories: Gen 50:15; Josh 22:18; Isa 66:15; Ezek 8:17; Hos 7:16; 12:14; Amos 1:11; Ps 60:2 (60:1 Eng.); Lam 2:3; Ezr 9:14; 2 Chr 32:25.
most common is to refer to the cessation of anger. Sometimes, the context suggests that individuals have a degree of control over how angry they are, as in Exod 32:12. A number of different texts suggest that others can influence the dissipation of anger.

Proverbs 15:1, for example, says, “A soft answer can turn (חָסֵד) wrath (זֶרֶע) away” (cf. Prov 29:8). There are also cases where the text implies that anger will dissipate over time, as with Esau’s anger (Gen 27:44-45). The tendency for a word like זֶרֶע to appear with words for anger suggests, contra van Wolde (§3.1, §3.2.4), that individuals have some degree of control over anger. There are ways to turn this emotion back.

3.3.9 Qualifiers

Four words, דָּמָא, לֹדֵג, נֵרֶךְ, and רוּךְ, frequently appear with terms for anger as a way of qualifying them. The word דָּמָא (very) is a fairly common word in the Hebrew Bible, making 300 appearances in 278 verses. Nearly 10% of these verses mention anger, usually with the adverb modifying the act of becoming angry. There are also over two dozen cases where לֹדֵג (to be great) and לֹדָג (great) appear with terms for anger. Finally, the words נֵרֶךְ (long, length) and רוּךְ (short, shortness) are also frequently used with

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107 See also זֶרֶע in Exod 32:12; Jonah 3:9; 4:2; Zech 8:14; where it also is used to communicate changing one’s mind concerning anger.
terms for anger (especially מַחַל) to designate being slow to anger (i.e., patience) and quick to anger (i.e., short-tempered), respectively.108

3.3.10 Terms for Anger

It is useful to conclude this section by noting that words for anger have a strong tendency to appear with one another (see Figure 1 below). One reason for this tendency is the Hebrew Bible’s affinity for parallelism. There are also syntactical reasons. The terms בָּלָה and מַחַל idiomatically appear with one another, and so it is not surprising that they have the highest percentages. The fact that מְזַח and זָקֵן appear less frequently with other terms for anger stems from their having meanings that extend beyond anger.109

The differences in meaning between individual terms are discussed further at the end of this chapter (§3.5).

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108 מַחַל (cases where this word does not modify anger are noted with parenthetical remarks designating what it modifies): Gen 4:5; 34:7; Num 11:10, 33 (plague); 16:15; Deut 9:20; 1 Sam 11:6; 18:8; 28:15 (distressed); 2 Sam 3:8; 12:5; 13:21; 2 Kgs 17:18; Isa 16:6 (pride); 47:6 (yoke); 64:9; Ezek 20:13 (profaned Sabbaths); Ps 78:59 (abhorred); Job 35:15 (acknowledge transgression); Lam 5:22; Esth 1:12; Neh 4:7; 5:6; 2 Chr 25:10. מְזַח: Exod 32:10-11; Deut 29:24, 28; Josh 7:26; 1 Sam 17:28; 2 Kgs 3:27; 22:13; 23:26; Jer 21:5; 32:37; 36:7; Ezek 8:18; 16:26; 25:17; 38:19; Ps 145:8; Jon 4:1; Nah 1:3; Zech 1:15; 7:12; 8:2; Dan 11:36, 44; 2 Chr 34:21. מְצַי: Exod 34:6; Num 14:18; Isa 48:9; Jer 15:15; Joel 2:13; Jon 4:2; Nah 1:3; Ps 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Prov 14:29; 15:18; 16:32; 19:11; 25:15; Neh 9:17. מְזוּזָה: Prov 14:17, 29. The fact that מְזַח is found with terms for anger more frequently than מְצַי may provide further evidence that biblical authors considered anger something that could be controlled (contra van Wolde).

109 As explained in §3.5.1.1, §3.5.1.3 below, מְצַי carries the basic meaning shake while מְזַח refers to being troubled. In each case, these words can be used to express anger but they do not always do so.

One should note that Figure 1 offers only an approximation. Because of the complexities involved, this graph treats all the terms for anger without subtracting instances of “false positives,” i.e., cases where such terms do not refer to anger (e.g., Gen 2:7 where מַחַל refers to nostrils not anger). Taking false positives into account in other cases made a very small difference in the final outcome, and one suspects the same would happen here as well. Nevertheless, the figures in this graph are only estimations. Numerical values have been intentionally omitted.
3.4 Conceptual Metaphor

As mentioned above (§3.3.4), many of the words for anger depict this emotion metaphorically by referring to a perceived physiological symptom, particularly רחם (lit. burn), נש (lit. nose), and חום (lit. heat). A number of biblical scholars have drawn on the findings of conceptual metaphor, another subfield of cognitive linguistics, to examine how these words function. Scholars working in this subfield analyze how metaphors work cognitively to organize and even create reality. Many of the studies in this area came as a result of George Lakoff and Mark Turner’s *Metaphors We Live By*, first published in 1980, although several thinkers in previous times helped lay the foundation for some of its basic postulates. 110 Lakoff and Turner explore a spectrum of ways in

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110 George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980, 2003). On the precursors to this work, see Michael K. Smith, “Metaphor and Mind,” *American Speech* 57, no. 2 (1982): 128-134. As this work mentions, in the eighteenth century, Giambattista Vico described language as fundamentally metaphorical, arguing that modern languages are collections of dead metaphors, that is, metaphors that have gained such currency in popular speech that they are no longer seen as metaphorical (e.g., *electric charge*; see I. Berlin, *Vico and Herder* [London: Hogarth Press, 1976], esp. 45-47). In the nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche made similar points. He argued that all of
which metaphors permeate language and guide thought processes. Their thesis is as follows: “We have found … that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.”\footnote{Lakoff and Johnson, Metaphors We Live By, 3.} Their work contains many examples that illustrate their point.\footnote{A key metaphor to which they devote considerable time is ARGUMENT IS WAR. They point to many examples of how this metaphor manifests itself within American English:}

Lakoff and his colleagues have extended the findings of this initial work to several other fields, including the study of emotions. A key work here is George Lakoff and Zoltán Kövecses’ “The Cognitive Model of Anger Inherent in American English,” which examines the types of conceptual metaphors for anger that are reflected in language—and even all of truth—is no more than a moveable set of metaphors that over time has become “fixed, canonical, and binding.” Truths, Nietzsche argues, are “illusions which we have forgotten are illusions…. To be truthful means to employ the usual metaphors” (Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense,” in Truth: Engagements across Philosophical Traditions, ed. David Wood and José Medina [Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2005], esp. 17). In the early twentieth century, Greenough and Kittredge did not go as far as Nietzsche in their conclusions, but they joined him in arguing that much of language is metaphoric. “Our commonest words,” they say, “are worn-out metaphors” (James Bradstreet Greenough and George Lyman Kittredge, Words and Their Ways in English Speech [New York: Macmillan, 1930], esp. 11-12).

\footnote{Lakoff and Johnson, Metaphors We Live By, 3.}

\footnote{A key metaphor to which they devote considerable time is ARGUMENT IS WAR. They point to many examples of how this metaphor manifests itself within American English:}

- Your claims are indefensible.
- He attacked every weak point in my argument.
- His criticisms were right on target.
- I demolished his argument.
- I’ve never won an argument with him.
- You disagree? Okay, shoot!
- If you use that strategy, he’ll wipe you out.
- He shot down all of my arguments.

Lakoff and Turner argue that this conceptual metaphor is not simply reflected in our everyday manner of speaking. Rather, it also influences how we conceive of arguments and how we act in the midst of them. They write, “ARGUMENT is partially structured, understood, performed, and talked about in terms of WAR.” See ibid., 4-6, 77-86. This quotation comes from p. 5; the various examples mentioned above are quotations from p. 4.

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American English. They examine several such metaphors, such as **ANGER IS INSANITY**, which is found in various idiomatic expressions of anger:

- I’m mad.
- You’re driving me nuts!
- He got so angry, he went out of his mind.
- When my mother finds out, she’ll have a fit.
- He’s about to throw a tantrum.
- I just touched him, and he went crazy.113

Such idiomatic expressions of this metaphor obviously reinforce the perceived dichotomy between reason and emotion among English-speakers (a point Lakoff and Kövecses could have better discussed).

Lakoff and Kövecses observe that frequently, conceptual metaphors for anger entail the use of the perceived physiological effects of anger (i.e., “increased body heat, increased internal pressure [blood pressure, muscular pressure], agitation”114) to represent metonymically the entirety of anger. Thus, a common conceptual metaphor is **ANGER IS THE HEAT OF FLUID IN A CONTAINER.**115 The examples they give include the following:

- Keep cool.
- They were having a heated argument.
- You make my blood boil.
- I was fuming.
- I just needed to vent.
- I could barely keep it in anymore.
- When I told him, he just exploded.
- She blew up at me.116

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113 These are all quotations taken from various locations on ibid., 204.

114 Lakoff and Kövecses, “The Cognitive Model of Anger,” 196, capitalization removed. For a summary of what science has shown these physiological affects to be, see Davidson, Scherer, and Goldsmith, eds., *Handbook of Affective Sciences*, 214.


116 Again, these expressions are quotations found throughout ibid., except the example of “I just needed to vent,” which is a paraphrase.
As they note, this metaphor is fairly well developed within the mind. It suggests that as anger increases, so does heat and pressure within the body. Thus, anger can build to the point that it is described as explosive, which metaphorically corresponds to persons losing control and causing harm to themselves or others. This metaphor also suggests that if anger is kept within too long and not properly released or “vented,” it is dangerous to the individual.\footnote{Ibid. The notion that anger is dangerous unless it is vented has been challenged by Carol Tavris, \textit{Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion} (revised ed.; New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989, 1982).}

Several additional studies show that metonymically depicting an emotion with its perceived physiological effects is a cross-cultural phenomenon found in many languages.\footnote{Kövecses, \textit{Emotion Concepts}; Hupka, “Anger, Envy, Fear, and Jealousy.”} A number of biblical interpreters have pointed to such features in Biblical Hebrew. In particular, Paul Krüger, Zacharias Kotzé, and Ellen van Wolde have appealed directly to the findings of cognitive linguists like Lakoff and Kövecses. Other scholars such as H. Wheeler Robinson, A. R. Johnson, E. Dhorme, Mayer Gruber, and Mark Smith conducted earlier studies of the ways emotions are depicted metonymically and metaphorically in the Hebrew Bible, but without a cognitive linguistic framework.\footnote{Robinson, “Hebrew Psychology;” Johnson, \textit{The Vitality of the Individual}; Dhorme, \textit{L’emploi métaphorique}; Gruber, \textit{Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East}; Smith, “The Heart and Innards in Israelite Emotional Expressions.” These works are not evaluated in depth because fine reviews of these and related works already exist. See Kotzé, “Research on the Emotion of Anger;” Krüger, “On Emotions and the Expression of Emotions,” esp. 213-217.}

Paul Krüger has played a key role applying this cognitive linguistic approach to emotion in the Hebrew Bible. An important study of anger came in 2000 with his
It reviews in detail the work of Lakoff and Kövecses described above. Then, Krüger asserts that many of the conceptual metaphors for anger found in American English are also present in Biblical Hebrew. He draws particular attention to the metaphor ANGER IS THE HEAT OF FLUID IN A CONTAINER, citing the following passages to claim that Biblical Hebrew conceives of anger with this metaphor as well (translations his):

Deut 19:6: “Lest the avenger of blood pursue the slayer, while his heart is hot (~mx).”
Isa 30:27: “He (his lips) is/are filled (alm) with anger.”
Ezek 38:18: “My fury shall come up (σαυρ) in my face.”
2 Sam 22:9: “Smoke went up (ueblo) from his nostrils.”
Jer 42:18: “My anger and my wrath were poured out (τζ) upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem.”
Prov 29:11: “A fool gives vent (κατα) to all his anger [xwr]; a wise man stills (xbv) it.”

Based on examples such as these, Krüger concludes that many expressions of anger in the Hebrew Bible use the same conceptual metaphors as American English.  

Several scholars, particularly Zacharias Kotzé and Ellen van Wolde, have drawn on Krüger’s findings in their own work. Kotzé, in a number of his works published before 2006, makes similar arguments and works to outline a methodology for the study

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122 Ibid., 191.
of conceptual metaphor in the Bible. Van Wolde also appropriates Krüger’s work, summarizing him, quoting him, and even taking his conclusions a step farther. For example, she joins Krüger in arguing that several biblical texts metaphorically depict anger as explosive. Then, she claims that explosive metaphors for anger point to a lack of control—a step Krüger does not make.

There are several overarching problems with these approaches. First, the examples these authors give do not always fit especially well with the conceptual metaphor from which they allegedly derive. Most of the texts cited as examples of explosive anger in fact refer to the *pouring out* of anger described above. *Pouring out* need not entail any type of explosion. In fact, one wonders how frequent *explosions* were

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124 Van Wolde, “Language of Sentiment.” This essay is an abridged form of van Wolde, “Sentiments as Culturally Constructed Emotions.”

125 She writes, “culturally most representative is the view that anger is a sentiment that takes control of a person” (van Wolde, “Sentiments as Culturally Constructed Emotions,” 9, italics added).

126 While certain verses refer to anger going up, לָמָּד, these instances sometimes have more similarities with the military idiom of rising up against someone than with anger rising within a person’s body (cf. 2 Sam 11:20; Ezek 38:18; Ps 78:31; Prov 15:1; 2 Chr 28:9; 36:16). The evidence van Wolde cites as referring to a person exploding with intense anger is likewise questionable. Two verses describe anger as overflowing (סָרָה; Isa 30:27-28; Prov 27:4), but these invoke water imagery more than explosiveness. Similarly, the other examples she mentions describe anger being poured out (סָרָה, סָרָה), which need not imply any type of explosion (Jer 42:18; 44:6; Nah 1:6; Job 40:11; 2 Chr 12:7; 34:25). The clearest examples of explosiveness are Isa 30:27-30 and Ps 78:21. Yet, if anger was commonly conceived in terms of this type of rising and exploding, one would expect a greater number of examples than those two.
in the ancient Near East. Second, Lakoff and Kövecses refer to established, idiomatic expressions in the English language, such as “Keep cool,” and “You make my blood boil.” They argue that these established, idiomatic expressions reflect pervasive conceptual metaphors that guide American thinking about anger. Biblical scholars, on the other hand, fail to give sufficient evidence that their examples are widespread, at least with the more elaborate metaphors such as ANGER IS THE HEAT OF FLUID IN A CONTAINER. Without a demonstration of metaphors being widespread, one can easily question whether they guide the thinking of a culture and truly are conceptual metaphors.

Perhaps the biggest problem with these works, however, is that they are heavily reliant on the work of Lakoff and Kövecses, but they do not adequately address the ways

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127 Kotzé has criticized van Wolde on this point, arguing that the image of exploding containers, while prominent in modern readers’ minds, was virtually nonexistent in ancient Israel, at most approximated with volcanic and metallurgic imagery. See Zacharias Kotzé, “In Response to van Wolde,” *SBL Forum* (2007): Cited May 31, 2007. Online: http://www.sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleID=671. While there is an element of truth in what Kotzé argues, one wonders about the frequency with which containers exploded during cooking or while in the pottery kiln in ancient Israel.

Another instance where the example cited does not necessarily illustrate the claim is Krüger’s translation of Prov 29:11. He claims that the Hebrew אַמַּש refer to anger. While he may be right (cf. LXX), it is also possible, considering close linguistic similarities between this verse and Ps 146:4, that the reference to the fool’s breath going forth is a reference not to anger but to death. Unfortunately, Krüger does not explain why his translations are preferable over others. Instead, his work consists primarily of cataloguing various examples according to how they respond with different metaphors.

To name a final case where the example cited does not necessarily illustrate the claims of these authors is Gen 34, which is van Wolde’s chief evidence of anger being uncontrollable. As shown in the previous chapter (§2.4), Levi and Simeon’s anger is not uncontrollable, but carefully calculated.

128 Van Wolde, “Sentiments as Culturally Constructed Emotions,” 8, argues that גזע (Hithpael) and פָּרַע refer to anger in terms of an overflowing container. She bases this claim on *BDK* (see also *HALOT*), which asserts that this word can be translated “overflow” or “outburst.” It appears that such definitions were chosen for two reasons (see *HALOT*). First, פָּרַע tends to refer to extreme forms of anger, as can the English word outburst. Second, גזע typically means “cross over” and a similar idea is captured in the English words “overflow” and “outburst.” While these definitions can easily be defended, they should not be pushed too far. For example, if גזע (Hithpael) and פָּרַע in fact are related to the meaning “cross over” (which many contend they are not; see K.-D. Schunck, “_PASSWORD:_PASSWORD,” *TDOT* 10:426), the etymological roots of this metaphor may relate to crossing over restraint (see below), not crossing over the brim of a container that metaphorically represents the body. Van Wolde offers insufficient evidence that the words גזע (Hithpael) and פָּרַע must be connected with the metaphorical depiction of the human body as a container.
that Lakoff and Kövecses have been criticized. Ronald Butters faults Lakoff and Kövecses’ use of evidence, which consists more of a series of examples than a sustained empirical analysis. Butters furthermore suggests that even if individuals routinely employ particular metaphors, these metaphors are not taken seriously for very long. Naomi Quinn, meanwhile, criticizes Lakoff and his colleagues for failing to examine what cultural models may underlie common metaphorical expressions.

Dirk Geeraerts and Stefan Grondelaers attack specifically the work that Lakoff and Kövecses have done with anger. In a move analogous to Butters’ and Quinn’s, they argue that the metaphors describing anger as the heat of fluid in a container are not particularly significant on their own. Rather, they are vestiges of the Classical and Medieval doctrine of the four humors, which posited a close relation between one’s emotional displays and bodily fluids, particularly between anger and hot yellow bile. Much of the language for anger in American English, they conclude, reflects this outdated model and is used primarily for its functional value, the same way that sunset and sunrise are used without endorsing pre-Copernican models of the universe. Others have made similar points, such as Gerard Steen and Raymond Gibbs, who observe that

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129 Ronald R. Butters, “Do ‘Conceptual Metaphors’ Really Exist?,” *The SECOL Bulletin* 5, no. 3 (1981): esp. 111, talks of the evidence as “amazingly scanty and weak.” While Butters here is refuting Lakoff’s work (written with Mark Turner) *Metaphors We Live By*, the same type of evidence is used in this work by Lakoff and Kövecses. This evidence is not based on empirical studies but the listing of a few examples. In Lakoff, Turner, and Kövecses’ defense, however, one can note that the examples they list are salient, more so than some of the examples mentioned by biblical scholars.

130 Ibid., 111, 115.


common metaphors may be evident in the speech patterns of people who neither understand what gave rise to such metaphors nor “have all the full-blown conceptual metaphors uncovered by linguistic analysis.”

Paul Krüger and Ellen van Wolde do not adequately respond to these criticisms of the Lakoff-Kövecses model. Zacharias Kotzé, on the other hand, has taken note of many of these criticisms, particularly those that Geeraerts and Grondelaers make regarding humoral doctrine. While Kotzé has consequently changed his course, the new path he takes is problematic as well. He argues that as American English reflects a doctrine of the humors in its metaphors for emotion, so does the Hebrew Bible. He does not believe it is the same doctrine of the humors, but he does contend that bodily fluids are closely related to emotion in the Hebrew Bible. Thus, he argues that saliva plays an especially significant role in the Hebrew conception of anger. He claims that קָבָר, קָבָר, and יָצֶה “have as their basic meaning ‘foam’ or ‘froth,’” and he argues, “these designations make metonymic allusion to a perceived symptom of anger, i.e. the emotion of anger is accompanied by foam (at the mouth).” It is doubtful that Kotzé is correct


135 Kotzé, “Humoral Theory as Motivation for Anger Metaphors in the Hebrew Bible,” 206. He also asserts that anger is closely connected to bile in the Hebrew Bible, appealing to cases where anger is related to words from the root כָּל (Kotzé, “Humoral Theory as Motivation for Anger Metaphors in the Hebrew Bible,” esp. 206-207). Here, his moves are questionable as well. The connection between כָּל and anger in Ezek 3:14, for example, is a creative combination of anger with bitterness, not a reflection of a widespread theory that anger is related to bile and gall. Simply because כָּל refers to gall on two
here. First, it is not clear that these three words refer to foaming. Second, saliva plays a very insignificant role in the Hebrew Bible, and one would expect greater evidence if it was foundational to the Israelite understanding of anger. Third, it is not apparent that foam at one’s mouth would have been a perceived symptom of anger among the communities that gave rise to the Hebrew Bible.

While the approaches offered by Krüger, van Wolde, and Kotzé each have their problems, one should not abandon the study of metaphors and emotion altogether. Instead, one needs to begin at the most basic level. When one considers the foundational meaning of each of the terms for anger in the Hebrew Bible, it quickly becomes apparent that many of them are dead metaphors:

Anger is a burning nose (חָרָם).

Anger is a nose (חָרָם).

occasions (Job 16:13; 20:25), one should not assume that all words from the root רָמָה refer to bile. As Robinson, “Hebrew Psychology,” esp. 364, puts it, “The liver, so important for Babylonian psychology, takes little place in the Hebrew.”

Gruber, Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East, esp. 538-550, is one of the few to make such a claim, and he does so primarily with regard to רָמָה, on the basis of the Akkadian intimu. There are, however, many other Semitic cognates, and so most lexicographers tend to connect רָמָה less with foaming and more with heat (DBD, 404-405; HALOT [study ed.], 1:326; Schunck, TDOT 4:462; Gale B. Struthers, “רָמָה,” NIDOTTE 2:170-171). Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament, esp. 1:258-259, makes a similar move to Gruber that likewise has not been followed by most scholars.

1 Sam 21:14 (21:13 Eng.) is the sole appearance of the word רָמָה in the Hebrew Bible, and in this text it is associated with David’s feigning insanity, not with David’s experiencing anger. A couple of passages make clear that spitting in someone’s face communicates a strong rebuke (Num 12:14; Deut 25:9; cf. “The Story of Sinuhe,” [AEL 1:222-235, esp. 1:225, §8, 40-43]). While these few texts speak of spitting on someone as a potential expression of anger, they do not indicate a perception of anger being fundamentally linked with saliva.

Again, the clearest account of someone foaming at the mouth is 1 Sam 21:14 (21:13 Eng.), and here it is associated with insanity not anger.

Technically, this figure of speech is a metonym. However, it functions as a metaphor and can be understood as a subset of the metaphoric trope.
ANGER IS HEAT (חרם).

ANGER IS A SHAKING (זרע).

ANGER IS A DISTURBANCE (✴טש).

Unlike the elaborate metaphor ANGER IS THE HEAT OF FLUID IN A CONTAINER, these metaphors pervade and even constitute Biblical Hebrew’s terminology for anger.140

Frequently, these basic metaphors are dead; they are understood by readers as straightforward references to anger without evoking a moment of Gestalt (so Wittgenstein and Ricoeur) wherein both contradictions and similarities are seen between the metaphorical referents.141 The beginning of Gen 27:45, for example, is best translated, “until the anger (✴טש) of your brother subsides (ברמד).” There is no need for readers in this case to see ✴טש as a reference to nose. Rather, the metaphor (technically, a metonym) ANGER IS A NOSE has reached such a degree of currency that ✴טש simply means anger. As a dead metaphor, one can debate the extent to which it influenced everyday thinking or what the significance would be if it did.142 Just as the etymological origins of

140 Kotzé, van Wolde, and Krüger note the basic metaphors outlined here but then focus on the similarities between them and English metaphors that are more elaborate, particularly, ANGER IS THE HEAT OF FLUID IN A CONTAINER.

141 Paul Ricoeur, The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language (trans. Robert Czerny, Kathleen McLaughlin, and John Costello; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977, 1981), 212-214. More precisely, they are dead metonymies. Like dead metaphors, dead metonymies are expressions that have gained such currency that they are no longer recognized as tropes.

142 Krüger, “A Cognitive Interpretation of the Emotion of Fear in the Hebrew Bible,” esp. 87, writes, “One of the most important insights of the cognitive model is the valid claim that conventionalised language employed to talk about emotion concepts reveals a great deal about the conceptual content and experience of those particular emotions.” While there may be some truth in this comment, it is easy to go too far with this type of thinking. When the metaphors at hand are so worn-out that their metaphorical qualities are not usually recognized, then they most likely do not exert powerful influence on one’s thinking. One can use the word armchair without having one’s thinking heavily influenced by the anthropomorphic qualities that such chairs possess. Thus, there are problems with those who claim ✴טש should not be translated became angry because this translation does not reveal metaphorical qualities, e.g., S. Schroer and T. Staubli, Body Symbolism in the Bible (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Collegeville, Minn.: The
a word may not figure prominently in its present usage, so the figurative meaning of a
dead metaphor may not have much bearing on everyday speech. Furthermore, as a
dead metaphor, one need not assume that each reference to כותב, רבד, or עצב means that the
angry person literally felt heat or redness in the face. People do not consistently
perceive the same physiological symptoms of particular emotions (even within the same
culture). While the perception of warmness in the face was likely prototypical among
the perceived physiological symptoms of anger, there is no reason to see it as
universal.

Paul Ricoeur observes that sometimes dead metaphors are revived or rejuvenated,
particularly when writers expand their implications or employ them in fresh ways. There are several instances in the Hebrew Bible where writers appear to reanimate dead
metaphors for anger. As discussed above, כותב, fire, is often used to express vivid imagery
about anger that points to its destructive nature, among other things. These instances can

Liturgical Press, 1998), 95-96. Because the metaphor was dead in Biblical Hebrew, translators engage in
questionable moves by bringing to light the metaphoric qualities (unless they find metaphors that are
likewise dead in the English language).

143 Barr, The Semantics of Biblical Language, esp. 102-103, discusses the etymological fallacy.

144 Contra Lytta Basset, Holy Anger: Jacob, Job, Jesus (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B.

145 As Nussbaum, Upheavals of Thought, 95-100, esp. 97, points out, researchers have faced
fundamental problems correlating particular emotions with particular physiological states, essentially
abandoning the quest to find such correlations. While she is here speaking about research in modern,
Western culture, there are few reasons to suspect that ancient Israelites were more monolithic in their
perceptions of the physiology of emotion than we are.

146 Thus, there are problems with Gale B. Struthers’ argument that כותב “is the type of anger in
which the face may turn red and the passions are aroused” (Struthers, NIDOTTE 1:463). Just because heat
in the face is part of the prototypical experience of anger does not mean all experience it that way.

be seen as cases where writers took the dead metaphor ANGER IS HEAT and breathed into it new life, allowing readers to understand afresh the dynamic connections between anger and fire. At the same time, one should be cautious about seeing all such connections between anger and fire as merely reviving dead metaphors. One needs also to be aware of underlying cultural models. In this case, texts portraying YHWH as breathing smoke and fire (2 Sam 22:9 [=Ps 18:9 (18:8 Eng.)]; Isa 30:27, 33; 33:11; 65:5) may have less to do with extending a dead metaphor and more with appealing to motifs in ancient Near Eastern mythology, where many deities (e.g., Huwawa) were often portrayed with fire imagery, frequently using it as a weapon in battle.  

The preceding discussion leads to the following conclusions. First, on the basic level, there are some similarities between how anger is metaphorically depicted in American English and Biblical Hebrew. Both languages engage in a larger cross-cultural phenomenon of metonymically depicting an emotion by referring to a perceived physiological symptom. Second, while American English has fairly well-developed metaphors such as ANGER IS THE HEAT OF FLUID IN A CONTAINER, one should be hesitant about assuming that Biblical Hebrew routinely develops the metaphor ANGER IS HEAT in the same way. For example, there are many idiomatic expressions in American English that suggest the metaphorical fluid in this container (i.e., the body) can rise and explode,


resulting in a loss of control and harm to oneself or others. When one turns to Biblical Hebrew, however, there are not many unambiguous, idiomatic examples to suggest that anger was routinely conceived in such a way. One should not conflate the American English model of anger with that of the Hebrew Bible, even when there are similarities. Third, many of Biblical Hebrew’s routine depictions of anger are dead metaphors that sometimes were revived for particular purposes. Thus, the metaphor ANGER IS FIRE extends and vivifies the dead metaphor ANGER IS HEAT, pointing particularly to anger’s dangerous consequences (especially its consuming nature, cf. ְקָרָד). While dead metaphors obviously influence their vivification, they do not necessarily influence everyday thinking in decisive ways. Finally, cultural factors can play a role in metaphoric formulations. Just as the Classical and Medieval doctrine of the four humors surfaces in many American English expressions for anger, so the depiction of an angry deity fuming with smoke and fire may derive from motifs in ancient Near Eastern mythology. One need not commit Kotzé’s error of assuming that because English language for emotion reflects a humoral understanding that Biblical Hebrew does likewise. The text needs to be understood on its own terms, not ours. Only in that way can violence against the text be minimized.
3.5 The Nuances and Meanings of Terms for Anger

Biblical scholarship has tended to see human anger in the Hebrew Bible as a complex albeit unified concept that a variety of words can convey.\textsuperscript{150} There are compelling reasons for doing so, such as the ways various terms for anger can be used interchangeably (e.g., Ps 78:49). Nevertheless, there are discernible differences between the various terms for anger, which comprise the final focus of this chapter. As a point of departure, the diagram below (Figure 2) begins to explain the basic meanings of terms for anger in Biblical Hebrew. Although this diagram is somewhat simplistic,\textsuperscript{151} it illustrates that many words for anger have meanings that extend beyond anger. Three words refer to more than one type of emotion: בזז, ע condolences, and סק. Three other words have basic meanings that relate to perceived physiological symptoms of anger: ז, א, and ג. The remaining four words tend to designate particular types of anger: ג (anger by someone with authority), ט (anger that often involves speech), ז (Hithpael) / פ (anger that is particularly destructive or unrelenting), and ש (anger that holds a grudge).

\textsuperscript{150} Cf. Baloian, \textit{Anger in the Old Testament}, esp. 5; Bergman and Johnson, \textit{TDOT} 1:356.

\textsuperscript{151} This diagram does not point to all the spheres of semantic overlap (e.g., ז and א). Nor is it drawn to scale. Thus, ז represents a small portion of the diagram, though it is one of the most common words for anger. For an interesting discussion of diagrammatic representations of terms in linguistics, see Dirk Geeraerts, “Representational Formats in Cognitive Semantics,” \textit{Folia Linguistica} 29, no. 1 (1995): 21-41.

The words for anger appearing here are the same ones that Baloian, \textit{Anger in the Old Testament}, 5-7, and Bergman and Johnson, \textit{TDOT} 1:351-356, classify as “Words for ‘Anger’ in the Old Testament” with two exceptions. First, ז is not included here. Although there are cases where it has connections with anger (esp. Prov 16:32), ז is not innately connected with anger. Like ר and (ז, ז) refers to a component of one’s personhood. Sometimes, these words are connected with anger (e.g., Job 18:4, Prov 19:3), but not typically. Second, the word ז is included here. Although it is quite rare (appearing only in Gen. 27:41; 49:23; 50:15; Job 16:9; 30:21; Ps. 55:4), it appears to refer to harbored anger, particularly with the desire to harm someone. It is included here in part because of its repeated appearances in Genesis. One should note that there are several other terms in the Hebrew Bible that may at least imply anger, such as ז (jealousy), ז (vengeance), א (curse), and ז (contend). Most of these were treated when discussing anger’s associative networks above (§3.3).
3.5.1 Words Designating More than One Emotion

Like its Semitic cognates, the word כַּמָּה means basically to shake. It sometimes appears with its synonyms כֵבָשׁ (quake; 7x) and דָּרָד (tremble; 2x), as well as its antonym מָחַז.
The word **נִזְעָה** appears in the Hebrew Bible only thirteen times, mostly in later literature.157 With so few appearances, lexicographers have had difficulty ascertaining its

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152 The root נִזְעַה is found 7 times as the noun נִזְעָה, once as the noun נִזְעִית, 41 times as a verb (30 Qal, 7 Hiphil, 4 Hithpael), and once as the adjective נִזְעֵית, modifying בֵּית (heart, Deut 28:65).

153 1 Sam 14:15; 2 Sam 22:8; Isa 5:25; 13:13; 14:9, 16; Ezek 12:18; Joel 2:10; Amos 8:8; Hab 3:7; Ps 18:7; 77:16, 18; Prov 30:21; Job 9:6; 37:2; 39:24; 1 Chr 17:9.

154 Samuel, summoned from the grave, asks Saul why the king has **shaken** (נִזְעַה) him. While it may be that Samuel asks Saul why the king is **angering** him, anger is probably not the primary sense, given the extrabiblical evidence. A Phoenician inscription by the son of **Sīpīṭa’al** from 500 BCE found in Byblos / Gebal from the burial site of this king reads (**KAI** 9A:5): “You shall not open this resting place to trouble my bones,” [אָלָא חָפְצֶה יֶבֶרֶךְ בַּלַּא הָבִילָה הַפְּלִים], A similar warning also containing נִזְעַה is found in an inscription from Sidon from the end of the sixth century BCE (**KAI** 13:4, 6, 7). The word נִזְעַה is thus commonly used with the dead and refers primarily to disturbing their remains. Yet, there is also evidence that these disturbances may invoke cursing, which may imply the presence of anger (see **KAI** 191B:2).

155 Exod 15:14; Deut 2:25; 28:65; 2 Sam 7:10; 18:33; Ps 99:1; Isa 14:3; 23:11; 32:10-11, 64:2; Jer 33:9; 50:34; Ezek 12:18; Joel 2:1; Mic 7:17; Hab 3:16 (x2); Job 3:26; 14:1.

156 Gen 45:24 (cf. LXX); 2 Kgs 19:27-28; Isa 28:21; 37:28-29; Ezek 16:43; Hab 3:2; Ps 4:5 (4:4 Eng.); Job 3:17; 12:6; Prov 29:9. Biblical Aramaic also contains an appearance of נִזְעַה that refers to anger, Dan 3:13. Some of these references appear to refer to anger, but have a degree of ambiguity (e.g., Ps 4:5 [4:4 Eng.]).

157 It appears seven times as the noun נִזְעָה, four times as a Qal verb, and twice as the adjective נִזְעֵית.
precise meaning. Most (BDB, HALOT, TDOT, NIDOTTE) see it meaning primarily rage. However, there then is difficulty in determining what to do with Gen 40:6; 1 Kgs 20:43; 21:4; and Dan 1:10, where the subject is obviously not angry.158 Some sources (HALOT, NIDOTTE) claim that the word in these verses is from a different root (same spelling) that is cognate with the Arabic da 'īf, meaning weak. While such a possibility cannot be ruled out, the Arabic ḏ does not typically correspond to the Hebrew ṭ.159 It seems preferable to see ṭ as instead meaning greatly disturbed or in an uproar, a definition that works in all appearances of the word including Jon 1:15, where it describes the tumultuous sea.160 Within this lexical rubric of disturbed, one can fit the various episodes of despondency (Gen 40:6; 1 Kgs 20:43; 21:4), the case of hunger in Dan 1:10, and the eight cases where the word refers to anger. In all of the cases, this word has close ties with authority. Whatever the type of disturbance, the subject is almost always an official of some type, save the two instances where the subject is God and the case of Prov 19:3, “his heart is in an uproar ṭ against YHWH.”

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158 HALOT (study ed.), “ InputDecoration,” 1:277 asserts that this word in 1 Kgs 20:43; 21:4 refers to being furious. However, Ahab’s response of lying down, turning his face away, and refusing food have little in common with the typical responses to anger in the Hebrew Bible.

159 H. Ringgren, “个赛季; 顾客; 顾客;” TDOT 4:111-112, esp. 4:111.

160 This definition of disturbed is not far removed from BDB’s understanding of the word as meaning vexed (BDB, s.v., “[[slot]],” 277). It also is not far removed from the Aramaic ṭ, which means storm, something we refer to as a disturbance of nature. While anger is sometimes expressed in English in terms of a tempest (e.g., “He stormed off”), it is difficult to use such expressions consistently to translate ṭ.

The word appears in the Dead Sea Scrolls, referring to anger (often on the part of those with authority; 1QpHab III, 12; 4Q223-224 frg. 2, II, 52; 4Q435 frg. 1, I, 4 = 4Q436, frg. 1, II, 2; 4Q511, frg. 35, 1) or disturbed waters (1QHא XIV, 22; XV, 4; 4Q429 frg. 4, II, 1).
Like צגר and @ז, the word סק (spelled קשת in Job) can refer to not only anger but also other forms of displeasure, such as sadness. It makes 79 appearances, most commonly in Deuteronomistic works (8x Deut; 20x Kings; 11x Jer), and it carries the meaning of being troubled.161 Perhaps the most striking feature of this root is that its connotations differ depending on the social standing of the one who is troubled. When someone in a hierarchical position is troubled, that person tends to become angry. On the other hand, when someone in a marginalized or culturally inferior position is troubled, that person tends to experience anguish or sadness.162 As with many terms for anger, issues of power determine how this emotion is experienced and expressed. Because סק can, like צגר and @ז, carry associations with sadness, one can consider sadness to be an associated commonplace of anger as well (cf. discussion of סק in §3.3.2 above). The boundaries between anger and sadness are not as sharp as they are in American English.

161 Many lexicons (BDB, HALOT) suggest that it means to be vexed, which is similar to the definition of being troubled proposed here (cf. previous note). The translation trouble avoids the problems of the translation offend, which is associated with the degradation of honor, an association that is tangential to סק (N. Lohfink, “סק and סק’, TDOT 7:282-288, esp. 7:285).

162 In the following texts mentioning סק, the person who is troubled is in a hierarchical position of power and is angry: Deut 4:25; 9:18; 31:29; 32:16, 19, 21a; Judg 2:12; 1 Kgs 14:9, 15; 15:30 (2x); 16:2, 7, 13, 26, 33; 21:22 (2x); 22:53; 2 Kgs 17:11, 17; 21:6, 15; 22:17; 23:19, 26 (2x); Isa 65:3; Jer 7:18, 19; 8:19; 11:17; 25:6, 7; 32:29, 30, 32; 44:3, 8; Ezek 8:17; 16:26, 32; 20:8; 32:9; Hos 12:14; Ps 78:58; 85:4; 106:29; Job 10:17; Neh 3:33 (4:1 Eng.); 2 Chr 16:10; 28:25; 33:6; 34:25. In the following texts that also mention סק, the person who is troubled is in an inferior position and experiences anguish or sadness: Deut 32:21b; 1 Sam 1:6 (2x), 7, 16; Ps 6:7; 10:14; 31:9; 112:10; Job 6:2; 17:7; Eccl 1:18; 2:23; Neh 3:37 (4:5 Eng.). The following appearances of סק are marked by some level of ambiguity with respect to social standing: Deut 32:27; Job 5:2; Prov 12:16; 17:25; 21:19; 27:3; Eccl 7:3, 9 (2x); 11:10. The twofold meaning of this word may be related to סק, be angry, in Northwest Semitic and קашא, fear, in Arabic (Lohfink, TDOT 7:283).
3.5.2 Words Related to a Perceived Physiological Symptom

3.5.2.1 הּ

Although scholarship is divided about the precise origins of הּ and its root מְ, the substantive הּ clearly carries double meaning in the Hebrew Bible. In 234 cases, it refers to anger (an additional 13 if one counts מְ, which is used exclusively of divine anger). The other 42 appearances of this word refer to a nose or nostril(s). Lexicographers tend to assume the two meanings are related, although they differ in how they parse this difference. On the basis of the expressions מְ בָּלַע (lit. length of nostrils; idiomatically slow to anger) and מְ יָרָה (lit. shortness of nostrils; idiomatically quick to anger), some such as Dhorme see anger as marked by an increased rate of respiration, which is conveyed by referring to one’s nose, מְ. Instances where מְ (breath) appears in conjunction with references to anger substantiate such a claim (see esp. Prov 14:29; cf. Judg 8:3). Others associate these references to the nose with a perception of burning or

163 See discussion in Bergman and Johnson, TDOT 1:351.

164 When מְ is used in the Mesha Inscription, it also refers to divine anger, that of Chemosh, which results in Omri afflicting (גָּדַשׁ) Moab. See KAI 181:5.

165 The word מְ is connected with breath and life in Gen 2:7; 3:19; 7:22; Isa 2:22; Job 27:3; Lam 4:20; Song 7:8. Perhaps the same is true of KAI 224:2, although the expression may also have to do with snorting. The nose is also mentioned in conjunction with smelling (Ps 115:6). Odors can be both pleasing (Deut 33:10) and repulsive (Num 11:20; Amos 4:10; cf. Ezek 8:17). In many cases where the term can be translated nose, the meaning relates to some type of emotion. The term means nose but refers to humility (esp. with the Hiphil form of מְ [to bow down]) in the following cases: Gen 19:1; 42:6; 48:12; Num 22:31; 1 Sam 20:41; 24:8; 25:23, 41; 28:14; 2 Sam 14:4, 33; 18:28; 24:20; 1 Kgs 1:23, 31; Isa 49:23; Neh 8:6; 1 Chr 21:21; 2 Chr 7:3; 20:18. In Ps 10:4 the term is associated with haughtiness. When a nose ring is mentioned, it frequently connotes honor: Gen 24:47; Isa 3:21; Ezek 16:12; Prov 11:22; cf. Song 7:4. Barbs, hooks, or ropes in the nose, on the other hand, refer to capturing someone or something, which can entail humiliation (2 Kgs 19:28; Job 40:24; 41:2; cf. Prov 30:33). In addition to these 40 appearances, there is one case where the dual form does not refer to a nose or to anger but a double portion (1 Sam 1:5).

166 Dhorme, L’emploi métaphorique, 81-82.
heat in that bodily locale. There is a great deal of textual evidence for this connection. Fifty-seven times, ראה is the subject of הרג, to burn.167 Thirty-nine times, the noun ראה appears in a verse with חזק, and typically the two words stand parallel to each other.168 At least in terms of frequency, the noun ראה appears to be connected with anger primarily on the basis of perceiving heat in one’s face, and secondarily on the basis of perceiving an increase in one’s rate of respiration. In either case, such metaphorical connections appear to be dead in most biblical texts.169 The word ראה is the most common word for anger in the Hebrew Bible, and it has a relatively wide semantic range, referring to all types of anger. It is able to describe both the fairly minor anger of Jacob toward his wife (Gen 30:2) as well as the exceptionally violent anger mentioned in Ezek 23:25.170 Of the 234 references ראה makes to anger, 52 refer to human anger.171 These references to human anger appear predominantly in Gen (6x), Job (7x), and Prov (13x).

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169 While these connections help explain why this word refers to anger and how it sometimes is used, there is no reason to assume that each time ראה expresses anger, it is conveying a literal warming of the face or quickness of breath, as mentioned above (§3.4).

170 Perhaps the most extensive treatment of the relationship between ראה and anger is Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East*, 480-553.

Whereas הָרַע is the most common noun for anger in the Hebrew Bible, the word הָרַע is the most common verb, appearing 93 times. As its various Semitic cognates suggest, this word fundamentally means to burn. Aside from its rare appearances in the Tiphel and Hiphil stems, this verb refers to anger. In the 82 appearances of this word in the Qal stem, the text either says that someone’s הָרַע (nose) burned (57x), or it employs an impersonal subject (perhaps an implied הָרַע, cf. BDB) (25x). With the latter, a ל- particle is typically employed to designate who is angry. Hence, expressions like יָרַע לְּךָ in Gen 4:5 are quite common, which literally could be rendered, It burned for Cain, but idiomatically means, Cain became angry. In all of its stems, הָרַע refers to a figurative

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172 The root הָרַע has two nominal forms that are used less frequently. The noun יָרַע is found 41 times and is used only of divine wrath, while יָרַע is found six times and used of both humans (4x) and God (2x). When יָרַע is used in an eighth-century Aramaic stele from Sefire (KAI 223B:12), it is connected with divine wrath, particularly a day of wrath (יָרַע צָרִי), much like the Hebrew יָרַע (cf. Isa 13:13; Lam 1:12).

173 The Tiphel appears in Jer 12:5; 22:15 (see GKC §55 h for more on the Tiphel stem). The Hiphil appears only in Neh 3:20, which perhaps should be deleted on the grounds of dittography, cf. LXX. (Job 19:11 should be repointed as a Qal verb.)

174 This verb appears 79 times in the Qal, 3 times in the Niphal, and 4 times in the Hithpael. The meaning does not differ greatly between these three stems. The Hithpael appears in Ps 37:1, 7, 8; Prov 24:19, all of which employ a negative jussive, telling readers Do not יָרַע. In this stem, the word typically is translated fret. However, fretting tends to connote worrying, which does not seem to be in view here. Rather, these verses tend to be saying, Do not anger yourself, which works very well with how the Hithpael is frequently employed (reflexively) and with context (note the parallels between this word and רָע in Ps 37:1 and between this word and רָע and יִרְעָא in Ps 37:8). Meanwhile, when the Niphal is used (Isa 41:11; 45:24; Song 1:6), the subject no longer needs to be רָע or impersonal (with ל). Hence, Isa 41:11, כִּי רָע אַל-אֱלֹהִים literally can be rendered all who are burning against you, but idiomatically means all who are angry with you. Finally, one should note the rare expression in Gen 31:35; 45:5: [(pro)noun] יָרַע רָעִיָּא. Literally, it would be rendered Do not let it burn in [your/my lord’s] eyes. The expression is obviously referring to anger (cf. Gen 18:30, 32). An idiomatic translation, though not very satisfactory, would be something like Do not see red [my lord].

175 Besnier, “Language and Affect,” 423, cf. 425, has an interesting discussion of how several languages convey emotion by having the one experiencing emotion not as the subject of the emotion-denoting verb but as its locative modifier, as is the case here.
burning related to emotion, not to a literal one (i.e., it is never used of fire in non-
figurative ways). Like the term ס, the word חם is popular and describes many types of
anger, ranging from Jonah’s anger over a withered plant (Jon 4:9) to Zebul’s anger,
which leads to mass slaughter (Judg 9:30). Also like ס, חם functions as a common
expression for anger that need not entail an actual description of the subject’s
physiological symptoms. The word חם is one of the few terms used more frequently to
refer to human anger (46x) than divine anger (41x). ¹⁷⁶ This word is most common in the
books of Genesis (where it tends to refer to human anger) and Numbers (where it tends to
refer to divine anger). ¹⁷⁷

3.5.2.3 חמה

The term חמה behaves similarly to ס and חם in many respects. Its underlying
meaning is heat. Like many of its Semitic cognates, it can refer not only to heat, but also
to anger. In the Hebrew Bible, חמה appears 125 times, 117 times in reference to anger
(spelled קנה in Dan 11:44, cf. Aramaic), seven times in reference to venom or poison, and
once in reference to the heat of wine. ¹⁷⁸ It also appears an additional six times with the

¹⁷⁶ The references to human anger are: Gen 4:5-6; 30:2; 31:35-36; 34:7; 39:19; 44:18; 45:5; Exod
32:19, 22; Num 16:15; 22:27; 24:10; Judg 9:30; 14:19; 1 Sam 11:6; 15:11; 17:28; 18:8; 20:7, 30; 2 Sam
3:8; 6:8; 12:5; 13:21; 19:42; Isa 41:11; 45:24; Jon 4:1, 4, 9; Ps 37:1, 7-8; 124:3; Job 32:2-3, 5; Prov 24:19;

¹⁷⁷ Genesis and Numbers have the highest number of appearances of the verb (11x each), while
Genesis has the highest appearances of the verb referring to human anger (9x), followed by 1 Sam (7x) and
2 Sam (5x). The verb is unusually rare in the Latter Prophets.

¹⁷⁸ Ezek 3:14 and Ezek 19:12 were counted in the number of references to anger. However, it is
possible that they refer to poison and heat, respectively. Hos 7:5 speaks explicitly of the heat of wine (cf.
Deut 32:33; Isa 63:3; Jer 25:15; Esth 7:7).
alternate pointing הַמִּשְׁרָה, referring to the sun or its heat.179 As with הַרְעָה and הַרְעָה, the perception of anger involving the experience of heat likely provided the basis for using this word to convey anger.180 The word הַמִּשְׁרָה tends to arise in later texts, and it is a favorite of Ezekiel, who mentions it 30 times, almost always with respect to divine anger. On 28 occasions, הַמִּשְׁרָה designates human anger, most commonly in Proverbs (9x), while Esther is not far behind (6x).181 References to human הַמִּשְׁרָה tend to be quite serious and frequently involve at least the possibility of deadly violence.182

3.5.3 Words Referring to Specific Types of Anger

The words חֲנָפָה, חַפְּשָׁה, חֵצָה, חֱסָה (Hithpael) refer to human anger only 14, 10, 4, and 11 times, respectively. Particular patterns emerge with each word, suggesting that each may designate a particular type of anger. However, with so few appearances, any conclusions can only be somewhat tentative.183


180 Schunck, TDOT 4:462.


182 Gen 27:44; Isa 51:13 [2x]; Job 19:29; Prov 6:34; 16:14; Esth 3:5; 5:9; 7:7, 10; Dan 8:6; 11:44.

183 Neither Dobbs-Allsopp et al., Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance nor Donner and Röllig, eds., Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften mention these four words in their respective concordances. The only exception is חַפָּה, but it carries meanings there that have nothing to do with anger.

Edward Ullendorff, Is Biblical Hebrew a Language? Studies in Semitic Languages and Civilizations (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1977), 16-17, has argued that Biblical Hebrew is not so much
3.5.3.1

The root כּרָע appears to refer to authoritative anger.\footnote{\textsuperscript{184}} This word conveys anger on the part of an official, king, leader, or someone with authority in arguably all of its appearances. Certainly, the 44 cases referring to divine anger can be seen as anger on the part of someone with great power. The word also designates anger on the part of several humans with authority:

- Pharaoh (פַרְחָא, Gen 40:2; 41:10)
- Moses (angry with the people he leads; Exod 16:20; Lev 10:16; Num 31:14)
- The commanders of the Philistines (פַרְשָא, 1 Sam 29:4)
- Naaman the commander of the Aramean army (פַרְשָא, 2 Kgs 5:11)
- Elisha the man of God (פַרְשָא, who exerts his authority with the king of Israel; 2 Kgs 13:19)
- The officials who beat Jeremiah (פַרְשָא, Jer 37:15)

\footnote{\textsuperscript{184}} Its cognates tend to carry meanings of \textit{anger}, although the Akkadian \textit{kasāpu} and \textit{keşēpu} mean \textit{think}. Of the 34 appearances it makes as a verb, 28 are Qal, 5 Hiphil, and 1 Hithpael. The verb refers to divine anger 22 times and human anger 12 times. Of the 28 appearances this root makes as the noun כּרָע, 26 refer to divine anger and only 2 to human anger. (The number of references to divine anger assumes that 2 Kgs 3:27 is a reference to the perception of divine wrath on the part of the Moabite god Chemosh against Israel.) There is one other appearance of כּרָע (Hos 10:7), but it refers to a \textit{twig}, not \textit{anger}.}
Various officials of King Ahasuerus (חצר, Esth 1:18; מָלָאכָה, Esth 2:21)

King Ahasuerus himself (Esth 1:12)  

In Isa 8:21, those who are angry are not officials or in a position of authority, but the verb in this case makes its sole appearance in the Hithpael. It is likely that the verb here is an *estimative-declarative reflexive*, where subjects can feign or pretend that they have particular qualities they do not. Thus, the subjects act as though they have stature and authority when they “become enraged (יהוהי) and curse (יהוהי) their God and their king.”

In Eccl 5:17 (5:18 Eng.), is not linked explicitly with authority, but even here the surrounding discussion focuses on wealthy individuals that have status higher than the worker/slave) mentioned in 5:11 (12 Eng.). Terms for anger tend to have connections with authority, and that is especially the case with ענוה.

3.5.3.2

Most of the cognates of refer to angry speech, which appears to be the case in the Hebrew as well. The Hebrew ענוה appears in conjunction with משון (discourse; Num

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185 In Biblical Aramaic, King Nebuchadnezzar is also the subject of in Dan 2:12, where the verb appears in the Peal stem.

186 As Waltke and O’Connor observe, “the Hithpael may denote esteeming or presenting oneself in a state, sometimes without regard to the question of truthfulness” as in 2 Sam 13:5; Prov 13:7; and perhaps Esth 8:17 (Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990], esp. 430-431, §26.2.f).


188 These cognates include meanings such as “attack verbally, scold” (Syr.), “speak angrily” (Arab.), and “quarrel” (Old South Arabic). See B. Wiklander, “ענוה, ענוה,” *TDOT* 4:106-111, esp. 4:107. The root is found 34 times, 12 as a verb (11 Qal, 1 Niphal; 6 human, 6 divine) and 22 times as the noun (4 human, 18 divine). The instances of human anger are: Num 23:7-8; Jer 15:17; Hos 7:16; Mic 6:10; Prov
23:7), מָרַע (curse; Num 23:7), נָשָׁפָה (curse; Num 23:8; Prov 24:24), מִף (mock; Hos 7:16), מְשִׁיר (tongue/speech; Isa 30:27; Hos 7:16; Prov 25:23), and שְׁפִּי (lip; Isa 30:27).

Lexicographers have suggested that when the subject is human, מָרַע always refers to cursing.\(^{189}\) While it is not apparent that cursing is always in view (e.g., Prov 25:23), the biblical and extrabiblical evidence makes strong connections between this word and verbal communication.\(^{190}\)

### 3.5.3.3 הָרֵב (Hithpael)

Although the etymology of these words is uncertain, a key pattern emerges in its usage in the Hebrew Bible.\(^{191}\) In most of these cases, the word refers to unbridled emotion, usually anger although three cases refer to unbridled pride (Isa 16:6; Prov 24:24; 25:23; Dan 8:19; 11:30, 36. The case of Jer 15:17 could be seen as an instance of divine anger. The following verse, however, suggests that YHWH’s deceptiveness has led to the prophet’s anger. Dan 8:19 and 11:36 could also be seen as cases of divine anger, but 11:30 suggests that these instances refer to human anger. Mic 6:10 apparently refers to a “cursedly small ephah,” and it is unclear whether God or humans have cursed the measure.

\(^{189}\) Wiklander, TDOT 4:107. Even if this is the case, there appears to be implicit anger present in the cursing, something attested to in other languages as well (see Levy, Tahitians, esp. 286-287; Besnier, “Language and Affect,” esp. 423-424).

\(^{190}\) The word מָרַע appears with another term for anger in the following cases: Isa 10:5, 25; 30:27; Jer 10:10; Ezek 21:36; 22:31; Nah 1:6; Hab 3:12; Zeph 3:8; Ps 69:25; 78:49; 102:11; Lam 2:6.

\(^{191}\) BDB, HALOT, and NIDOTTE all note the uncertain etymology. Schunck, TDOT 10:425-430, esp. 10:426, meanwhile, does the most to outline the various possibilities. The idea of a lack of restraint may be related to the idea of crossing over, מָרַע. The noun מָרַע and Hithpael forms of מָרַע appear 34 and 8 times, respectively. These words are used of divine anger in Deut 3:26; Isa 9:19; 10:6; 13:9, 13; Jer 7:29; Ezek 7:19; 21:31; 22:21, 31; 38:19; Hos 5:10; 13:11; Hab 3:8; Zeph 1:15, 18; Ps 78:21, 49, 59, 62; 85:4 (85:3 Eng.); 89:38 (89:37 Eng.); 90:9, 11; Prov 11:4, 23; Lam 2:2; 3:1. These words are used of human emotion in Gen 49:7; Isa 14:6; 16:6; Jer 48:30; Amos 1:11; Job 40:11; Ps 7:6; Prov 14:16, 35; 20:2; 21:24; 22:8; 26:17.
The lack of restraint that characterizes the anger conveyed by these words is typically quite harsh, although it need not be marked by a total lack of control. Isaiah 14:6 and Amos 1:11 illustrate the ferocity of this type of anger, the former speaking of “strik[ing] peoples in ḥeḇḇ. with unceasing blows,” while the latter describes the absence (lit. destruction, ḥaḇa) of compassion, the constant tearing of anger, and the preservation of ḥeḇḇ. Not all appearances of this word give sufficient context to suggest that a lack of restraint is always in view, but the available evidence suggests that it typically is.

3.5.3.4 ḥeḇḇ

The final word to consider is ḥeḇḇ, a rare verb appearing only six times, three of which are in Genesis. All six of these instances involve the desire to cause harm, and most of them can be connected with buried or harbored anger, that is, with bearing a

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192 Schunck, *TDOT* 10:426, uses the word “unbridled.”

193 Thus, in Deut 3:26, Moses suffers the consequence of YHWH’s anger that he not cross the Jordan. While this result is harsh for the leader who has stood with the disobedient people so long, it is not as harsh as YHWH killing Moses would be. Likewise, Gen 49:7 refers to the anger of Levi and Simeon against the inhabitants of Shechem. While this anger is marked by a lack of restraint, it does not display a total lack of control, as shown in §2.4.

194 Ps 85:4 (85:3 Eng.), 90:9, 11; Prov 11:23; 14:16, 35; 22:8; 26:17. In Jer 48:30, God mocks Moab’s fury: even when it is unrestrained, it amounts to nothing.

195 To convey the lack of restraint, a number of sources (*BDB*, *TDOT*) recommend translating the noun outburst. However, in English, the term outburst suggests a flash of anger that does not endure. As the above examples from Isa 14:6 and Amos 1:11 illustrate, this temporally bound connotation of outburst does not fit especially well.

grudge. Whereas גֶּרֶד suggests a lack of restraint, גָּנֵב suggests that anger is bridled, at least for a time. Thus, in Gen 27:41, Esau is the subject of the verb. He is clearly angry with Jacob and intends not only to harm his brother but also to kill him. However, he restrains his anger, waiting until after his father’s death before taking action. Genesis 50:15 employs the same verb with a nearly identical situation: Joseph’s brothers fear that Joseph has stored up anger against them for past wrongs and plans to harm them after their father dies, much as Esau did with Jacob.197 Among other things, גָּנֵב illustrates the tendency for biblical anger to result in violence that is not always immediate or uncontrolled.

3.6 Conclusions

Neither the Hebrew Bible’s concept of anger nor the various words that express it have precise equivalents in the English language. There are obvious connections, such as both languages describing anger in terms of heat. However, these connections break as soon as they are taken too far. The prototypical script of anger in the Hebrew Bible needs to be understood not on the terms of an American or Japanese model, but rather on its own terms. It arises in response to perceived wrongdoings more than mere frustrations over daily affairs. It is concerned with ethical issues and is communal, directed not

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toward things, but toward people. It almost always results in some form of estrangement and frequently leads to violence. Consequently, it tends to be evaluated negatively, but because of its moral dimensions, it also has positive qualities. The associative networks of biblical anger pertain to concepts like jealousy, fire, evil, and calamity, extreme violence, and pouring out—far more than Western associations like being mad, inner fluids rising, or explosiveness. The Hebrew terms reveal connections between anger and sadness (חָשֵׁם, חָשַׁה), between feeling angry and feeling warm (רָאשׁ, רָע, and חָמָה), and between anger and authority (טָבָח), speech (חֵכֶם), restraint (חָסַד), and a lack thereof (בְּשֵׁה). For many of these terms, there are no precise equivalents in the English language.

Inevitably, translating these terms involves casualties, particularly as elements of the source language are lost and elements of target language are imposed on the text.

However, George Steiner, who speaks at length about the violence of translation, maintains that translation is not merely negative. It entails not only aggression but also incorporation, that is, the importation and embodiment of new concepts, insights, and worldviews not fully manifest within the socio-linguistic confines of the target language. Thus, Steiner uses the metaphors of “sacramental intake” and “incarnation” to describe the act of translation. Von Humboldt grasps a similar idea when he observes that translators have the opportunity of helping their target audience awaken values and concepts that “slumber” in their native language, opening themselves to new ways of speaking, thinking, and being. While interpreters would not want to incorporate all of

198 Steiner, After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation, 299.

199 Humboldt, “From the Introduction to His Translation of Agamemnon,” 56-57.
the Hebrew Bible’s conceptualization of anger (e.g., its masculine bias), studying how another culture conceives of anger may facilitate freedom from the problematic conceptions of emotions within Western discourse. By doing all that one can to minimize the violent nature of translation, interpreters can help their readers to understand the text on its own terms and thus allow them to enter new worlds and envision alternate modes of existence.
4. Daybreak after the Dim Glow of the Enlightenment: Advances in Old Testament Ethics

This chapter begins by surveying the field of Old Testament ethics, focusing not only on important works but also on the reasons this field has grown dramatically in recent decades whereas previously it received little attention. One of the key arguments offered is that the most important advances in recent decades have occurred as biblical scholarship embraced alternatives to the Enlightenment’s narrow approach to ethics.

This chapter outlines these advances and then critiques them, examining their suitability for examining Genesis’ message about anger. Turning to a variety of literary, philosophical, and critical theorists, this chapter makes the case that a complex narrative such as Genesis is particularly suited for treating a topic like the ethics of anger. Some of the most useful resources for understanding the ethical message of Genesis are the works of Mikhail Bakhtin, Paul Ricoeur, Jean-François Lyotard, Martha Nussbaum, Wayne Booth, and Kenneth Burke. While none of these thinkers offers an approach to narrative or ethics that aligns perfectly with the ways that ethics are conceived in Genesis, their alternatives and modifications to traditional Enlightenment emphases provide useful heuristic models that resonate in different ways with this text. This chapter lays the framework for the following one, which interprets Genesis’ texts about anger.
4.1 The Rise of Works on Old Testament Ethics

The last twenty-five years have seen a marked increase in works on the ethics of the Hebrew Bible. Only a handful of works on this topic were written during the first three-quarters of the twentieth century. Thus, Cyril Rodd refers to ethics as being a “non-subject” for biblical scholars in the middle of the century, a topic assumed to have “no future.” Similarly, Christopher Wright explains that when he planned a dissertation on Old Testament ethics in 1970, John Sturdy told him “nobody had written anything on [the topic] in English for fifty years.” In the same year, Brevard Childs observed, “In spite of the great interest in ethics, to our knowledge, there is no outstanding modern work written in English that even attempts to deal adequately with the Biblical material as it relates to ethics.” As many of these authors go on to acknowledge, the state of Old Testament ethics has been largely ignored by biblical scholars until recently.


4 Wright, Old Testament Ethics for the People of God, 13.

5 Brevard S. Childs, Biblical Theology in Crisis (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 124. One wonders if Barth’s influence is partially to blame for this lack of attention to ethics in biblical theology. Barth has obviously exerted great influence on many biblical theologians. However, his work on ethics was not as enthusiastically received. As John Webster, Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1, puts it, “The ethical sections of the Church Dogmatics have attracted
Testament ethics is now quite different, as many works have been published on the topic.⁶

There are several reasons why Old Testament ethics received relatively little attention until the 1980s. First, for much of the twentieth century, source criticism and form criticism were the prevailing areas of concern. Compared with literary and rhetorical approaches, which did not come onto the scene prominently until the late 1970s and the 1980s, these approaches did not lend themselves easily to theological or ethical exploration.⁷ They tended to focus on reconstructing the hypothetical authors and Sitz im Leben of a given text. Literary and rhetorical approaches, on the other hand, were more concerned with the messages texts convey and the means by which they convey them. The focus on content in these approaches facilitated a focus on the ethical dimensions of a passage’s content.

A second reason for a lack of concern for Old Testament ethics prior to the 1980s pertains to biblical theology, of which biblical ethics is often considered a subset. In preceding decades, especially the 1950s and 1960s, the enterprise of biblical theology appeared increasingly problematic and faced an uncertain future. At the time, Brevard far less attention than the more obviously dogmatic material; and even those who do give time to studying them frequently go away from the texts dissatisfied.”


⁷ For an account of how historical approaches failed to reckon with the “text as such,” see Hans Frei, “Apologetics, Criticism, and the Loss of Narrative Interpretation,” in Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), esp. 53-55. For a bibliographic essay explaining how biblical studies appropriated rhetorical and literary approaches, see Schlimm, “Biblical Studies and Rhetorical Criticism,” 244-275. In many ways, James Muilenburg’s 1968 SBL presidential address constituted a starting point for these types of studies, although they did not reach their maturation until the late 1970s and the 1980s. See Muilenburg, “Form Criticism and Beyond,” 1-18.
Childs characterized these problems as a “crisis,” while John J. Collins would later use stronger language, asserting that the biblical theology movement “died of its own contradictions in the late 1960s.” With the broader field of biblical theology in a state of crisis (if not demise) in the middle of the twentieth century, biblical ethics not surprisingly received relatively little attention. However, when biblical theology resurfaced in the 1980s and beyond, works on biblical ethics flourished as well.

There is a third, broader reason why biblical ethics received much more attention in the 1980s and following: this period brought freedom from many assumptions that had been taken for granted since the Enlightenment. As is well known, the Enlightenment exalted reason as the ultimate authority, rejecting appeals to tradition and ideas of the supernatural. It assumed that reason could articulate a universally valid morality (and thus prevent afreefall into moral relativism in a world free from the constraints of traditional authority). The project of articulating such a morality gave priority to abstractions, generalizations, and universals over the concrete, the particular, and the contingent. To achieve the universality for which it strove, the Enlightenment project placed great emphasis on impartiality, objectivity, and neutrality. Taking cues from science and mathematics, it strove to locate the laws and formulas that lay at the heart of things. It exhibited a strong tendency toward monism, tending to prize singularity over

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8 Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, passim, esp. ch. 3; John J. Collins, “Historical Criticism and the State of Biblical Theology,” *ChrCent*, July 28-Aug 4 1993: 743. The unsolved problems of biblical theology as Childs presented them at the time were: (1) failing to understand how the Bible was inspired by the divine but written by humans, (2) failing to explain how the Old and New Testaments relate, (3) failing to locate the center of the canon, (4) failing to produce commentaries of considerable quality, (5) focusing on history—which did not work well with much of the canon, (6) failing to provide a foundation for the discipline of theology, and (7) connecting the Bible with social ethics in questionable ways (Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, ch. 3).
plurality, systematization over fragmentation, unity over diversity, consistency over variety, commensurability over difference, commonality over irreducibility, and certainty over ambiguity.\(^9\) It focused more on the metaphysical and transcendental than the material and immanent.

In comparison with classical ethical theories, the Enlightenment took an approach that was more Platonic than Aristotelian, emphasizing first principles over practical wisdom.\(^10\) Reason was esteemed over the emotions, theory reigned over particular experience, and propositional discourse took priority over narrative and poetic genres. John Rawls, in *A Theory of Justice*, articulates a modernist vision of what an ethical theory must encompass in order to be valid. In a summary statement, he writes, “a conception of right is a set of principles, general in form and universal in application, that is to be publicly recognized as a final court of appeal for ordering the conflicting claims of moral persons.”\(^11\) By equating ethics with principles, Rawls excludes a number of

\(^9\) As explained in greater depth below, the failure of the traditional biblical theology movement to produce significant ethical treatises stems from its embracing these Enlightenment priorities. The diversity, ambiguities, and particularities of Old Testament materials do not permit their becoming systematized in a way that satisfies these modernist preferences.


other possible priorities for ethical theory, such as paradigms, virtues, ethos, wisdom, perception, and learned experience. By emphasizing generality and universality, he sidelines the particular and concrete. The major ethical theories of the Enlightenment, Kantianism (in which Rawls participates) and Utilitarianism, fit Rawls’ criteria, upholding in typical monistic fashion a single guiding principle for all.

On occasion, biblical scholars have attempted to articulate an ethics of the Hebrew Bible that fits within this type of Enlightenment model. Perhaps the best example is Walter Kaiser’s *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, published in 1983, which attempts to describe the ethics of the Hebrew Bible by focusing on legal materials. Kaiser argues that the ethics of the Old Testament are unified, consistent, universal, and comprehensive—all qualities that modernists like Rawls uphold. Also in typically

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12 Although this dissertation is critical of the Enlightenment approach on the whole, there is some value in universal ethics. Reaching across cultures to reach a minimum consensus about upright moral behavior, for example, has led to advances in human rights. The Hebrew Bible at times participates in something similar, as I have argued in Matthew R. Schlimm, “Teaching the Hebrew Bible amid the Current Human Rights Crisis: The Pedagogical Opportunities Presented by Amos 1:3-2:3,” *SBL Forum* 4, no. 1 (2006): Cited July 31, 2008. Online: http://sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleId=478.

13 Traditional Kantianism is driven by the categorical imperative, “Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law” (Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals; with, On a Supposed Right to Lie Because of Philanthropic Concerns* [trans. James W. Ellington; 3rd ed.; Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993, 1785], 30, §421). Utilitarianism, meanwhile, seeks to answer the architectonic question, “What brings the most good to the most people?” Even a work like Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1966), is arguably at home within modernity. Although it calls for more attention to particularity than many approaches, its suggestion that all ethics can be summarized in the love command reflects the monism and reductionism so characteristic of the Enlightenment.


modernist form, Kaiser argues that Old Testament ethics can be summarized with a single
principle, that of holiness.\textsuperscript{16}

Although Kaiser provided a valuable service in initiating an important
cornerstone about Old Testament ethics, his work has significant flaws. The diverse and
organic qualities of ethical material in the Hebrew Bible simply do not fit within the rigid
framework of the Enlightenment.\textsuperscript{17} Like the failed attempts at recognizing a single
theological center of the Old Testament, Kaiser’s focus on holiness has multiple
problems.\textsuperscript{18} Clay Libolt’s critique of Kaiser in 1985 is revealing:

In the end the most significant thing that can be learned from this book is that it is a bad
project. “Old Testament ethics” is a strange mixing of categories, rather like “Old
Testament philosophy” or “Old Testament botany.” We do ethics. The writers of the Old
Testament did law or prophecy, or they told stories, some of which are, by our standards,
hardly ethical. To put this in another way, the Old Testament prompts reflection, but,
with the exception of Proverbs (which Kaiser scarcely mentions), it rarely does the sort of
thing that counts for ethics in our culture. The differences should be respected. The texts
should be read as they were written.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 139, 301, cf. “Part III: Content of Old Testament Ethics.” Note, however, that on 20-21,
he talks about several “central concepts” (obedience, divine will, holiness, and creation).

\textsuperscript{17} Cf. Waldemar Janzen, “Review of Walter Kaiser, \textit{Toward Old Testament Ethics},” Int 39, no. 4
(1985): 424, which describes Kaiser’s chief weakness as a “its neglect of the Bible’s historical dynamic in
favor of a certain systematizing flatness.”

The incompatibility of biblical and Enlightenment concepts has been observed elsewhere. For
example, regarding the biblical concept of election, Kaminsky, \textit{Yet I Loved Jacob}, 3, writes, “[T]he attempt
has been made to try to fit the Bible’s truth into certain Enlightenment notions, and generally speaking, the
biblical ideas have been distorted in the process.”

\textsuperscript{18} There are a number of other possible centers of Old Testament ethics. See, e.g., the discussion
sense for Kaiser to claim, on the one hand, that the call to holiness is central to Old Testament ethics and
what distinguished Israel from the nations (Kaiser, \textit{Toward Old Testament Ethics}, 140-141), while also
claiming, on the other hand, “Old Testament ethics are \textit{universal}, embracing the same standard of
righteousness for all the nations of the earth as it does for Israel” (Kaiser, \textit{Toward Old Testament Ethics},
11). Is the call to holiness what makes Israel unique or a universal call for all peoples?

106. One should note that there are some problems with this characterization of the Old Testament. For
example, the concept of “Old Testament philosophy” is not so unusual when one interacts with texts like
Job and Qohelet.
When ethics is understood in Enlightenment terms, that is, as a set of general, universal, and consistent principles, one cannot but agree with Libolt that Old Testament ethics is a fundamentally flawed enterprise. So long as modernity sets the terms and definition of ethics, interpreters face extreme difficulties in articulating the ethics of the Hebrew Bible.

However, in the twenty-five years since the publication of Kaiser’s work, biblical scholars have developed a much broader understanding of ethics that has led to a wide variety of analyses of Old Testament ethics. This broader understanding stemmed from changes in philosophical and related fields. Moral philosophers began to question traditional Enlightenment priorities. As early as 1958, Elizabeth Anscombe’s “Modern Moral Philosophy” argued, for example, “the concepts of obligation, and duty—moral obligation and moral duty … ought to be jettisoned.” She called instead for attention to moral psychology.\(^{20}\) Many of her emphases were picked up and later popularized, especially in the 1980s with a variety of publications by Alasdair MacIntyre and Martha Nussbaum, who argued in favor of a more Aristotelian virtue-centered approach to ethics.

At roughly the same time, postmodernity came prominently on the scene, undermining many of the Enlightenment’s aims and assumptions, particularly those related to authority, hegemony, rationality, certainty, and language.\(^{21}\) With renewed interest in Aristotelian virtue ethics and the advent of postmodernity, biblical scholars began to think about ethics in a broader sense than those like Kaiser had envisioned. In many


cases, they retained strong connections with modernity. But by and large, they no longer had the concerns Kaiser did, of focusing on legal materials, extrapolating its principles, locating its center, and arguing for its unity, consistency, and universality. Rather than abandoning the project of Old Testament ethics, biblical scholars reformulated what such ethics might entail.

Many interpreters have observed that the Old Testament contains [1] texts that appear morally problematic (e.g., the הָעַרְנוּל texts), [2] texts that are morally ambiguous (e.g., is Jacob’s trickery praised or condemned?), and [3] texts that are very diverse, potentially in conflict with one another.\(^{22}\) Such dynamics make it nearly impossible to formulate a *modernist* vision of Old Testament ethics, that is, one that is unified, consistent, systematic, and focused on moral principles. However, such textual dynamics do not present insurmountable problems for articulating a more *postmodern* vision of Old Testament ethics. Postmodernity has brought an awareness of the value of diversity and particularity, as well as an awareness that morality is about far more than ethical rules. Such awareness has led to various shifts in assumptions, and at least six broad, creative advances have resulted in the field.

\(^{22}\) Cf. Barton, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics*, 2-3. Many of these criticisms have been made for centuries. One thinks not only of the Marcionite controversy, but also of several thinkers in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century who disparaged the Old Testament, such as Matthew Tindale and Thomas Morgan (for an introduction to how these figures treated the Old Testament, see Matthew R. Schlimm, “Defending the Old Testament’s Worth: John Wesley’s Reaction to the Rebirth of Marcionism,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 42, no. 2 [2007]: 28-51, esp. 30-37). See also Hermann Gunkel, *Water for a Thirsty Land: Israelite Literature and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 2-4.
First, rather than focusing on legal materials like Kaiser (which prima facie share a greater affinity with abstract principles than a number of other genres), several works appeared arguing that narratives provide tremendous ethical resources. Especially noteworthy here are several essays by John Barton and Story as Torah: Reading Old Testament Narrative Ethically by Gordon Wenham. Both authors rely heavily on the work of Martha Nussbaum and Wayne Booth to argue that narratives are particularly suited for addressing the complexities and difficulties of moral decision-making. Their work has inspired many interpreters. For example, Mary Mills’ Biblical Morality: Moral Perspectives in Old Testament Narratives and Robin Parry’s Old Testament Story and Christian Ethics: The Rape of Dinah as a Case Study spring from Barton’s and Wenham’s suggestive proposals.

A second creative advance pertains to the Hebrew Bible’s polyvocality. Moving beyond the modernist tendency toward monism, several works in the last decade stress

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23 The phrase “prima facie” is an important qualification in this clause. Upon close inspection, legal materials are not as congruent with abstract principles as one might assume. See, e.g., discussion in Rogerson, Theory and Practice in Old Testament Ethics, 17, where he concludes, “In short, the Old Testament does not lay down timeless laws or principles that express God’s blueprint for creation.”


the diversity of Old Testament ethical teachings.\textsuperscript{26} Rather than attempting to find a single center, they either examine multiple centers or abandon this type of approach altogether, stressing the plurality of perspectives in the Hebrew Bible. John Barton’s work points to multiple centers in Old Testament ethics. He argues that there are three primary categories of ethical norms in the Old Testament: [1] norms that God explicitly commands, [2] norms that conform with the moral qualities present in the created order (cf. natural law), and [3] norms that can be seen as ways of imitating God.\textsuperscript{27}

Other authors have gone much farther in stressing the diversity of Old Testament ethical materials, abandoning the search for a center or centers. Cyril Rodd maintains on a general level the vast diversity of Old Testament ethics. In \textit{Glimpses of a Strange Land: Studies in Old Testament Ethics}, he “deliberately reject[s] an overall scheme, model, paradigm, dominant theme, underlying principle, or any other attempt to discover a unifying motif by means of which the ethics [of the Old Testament] can be packaged.”\textsuperscript{28} David Pleins’ \textit{Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible} makes similar moves with respect to social ethics. Explicitly seeking a postmodern understanding of biblical social ethics, he argues that the Hebrew Bible is less a single system of social ethics and more “an anthology of theological diversity.”\textsuperscript{29}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{26} Even some earlier works such as Hempel, \textit{Das Ethos des Alten Testaments}, and Hempel, “Ethics in the OT,” esp. 154-157, display an awareness of the ethical diversity of Old Testament materials.

\footnote{27} Barton, \textit{Understanding Old Testament Ethics}, esp. chs. 1-3.

\footnote{28} Rodd, \textit{Glimpses of a Strange Land}, 3-4, cf. 159, 272.

\footnote{29} Pleins, \textit{The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible}, 21. Pleins shows, for example, that whereas the language of poverty appears prominently in many books (Psalms, Proverbs, Prophets), it is not found in the Deuteronomistic History even in cases where one might expect it (e.g., Samuel’s critique of kingship [1 Sam 8], the corvée under Solomon [1 Kgs 5:27-32 (13-18 Eng.); 9:15-22; 12:1-7] or when portraying the seizure of Naboth’s vineyard [1 Kgs 21]) (Pleins, \textit{The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible}, 115).}
Mary Mills also stresses the diversity of Old Testament ethics. However, she does so not by focusing on the differences between the sources and books of the Old Testament as Rodd and Pleins do, but rather by arguing for the multiplicity of meaning within a given text. When she examines the Abrahamic narrative, for example, she argues that the patriarch’s moral life can be interpreted in a variety of ways: as a pious individual, a comic character, a trickster, a tragic figure, a savage parent, and an unworthy husband.\textsuperscript{30} She furthermore argues against a single interpretation trumping the others. She writes, “morality, in any given text, is not a single message but consists of a plethora of interpretations, some contradictory to others.”\textsuperscript{31} Obviously, approaches like those taken by Rodd, Pleins, and Mills are far removed from the unifying tendencies seen with Kaiser.

A third creative advance pertains to the primary concern of ethics. A number of biblical interpreters have argued against the modernist assumption that ethics is primarily an issue of outlining moral principles. Waldemar Janzen and Christopher Wright have, in their own ways, made the case that the Old Testament offers its readers ethical resources less by offering abstract principles and more by providing paradigms and models.\textsuperscript{32}

Throughout \textit{Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach}, Janzen argues that

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{30}] Mills, \textit{Biblical Morality}, 32-47. The above summary is a very close paraphrase of Mill’s language on various occasions.
\item[\textsuperscript{31}] Ibid., 243. Although Mills does not draw heavily on the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin (ibid., 258-259, contains one of the few references to him), her approach has some similarities with his thoughts about polyvocality.
\item[\textsuperscript{32}] While there is something of a modernist ring to these approaches, Janzen and Wright do tend to stress the irreducibility of the Old Testament text, arguing strongly against the notion that once a paradigm is extracted, the particularities of a text can be dismissed.
\end{itemize}
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focusing on ethical principles is an incomplete exercise. Instead, he turns to five loci of concern, which he terms “paradigms.” He asserts that although no particular character within the biblical text may serve as a perfect example, readers form in their minds ideal images with respect to various spheres of life. Thus, he examines “Israel’s inner image” of the following:

[1] “a loyal family member,” that is, the familial paradigm;
[2] “a dedicated worshiper,” that is, the priestly paradigm;
[3] “a wise manager of daily life,” that is, the wisdom paradigm;
[4] “a just ruler,” that is, the royal paradigm; and
[5] “an obedient proclaimer of the prophetic word,” that is, the prophetic paradigm.34

Christopher Wright in his work *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* also takes a paradigmatic approach, but focuses on a single paradigm, Israel, rather than Janzen’s five paradigms. He understands the term “paradigm” in a somewhat different sense than Janzen, seeing it as referring to both “the total conceptual matrix of Israel’s faith” and “the concrete model by which Israel was to be an exemplar to the nations.”35 Wright argues that just as grammatical paradigms provide a pattern that can be utilized in

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34 Ibid.

a nearly infinite variety of contexts, so the Old Testament provides the paradigm of
Israel, one that can be drawn upon for ethical decisions in a vast variety of situations.  

Focusing on paradigms is not the only alternative to a focus on principles.  A
fourth advance in Old Testament ethics occurred as John Barton and Gordon Wenham,
taking cues from Alasdair MacIntyre, argued that certain biblical texts, particularly
narratives, provide ethical instruction by upholding particular virtues for readers to
emulate.  Barton’s essay, “Virtue in the Bible,” raises the question of whether the Bible
displays concern for anything analogous to the interest in virtue ethics in recent times,
which Barton nicely summarizes as [1] sometimes emphasizing being and dispositions
more than a set of decisions, [2] stressing moral formation and development over time,
[3] seeing moral rules “more as a distillation from many good decisions made by virtuous

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36 Ibid., 65-66.  John Rogerson’s *Theory and Practice in Old Testament Ethics* does not use
the language of paradigms and models as prominently as Janzen’s and Wright’s works, but it is worth
mentioning here because it emphasizes repeatedly that the Old Testament offers resources less by providing
principles and more by offering insightful examples.  While he argues that the ethical teachings of the Old
Testament are bound to particular contexts, he does believe it is possible to make transferences to the
present day, particularly when one focuses on the “spirit” of a passage rather than its “letter.”  For example,
he argues that the Jubilee laws are not useful on the level of “letter” for modern societies, but on the level
of “spirit” they speak about workers’ rights in the two-thirds world (Rogerson, *Theory and Practice in Old
Testament Ethics*, 27).

One should note that Paul Hanson also promotes a paradigmatic approach to the Old Testament.
Whereas Jansen emphasizes his five paradigms and Wright focuses on Israel, Hanson understands
paradigms as events in the Bible that reveal the divine nature and are “treasured by the tradition through
retelling, reinterpretation, and in special cases such as the Passover seder or the Lord’s Supper, through re-
enactment that takes on sacramental significance” (Paul D. Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of
Community in the Bible* [Cambridge: Harper & Row, 1986], 529-530).  Such a way of reading texts is not
far removed from the proposal made below that readers engage in metaphorical transference between
narratives and their lives (§4.6.1).  However, it may be necessary to enlarge Hanson’s definition of
paradigms to include events that reveal not just “the nature of God’s purpose” but also the nature of
humanity (ibid., 529).  Similarly, the focus on events may need to be expanded to be useful across the
Hebrew Bible’s diverse genres, particularly genres like poetry that are not always focused on events.

37 E.g., Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (2nd ed.; Notre Dame, Indiana:
University of Notre Dame Press, 1984, 1981), argues in favor of virtue ethics over against an
Enlightenment approach to ethics.
people than as laws operating in an abstract way,"^38^ and [4] understanding the necessity of a moral vision for virtuous living.^39^ Barton contends that while books like Proverbs and Deuteronomy display little affinity with such an approach to ethics, there are deeper resonances with the Bible’s complex narratives, such as 1-2 Samuel. This essay by Barton is suggestive rather than comprehensive. For example, he does not undertake a full examination of the books of Samuel.^40^ Wenham, meanwhile, goes further by developing a methodology and applying it. He posits three criteria for determining what an implied author of a given narrative upholds as a virtue: [1] a repeated behavior pattern, [2] appearance in a positive context, and [3] confirmation from legal codes, psalms, and wisdom books.^41^ In *Story as Torah*, Wenham applies this method to Genesis.^42^

In line with this broader understanding of ethics as pertaining to more than principles, a fifth advance in Old Testament ethics occurred as biblical interpreters turned attention to the question of ethos, that is, the type of atmosphere envisioned by texts that is most conducive to right living.^43^ Here, William Brown has played a significant role in

[^39]: Ibid., ch. 5, 65-74.
[^40]: One should note that he does treat the David and Bathsheba narrative (2 Sam 11-12) more fully in Barton, *Ethics and the Old Testament*, 19-36.
[^41]: Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 88-89.
[^43]: Some of the authors mentioned in the discussion of paradigmatic approaches also deal with the question of ethos. Janzen maintains that legal materials point beyond themselves to a more comprehensive ethos (Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics*, 91). Rogerson is more reticent to use the language of “ethos,” and
his book *The Ethos of the Cosmos*, which examines five creation texts (Gen 1:1-2:4a; 2:4b-3:24; 2 Isaiah; Prov 8:22-31; and Job 38:4-41:26), studying how creation is ordered in these texts and how such an ordering relates to faithful living. Works by Patrick Miller and Eckart Otto also move in this direction.

A final advance in biblical ethics concurrent with an awareness of modernity’s shortcomings is ideological criticism. These approaches tend to be particularly concerned with power relations, marginalization, and treatment of “the Other.”

Ideological criticism in biblical studies usually takes one of three trajectories, criticizing yet, his appropriation of Habermasian discourse ethics, especially with respect to issues of *Lebenswelt*, have obvious points of continuity, such as the creation of an atmosphere most conducive to ideal living (Rogerson, *Theory and Practice in Old Testament Ethics*, 54-57).


With the idea of *ethos*, it is worth noting that German works have tackled the subject of *Ethos* on several occasions. Eckart Otto, *Theologische Ethik des Alten Testaments* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1994), has played a major role here, examining not only enforceable legal norms (*Recht*) but also *Ethos*, giving particular attention to the type of community values upheld by particular sets of laws. For example, on ibid., 81-94, he focuses on the solidarity with the weaker members of the community that is upheld by the Book of the Covenant. As its title suggests, the older work by Hempel, *Das Ethos des Alten Testaments* also discusses *Ethos*. See also Wolfgang Richter, *Recht und Ethos: Versuch einer Ortung des weisheitlichen Mahnspruches* (Munich: Kösel, 1966). However, with these works, one must keep in mind that *Ethos* in the German has a broader meaning than how Brown uses the English word *ethos* in his work. Whereas Brown is concerned with the settings conducive to moral formation, the German term *Ethos* refers to “the lived, embodied set of convictions and virtues and also customs/laws that characterize a particular moral community,” which should not be confused with the German term *Ethik*, which refers to the discipline of reflecting on moral principles and the like without necessarily embodying them (Reinhard Huetter, Personal Communication, Apr. 8, 2008).

either [1] biblical texts, [2] biblical scholarship, or [3] current social tendencies. What makes the last of these fall into biblical scholarship is that social tendencies are assessed critically using biblical texts. While perspectives differ (e.g., taking a feminist approach versus a postcolonial approach), these studies share in common a general posture that seeks to expose how particular works serve (or in some cases counteract) the interests of hegemonic forces.

4.2 Principles in Conflict

Understanding the ethical message of Genesis requires building upon and qualifying these advances. To begin, it is useful to turn to the matter of principles.

47 For further discussion, see Schlimm, “Biblical Studies and Rhetorical Criticism,” 253-254, 269-272.

48 Some examples of ideological criticism include the following. Musa W. Dube, Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2000), is addressed to a South African audience and argues that the content of the Bible is imperialistic, that the Bible has been used in imperialistic ways, and that South Africans need to develop alternate means of appropriating religious authority by transgressing boundaries, challenging imperialist texts, and developing a multicultural canon. Keith W. Whitelam, The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History (London: Routledge, 1996), engages in an postcolonial critique of biblical studies, demonstrating how its discourse has served as an expression of Orientalism that marginalizes and silences Palestinian interests with its nearly exclusive focus on Israel. Walter Brueggemann, The Covenanted Self: Explorations in Law and Covenant (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), engages in a fair amount of social critique using biblical texts relating to law and covenant.

49 This section discusses the first five advances (i.e., narrative, diversity, paradigms, virtues, and ethos). Ideological criticism is a fairly broad area of study that could play a fruitful role in subsequent discussions of how Genesis’ message about anger relates to the experiences of Jewish communities in the exilic and post-exilic periods (cf. §1.5). Does Genesis’ largely negative portrayal of anger serve hegemonic interests and lead to a preservation of the status quo, squelching anger that may serve as an agent of change? Or, does Genesis’ message about the dangers of anger serve to prevent marginalized groups from becoming violent against one another amid imperial pressures? Much could be said about both of these possibilities. As scholars increasingly recognize, resistance literature rarely consists of direct confrontations with imperialist power. Rather, this type of literature typically voices support of the status quo while subtly counteracting it, as demonstrated by James C. Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), passim; James Scott, Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985),
While Genesis does give attention to ethical principles on explicit and implicit levels, it displays considerable awareness of their shortcomings. It tends to present ethical principles in conflict with one another, and it does not always offer easy solutions for resolving such conflicts (contra Rawls’ emphasis on ordering ethical principles so that these conflicts can be easily resolved). The text of Genesis suggests that while ethical principles are necessary, they are fairly obvious and often insufficient. Within the imperfect world it envisions, making a moral decision is frequently more difficult than simply following a moral maxim. One is hard pressed to extrapolate universal moral principles from this text that are always binding regardless of context.

At times, the text of Genesis explicitly names commands that may sound initially like they are universal moral principles. For example, the prohibition of bloodshed in Gen 9:6 is issued by God to all living humans, which suggests it has a universal appeal. Furthermore, the rationale given for this prohibition likewise has a broad appeal: bloodshed is prohibited because humanity is created in God’s image. The rationale is not particular to Israel or another subset of humanity. Rather, it appeals to a characteristic assumed to be present among all humans. Because of who issues the command, who

284-289, cf. 28-41; Gerald O. West, *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 44-55; Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, 23-24; Brett, *Genesis*, 44. One suspects that Genesis may be operating similarly, calling on its readers to avoid violence amongst not only members of the Jewish community, but also other groups also facing imperial domination.

50 Note also that the book of Job presents a variety of perspectives about how to relate to God, leaving the reader to choose from the options. See Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), esp. 21-31.

51 As Lapsley puts it, “In the narrative worlds of the Old Testament easy moral judgments are elusive and most often miss the mark” (Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 11).
receives it, and the rationale undergirding it, the text appears to portray this prohibition as universally binding.52

Yet, in the course of Genesis, the universality of this prohibition is called into question. For example, when Lot is taken captive (14:12), Abram leads 318 trained soldiers against the captors to recover Lot and his goods. Using the verb הָקַנ (strike down, 14:15), the text leaves little doubt that the attack by Abram and his soldiers involved bloodshed.53 However, rather than portraying Abram and his soldiers negatively, the text portrays the patriarch as motivated by the bonds of kinship (14:14a) and not by the prospect of personal gain (14:21-24).54 Immediately following the battle, Abram does not receive condemnation but a blessing (14:18-20). So in this text, the prohibition of bloodshed appears to conflict with the principles of Care for one’s kin and Punish wrongdoing. Abram, adhering to the last two principles, is blessed for his actions. At least in the final redacted form of Genesis, the seemingly universal command not to shed another’s blood (9:6) is subject to qualification when it encounters conflict with other principles.

52 Another example is the divine command given to all humans to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth, found in Gen 1:28; 9:1, 7. While readers in recent times have asked whether this commandment is still binding in a world that has essentially been filled and where overpopulation is a significant problem, the textual features of this command (subject, recipients, rationale, etc.) suggest that it was understood as universal for the foreseeable future. It is interesting, nevertheless, that with Abram and Sarai, readers encounter protagonists who are unable to fulfill this command—not because of their lack of willingness but because of forces beyond their control. Such a narrative also qualifies the extent to which this command should be understood as universal. Beyond its second chapter, Genesis does not present so much an ideal world always conducive to ethical living as an imperfect world where fully embodying moral principles is an elusive goal.

53 The verb תֶּפֶס (to pursue, 14:14-15) may also suggest the presence of bloodshed, as it frequently connotes an aggressive, military pursuit resulting in bloodshed.

One sees similar dynamics in Gen 18:17-33. There, the deity does not issue eternally valid prescriptions that are binding in all situations and contexts. Rather, one reads about a bartering match between Abraham and YHWH over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. Uncertain about the ethics of YHWH’s plan for extermination, Abraham raises a series of risky questions about what the deity has planned. Both parties in this dispute assume that the exceptionally grave sin of these cities merits punishment (assuming they are verified by firsthand observation, 18:20-21). The text thus implies that both parties agree with the principle, *Punish wrongdoing.*\(^{55}\) However, when one moves to the specifics of punishment, there is disagreement. In 18:23, Abraham perceives a potential conflict between this principle and the principle *Do not punish the righteous:* “Will you actually sweep away the innocent with the wicked?” Like one uttering a complaint psalm (e.g., Pss 6; 10; 13; 22; 35), Abraham essentially rebukes the deity, raising questions about YHWH’s future actions and asking the deity to abide by the highest standards of human morality:\(^{56}\) “Far be it from you to do such a thing – to kill the innocent with the wicked, to treat the innocent and wicked alike! Far be it from you! Shall not the judge of all the earth act justly?” (18:25). After several similar requests, YHWH eventually agrees to spare the city if it contains ten righteous individuals.


\(^{56}\) Cf. James L. Crenshaw, “The Sojourner Has Come to Play the Judge: Theodicy on Trial,” in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann*, ed. Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 87; Crenshaw, *Defending God*, 89; R. N. Whybray, “‘Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do What Is Just?’ God’s Oppression of the Innocent in the Old Testament,” in *Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do What Is Right? Studies on the Nature of God in Tribute to James L. Crenshaw*, ed. David Penchansky and Paul L. Redditt (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 6. Interestingly, the narrator does not make explicit that the deity agrees with Abraham that the righteous should not be punished. The narrator may be characterizing the deity as (1) reluctant to communicate, (2) ethically questionable, or (3) supremely authoritative.

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The passage illustrates, among other things, the complexity of enacting justice, even when the actors are none other than YHWH and Abraham. It shows that while consensus can sometimes be reached about general principles (here, *Punish wrongdoing*), there are divergent understandings about how such principles are concretely enacted. The passage furthermore illustrates that two fairly obvious moral principles (*Punish Wrongdoing* and *Do not punish the righteous*) can quickly come into conflict with one another amid the concrete realities of an ethical decision (see Gen 20:3-4 for an analogous scenario). This chapter does not offer a system that orders particular principles so that one knows which to follow when they are in conflict (contra Rawls). Rather, this text offers a conversation between a mortal and the immortal, one that displays not so much an outright aversion to ethical principles, but rather an awareness of their shortcomings and limitations.\(^{57}\) It enters the difficult terrain where moral decisions lack easy resolution. It portrays ethical action not in terms of a straightforward implementation of an ordered set of right principles, but rather in terms of a confrontation that takes place in an imperfect world.

The text of Genesis is not an Enlightenment text, and so it may not be surprising that it has little continuity with an Enlightenment program of ethics. What is surprising, however, are the ways that Genesis resonates with thinkers in the last century who have criticized the Enlightenment. For example, Martha Nussbaum’s *Love’s Knowledge* conducts a thoroughgoing critique of rule- and principle-based ethical theories. Appealing to both classical (especially Aristotle) and modern (especially Henry James)

\(^{57}\) As argued below (§4.6.4), conversation can play a key role in moral development. See also Rogerson, *Theory and Practice in Old Testament Ethics*, 7-8, 37-38, 46, chs. 5-7, 15.
thinkers, she describes “the ethical crudeness of moralities based exclusively on general rules.” She maintains that ethical theories need to empower actors with greater freedom to improvise and respond to situations as they arise. She points to three key limitations of pre-formulated ethical rules. First, they fail to account for what is new and unanticipated in a given situation. Second, they fail to give adequate attention to how features are contextually embedded in a given situation. Finally, they fail to do justice to the “ethical relevance of particular persons and relationships” in a given situation.58 One sees these types of limitations present in Gen 18:17-33. The simple principle *Punish wrongdoing* is, at least in Abraham’s mind, potentially insufficient for the particularities of the actual situation.

Mikhail Bakhtin’s *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, a study that has received surprisingly little attention by biblical scholars, also has some interesting points of continuity with a text like Gen 18:17-33.59 This work undertakes a thorough critique of Kant’s approach to ethics (and those taking similar approaches). For Bakhtin, focusing exclusively on general ethical principles has problems because actual ethical decisions are never made on the plane of abstract generalities. Such a realm, Bakhtin maintains, is “not that unique Being in which we live and die, in which our answerable acts or deeds

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59 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (trans. Vadim Liapunov; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 8. Barbara Green is one of the few to interact with this work, and even then the interaction is sparse. Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship*, contains a handful of references to this work (see ibid., 13, 30 n. 6, 32 n. 9, 33 n. 11, 40, 45). However, it does so when characterizing Bakhtin generally, rather than when characterizing how his work has been or can be used when interpreting biblical texts. Barbara Green, *King Saul’s Asking* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003), contains even fewer references (see 47 n. 4).
are performed; it is fundamentally and essentially alien to living historicity." 60 This realm, Bakhtin avers, is an uninhabited, disembodied, and ultimately artificial world where it makes little difference whether one exists. 61 Bakhtin thinks that while there may be some limited value in general principles, 62 they represent neither the fullest nor the ultimate focus of ethical concern. Instead, the most significant area of ethical concern for Bakhtin is the concrete, unique, never-repeatable situations where individuals have the responsibility to act as only they can. 63

60 For this reason, Bakhtin maintains that abstract reasoning, rather than being the summit of ethical thought, is in fact a limitation to full understanding. He writes:

It is an unfortunate misunderstanding (a legacy of rationalism) to think that truth [pravda] can only be the truth [istina] that is composed of universal moments; that the truth of a situation is precisely that which is repeatable and constant in it. [It is likewise a misunderstanding to think] that which is universal and identical (logically identical) is fundamental and essential, whereas individual truth [pravda] is artistic and irresponsible. (ibid., 37)


61 Bakhtin, Toward a Philosophy of the Act, 43.

62 He believes a general ethical principle is at best “a rough draft of a possible actualization or an unsigned document that does not obligate anyone to do anything” (ibid., 44).

63 Bakhtin, Toward a Philosophy of the Act, e.g., 40. Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson draw a wonderful comparison between this line of thinking by Bakhtin and the work of Leo Tolstoy:

Leven in Anna Karenina and Pierre in War and Peace have both been troubled by the impossibility of grounding an ethical theory, and therefore of knowing for sure what is right and wrong. On the one hand, absolutist approaches not only proved inadequate to particular situations but also contradicted each other. On the other hand, relativism absurdly denied the meaningfulness of the question and led to a paralyzing indifference. After oscillating between absolutes and absences, they eventually recognize that their mistake lay in presuming that morality is a matter of applying rules and that ethics is a field of systematic knowledge. Both discover that they can make correct moral decisions without a general philosophy. Instead of a system, they come to rely on a moral wisdom
While the book of Genesis may not go as far as Bakhtin in stressing the uniqueness of human experience, it joins him in displaying an awareness of the limitations of ethical principles. Instead of operating on the abstract level, it focuses on the concrete and often complicated cases where individuals face a variety of limitations. Such is clearly the case when one looks at texts pertaining to anger. The book of Genesis does little to offer universal principles about this emotion. In Gen 49:5-7, Jacob condemns the anger of Simeon and Levi. However, as shown in §2.4 above, there is ambiguity about whether the brothers’ anger and subsequent deeds have some justification, given both the narrator’s condemnation of Shechem in 34:7 and the chapter’s ending without challenging the brother’s defense of their actions. As in Gen 18:17-33, Gen 34 portrays a conflict between the principles Punish wrongdoing and Do not punish the righteous. If the brothers agree to Shechem’s offer, then evildoing goes unpunished. Their alternative of killing the entire city appears to conflict with the principle Do not punish the righteous. Genesis does not offer a foolproof system of ordered principles that resolve such complex situations. Instead, it is acutely aware of how ethical norms have the potential to conflict amid life’s events.64

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64 Even legal and sapiential materials in the Hebrew Bible display an awareness of the potential for ethical principles to conflict. While it is true that texts like Amos 1:3-2:3 and Exod 20:13-16 appear to imply that a bare minimum of ethical norms is binding on all peoples (see Schlimm, “Teaching the Hebrew Bible amid the Current Human Rights Crisis;” Rogerson, Theory and Practice in Old Testament Ethics, 27), the Hebrew Bible often sees ethical norms as bound to particular peoples and situations, not as general and universally binding (Roland E. Murphy, The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom 171).
Perhaps the closest Genesis comes to offering a guiding principle about anger is YHWH’s words to Cain in Gen 4:7. When Cain becomes upset following the rejection of his offering, YHWH speaks directly to him, asking why he is angry. YHWH then utters words that literally might be rendered, “Is it not true that if you do good, then a lifting? But if you do not do good, sin is one crouching at the doorway. Its desire is for you. You must rule over it.” Unfortunately, this text is exceptionally difficult. It receives


Perhaps the most obvious example is Prov 26:4-5 (cf. Peter Enns, Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2005], 76). There, one finds two maxims with almost identical language. The first instructs the reader not to answer a fool in folly, while the second instructs the reader to answer a fool in folly. There is a logical contradiction when these maxims are understood to be universal principles. However, it seems likely that the redactor(s) placed these proverbs beside one another not so they would cancel each other out, but rather to show that such maxims need to be understood contextually. There are some cases where it would be appropriate to answer fools according to their folly and others when it would be inappropriate to do so. The book of Proverbs, when viewed as a collection, is less about offering readers an enormous set of universal ethical principles. It is, rather, the collective wisdom of communities whose members participate in a shared humanity while displaying considerable variation. In some circumstances, a particular proverb can offer sound guidance, but not in all. A level of practical wisdom, what Aristotle called προφήτες (Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics, 336-341, §VI.v), but which the Hebrew Bible calls הוב ט (Michael V. Fox, “Words for Wisdom,” ZAH 6 [1993]: 153; cf. Davis, “Preserving Virtues: Renewing the Tradition of the Sages,” esp. 189-192), is necessary to know which proverbs can best guide one on particular occasions (cf. discussion of propriety in James L. Crenshaw, Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction [Revised and enlarged ed.; Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 1998], 11-12; see also James L. Crenshaw, “The Acquisition of Knowledge in Israelite Wisdom Literature,” WW 7, no. 3 [1987]: esp. 248). Their validity depends in no small part on their context.

Similarly, the biblical evidence makes clear that even legal materials are to an extent context-dependent, being reinterpreted in various ways and on various occasions (cf. Childs, Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments, 680-681; M. Gilbert, J. L’Hour, and J. Scharbert, Morale et Ancien Testament [Louvain-la-Neuve: Université Catholique de Louvain, 1976], 46, 78). While there are obviously points of continuity between the various law codes of the Hebrew Bible, it is also clear that different circumstances at times called for different norms. On a micro-level, one sees that while Exod 20:13 prohibits murder on a general level, other passages such as Exod 21:13 and Num 35:9-28 display an awareness of how different circumstances merit a different punishment of those who kill another (Rogerson, Theory and Practice in Old Testament Ethics, 8, 27, cf. 19). On a macro-level, many have argued that some of the Hebrew Bible’s law codes are reinterpretations of earlier ones. Thus, Eckart Otto sees Deuteronomy as a “modernizing interpretation of the Covenant code with cultic centralization as its hermeneutical key” and the Holiness Code (Lev 17-26) as “an exegetical harmonization of the Priestly Code, the Decalogue, the Covenant Code, and Deuteronomy” (Eckart Otto, “Of Aims and Methods in Hebrew Bible Ethics,” Semeia 66 [1994]: 163-164).

65 This translation follows the diacritical markings in the MT. As explained in §8.7.2, however, it may be preferable to see הוב ט as a construct chain. Thus, an arguably better translation is “Is it not
thorough treatment and interpretation below (§5.1, §8.7). For now, however, it is obvious that the ethical instruction contained in this verse (when considered in isolation from context) is fairly vague. If the verse contains a universal principle, this principle would be essentially Do what is right or Watch out for sin. Such truisms, placed on an abstract plane, are not of great value to those facing ethical decisions. As the next chapters will show, the words in this verse actually display considerable literary artistry and ethical richness. Such richness, however, is not evident when the verse is reduced to generalities and considered independently of the particularities of the book of Genesis.

The ethical concerns of Genesis, therefore, do not match the concern for universal principles found with the Enlightenment project. Occasionally, there may be a similarity (e.g., prohibition of bloodshed), but the text of Genesis is keenly aware of the shortcomings of ethical principles and their potential to conflict with one another. The narratives of Genesis are far removed from Aesop’s Fables.66 That is to say, their primary point is not to illustrate a single moral. Such an option was available to the authors and redactors of Genesis. The literature of the ancient Near East, for example, includes some stories that resemble the genre for which Aesop is so well known. The Hittite Myth of “Appu and His Two Sons” provides an excellent case in point. This text

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66 At the same time, there is truth in what Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis, 115, claims: although one will not find moralizing at the end of Genesis’s stories, “the stories are by no means amoral.” Cf. Stanley Hauerwas, The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 24-28.
contains a number of parallels with the text of Genesis. Yet, it exhibits a simplistic understanding of moral principles in contrast with the more complex treatment found in Genesis. In this story, the wealthy but childless Appu is visited by a god and promised offspring (cf. Abram in Gen 15:2). His wife conceives while he is intoxicated (cf. Lot in Gen 19:31-36). She gives birth to a son who is named Wrong, and later becomes pregnant again, giving birth to a second son named Right (cf. Cain and Abel in Gen 4:1-8). These two have disputes over land and decide to settle in different locations (cf. Abram and Lot in Gen 13:7-12). The two brothers divide their cattle, with Wrong taking a healthy ox and giving an unhealthy cow to his brother. Although Brother Right receives the unhealthy animal, divine forces heal his sick animal and cause him to prosper (cf. Jacob and Laban in Gen 30:25-31:12). Next, the brothers appear before the Sun God and later the goddess Šawuška seeking justice. The Sun God awards judgment to Brother Right. Brother Wrong in turn curses, so the Sun God refers the matter to Šawuška. The episode involving this final arbitration has been lost.

The proemium of this story is particularly noteworthy for our discussion of principles: “He/she it is (i.e., some deity) who always exonerates just men, but chops down evil men like trees, repeatedly striking evil men on their skulls (like) …s until he/she destroys them.” In this prologue, one sees the morals and main points of the entire story: the divine will punish wrongdoing and exonerate the righteous, so humans should avoid wrongdoing and pursue righteousness. The prologue is quite similar to the kind of

67 COS, 1.58:153-155. Although extant copies are from the New Hittite period, the language suggests it originated in the Old or Middle Hittite period (ibid., 153).

68 For more on Šawuška, e.g., her connections with Ishtar and her roles as the goddess of war and love, see M. Hutter, “Shaushka,” DDD 758-759.
moral-filled epilogues found at the end of Aesop’s fables. One senses that while the story of Appu illustrates these principles, the principles are of primary importance. The story serves the secondary role of exemplifying them. The principles *Punish wrongdoing* and *The righteous should be exonerated* are not shown to be in conflict with one another. Nor are they shown to have many shortcomings. In the book of Genesis, by contrast, one sees greater complexity. Although similar *theological* points are made by Genesis and the Myth of Appu, texts such as Gen 18:17-33 present a more complex *ethical* picture, demonstrating that these same two principles (*Punish wrongdoing* and *Exonerate the righteous*) have the potential to conflict in ways that are not easily resolvable.

### 4.3 The Problems with Paradigms, Models, Virtues, and Ethos

If Genesis is not primarily about offering its readers clear-cut ethical principles, how does it offer ethical guidance? Do the paradigmatic approaches upheld by Waldemar Janzen and Christopher Wright provide the answer? Is the virtue-oriented

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69 E.g., divine forces cause both Right and Joseph to prosper even though human forces seek to undermine them.

70 One wonders if the book of Genesis is not in some way parodying “Appu and His Two Sons,” making obvious parallels with the story while also presenting a far more complex moral understanding. Incidentally, one can note that the book of Job displays something quite similar to Genesis: it assumes that the principle of divine retribution is a universal principle, but then that assumption is called into question throughout the ensuing dialogues (cf. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, 95-109). Likewise, the book of Joshua appears at first glance to take for granted the principles of Deuteronomy, but then it subjects such principles to various questions and qualifications. For example, the harlot Rahab is spared from the ban (צָרֵע, cf. Deut 7:1-2), while the Israelite Achan is essentially subject to it (Ellen F. Davis, “The Poetics of Generosity,” in *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays*, ed. R. Wagner, K. Rowe, and A. K. Grieb [Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2008, forthcoming]).
approach upheld by John Barton and Gordon Wenham preferable? Should one instead follow in the footsteps of William Brown, focusing on ethos?

While all of these works made significant advances in moving beyond the Enlightenment’s preoccupation with moral principles, they also display weaknesses and shortcomings, particularly when applied to Genesis.\footnote{These problems are less prominent with other books of the Bible. For example, paradigms and models can help one understand the interrelation of laws in a book like Leviticus.} The paradigmatic approach has several problems. First, although Janzen and Wright are aware of the Hebrew Bible’s diversity, their writings sometimes do not go far enough to acknowledge this diversity.\footnote{It would be exceptionally difficult, for example, to go through the diverse evidence that Pleins, \textit{The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible}, passim, presents and somehow forge it into a single (or even multiple) paradigm(s).} Janzen, for example, speaks of the familial paradigm (as if there is only one), giving insufficient attention to how different texts display different ethical presuppositions about how family members should behave.\footnote{For example, whereas texts like Exod 20:12 command one to honor one’s parents, a text like 1 Sam 19:11-17 illustrates the complexities of following such a command, particularly when one’s father is attempting to murder one’s spouse. In this passage, the narrator gives no clear indication that Michal’s actions merit condemnation, even though she clearly did not do all she could to honor her father. For more on the conflict between “filial devotion and erotic attachment,” see the excellent discussion in James L. Crenshaw, \textit{Samson: A Secret Betrayed, A Vow Ignored} (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978), esp. ch. 2. The Hebrew Bible does not present a single coherent unified familial paradigm so much as several varying paradigms. Furthermore, one can easily question Janzen’s claim that the familial paradigm is the most comprehensive paradigm of the Old Testament (Janzen, \textit{Old Testament Ethics}, 96-99).} Wright arguably does better in exhibiting an awareness of the Hebrew Bible’s historical and theological diversity.\footnote{For example, in examining Israel as a political model, he admits that interpreters need to wrestle with the question “which Israel and when?” as well as the “apparently contradictory viewpoints” between various texts (Wright, \textit{Old Testament Ethics for the People of God}, 219).} Nevertheless, he makes questionable moves at times. Thus, many might agree with him that Israel, at her best moments within the textual world of the Old Testament, is exemplary. However, a
great number of scholars would disagree with the ways Wright affirms that Israel’s “whole concrete existence in history is paradigmatic.” Wright could do much more to acknowledge the difference and diversity between the textual world of the Old Testament and the historical practices of ancient Israel.

Second, if a book like Genesis provides ethical instruction by imparting paradigms and models to its readers, why does it not provide clearer paradigms and models? Admitting that characters like Abraham, Moses, and David are not in and of themselves models to emulate, Janzen maintains that their right actions collectively contribute in the minds of readers to an image of what ideal ethical living entails. There is, however, a qualitative difference between what Janzen seeks to do and what a text like Genesis seeks to do. The narratives of Genesis appear less concerned with presenting ideals and more concerned with portraying human beings who are never ideal. Likewise, Wright’s upholding Israel as a model has problems. Although he admits, “Israel failed to be all they believed themselves called to be in terms of the

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75 Ibid., 68. For example, Otto, “Of Aims and Methods in Hebrew Bible Ethics,” 162, states explicitly “the actual behavior of Israelites and Judeans cannot be the subject matter of an ethics of the Hebrew Bible.”

76 Janzen describes a paradigm as “a personally and holistically conceived image of a model (e.g., a wise person, good king) that imprints itself immediately and nonconceptually on the characters and actions of those who hold it” (27-28). He maintains that just as most people have a mental image of a good driver and yet would have difficulty naming someone who perfectly matches that description, so, he believes, the Old Testament instills on its readers models to emulate without lifting up a single individual as such a model (Janzen, Old Testament Ethics, 8-9, 28). Barton gets at something similar when he writes, “We may treat all of what we find in the Bible as contributing to a kind of profile of the good life by imagining possible lives or lifestyles in which its precepts are instantiated” (Barton, Understanding Old Testament Ethics, 73).

77 Even though Genesis occasionally labels an individual as righteous (Noah, 6:9, 7:1; Abraham, 15:6; Tamar, 38:26), these people are certainly not perfect. Moreover, the text nowhere suggests that if readers saw the image of an ideal family member, they would somehow gain the capacity to act in ideal ways themselves. Genesis 18:19, for example, says that Abraham will guide his descendents in doing righteousness and justice by his commands, not by his example.
covenant, law and social institutions,” his primary emphasis is on the positive ways
Israel’s faith serves as a model.\footnote{Wright, \textit{Old Testament Ethics for the People of God}, 68.} The Hebrew Bible, by comparison, tends to present
Israel’s faith as falling far short of divine expectations.\footnote{The most common theme in the Latter Prophets is the sinfulness of Israel and Judah. Similarly, the Deuteronomistic History condemns the majority of Israel’s and Judah’s kings. Late liturgical prayers often mention the sinfulness of the people. Even a text like Joshua arguably displays a level of “disquiet” with the ethics of slaughtering the indigenous population, as astutely pointed out by Lawson Stone, “Ethical and Apologetic Tendencies in the Redaction of the Book of Joshua,” \textit{CBQ} 53, no. 1 (1991): 25-35.} In this sense, the Hebrew Bible is concerned with ethics in a much broader sense than Janzen and Wright emphasize. It focuses on not only right actions, but also the limitations and temptations that impede ethical living. In other words, taking an approach to the Old Testament that focuses on positive examples (and turns negative examples into positive ones by negation [cf. Janzen’s account of “models and countermodels”\footnote{Janzen, \textit{Old Testament Ethics}, 36.}]) is an incomplete treatment of the ethics of the Hebrew Bible. Among other things, those expounding the ethics of the Hebrew Bible need to do more to acknowledge the extent of human and circumstantial evil, which obviously is a chief concern of many of its texts.\footnote{This is not to say that these authors are ignorant of the grim picture the Bible paints about evil and sin. See, e.g., Wright, \textit{Old Testament Ethics for the People of God}, 150-153. The point, rather, is that these negative emphases do not, on the whole, receive sufficient attention.} The Hebrew Bible instructs readers not only about how one should live, but also about the limitations individuals face in pursuing ethical goals.

Finally, although both Janzen and Wright stress that biblical ethicists must be concerned with much more than principles, their paradigms sound, at times, very much like a set of principles. Thus, both of their definitions of paradigms include the language
Wright defines a paradigm as “a model or pattern that enables you to explain or critique many different and varying situations by means of some single concept or set of governing principles.” Janzen quotes Wright’s principle-focused definition of paradigms, offering only relatively minor qualifications. Though Janzen and Wright strongly oppose focusing only on principles, contending that their paradigms offer an improvement, readers of their works are at times left wondering how their paradigms guide moral living other than through the paradigms’ constituent principles.

Gordon Wenham’s approach to virtues displays many of the same types of problems. He appears insufficiently aware of the Hebrew Bible’s ethical diversity. For example, one of the methodological steps he proposes for determining the virtues upheld by a narrative is turning to non-narrative texts elsewhere in the canon for confirmation. Such a step presupposes different texts uphold the same virtues, which is not necessarily

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82 Ibid., 63.

83 Janzen actually quotes an earlier work of Wright’s (Christopher J. H. Wright, An Eye for an Eye: The Place of Old Testament Ethics Today [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1983], 43), which emphasizes the role of principles in paradigms even more: “A paradigm is something used as a model or example for other cases where a basic principle remains unchanged, though details differ” (Janzen, Old Testament Ethics, 26-27).

84 Wright essentially makes a concession to this criticism. Noting the similarities between his approach and Janzen’s, he observes that there is not a great difference between a paradigmatic approach and extracting the underlying principles of a text. He admits that paradigms have constituent principles. To counterbalance this criticism, he stresses the importance of various principles holding together coherently, and he maintains that the specific realities of the Old Testament text should never be abandoned in favor of their underlying principles (Wright, Old Testament Ethics for the People of God, 70). Nevertheless, one has difficulty finding a clear difference between what he proposes and what he criticizes. Cf. Janzen, Old Testament Ethics, 55-56.

85 Barton’s work, meanwhile, is fairly incomplete. It offers some suggestive proposals, but not a full treatment that includes a textual application of these proposals. Barton, Ethics and the Old Testament, 19-36, moves in this direction by treating 2 Sam 11-12. Although his treatment is quite rich, this particular narrative (David and Bathsheba) has some fairly obvious ethical implications. One wishes he would work more with other texts.

86 Wenham, Story as Torah, 88-89.
the case. Second, his compilation of the virtues upheld by Genesis seems flat, one-dimensional, and markedly different from what one finds in the text itself. Summarizing the virtues of Genesis, he writes:

[The righteous person] is pious, that is prayerful and dependent on God. Strong and courageous, but not aggressive or mean. He or she is generous, truthful and loyal, particularly to other family members. The righteous person is not afraid to express emotions of joy, grief or anger, but the last should not spill over into excessive revenge, rather he should be ready to forgive. Finally righteousness does not require asceticism: the pleasures of life are to be enjoyed without becoming slave to them.

Although Wenham argues that narratives like Genesis can do justice to the complexities of the moral life, his account of virtues in the Bible’s first book does not. Just as there is a sharp contrast between the ideal image of a family member posited by Janzen and the family members of Genesis, so there is a marked difference between Genesis’ complex characters and this catalogue of virtues upheld by Wenham. A final problem with Wenham’s work is that on occasion he also reduces complex narratives to ethical principles. For example, he describes how the Jacob cycle (25:19-35:29) and the Joseph story (37:2-50:26) suggest to readers “that they too should forgive even their long-term enemies, if they show sincere contrition.” As will be shown in the next chapter, the moral message of these two massive sections of texts is much more complex than this moral cliché put forward by Wenham. One should not criticize Wenham too much for

87 Pleins, *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible*, passim, thoroughly illustrates this point.

88 Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 100.

89 Cf. ibid., 13-14.

90 Ibid., 38.

91 Although Hettema, *Reading for Good*, 312-314, does not refer specifically to Wenham, his conclusions about the Joseph narratives refute the type of move Wenham makes. He stresses that these narratives do not offer a universal imperative like “Reconcile with each other, in remembrance of God’s
making these types of comments, which are summaries (not comprehensive totalities) of what he finds in the texts. At the same time, one wonders if there are ways of doing greater justice to the complexities of moral living.

In comparison with the paradigmatic and virtue approaches by Janzen, Wright, and Wenham, analyses of ethos in the Old Testament tend to do better. William Brown and others (e.g., Otto) recognize the diversity of Old Testament texts. For example, they do not sometimes speak as though there is one ethos reflective of the entire Old Testament. Furthermore, in turning to the issue of ethos, they clearly have a much broader understanding of ethics than the principle-based approach seen with Kaiser and even the paradigmatic and virtue-oriented approaches seen with Janzen, Wright, and Wenham. Moreover, it is clear that Brown is examining a topic with which the texts themselves are concerned. The issue of ethos is, for example, of great importance to texts like Genesis 1-2.

providence.” Rather, the most that one can assume is, “All readers should display the sensitivity that Joseph unfolds, realizing the frailty of human action and life in the common perspective of God’s providence and the complexities of reconciliation.”

By the same measure, when turning to Brown’s treatment of virtue in Proverbs, it is useful to highlight his remark, “The book of Proverbs is eminently more than a catalogue of virtues” (Brown, *Character in Crisis*, 49).

Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 347, writes, “To describe or summarize any myth is almost inevitably to reduce its power, or even to destroy it.” Summaries, by their very nature, fail to do justice to the complexities of works. Yet, some summaries are less destructive than others.

One should also note that there are some other obvious differences between virtue ethics as advanced by MacIntyre (who influenced Wenham) and the key emphases of the Hebrew Bible. For example, virtue ethics is concerned with issues of “selfhood” and “identity” (e.g., MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 216-217; Roberts, “Narrative Ethics,” 474; Stanley Hauerwas, “Character, Narrative, and Growth in the Christian Life,” in *Toward Moral and Religious Maturity: The First International Conference on Moral and Religious Development* [Morristown, New Jersey: Silver Burdett Company, 1980], 461). At least explicitly, the Hebrew Bible does not share this same concern. When writers and narrators express concern for one’s כמות, the text usually has in mind the preservation of life, not the integrity of the self. Virtue ethics as expounded by modern moral philosophers thus has somewhat different areas of concern than the biblical text.
Nevertheless, in terms of the role of anger in the book of Genesis, there is something missing in Brown’s work. Brown defines *ethos* as “the setting that is conducive for the formation of a community’s character.” However, most of Genesis is concerned with a world and setting that does not appear particularly conducive to forming character. His examining the type of ethos presupposed by Gen 1:1-2:4a and 2:4b-3:24 is appropriate, given that these texts (at least chs. 1-2) do portray worlds conducive to moral living, the former being called “very good” and the latter displaying utopian characteristics. However, most of Genesis is concerned with a realm very different from the relatively ideal visions found in the opening chapters. Humanity is expelled from Eden, inhabiting a world of fratricide. The evil of humanity is so great that even a worldwide flood cannot wash it away, as Gen 9:18-29 and 11:1-9 vividly illustrate. Rather than portraying humanity with the freedom to design and achieve their own moral excellence, Genesis presents humanity occupying a world they did not create.

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96 For this reason, there are some concerns with Mary Mills’ characterization of moral order in Genesis being “stable yet fragile” (Mills, *Biblical Morality*, ch. 8, esp. 166). One wonders if there is an overemphasis on moral order and stability. While clearly present in the Garden, chaos and confusion is found outside it, not just in Gen 3-6 (which Mills essentially admits), but also in Gen 9:18-29 and 11:1-9.

97 See not only Gen 4 but also the constant struggles between kinsfolk found throughout Genesis, such as Jacob and Esau, Jacob and Laban, Joseph and his brothers: in each case, fratricide is a clear danger (Gen 27:41-45, 31:23, 37:18, 37:20). Unlike Romans 5:3-5, where Paul sees a cause and effect relationship between hardship and character formation, Genesis suggests hardships, especially perceived wrongdoings, can lead to anger, which in turn can lead to sin (e.g., Esau’s hardships produce murderous rage).
and do not fully comprehend or control. While the book of Genesis does not present moral formation as impossible, it does present a world with serious moral obstacles and ethical dilemmas. Character formation does not come easily, and many fail along the way. Strife is a topic the text returns to time and again. Although Brown does not ignore texts like Gen 3-4 (or even 9:18-29), some questions receive insufficient attention. In particular, how do individuals make morally laudable decisions when they are not in settings conducive to doing so? It is possible to build upon the work of Brown by examining the challenges of the world envisioned by the text.

The issue of ethos is essential to determining the approach one takes to ethics. If one presupposes the world is consistently ordered in a way sufficiently transparent to human beings, then it makes sense to view ethics as an exercise in determining this order and formulating moral principles based on that order. On the other hand, if one presupposes an imperfect world, then a rule-based approach makes little sense, and one must turn to other ways of approaching ethics. Bernard Williams draws this type of distinction when comparing the ethics of Greek philosophy and its heirs with the ethics of Greek tragedy:

Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel are all on the same side, all believing in one way or another that the universe or history or the structure of human reason can, when properly understood, yield a pattern that makes sense of human life and human aspirations. Sophocles and Thucydides, by contrast, are alike in leaving us with no such sense. Each of them represents human beings as dealing sensibly, foolishly, sometimes

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catastrophically, sometimes nobly, with a world that is only partially intelligible to human agency and in itself is not necessarily well adjusted to ethical aspirations.100

On the whole, the moral vision of the world offered by Genesis has more affinity with Sophocles and Thucydides than with their philosophical counterparts. Though its opening chapters present a carefully ordered world, the chapters that follow present a world that humans struggle to understand and master ethically. With the loss of Eden, the world’s order has become partially undone, and humanity’s capacity for perceiving this order has been impaired. Such a world calls not for a relentless focus on principles, but rather a reflection on the complexity and difficulty of the moral life.101

To summarize this discussion of alternatives to principle-based ethics, many works on Old Testament ethics have made progress by moving beyond the narrowness of the Enlightenment’s vision of ethics. At the same time, they have focused on questions that may not be the best suited for examining the teachings of Genesis about anger. Rather than asking, What is the ideal ethical image (singular) put forth by the text? (Janzen), one needs to ask, What are the realistic ethical images (plural) put forth by the text? Instead of asking, What positive models and virtues does the text uphold for emulation? (Janzen, Wright, and Wenham), readers need to ask more broadly, How does

100 Bernard Williams, Shame and Necessity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 163-164.

101 While the idea of “the fragility of the moral life” sounds similar to Nussbaum’s The Fragility of Goodness, that title is actually referring to the fragility of ἀρετή, not the fragility of character (Martha C. Nussbaum, The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 1986], xiii). Nevertheless, there is continuity between the idea stated here and Nussbaum’s writings. For example, describing a “secular analogue of the idea of original sin,” Nussbaum, Love’s Knowledge, 133, articulates very nicely a view of the human-world relationship that has resonances with this notion of imperfect beings in an imperfect world. Characterizing Henry James’ The Golden Bowl, she writes, “a human being’s relation to value in the world [is], fundamentally and of contingent necessity, one of imperfect fidelity and therefore of guilt; [we see] ourselves as precious, valuing beings who, under the strains imposed by the intertwining of our routes to value in the world, become cracked and flawed.”
the narrative equip readers with a better understanding of the world’s ethical dynamics, wherein goodness and evil are frequently intertwined? In addition to the question, What type of environment does the text presuppose is conducive to moral formation? (Brown), biblical ethicists also need to be concerned with What factors, internal and external, impede the realization of moral goodness by characters? Attending to these alternate and additional questions allows interpreters to come closer to understanding the ethical message of Genesis on its own terms.

4.4 Mimesis: Fictive Reality

The preceding discussion has examined approaches that are not necessarily the best for understanding the ethical message of Genesis. While the questions posed in the previous paragraph move toward positive ways of understanding this message, it is possible to be more specific and articulate clearly the ways in which Genesis instructs readers ethically. To begin, a foundational concept is mimesis. The fundamental idea here is that narrative is essentially an imitation of life. Thus, individuals in narrative converse the way they do in real life; they act as actual people act; they experience the same feelings readers experience; they confront problems in the ways that most sensible

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individuals confront problems. Building on this idea and drawing on the work of Paul Ricoeur, Robin Parry speaks of the “proto-narrative structure” of human life, maintaining that lived experience “calls out to be narrated.”

Elaborating on the concept of mimesis, Paul Ricoeur undermines the common assumption that fiction is unreal. While that assumption is true on the level of first-order reference (i.e., referring to events that happened in history), it is not true, Ricoeur demonstrates, on the level of second-order reference. There, fictional narratives refer to reality less by describing particular people and more by describing and redescribing the logical structure of human experience. Thus, whether a narrative reflects historical events or is completely imaginative, it can mimic real life. Some fantasies, as Bakhtin and Dostoevsky have noted, are the most realistic and most truthful works we will ever

104 Barbara Hardy calls into question the long-established distinction between reality and fantasy. She writes, “we dream in narrative, day-dream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative. In order really to live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future” (Barbara Hardy, “Towards a Poetics of Fiction: 3] An Approach through Narrative,” Novel: A Forum on Fiction 2, no. 1 [1968]: 5). At the same time, the match between actual reality and imaginative narratives is never complete. For example, narratives can exaggerate features of life to promote reflection upon them.

105 Parry, Old Testament Story and Christian Ethics, 11. MacIntyre, After Virtue, 211, makes a similar point, observing, “Narrative is not the work of poets, dramatists and novelists reflecting upon events which had no narrative order before one was imposed by the singer or the writer; narrative form is neither disguise nor decoration.”

In fiction, even exaggerations and things that are blatantly unreal can serve to illuminate human nature.

The book of Genesis, by participating in narrative, functions not as mere fiction, but rather as a collection of realistic depictions of the types of events that can and do take place in life. Attempts to see Genesis as historical in nature quickly run into problems. Yet, the ethical value of this work is tied less to its accuracy as history and more to its function as mimesis. To use Ricoeur’s language, its degree of second-order referentiality (i.e., how well it depicts human nature) is of greater ethical significance than its degree of first-order referentiality (i.e., how well it recounts historical occurrences). By persuasively portraying archetypal features of human nature, Genesis

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107 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 55. One is reminded here of Wayne Booth’s comment that some texts “will be, as fictions, the most precious truths we ever know” (Booth, *The Company We Keep*, 345).


109 Granted, there are sections of Genesis that clearly depict a different time that has less commonality with the present realm. One thinks not only of texts like the Eden narrative, but also Gen 6:1-4, which clearly belongs to a different age with its remark, “These were the heroes of old” (יָדֶהוּ בְּעֵצַי הָאָרֶץ, יָדֶהוּ בְּעֵצַי הָאָרֶץ, italics added, v. 4). Note also the differences in lifespan between the pre- and post-diluvial world. While such differences exist, there are many areas of commonality. Eden may be lost, as well as the pre-diluvial world, but as their names suggest, יָדֶהוּ and יָדֶהוּ are representations of humanity as a whole, not bygone heroes of a past age.

110 While this book [1] reflects the time period when its texts were written and compiled and [2] occasionally offers glimpses into historical features of the ancestral period (see Ronald S. Hendel, *Remembering Abraham: Culture, Memory, and History in the Hebrew Bible* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2005], 45-55, 135-139), it would be incorrect to classify it as history. It certainly does not belong to a historical genre the way that a book like 1-2 Kings does with its concern for outlining the lineage of kings of Israel and Judah, along with other historical issues such as providing a temporal reference for events. At the same time, it is useful to keep in mind the arguments of John Van Seters, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), passim, that the Yahwist sections of Genesis have points of continuity with ancient ways of writing history.

invites its readers to envision themselves within its textual world and to make transferences from that world to their own.  

Understanding a narrative like Genesis to function mimaetically is not to say that all readers experience events just like the characters in the narrative. It is, however, to say that there are sufficient points of commonality that readers can forge relationships between what they read and what they experience. While each individual life is unique, it bears points of continuity with other lives, actual and imagined. As Booth puts it, life stories fit within various genres that are not limitless in number. Or, as Kenneth Burke describes in his work “Literature as Equipment for Living,” narrative functions much like proverbial sayings: it seeks to chart social situations that are common and recurrent, providing strategies by instructing readers in matters such as what to expect and when to be cautious. He writes that literature “singles out a pattern of experience that is sufficiently representative of our social structure, that recurs sufficiently often *mutatis mutandis*, for people to ‘need a word for it’ and to adopt an attitude towards

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112 Likewise, Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (trans. Emerson Buchanan; New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 235-236, describes the significance of seeing Gen 2-3 as myth rather than history. His point is applicable to other sections of Genesis as well, such as Gen 4:1-16 (cf. §5.1):

Every effort to save the letter of the story as a true history is vain and hopeless. What we know, as [people] of science, about the beginnings of [hu]mankind leaves no place for such a primordial event. I am convinced that the full acceptance of the non-historical character of the myth—non-historical if we take history in the sense it has for the critical method—is the other side of a great discovery: the discovery of the *symbolic* function of the myth. But then we should not say, “The story of the ‘fall’ is only a myth”—that is to say, something less than history—but, “The story of the fall has the greatness of myth”—that is to say, has more meaning than a true history.

113 As Martha Nussbaum puts it when describing novels, “they speak to us: they ask us to imagine possible relations between our own situations and those of the protagonists, to identify with the characters and/or the situation, thereby perceiving those similarities and differences” (Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge*, 95). See also Mills, *Biblical Morality*, 11.

114 Booth, *The Company We Keep*, 289.
it.”115 Readers certainly will perceive differences between what they read and what they actually encounter, but they will also discover sufficient similarities for narratives to provide guidance of various types, including moral instruction.116

Because of the narrative contours of human experience, many theorists make epistemological claims about the power of narrative. In rhetorical criticism, Walter Fisher describes “narrative rationality,” which he sees as broader than traditional logics, providing warrants for beliefs and action. Affirming Alasdair MacIntyre’s characterization of the human being as essentially a “story-telling animal,”117 Fisher maintains that humanity is always pursuing a narrative logic: “all forms of discourse can be considered stories, that is, interpretation of some aspect of the world occurring in time and shaped by history, culture, and character.”118

In philosophical circles, Jean-François Lyotard makes similar claims, distinguishing scientific knowledge from narrative knowledge and asserting, “narration is the quintessential form of customary knowledge.”119 He explains that although science has achieved a place of prominence in the modern world, influencing for example the


116 It is perhaps for this reason that narrative plays such an important role in the Torah. The Hebrew Bible begins with narrative, it intersperses legal materials with narrative, and then it returns to stories after the conclusion of the Pentateuch. As Ellen F. Davis, Personal Communication, Apr. 26, 2008, has pointed out, “Interpretation of the legal material is then in a sense qualified by its narrative setting. This seems to me very important for how we read both genres.”

117 MacIntyre, After Virtue, 216.


shape of ethical and political discourse, it has many limitations and never represents the totality of knowledge. Knowledge, as Lyotard sees it, is much broader, encompassing such topics as justice, happiness, and beauty. In sharp contrast to scientific knowledge, which is incapable of adequately addressing such matters, narrative knowledge, he maintains, is particularly suited for dealing with these subjects.\textsuperscript{120}

At times, claims about the importance of narrative can be exaggerated. For example, Fisher and MacIntyre’s characterization of humanity in terms of \textit{homo narrans} seems rather narrow in comparison with Kenneth Burke’s broader characterization of the human as the “symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol-misusing) animal,”\textsuperscript{121} which is able to encompass far more of the human experience (although even with Burke there are questions about how well the human condition can be characterized in so brief a statement). Likewise, when theologians like Stanley Hauerwas claim that the entire Christian canon is best seen in narrative terms, they are making unsupportable claims that devalue non-narrative materials in the Bible.\textsuperscript{122} One can affirm the necessity of narrative

\textsuperscript{120} Lyotard argues that whereas scientific knowledge confines itself to a single language game (so Wittgenstein), narrative form lends itself to a variety of language games and is better suited for projects such as legitimating, even if there are limitations to narrative knowledge, especially in a postmodern world where grand narratives have lost their credibility. In contrast to the grand narratives, Lyotard argues that we still have recourse to “the little narrative,” \textit{petit recit} (ibid., 60).


\textsuperscript{122} Hauerwas, \textit{The Peaceable Kingdom}, 28, claims, “Narrative is the form of God’s salvation.” See also the thesis “Scripture is rightly understood ... as a coherent dramatic narrative” (Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, eds., \textit{The Art of Reading Scripture} [Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003], 1). Although it is not the intention of these authors to devalue non-narrative materials, their works may lead readers in this direction. Like other claims to locate a center or overarching category for encapsulating canonical materials, this focus on narrative cannot do justice to the diversity of
for framing and understanding human experience without elevating it to an all-encompassing level that displays insufficient awareness of its shortcomings and limitations. There is no need for dissolving the idea of narrative into something so broad it encompasses the entire Bible or all of human experience. Narratives are an integral, but not the only, part of one’s moral compass. Thus, the point to stress is that narrative has an essential role to play in ethics—not that it has the solitary role. While rules and principles have shortcomings, so do narratives. There thus is need for an ethical system that utilizes narrative without abandoning other forms of moral discourse.

Narratives, after all, do not always lead readers on to admirable ends. Their immense influence on readers is not always edifying. Thus, as Booth points out, although censorship obviously has many problems, the impulse to ban literature stems from the basic insight that literature exerts great influence on people’s lives, sometimes to negative ends. While few people today (at least in non-totalitarian societies) would want to go so far as to forbid the publication of works of literature, readers should take


123 Developmentally, there may be times when rules and principles are particularly useful, such as teaching children right conduct.

124 There is a time and place for legal materials, which are necessary for establishing a bare minimum of ethical standards for a society. When one turns to the legal materials of the Bible, furthermore, one is impressed by the degree of attention they give to providing motivation and explanation (cf. motive clauses), as well as the adaptability they display toward their contexts (cf. Rogerson, Theory and Practice in Old Testament Ethics, 8, 27, cf. 19). Genesis is joined with various legal materials within the Pentateuch, and this union can be seen as a complimentary pairing more than a violent clash. The narrative materials surrounding the Pentateuch’s legal materials serve to qualify and clarify it in a variety of ways (see, e.g., Davis, “The Poetics of Generosity”).

125 One thinks here not only of literature, but also of other media that utilize narrative, such as television, film, and drama. The images presented through these means can be (and often are criticized for being) highly disturbing and morally problematic.

126 Booth, The Company We Keep, 159-167.
certain cautions when engaging narrative. They should be aware of the power of literature to shape the moral life in negative ways. To this end, Booth suggests that readers neither naively trust the text nor skeptically retain a distance, but rather “pursue a two-stage kind of reading, surrendering as fully as possible on every occasion, but then deliberately supplementing, correcting, or refining our experience with the most powerful ethical or ideological criticism we can manage.”127 Such an approach allows one to appreciate the value of narrative without being misguided about its shortcomings.

4.5 Narrative and Anger

Even with its limitations, narrative is particularly useful for tackling a topic like the ethics of anger. There are several reasons. First, emotions themselves tend to have a narrative structure.128 Consider, for example, the prototypical account of anger in the Hebrew Bible outlined in the previous chapter: one can fairly easily speak about the cause of anger, the subject who becomes angry, the object toward whom the anger is directed, and the result of anger. More specifically, one can describe anger as prototypically having a narrative-like genre, or at least common plot elements: someone perceives that a wrongdoing has taken place and experiences anger toward the party responsible, which typically results in violence and/or separation. Because of this

127 Ibid., 280-281. See also the excellent discussion in ibid., chs. 6-8.

narrative structure, stories are particularly useful media for instructing readers about the nature of emotion. Martha Nussbaum explains:

[T]he evaluative beliefs that ground our emotional life are not learned in logical arguments…. They are learned through exposure—usually very early and very habitual—to complex social forms of life, in which these beliefs and the related emotions are housed, so to speak, and by which, for the individuals who learn them, they are constructed. A child does not learn its society’s conception of love, or of anger, by sitting in an ethics class. It learns them long before any classes, in complex interactions with parents and society…. And, since we are all tellers of stories, and since one of the child’s most pervasive and powerful ways of learning its society’s values and structures is through the stories it hears and learns to tell, stories will be a major source of any culture’s emotional life….

…[T]he whole story of an emotion, in its connections with other emotions and forms of life, requires narrative form for its full development.129

Because of the narrative structure of emotions and the role stories play in grounding emotions, narrative provides an indispensable tool for examining the emotions.

Second and related, narrative is useful for engaging a topic like the ethics of anger because it can give readers the opportunity to experience anger and other emotions in the course of their reading.130 Although readers of fiction know that they are not reading of events that historically occurred, they also sense, because of the mimetic function of narrative, that the events of which they read are realistic possibilities for human beings. Hence, they can experience powerful emotions even while reading about events they know never took place.131 They thus are able to reflect on such emotions not from the

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129 Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge*, 293, 296; see also 287. For more on how stories concretely teach the scripts undergirding emotions, see Peter Stearns’ excellent account of Victorian children’s books: Stearns, *American Cool*, ch. 2.

130 As Martha C. Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 53, puts it, “Literature is in league with the emotions. Readers of novels, spectators of dramas, find themselves led by these works to fear, to grief, to pity, to anger, to joy and delight, even to passionate love. Emotions are not just likely responses to the content of many literary works; they are built into their very structure, as ways in which literary forms solicit attention.” Aristotle, on whom Nussbaum depends, links emotion with tragedy, particularly when he defines tragedy as achieving the catharsis of fear and pity (Aristotle, “Poetics,” 46-49, §1449b 24-28).

distant realm of abstraction, but as they concretely experience them through the events of
the story. It is one thing to speak abstractly about the level and type of anger one should
feel toward one’s kin. It is another thing to be a silent observer as Laban catches up with
a fleeing Jacob, hurling repeated accusations while Jacob defends himself and launches
his counterattacks. Narrative, by realistically depicting the types of events that may take
place in life, brings its readers to a more immediate encounter with what it depicts.

Third and finally, narrative is especially suited for addressing the ethics of anger
because of the attention it can give to the complexities and limitations of moral living. Anger presents difficulty for the moral life because it urges individuals to enact the
principle _Punish wrongdoing_ (§3.2.1), even though individuals are rarely in a position to
enact such a principle flawlessly. Such a principle does not, for example, explain who
bears the responsibility for punishing, how to verify wrongdoing, or the many other
perplexing issues involved in the execution of justice. When one recognizes (as Genesis
does) the limitations of such principles, ethics becomes a complicated matter. Rather
than appealing to a singular good (as most Enlightenment approaches do with their

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132 As Booth, _The Company We Keep_, 266 (cf. 284-288), puts it, “The stories we tell to each
other—are too rich and complex to be caught in any critic’s formulas.” Meanwhile, Gunn and Fewell,
_Narrative in the Hebrew Bible_, 49, speaking specifically about the Hebrew Bible’s narratives, write, “the
notion that folk genres are primitive and somehow limited in their potential complex characterization is
problematic and, in the end, a matter of the reader’s perspective.”

This is not to say, however, that narratives always reflect the complexities of life. Some in fact
may have the opposite effect, simplistically depicting life’s ambiguities (see Paul Ricoeur, _Figuring the
27; Lyotard, _The Postmodern Condition_, xix).

133 As seen above, Gen 18:17-33 suggests that even YHWH may have difficulty enacting such a
principle. Elsewhere in the canon, one sees other cases where the deity struggles to enact this moral
principle, such as Jer 31:15-20 and Hos 11:8-9. In those verses, God’s impulse is to send punishment,
which conflicts God’s impulse to love.
monistic focus on a primary guiding principle\textsuperscript{134}, actors must wrestle with a plurality of goods that are not always commensurate.\textsuperscript{135} Simultaneously, they must make moral decisions in a world that they do not fully control and where they never know all the facts, a world filled with unforeseeable events, many of which are disastrous.\textsuperscript{136} Narrative is particularly suited for tackling such surprises, in marked contrast to most philosophical discourse, which has tremendous difficulty depicting the unexpected nature of life’s events.\textsuperscript{137}

\textsuperscript{134} A chief reason why the Enlightenment had so much difficulty with the emotions and strove for a focus on reason alone is that emotions frequently presuppose a plurality of uncontrollable and conflicting goods.

\textsuperscript{135} Nussbaum, \textit{The Fragility of Goodness}, xxix.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 25, describes how Greek tragedy “shows good people doing bad things, things otherwise repugnant to their ethical character and commitments because of circumstances whose origin does not lie with them.” One sees something quite similar in Gen 25:29-34. Many Western commentators who likely never experienced life-threatening hunger quickly condemn Esau’s selling his birthright for a bowl of lentil soup in this passage (e.g., Gunkel, \textit{Genesis}, 291-293; Judah Goldin, “The Youngest Son or Where Does Genesis 38 Belong,” \textit{JBL} 96, no. 1 [1977]: 36; cf. Steinmetz, \textit{From Father to Son}, 97-98, 150; Kaminsky, \textit{Yet I Loved Jacob}, 45, 56). Perhaps he did lack foresight (cf. Nussbaum, \textit{The Fragility of Goodness}, xxx). But readers also see in Esau a person facing limitations and restraints on a variety of levels. He inhabits a world whose soil has been cursed and whose land does not always provide the sustenance one needs. Facing a hunger that he sees as imperiling his own life (25:32), the famished (and obviously unsuccessful) hunter enters his brother’s kitchen, only to find his sibling exploiting his desperate situation, willing to share food only in exchange for his birthright. Facing difficulties and limitations on every level, Esau sells his birthright in this episode that foreshadows how he would later lose his father’s blessing to the same conniving brother. Narratives such as this one illustrate vividly the constraints individuals face and how they do not make decisions in a moral vacuum or ideal world, but rather while subject to the often-harsh gusts of fortune and luck.

\textsuperscript{137} As Jean-Paul Sature puts it so well, “Kant says that freedom desires both itself and the freedom of others. Granted. But he believes that the formal and the universal are enough to constitute an ethics. We, on the other hand, think that principles which are too abstract run aground in trying to decide action…. The content is always concrete and thereby unforeseeable; there is always the element of invention” (Jean-Paul Sature, \textit{Existentialism and Human Emotions} [New York: Philosophical Library, 1957], 47). Similarly, Nussbaum, \textit{Love’s Knowledge}, 3, writes, “The expositional structure conventional to philosophy establishes things without surprise, without incident. But life contains significant surprises. Our task, as agents, is to live as good characters in a good story do, caring about what happens, resourcefully confronting each new thing.”
Narratives such as Genesis can also point to the complexities of the moral life by showing that blessing does not always follow on the heels of right action. Whether one considers Cain’s desire to win YHWH’s approval by sacrifice (Gen 4), Isaac’s and Esau’s simple desire to abide by custom and transfer a blessing (Gen 27), or Joseph’s helping his prison mate only to be forgotten (Gen 40), Genesis makes clear that blessing (cf. what the Greeks called εὐδαιμονία) is not an immediate result of right actions.\textsuperscript{138} It thus offers a richer understanding of the divine economy than one sees in a non-narrative text like Deut 27-28.\textsuperscript{139} Furthermore, Genesis makes clear, as many narratives do, that undeserved disaster can strike individuals so hard that their capacity for moral living is seriously impaired.\textsuperscript{140} Thus, Genesis never points to reconciliation and forgiveness as simple activities easily achieved following severe wrongdoings. Rather, it suggests that sometimes decades must transpire before individuals are again in the position to offer

\textsuperscript{138} Nussbaum, \textit{The Fragility of Goodness}, 334, deals specifically with the fragility of εὐδαιμονία, examining how disaster impairs the ability of individuals to flourish. As she puts it, “There is a real gap between being good and living well.” Aristotle, who clearly influences Nussbaum in many ways, makes similar points in writing:

\begin{quote}
Nevertheless it is manifest that happiness also requires external goods in addition, as we said; for it is impossible, or at least not easy, to play a noble part unless furnished with the necessary equipment. For many noble actions require instruments for their performance, in the shape of friends or wealth or political power; also there are certain external advantages, the lack of which sullies supreme felicity… [An individual] of very ugly appearance or low birth, or childless and alone in the world, is not our idea of a happy [person], and still less so perhaps is one who has children or friends that are worthless, or who has had good ones but lost them by death. (Aristotle, \textit{The Nicomachean Ethics}, 43, §I.viii.15-16)
\end{quote}

See also MacIntyre, \textit{After Virtue}, 176, 213-215.

\textsuperscript{139} One wonders if Genesis is not a qualification or subtle critique of such thinking. For more on the contrast between Genesis and Deuteronomy, see John Van Seters, “The Theology of the Yahwist: A Preliminary Sketch,” in \textit{Wer Ist wie Du, Herr, unter den Göttern? Studien zur Theologie und Religionsgeschichte Israels für Otto Kaiser zum 70. Geburtstag}, ed. Ingo Kottsieper, et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 219-228, esp. 228.

\textsuperscript{140} Nussbaum, \textit{The Fragility of Goodness}, 338-339.
even partial forgiveness, as one sees with Esau and Jacob, as well as Joseph and his brothers.\textsuperscript{141}

In addition to its value in addressing these specific moral complexities, an extended narrative like Genesis is also useful for dealing with anger because, on a more general level, the ethical truth about this emotion is too complex to nail down with a single principle or solitary illustration. Rather, readers need to return to it in different circumstances from different perspectives before gaining a sense of wisdom for handling it. Presenting readers with over a dozen episodes involving anger, the texts of Genesis begin to do justice to the manifold perspectives necessary for approximating the truth about this emotion. Bakhtin describes how Dostoevsky “transfers onto the plane of literary composition the law of musical modulation from one tonality to another…. These are different voices singing variously on a single theme. This is indeed ‘multivoicedness,’ exposing the diversity of life and the great complexity of human experience.”\textsuperscript{142} The various episodes featuring anger in Genesis operate similarly to Dostoevsky’s polyphony: they present a variety of perspectives on this emotion in order to promote a greater understanding of its complexity. Thus, Genesis does not so much

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., xvi, talks about how people who suffer have been “denied at least some ethically significant elements of human flourishing. Such people are not only unhappy: they also do and exchange fewer of the things that make for a completely good human life.”

\textsuperscript{142} Bakhtin, \textit{Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics}, 42. While there is a fruitful comparison here, one should note that Genesis does not go as far as Dostoevsky with respect to polyphony and multivoicedness.
offer hackneyed solutions to ethical dilemmas as present the manifold moral difficulties of this emotion with richness and depth.143

4.6 How Genesis Provides Ethical Guidance

In elaborating on the mimetic function of narrative, the preceding discussion points to key reasons why readers can receive ethical guidance about anger from Genesis. The remainder of this chapter outlines how readers can receive such guidance, pointing to four intersecting avenues: engaging in metaphoric transference, acquiring imaginative experience, being shaped by the second persona, and participating in formative conversations. These possibilities point a way forward to receiving the ethical resources that Genesis offers.

4.6.1 Metaphoric Transference

Wayne Booth has argued that one of the requisite tasks of gleaning ethical insight from narratives is that of forging metaphorical connections between the world of the text and the world of lived experience. The continuities between narrative and human experience described above facilitate such metaphor-making. Booth argues that in narratives one encounters “a vast articulated network of interrelated images, emotions, emotions, emotions, emotions, 143

143 Cf. Nussbaum’s account of Aeschylus (ibid., 49-50). Note in particular her point that there are times when “the only thing remotely like a solution … is to describe and see the conflict clearly and acknowledge that there is no way out” (ibid.).
propositions, anecdotes, and possibilities.”144 Such a network, Booth maintains, functions to present the world in a particular way, giving readers a view of the world that they can, at least in part, metaphorically adopt as their own.145

In the field of biblical studies, Richard Hays has made similar proposals with respect to New Testament ethics. He launches a full, frontal attack on approaches to New Testament ethics that attempt to extract timeless truths from the Bible and disregard the culturally conditioned elements. Such a Kantian enterprise, he contends, is fundamentally at odds with the text itself, all of which is culturally conditioned. Rather than dismissing the particularities of the text, Hays calls for valuing them by seeing how they may metaphorically illuminate the lives of readers. He also distinguishes between metaphors and allegories. Whereas the latter posit a point-by-point connection between story and referents, metaphors allow readers to “sustain the tension of simultaneous likeness and unlikeness between the semantic fields that are joined metaphorically.”146

144 Booth, The Company We Keep, 336-337, see also chs. 10-11. Such a network may be conceived as closely related to ethos, broadly understood.

145 Ricoeur makes similar points (although they should not be conflated with Booth’s). Ricoeur argues that there is a key similarity between the interpretation of texts and the deciphering of metaphors: both involve the construction of meaning by readers (Paul Ricoeur, “Metaphor and the Main Problem of Hermeneutics,” New Literary History 6, no. 1 [1974]: 95-110, esp. 103-104). He maintains that readers derive meaning from metaphors when they construct the network of interaction between (to use Max Black’s terms) the “focus” and “frame” of the metaphor, locating intersections of semantic lines between the two (ibid., 103). In a similar way, Ricoeur asserts, readers construct meaning from a text (ibid., 103-104). Poetic and fictional works evoke, as he puts it, “possible worlds and ways of orientating oneself in those worlds” (ibid., 106). The task of interpretation, which Ricoeur sees as the textually based construction of and orientation within these worlds, is similar to the task of constructing meaning between metaphorical referents. In both cases, he proffers, the construction of meaning involves educated guesswork, taking cues from the text itself to arrive at the meaning that is most probable, congruent, and plentiful (ibid., 104-105). See also Paul Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning (Fort Worth, Tex.: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 92-93.

In this way, he maintains, the foreign world of the Bible can illumine the ethical practices of its subsequent readers.

Appropriating the work of Booth and Hays, one enjoys several benefits from understanding metaphor-making as an essential task of Old Testament ethics. First, approaching narratives metaphorically provides a non-reductive way of seeing continuity between the textual world and the reader’s world. As many theorists of metaphors have emphasized, metaphors are irreducible. One cannot pinpoint a set of similarities between the metaphorical referents and assume, on the basis of such a set, that one has exhausted the rich and various meanings of the metaphor. The old substitution view of metaphors, which claimed that metaphors are merely ornamental and can be replaced by essential definitions, has been abandoned by nearly everyone working in the field.

When narratives are considered metaphors for life, they potentially intersect with experiences in innumerable ways that one cannot reduce to a single set. To put this point differently, approaching narratives metaphorically allows readers to avoid the tendency toward extrapolation and abstraction present in rule-based and even paradigm-based and virtue-based approaches. The full integrity of the narrative is preserved, and readers can

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148 Aristotle, “Poetics,” 104-105 (1457 b 7-9), defines metaphor in terms of the word, rather than in terms of the sentence, something challenged by later theorists like Black, *Models and Metaphors*, 28, and Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 44-100. With this focus on the single word, many have seen in either Aristotle or at least his followers the origins of the “substitution view” of metaphor. Both Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 8-9, and Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 19-20, esp. 44-48, cf. 101-102, however, challenge the suggestion that Aristotle held to so simple a view of metaphor. Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 10-14, suggests that it is in fact Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, both highly critical of metaphors, who have been most influential with the notion that metaphors are merely decorative replacements for “proper” words (cf. Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992], 353). For more on the substitution view (including some examples), see Black, *Models and Metaphors*, 31-34.
never say that they have arrived at a text’s definitive, singular meaning. The “surplus of meaning” inherent in biblical texts is not dismissed by reducing the text’s meaning to a formula or model. In the case of Genesis, it was mentioned above that the first book of the Torah addresses anger by giving attention to the complexities presented by this emotion. Were one to boil Genesis’ message about anger down to a set of propositions, these complexities would likely be lost in the transference to generality, or else the set of propositions would probably become too complicated to be useful. However, by forging metaphoric connections with particular texts, readers can retain a focus on these complexities. In short, metaphor-mapping allows closer attention to the particularities of the text itself.

Another advantage of seeing narratives as providing metaphors for life is their flexibility. Moral principles and rules do not inherently entail a great deal of flexibility in their application. Even the focus on paradigms and virtues can be inflexible at times, failing to address the unique specifics of a given situation. However, seeing texts as offering metaphorical guidance gives readers freedom in application. For example, readers sensing a strong metaphoric connection between their situation and that depicted in a text may see the need for relying closely on the ethical guidance offered therein.

149 Daniel W. Hardy, “Reason, Wisdom and the Interpretation of Scripture,” in Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom: Scripture and Theology, ed. David F. Ford and Graham Stanton (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 69-88, describes the “density of meaning” of the biblical text and how modernity in various ways reduced this density. See also Johnson, “Reading the Scriptures Faithfully in a Postmodern Age,” 122; Lapsley, Whispering the Word, passim. David C. Steinmetz, “The Superiority of Pre-critical Exegesis,” ThTo 37, no. 1 (1980): 27-38, makes similar points when he condemns the modernist attempt to boil texts down to a single meaning, although there are problems with this article, such as how its chief example is a parable, which naturally is more open to a plurality of meaning than something of a less figurative genre. For more on the above term “surplus of meaning” and its connections to metaphor, see Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, esp. 54-57 (although one should note that the proposal made here is not identical to Ricoeur’s).
while readers sensing only a loose metaphoric connection have the freedom to improvise and adapt the metaphorical image to the specifics of their situation.  

A hidden assumption (or at least a logical corollary) of rule-based ethics is that individuals are fairly ignorant of right and wrong and therefore need very specific direction. While there are obviously times in life when people are in fact ignorant of what is best and need the specific guidance provided by rules and principles, there are also times when a focus on rules and principles can feel paternalistic—even suspicious of individuals’ abilities to make creative decisions amid their concrete situations. In such circumstances, a metaphor-based approach to ethics can feel more affirming of the moral capabilities of individuals.  

Rather than telling them what must be done, this approach aims to provide them with ethical resources they can appropriate in the unique situations

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151 Not all metaphors are good ones, and many metaphoric connections with narrative depictions will quickly fall apart. Thus many of the authors mentioned above who discuss the mimetic function of narrative use phrases like “possible relations between our own situations and those of the protagonists” (Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge*, 95-96, italics mine); “[stories] have sufficient contact with what is experienced in daily life” (Mills, *Biblical Morality*, 11, italics mine); and “a pattern of experience that is sufficiently representative of our social structure” (Burke, “Literature as Equipment for Living,” 259, italics mine). One must acknowledge that some narratives are so situated within the particularities envisioned by their authors that they will have insufficient contact with the world of their readers to facilitate a transference of meaning. With Genesis, for example, one suspects that its early audiences were able to relate more closely with its depictions than modern ones.

152 Wayne Booth speaks of implied authors as “the company we keep,” arguing that we would want to become lifelong friends with some of the implied authors we encounter, while others are those whose company is best to avoid (Booth, *The Company We Keep*, chs. 6-8). He writes, “The writer should worry less about whether his narrators are realistic than about whether the image he creates of himself, his implied author, is one that his most intelligent and perceptive readers can admire. Nothing will so certainly consign a work to ultimate oblivion as an implied author who detests his readers or who thinks that his work is better than it is” (Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961], 395-396). One of the reasons Genesis has endured over the centuries is that it trusts its readers and assumes their moral sensitivities. It does not find it necessary on the moral plane to point out the obvious or to treat readers as though they need instruction every step of the way.
that they alone encounter. By utilizing a variety of narratives metaphorically, individuals can find themselves empowered to use their ethical resources in their unique contexts.

A final advantage to a metaphor-based approach is that metaphors already play an important role in ethical decision-making. As mentioned in the previous chapter (§3.4), metaphors can exert a great influence on how one reasons and thinks. A number of scholars have argued that metaphors decisively shape our perceptions of the world and how we act within it. Thus, Kenneth Burke in his *Attitudes toward History* contends that every worldview has a metaphor, implicit or explicit, that serves as its organizational base. For example, understanding the human being to function metaphorically as a *machine* leads to a host of philosophical presuppositions, whereas metaphorically envisioning individuals as *gods* or *apes* leads to quite different views of the world and its inhabitants. Richard Rorty joins Burke in pointing to the importance of metaphors, writing, “It is pictures rather than propositions, metaphors rather than statements, which determine most of our philosophical convictions.” Meanwhile, in *Moral Politics*, George Lakoff argues that metaphors provide the baseline orientations that guide people

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153 As Bakhtin stresses throughout *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, individuals have the responsibility to act in their unique, once-occurrence, never-repeatable place in Being that they alone inhabit. This place, he contends, is “a place that cannot be taken by anyone else and is impenetrable for anyone else” (40).


in making moral decisions in the political realm. A variety of evidence suggests that since its earliest receptions, readers of the Bible mapped metaphors between their worlds and the world evoked by the text itself, forging connections that provide ethical and theological guidance. Understanding biblical narratives to function in this way is an extension of what we already know about the earliest interpretations of the Bible.

### 4.6.2 Imaginative Experience

A second and complementary way of understanding how narratives provide moral guidance about anger is by focusing on the gift of imaginative experience that narratives provide readers. Through the mimetic function of narrative, readers vicariously experience what characters within the narrative experience. Such experiences instruct readers in the concrete and complex moral dynamics of the world. The modernist infatuation with science has deceived many into thinking that if one knows all the

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156 George Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* (2nd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), passim, argues that many Americans understand politics on the basis of the conceptual metaphor that the nation is a family. Conservatives, he argues, have worldviews driven by what he calls “the strict father” model of family, wherein the father is seen as the leader, discipliner, and protector in a hostile world. Liberals, on the other hand, are driven by “the nurturant parent” model of family, where the principle goal is for children to be happy and fulfilled in a world that is generally seen as safe. Lakoff argues that conservatives and liberals alike draw upon their conceptions of the family in the nation-family metaphor, using it to drive their political reasoning. For key components of this argument, see ibid., x, 99-101, 135-140.

157 For example, the phrase פָּתַיַּה וְלָלָת in Jer 4:23 appears to be a metaphoric appropriation of Gen 1:2 (although the dating of the texts is a complex matter here). It seems that the poet takes the chaos and confusion prior to creation (Gen 1:2) as a metaphor for the chaos and confusion of the destruction of the land and subsequent exile. See, e.g., the excellent discussion in Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1999), 356-359. Similarly, the writers of the Damascus Document metaphorically appropriate Adam to speak about eternal life: פָּתַיַּה וְלָלָת (“Those who remain steadfast in it will live forever, and all the glory of Adam will be theirs.”) (CD-A III:20 [= 4Q269 2]). Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 303, describes how New Testament writers also forged such metaphorical connections (e.g., 1 Cor 10:1-5).
formulas and rules, one can always arrive at the right solution. However, as workers in most non-scientific fields know well, formulas and rules can only guide novices so far; they also need to gain experience in the field.\footnote{Aristotle is one of many to make this important distinction:}

Narratives help equip readers with the type of field experience required for moral competence.

A number of key theorists speak of the importance of narratives in equipping readers with experience. Hence, Jean-François Lyotard describes narratives as “apprenticeships.” He contends that stories instruct readers in moral capacities and real-world standards, teaching individuals how to operate within society.\footnote{Lyotard, 	extit{The Postmodern Condition}, 18-23.}

In a similar vein, Wittgenstein describes how modernity’s preoccupation with science and mathematics is problematic when transferred to non-scientific fields. He explains that it has led to a craving for generality, to “reducing the explanation of natural phenomena to the smallest possible number of primitive natural laws,” and to “unifying the treatment of different topics by using a generalization” (Wittgenstein, \textit{Preliminary Studies for the “Philosophical Investigations,”} 18). He writes:

> Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does. This tendency is the real source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness. I want to say here that it can never be our job to reduce anything to anything, or to explain anything. (ibid.)

Although Wittgenstein is more concerned with the philosophy of language than with ethics, his primary points are applicable to both fields. He describes how the tendency toward generality, i.e., reducing meaning to the lowest common denominator, has “shackled philosophical investigation,” reaping few results and leading to a dismissal of concrete cases (ibid., 19).

In addition to Wittgenstein, others such as Nussbaum have stressed the insufficiencies of taking cues from science and mathematics. Indicting the discourse of utilitarian economics, she writes, “the economic mind finds it easy to view the lives of human beings as a problem in (relatively elementary) mathematics that has a definite solution—ignoring the mystery and complexity within each life, in its puzzlement and pain about its choices, in its tangled loves, in its attempt to grapple with the mysterious and awful fact of its own mortality” (Nussbaum, \textit{Poetic Justice}, 23). See also Hauerwas, \textit{The Peaceable Kingdom}, esp. ch. 2, on the insufficiency of generalities, particularly as related to ethics.
makes similar remarks, speaking of narrative as the “laboratory” of ethics. Through storytelling, readers exchange experiences and thus allow one another to acquire practical wisdom about how the world works. Ricoeur contrasts this practical wisdom (which Aristotle called διάστησις) with scientific observation, asserting that the former is of much greater value to individuals in their everyday lives. Walter Fisher makes similar points, maintaining that the world in which we live abounds in knowledge but is surprisingly short on wisdom. Narrative, he contends, allows readers to regain wisdom and incorporate ethical value into thought processes. When individuals turn to the Hebrew Bible, they encounter texts that resonate more with the idea of practical wisdom than scientific or abstract knowledge. Many of its narratives presuppose an integral


163 See the excellent essay, Westphal, “Phenomenologies and Religious Truth,” 105-125, esp. 107-108. One can also note that Fox, “Words for Wisdom,” 153, argues that הָלֹא is the Hebrew Bible’s rough equivalent of Aristotle’s διάστησις. Furthermore, his description of הָלֹא as entailing the ability to “see the implications of situations” as well as “good judgment in practical and interpersonal matters” also has continuity with what Aristotle describes (Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB; New York: Doubleday, 2000], 33). Seeing a text like Genesis as equipping readers with wisdom to guide them in practical ethical affairs is not to make a claim about its belonging to the wisdom corpus (cf. James L. Crenshaw, “Method in Determining Wisdom Influence upon ‘Historical’ Literature,” *JBL* 88, no. 2 [1969]: 129-142; James L. Crenshaw, “A Proverb in the Mouth of a Fool,” in *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Ronald L. Troxel, Kelvin G. Friebel, and Dennis R. Magary [Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2005], 103-115). Finally, it is useful to note that although the Bible is not scientific by modern standards, one does find a type of “applied science” in certain texts like the farmer’s practices mentioned in Isa 28:24-29.
connection between life experience and the wisdom required for making sound ethical decisions.\textsuperscript{164}

While it is certainly true that narratives have their limitations and that some literature negatively influences the moral life (see §4.4 above), many reasons exist for seeing the imaginative experience provided by literature as being as valuable, if not more valuable, than “real-life” experience. First, as Wayne Booth has astutely pointed out, fiction gives its readers a “relatively cost-free offer of trial runs.”\textsuperscript{165} As laboratories (so Ricoeur), narratives provide controlled environments where readers can test out experiments without fearing too greatly the consequences.\textsuperscript{166} Second, and this is a point also made by Booth, stories allow one to acquire more experience than one could in real life. He writes, “In a month of reading, I can try out more ‘lives’ than I can test in a lifetime.”\textsuperscript{167} Nussbaum makes a similar point in explaining why narrative experience is a necessary supplement to life experience: “We have never lived enough. Our experience is, without fiction, too confined and too parochial.”\textsuperscript{168} Third, as Nussbaum hints, there is not only a \textit{quantitative} but also a \textit{qualitative} difference in the experiences that narratives provide.

\textsuperscript{164} For example, Job 12:12 reads, “With the aged is wisdom and with the length of days is understanding.” Though Job may not fully endorse these words that he utters (especially given what his supposedly wise friends have said), his words suggest either [a] that the common assumption is that experience entails the acquisition of wisdom, or [b] that experience \textit{should} entail the acquisition of wisdom even if it does not with his “friends.” Cf. Francis I. Andersen, \textit{Job: An Introduction and Commentary} (TOTC; Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 162.

\textsuperscript{165} Booth, \textit{The Company We Keep}, 485. Speaking specifically of Genesis, Booth adds, “If you try out a given mode of life in life itself, you may, like Eve in the garden, discover too late that the one who offered it to you was Old Nick himself.”

\textsuperscript{166} They can learn, for example, something of how seemingly benign decisions lead to moral catastrophe, or of the human capacity to hurt and be hurt by those we love the most.

\textsuperscript{167} Booth, \textit{The Company We Keep}, 485.

\textsuperscript{168} Nussbaum, \textit{Love’s Knowledge}, 47.
provide. Literature allows readers to enter situations they have not and could not have previously encountered.\textsuperscript{169} It can foster compassion and respect for others and moreover prepare individuals for situations they will later encounter in life. Finally, narrative has the capacity to focus attention in ways that are not always available in life as it is actually encountered. Literature can allow readers to reflect and contemplate on subjects they would be unable to consider amid the flux of everyday life.\textsuperscript{170} This last point is particularly important for our study: anger may be too painful a topic to receive extended reflection as it is encountered in everyday experiences. However, when anger is readers’ first encounter outside of Eden, and when they see it leading to nothing less than fratricide, they are called to reflect on this emotion in ways that they cannot (or will not) amid their personal experiences of it.\textsuperscript{171}

### 4.6.3 Second Persona

A third avenue by which narratives like Genesis guide readers ethically is by what Edwin Black calls “the second persona.” If the first persona is the persona put forward

\textsuperscript{169} As she notes, through stories, individuals can vicariously participate in the lives of people markedly different from themselves (Nussbaum, \textit{Poetic Justice}, 5, 45).

\textsuperscript{170} Granted, narrative experience has its weaknesses as well. It does not allow one to utilize all of the senses, for example, in the way that lived experiences allow.

\textsuperscript{171} As Robert Alter puts it, “We learn through fiction because we encounter in it the translucent images the writer has cunningly projected out of an intuitively grasped fund of experience not dissimilar to our own, only shaped, defined, ordered, probed in ways we never manage in the muddled and diffuse transactions of our own lives” (Alter, \textit{The Art of Biblical Narrative}, 156). Cf. Booth, \textit{The Company We Keep}, 223.

\textsuperscript{171} As Nussbaum, \textit{Love's Knowledge}, 47-48, puts it, with the imaginative experience found in literature, “we are free from some of the distortions that come with the vulgar heat of everyday life.” Cf. Nussbaum, \textit{Poetic Justice}, 5-6.
by the author of a work (i.e., the implied author), then the second persona refers to a
“model of what the rhetor would have his real audience become.”172 The idea here is that
when authors choose the various elements of narrative—a genre, a vocabulary, a type of
discourse, particular focal points, a sort of plot, and a kind of resolution—they shape their
readers in subtle but profound ways by controlling, to an extent, what readers experience.
In this sense, reading is a vulnerable and risky business. It entails an act of submission to
the experiences and means of experience the author offers.173 In a variety of ways,
readers have their desires shaped by what they read.174 Consider, for example, the
function of genre. Kenneth Burke explains, “form is the creation of an appetite in the

172 Black, “The Second Persona,” 113. Rhetorical critics have gone farther, referring to the third
persona (i.e., audiences excluded and unaddressed by texts; see Philip Wander, “The Third Persona: An
Ideological Turn in Rhetorical Theory,” Central States Speech Journal 35 [1984]: 197-216) and fourth
persona (i.e., an audience addressed in subtle ways below the radar of the primary audience; Charles E.
Morris, “Pink Herring and the Fourth Persona: J. Edgar Hoover’s Sex Crime Panic,” Quarterly Journal of
Speech 88 [2002]: 228-244). The idea of the second persona or implied readers has made inroads among
biblical scholarship, including Old Testament ethics (e.g., Wenham, Story as Torah, 7-15).

173 As Booth puts it, “Regardless of my real beliefs and practices, I must subordinate my mind and
heart to the book if I am to enjoy it to the full” (Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, 137-138). To expand on
Booth’s point, consider how readers are shaped by the language and terminology the author uses, both its
limitations and its wide-ranging implications. As seen in the previous chapters, languages are not neutral.
Rather, they carry within them the values of their cultures and societies. As Michael Fishbane, Text and
constructs a universe of meaning and becomes the means whereby that universe is presented to
consciousness.” Kenneth Burke is also insightful. He explains:

Many of the ‘observations’ [authors make] are but implications of the particular
terminology in terms of which the observations are made. Much that we take as
observations about ‘reality’ may be but the spinning out of possibilities implicit in our
particular choice of terms. In the Bible, God is introduced in the first sentence and much
of what follows is the spinning out of that word. Darwinian terminology flatly omits that
term and spins out a different set of implications. (Burke, Language as Symbolic Action,
46)

174 Booth, The Company We Keep, 201-206, describes how “stories engage the listener in a
patterning of desire.”
mind of the auditor and the adequate satisfying of that appetite.”  In other words, when readers encounter a particular genre, they naturally come to expect particular things. Narrators may tempt readers with the illusion of filling their appetites, only to leave them hungry for more. In so doing, they shape the desires, hopes, and expectations of readers. Obviously, some works will shape readers’ desires in life-giving ways, while others will pattern readers’ desires toward what is unedifying.  One should note, nevertheless, that this patterning of desire sometimes works differently from what one may initially assume. Some openly pious works lead readers toward selfish desires, while others that appear aggressive on the surface may in fact lead readers on to admirable ends.

Readers of Genesis have their desires shaped in a variety of ways. Concerning anger, when readers encounter this emotion in the first episode beyond the fire-protected garden, an appetite is whetted. As Cain rises up against his brother in the field, readers begin to desire not only the Edenic community that has been shattered, but also alternatives to anger and fratricide. On the surface of things, Genesis’ account of murder in its opening chapters is neither uplifting nor inspiring. But something happens as

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176 For the duration of time we spend with a work, Booth argues, we are the kind of desirer the text wants us to be:

[T]his means that the most powerful effect on my own ethos, at least during my reading, is the concentration of my desires and fears and expectations, leading with as much concentration as possible toward some further, some future fulfillment: I am made to want something that I do not yet have enough of. So long as I continue to read, my whole being is concentrated on “how it will all turn out,” or on “what it will turn out to be.” (Company We Keep, 201)

This kind of desirer, he goes on to assert, is patterned by “precisely the strengths and weakness that the author has built into his structure” (ibid., 204).

177 Ibid., 206.
readers witness Abel’s blood pouring out onto the ground. Their perspective on the world shifts. Anger is no longer a mere emotion. It is something so powerful that divine words (which just a couple of chapters ago created the universe) are powerless to stop. With anger, readers have encountered the driving force behind the Bible’s first recorded sin. Cain’s murderous rage is something that cries out for resolution—if not in his own life then at least in the generations that follow. One longs to find someone who, in marked contrast to Cain, can serve as his brother’s keeper.\textsuperscript{178}

Narrative patterns desires. It summons attitudes. It instills values. It evokes a view of the world. It shows readers what truly matters, what is worth considering and reflecting upon, what people are truly like, and what hazards and opportunities the environment has in store. In different ways, literature serves as a screen through which reality is viewed. It does not merely reflect reality but selects and even deflects reality.\textsuperscript{179} Particular features come to the fore, while others are obstructed. Narrative has the potential to offer readers nothing less than an outlook on life, a posture toward humanity,

\textsuperscript{178} The earliest audiences of Genesis likely inhabited a culture of honor and shame that placed a significant emphasis on retribution and “getting even” (cf. Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, eds., “Honor and Shame in the World of the Bible,” \textit{Semeia} 68 [1994]: 1-161; for an example of the desire for retribution, see the Samson narrative, as well as the commentary by Crenshaw, \textit{Samson}, esp. 122-124). The book of Genesis does some interesting things with the impulse for revenge. It displays a God who is sometimes unable or unwilling to punish wrongdoing (e.g., neither Adam, Eve, nor Cain receive death for their misdeeds). Furthermore, by creating in readers the longing for alternatives to violence, it subtly challenges the value placed on retribution, upholding care for others as a higher good.

\textsuperscript{179} Burke, \textit{Language as Symbolic Action}, 45, and Black, \textit{Models and Metaphors}, 40-44, use similar ideas to explain how language and metaphors, respectively, function. Their ideas are applicable to literature as well.
a way of being in the world. Narrative certainly serves a descriptive function, but that is never all it does. It also prescribes ways of living and being for its readers.

4.6.4 Formative Dialogue

A fourth and final avenue by which narratives provide ethical instruction is by evoking discussions about morality among their readers. While such discussion is hardly all that is necessary for ethical development, it can serve several important

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181 Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 152. See also Ricoeur, “The Narrative Function,” 193, where he writes, “fictive images refer to reality not in order to copy it, but to prescribe a new reading.” Gunn and Fewell get at a similar idea, writing, “Texts are not objective representations of reality, but representations of particular value systems” (Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 191).

182 Such a proposal is not far removed from the suggestions made by Rogerson, *Theory and Practice in Old Testament Ethics*, 7-8, 37-38, 46, chs. 5-7, 15, who is heavily influenced by Jürgen Habermas’ account of discourse ethics. Simply put, discourse ethics springs from the idea that humans are both interdependent and communicative beings. With this understanding of the human creature, Habermas is concerned with the settings in which non-coercive and transparent communication can take place. Rogerson appropriates Habermas, not by supposing that the Old Testament has all the same concerns as Habermas, but rather by examining the importance of communication about ethics in the Bible. He upholds several examples from Genesis, such as Cain’s denial of responsibility for Abel (Gen 4:9), the disintegration of communication at Babel (Gen 11:1-9), the moral questions raised from a half-lie in Gen 12, 20, and 26, and Abraham and YHWH debating over the ethics of slaughtering the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:17-33). Rogerson also draws parallels between Habermas’s “ideal speech situations” and what he calls “structures of grace,” that is, settings conducive to the experience of divine graciousness, such as legislation protecting the poor. While there are problems with all that Rogerson and Habermas posit about discourse ethics (e.g., Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, passim, esp. 10, criticizes Habermas on several fronts, for example by contending that speech is by its very nature agonistic, and therefore not adaptable to the ideal speech settings Habermas envisions), it is possible to extend their work and point to very important ways that narrative texts guide readers by serving as a springboard for discourse about morality.

183 As Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Christian Character, Biblical Community, and Human Values,” in *Character & Scripture: Moral Formation, Community, and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. William P. Brown (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 11, persuasively notes, merely letting all be heard in dialogue “is quite an anemic response to genocide in Hitler’s Germany, in the colonial Americas, or in today’s Bosnia, Rwanda, or Kosovo; to exploitation of child labor in other countries by U.S. manufacturers; to the international sex trade; or to the rape and murder of women not only by criminals and political terrorists but even by their own fathers and husbands.” Indeed, it is
functions. The dialogue prompted by the text can be understood in two senses: a reader’s dialogue with the text and a reader’s dialogue with other readers about the text. Concerning the former, one might object, asserting that true dialogue cannot exist with a text, only a monologue. However, Bakhtin suggests that the act of reading is more dialogic than one might presume. He understands particular novels (and one could transfer his point to include the complex narratives of Genesis) to be polyphonic, expressing a variety of independent and unmerged perspectives interacting dialogically. This type of dialogic interaction can be greatly beneficial to the moral life, as readers consider a variety of perspectives and gain a better understanding both of others and of the options available to them.

Bakhtin makes other remarks that reinforce this idea of conversing with a text. He contends that any utterance anticipates the perspective of its intended audience and

[184] Particularly when one sees the self as dialogically constructed, as Bakhtin and Booth do (Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, 259-422, e.g., 281; Booth, The Company We Keep, 238-239).

[185] He writes, e.g., about the hero of a work as a “zone of potential conversation with the author … a zone of dialogical contact” (Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, 45, italics his).

One finds something similar in Baltasar Gracián y Morales, The Art of Worldly Wisdom (trans. Christopher Maurer; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 129-130, §229, which envisions life in three acts, instructing individuals to spend the first in conversation with the dead, i.e., in conversation with the great writers of past ages. Likewise, Davis, “The Poetics of Generosity,” points to the type of dialogue and questioning that biblical authors submit to their readers: “[I]nstead of setting out straightforward moral lessons, [the biblical writers] put their readers to work, confusing and unsettling us, raising questions where we might previously have imagined there was clarity.”

[186] Newsom has made this transference to several biblical books including Genesis (Carol A. Newsom, “Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth,” JR 76, no. 2 [1996]: 302-304) and Job (Newsom, The Book of Job, esp. 21-31, 234-235, 259-264).

seeks to respond both to objections raised by the readers and to the types of voices the audience encounters in their wider world. As Newsom puts it in her appropriation of Bakhtin, “no matter how monologic the form of the utterance, one can inquire about the way in which it is implicitly dialogized by its orientation to the already said and the yet to be said.” With such an understanding of utterances, it is possible to see texts like Genesis as serving the essential function of interacting with readers and thus constituting a moral conversation partner.

This idea of conversing with a text is not far removed from Booth’s argument that reading can be fruitfully understood through the metaphor of people meeting. The author implied by a text has the potential to serve as a friend, one who interacts with readers and invites them to a richer life than would otherwise be experienced. Luis Alonso-Schökel makes a similar point when describing specifically readers’ ability to enter into dialogue with Genesis. As he puts it, “Those who want to familiarize themselves with Genesis, so to speak, incorporate themselves into its family.”

Texts provide ethical guidance not only by eliciting conversations with their readers but also by eliciting conversations between their readers. A point made well by both Wayne Booth and Martha Nussbaum is that reading is most conducive to moral

188 Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, 281.
189 Newsom, “Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth,” 302-303.
190 Booth, The Company We Keep, passim, esp. 170. Nussbaum, Love’s Knowledge, ch. 9, draws on Booth’s points and extends them in several ways.
191 Booth, The Company We Keep, 223.
formation when it takes place in a community that can reflect together on their textual encounters. Because of the rich imaginative experience provided by narrative, it can be an especially useful forum for dialogue among readers, leading to their moral edification. There is ample evidence to suggest that the Hebrew Bible has been utilized in such communal settings for almost all of its existence. To some extent in the biblical text itself and certainly in the rabbinic and early Christian commentaries, one sees communities gathered before the text, awaiting ethical instruction while recognizing that such instruction frequently comes through conversation and interaction with the text and with one another.

The Enlightenment taught interpreters to approach Scripture as an object with a single meaning available for extraction. The Hebrew Bible, however, stubbornly refused to elicit a singularity of meaning. Its ambiguities defied resolution. While those continuing to hold on to Enlightenment ideals have contended that such ambiguities are grounds for objecting to the enterprise of Old Testament ethics, there is another way of understanding them. These ambiguities serve the essential function of prompting deep

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193 Booth talks about this idea with the word “coduction” (which he coins) (Booth, The Company We Keep, e.g., 72). Nussbaum, meanwhile, stresses the importance of such a practice as it thwarts a “naïve critical reliance” upon literature (Nussbaum, Poetic Justice, 76).

194 E.g., e.g., Exod 24:7; Neh 8. David Pleins, in outlining his postmodern approach to the diverse social ethics of the Hebrew Bible, notes the continuity between his work and the debate and discussion found among the early rabbis (Pleins, The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible, 21).

195 Johnson, “Reading the Scriptures Faithfully in a Postmodern Age,” 118-119.

196 As mentioned above (§4.1), Barton, Understanding Old Testament Ethics, 2-3, points out that objections have been raised to the enterprise of Old Testament ethics on the grounds that [1] many narratives in the Hebrew Bible are hardly morally edifying and [2] it is often difficult to discern whether particular behaviors are praised or condemned (cf. Jacob’s trickery). Such criticisms stem from the assumption that ethical instruction should take a fairly monologic form (cf. Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, passim, esp. 6-7, 31-32, 82, 96), presenting the ideal more than the real and answers more than questions.
reflection and formational dialogue. Rather than rejecting the ethical value of texts like Gen 34 that contain their share of ambiguity, one can understand such texts as [1] realistically presenting the ambiguities inherent to the moral life and [2] inviting the audience to draw its own conclusions about how individuals should act in such situations.197 Lacking resolution, these texts invite readers both to discussion with the multiple perspectives it presents and to ethical conversation with each other.198

4.7 Conclusion: What to Expect in Genesis

Readers who approach Genesis hoping to gain a formula, rule, or paradigm to help them handle anger will be disappointed. However, it is not apparent that rules are what one should be looking for in the first place. Rules and formulas work very well in science, but they are at best half-truths in a complex and imperfect world containing a plurality of conflicting goods. Iris Murdoch writes, “You may know a truth, but if it’s at all complicated you have to be an artist not to utter it as a lie.”199 Through the artistry of Genesis’ narratives, readers gain experience and wisdom for engaging anger. They acquire within their ethical repertoire a collection of “metaphors for life” that are adaptable to the particularities they encounter. They gain conversation partners for

197 Cf. Parry, Old Testament Story and Christian Ethics, 178, who writes, “Thus Genesis 34 provokes thought but does not aim to settle all the moral questions prematurely.”

198 The idea of a text presenting ambiguities to readers and evoking questions among them has much in common with Sternberg’s concept of “gapping” in the Hebrew Bible (Sternberg, The Poetics of Biblical Narrative, ch. 6), although he tends at times to minimize the amount of ambiguity left by the texts, as his discussion of Gen 34 illustrates (ibid., ch. 12).

thinking about this emotion. They receive training in small and large ways to envision
the world differently. Their desires and longings are patterned anew. They long for
alternatives to anger’s worst outcomes, while being sensibly cautious about what to
expect.
5. In Search of a Brother's Keeper: Anger and Its Antitheses in Genesis

Genesis has approximately one-dozen narratives where human anger appears on either explicit or implicit levels. Each of these narratives speaks clearly in its own voice about this emotion. Although particular themes emerge and reemerge, the text does not repeat a solitary message about this emotion. Rather, these narratives form a conversation about the multiple dimensions of anger. They qualify, amplify, and build upon one another. Thus, readers who experience these narratives view anger from a variety of perspectives and in different lights, gaining wisdom for diverse encounters with anger they may face. As a whole, these narratives display a deep sensitivity to human frailty, an acute awareness of anger’s power, and a realistic range of possibilities for engaging this emotion.

5.1 The Danger of Anger: Cain and Abel

Readers of Genesis first encounter anger as soon as humanity is forced out of Eden (4:1-16). This initial account of the world’s post-paradise realities is an exceptionally laconic text that leaves much unsaid. The ambiguities and silences of the text have occasioned numerous interpretive debates, which are discussed in an appendix below (§8). For now, one can note that readers gain little knowledge about Cain and

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1 Some interpreters have challenged whether Eden should accurately be characterized as a paradise or a utopia. E.g., Penchansky, “God the Monster: Fantasy in the Garden of Eden,” 43-60, esp. 54. While there may be some truth in what Penchansky and others claim, there does appear to be a drastic difference between the relatively ideal life within the garden and the chaos and murder beyond it.
Abel’s upbringing, their character traits, or their religious life. Readers are left uncertain about why God gives more attention to Abel’s sacrifice than to Cain’s. Even the murder itself is retold with exceptional brevity, revealing nothing about whether Abel put up a struggle, how Cain committed the murder, what happened to the body, or when and how Adam and Eve learned of the death.  

What readers do learn is precisely the reason Cain became angry, God’s response to this emotion, and the life-shattering events that anger causes. The text says specifically that Cain becomes very angry because God has regard for his brother’s offering but not his own (4:3-5). Scholars have debated whether Cain could have done more to win God’s approval. The text itself is ambiguous, possibly reflecting the liminal world outside of Eden, where old realities are gone and new realities are not yet apparent. Perhaps God would have accepted the offering if Cain had a better disposition or if he brought a better offering. Perhaps it would have made no difference at all. In any event, Cain is understandably upset. Although God has not commanded that he bring sacrifices, Cain does anyway. He offers fruits from the ground, presumably resulting from his own sweat and toil (cf. 3:17-19). Yet, God ignores it. If Cain has somehow violated the divine will, he is never told what he did wrong. In this world outside of Eden...
Eden, he has reached toward God and experienced nothing in return. When his younger brother brings an offering, however, God looks favorably upon it. Consequently, Cain experiences jealousy and anger.\(^5\) The terminology depicting Cain’s emotion is ליהי ולעשת מונח, which stresses the intensity of Cain’s anger.\(^6\)

While Cain’s sacrifice is ignored by God, his anger is not. YHWH confronts Cain about this emotion, which is highly significant, given that the divine word in Genesis is reserved for the most important of events: the creation of the world, the making of several promises, and the forging of numerous covenants. YHWH begins his conversation with Cain by asking him to express his anger: “So YHWH said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? Why has your face fallen?’” (4:6). These questions appear to be an invitation for Cain to express his anger in ways similar to what one finds in psalms of complaint.\(^7\) However, Cain turns down this invitation, remaining silent. YHWH continues: “‘Is it not true that if you do good, then a lifting up? But if you do not do good, then at the entryway to iniquity\(^8\) is a creature crouching down. Its craving is for you, but you can rule over it’” (4:7).

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\(^5\) The text does not use terms for jealousy, but it clearly portrays Cain as perceiving a wrongdoing concerning who should receive what (cf. §3.3.1). Moreover, his name ליהי has a phonetic connection with והז and והז, the Hebrew verb and noun (respectively) used for being jealous.

\(^6\) On ליהי, see §3.5.2.2. On והז with references to anger, see §3.3.9. On the following clause, והז (and his face fell), see §8.5.

\(^7\) See the full treatment in §8.6.

\(^8\) I here depart slightly from the MT, favoring בתו above בתו (i.e., seeing בתו in construct with the noun that follows). The reasons for this departure are stated below in §8.7.2.
Although interpretations of this verse differ considerably,\(^9\) it is best understood as presenting to Cain two options that can result from his anger. He can do what is good,\(^10\) and in turn experience a “lifting” (4:7a). In the immediate context of ch. 4, it refers to a lifting of Cain’s face, which 4:5b-6 has described as falling in conjunction with his anger.\(^11\) Cain is thus told that his anger can abate, particularly if he does what is good. In the broader scope of Genesis, there are other instances of different types of liftings that result from individuals doing what is good in conjunction with anger (as described below).

Here in Gen 4, Cain’s emotion has brought him to a morally dangerous place. YHWH tells him that if he fails to do what is good, there is a “crouching creature” ($^1\text{běrō}$) beside “a doorway to sin” ($^2\text{təjōx}$; 4:7b). Readers in the ancient Near East would likely have understood the reference to this creature at a door as an allusion to a sin-punishing demon, a life-threatening lion, or perhaps both.\(^12\) Cain thus is warned that his anger brings with it the possibility of sin and peril. He cannot approach the entryway to iniquity without ominous consequences. Should he fail to do good, he will be like one facing a lion or demon. Punishment will ensue, and his life will become endangered.

God’s word of warning concludes with a restatement of the two possibilities that lie before Cain (4:7c). On the one hand, the menacing, punishing creature “desires” him.

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\(^9\) See full treatment in §8.7.

\(^{10}\) Although some have claimed that “doing what is good” refers to making the correct type of offering, LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence*, 33, rightly points out that the matter at hand is ethical, not ritual, as demonstrated in the rest of the narrative.

\(^{11}\) Cf. §8.7.1.

\(^{12}\) See §8.7.2-§8.7.3.
The Hebrew text here uses a word (ḥq'WvT) that in this context likely refers to the attraction of a beast to its prey. This imagery suggests that escaping the worse effects of anger will not be easy. At the same time, Cain is not damned to doing evil. He is told that he can rule, lwm, over this beast. The word suggests that Cain will need a kingly, perhaps even a divine, power to overcome the threat to his life.

Whereas the divine word previously in Genesis has incredible power, creating the world out of primeval chaos, it here falls flat. Cain’s anger continues unhindered by YHWH’s speech. Unable to kill God, Cain kills God’s favorite. In the field, he rises up and strikes down Abel (4:8). As mentioned above, the text is exceptionally brief, giving virtually no details of this climactic event. What the text does stress repeatedly is that Abel is none other than Cain’s brother. Six times in four verses (4:8-11), the text uses the word xa’, brother. The purpose of this repetition is to drive home the devastating power of anger within families. The readers who witness Cain’s murder see that even those closest by blood and by birth can fall prey to the worse effects of this emotion. Neither God’s warning nor the bonds of kinship stop the devastating emotion that Cain experiences.

Anger brings death into the world. Readers expected death to occur once Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit (2:16-17; cf. 3:3-4). Death was delayed. Instead of God killing Adam and Eve for their sins, Cain slays Abel for receiving God’s favor. Various

13 See §8.7.3.
14 See §8.7.3 for a discussion of this word and how it relates to the leonine-demonic imagery of ħq’WvT.
15 LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence*, 85, 143.
parallels exist between Adam and Eve’s act of disobedience in the garden and Cain’s act of fratricide outside the garden. In each case, God brings a warning (2:16-17; 4:6-7), which humans refuse to heed (3:1-7; 4:8). In response, God initiates a series of questions that begin “Where are you?” (הַןָּו יָהָנָם, 3:8-9) or “Where is Abel, your brother?” (הֶנֲבָא יָהָנָם, 4:9a). The humans reply by denying responsibility (3:10-12; 4:9b) before YHWH asks, “What have you done?” (שֵׁלָחַת יַעֲכֹב, 3:13; 4:10). Next, YHWH issues various punishments pertaining to both the disobedient humans and the ground (הָנָּו) that contain the words, “Cursed are you” (נָאֲה יַעֲכֹב, 3:14-19 and 4:11-12). Finally, both episodes conclude with an expulsion from previous locales, making reference to what is east (נְוַנָם) of the Garden of Eden (3:22-24; 4:16). These manifold parallels suggest that


Thomas Brodie, meanwhile, sees these parallels as part of a broader type of pattern within Genesis. In an insightful and provocative study, he argues that Genesis consists of a series of paired texts that operate like two-part paintings or diptychs. Thus, in Gen 1-11, he finds:

In chaps. 1-5
Two accounts of creation (1:1-2:4a; and 2:4b-24).
Two accounts of sin (2:25-chap. 3; and 4:1-16).
Two sets of genealogies (4:17-26; and chap. 5).
the narrative of Cain and Abel clarifies and amplifies the initial account of Adam and Eve’s disobedience.\textsuperscript{17} If Gen 2-3 shows humanity disobeying God in a nearly ideal environment, then Gen 4 shows humanity sinning amid the concrete realities of the world.\textsuperscript{18} Collectively, the stories describe in archetypal terms the fundamentals of human nature and experience, underscoring humanity’s capacity for evil. Remarkably, of all the ways the narrator could have portrayed primal disobedience and sin outside of Eden, anger is the one chosen. Genesis names this emotion as one of the most fundamental threats to moral living and human existence. It endangers one’s ability to do what is right and can lead to both the destruction of community and the slaughter of the innocent.\textsuperscript{19}

\textit{In chaps. 6-11}

Two balancing parts of the flood story (chaps. 6-7; and 8:1-9:17)
Two texts based largely on Noah’s sons (9:18-29; and chap. 10).
Two texts of human finiteness (Babel, the failed tower, 11:1-9; and Shem’s fading genealogy, 11:10-32). (Brodie, \textit{Genesis as Dialogue} 16-17)

While his diptych theory works well with some texts (such as many of these), it works less well with others in Genesis. For example, there are some superficialities in his proposal that Gen 29:31-30:24 is related to Gen 30:25-43 because the former involves the generation of children while the later involves the generation of animals (ibid., 314-319). In any well crafted narrative, there will be similarities between what precedes and what follows. Such similarities, however, do not necessitate taking the expansive diptych approach that Brodie proposes.


\textsuperscript{18} These parallels also suggest that Gen 2:4b-3:24 is not devoid of teaching about disobeying God and the consequences thereof. The traditional “sin and fall” interpretation of this passage may not have gotten everything right, but it was not baseless either. Cf. Lyn M. Bechtel, “Rethinking the Interpretation of Genesis 2.4b-3.24,” in \textit{A Feminist Companion to Genesis}, ed. Althalya Brenner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 77-117; Lyn M. Bechtel, “Genesis 2.4b-3.24: A Myth about Human Maturation,” \textit{JSOT}, no. 67 (1995): 3-26. When interpreters claim, as Carol Meyers, \textit{Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 87, does, that there is little continuity between what Adam and Eve do in the garden and the “horrendous deed” committed by Cain, they are ignoring these highly significant parallels. Genesis 2-3 is about disobeying God, even if it deals with other themes and issues as well.

\textsuperscript{19} As noted in §1.7, there are similarities between how Genesis presents the destructiveness of anger and how Seneca does the same (Seneca, “De Ira,” 106-112, §1.1-11).
Cain’s anger is portrayed in prototypical terms, inviting readers to see his anger as not far removed from their own. As pointed out in §3.2.1, anger is prototypically caused by a perceived wrongdoing in the Hebrew Bible. Given that YHWH pays no attention to Cain’s sacrifice, the human obviously has reason to be angry (4:3-5). Cain’s anger appears to be directed both toward God (to whom he does not respond, 4:6-7) and toward his brother Abel (against whom he acts, 4:8).20 Such God-directed anger is less prototypical, but not unheard of with accounts of human anger (§3.2.2).21 Those who become angry in the Hebrew Bible are prototypically male with some degree of power (§3.2.3), as Cain appears to be (cf. his age and power over his younger brother, 4:1, 8). The normal outcomes of anger are violence and separation (§3.2.4), which clearly match Cain’s experience with respect to both his murder and his exile in the “Land of Wandering” (4:8, 16). In the Hebrew Bible, anger is often evaluated as a part of life that, while inevitable, should be avoided and held in check when possible (§3.2.5). Such an evaluation matches God’s words of warning in Gen 4:6-7 quite nicely. Little differs from the prototypical account of anger inductively assembled from the Hebrew Bible in §3.2. Thus, the narrator presents Cain’s anger as a common form of anger, allowing readers to

20 As Westermann, Genesis, 3:37, notes, something similar happens with Jacob’s favoring Joseph over his brothers. There, the narrator “touches on an experience that he can presuppose in his hearers: the hatred of the one slighted is often directed not toward the one who favors unjustly, but toward the one favored.”

21 It is striking that the one place where Cain’s anger appears less prototypical is its object. In this symbolic depiction of the world’s post-paradise realities, the text appears to be implying that God bears some level of responsibility for the difficulties and inequalities that humanity faces. It suggests that humanity has reasons to become angry with the divine.
see connections between Cain and themselves. For everyone, anger possesses the potential for great harm, particularly within families.

Anger is harmful not only to those like Abel who experience the worst effects of someone else’s anger, but also to those like Cain who experience this emotion themselves. After telling of Abel’s death, the narrative spends its remaining verses discussing God’s punishment of Cain, which causes him to fear for his life, renders the soil worthless, and causes him to wander alone east of Eden (4:11-16). While there is an element of grace in God’s punishment (4:13-15), Cain’s way of life is irreversibly changed. His brother is forever gone. His occupation must change. He must leave those he knows. Once a sedentary farmer, he now is a restless wanderer. The text portrays Cain as estranged even from God (4:16). In Cain’s descendants, violence becomes fruitful and multiplies, particularly in Lamech, who boasts not only of killing a child but also of vengeance far more destructive than even God’s (4:23-24). The violence mobilized by Cain’s anger becomes humanity’s greatest threat (cf. 6:11-13).

In presenting the grave danger and consequences posed by anger, the narrative creates the desire for an alternative to how Cain engages this emotion. When readers see anger resulting in death and punishment, they desire an antidote. Anger has led to the irreparable. Abel is forever gone. The human community has been forever

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22 The text is thus particularly open to the type of metaphoric transference described in §4.6.1.

23 Yet, somewhat paradoxically, the text also portrays Cain as building a city (4:17). For a useful discussion of this paradox, see LaCocque, Onslaught against Innocence, 6.

24 Ibid., 101, writes, “The first sacrificer in human history is also, paradoxically, the first ‘excommunicated.’”

25 Alonso-Schökel, Tu hermano, 323. For a useful discussion of the genealogies in Gen 4-5 and their relation to 4:1-16, see LaCocque, Onslaught against Innocence, 4, 131-145.
impoverished. As J. Robert Cox insightfully observes, rhetorical occurrences of the irreparable lead to shifts in attitudes and thinking among audiences.\textsuperscript{26} By tying anger to death, Genesis focuses heightened attention on this emotion, generating a desire for more information about it and its ethical implications. Readers want to know ways it can be handled that avoid irreversible damage. They wonder what other options are available.

Two times, the text hints at alternatives to anger-driven violence. The first occurs when God warns Cain about his anger. The deity makes clear that Cain, though he is angry, still can do good (4:7a). Cain obviously does not take this path, but the text leaves open the possibility that other characters will come in Genesis who will respond to anger in ways markedly different from Cain. Readers want to encounter one who will do good (Hiphil of בָּשַׁל, Gen 4:7a)—a brother who will find the strength to rule over (יָטֵב, Gen 4:7c) the menacing, punishing creature (גֶּזֶר, Gen 4:7b) at the doorway to iniquity (סָפֹת הָעִבְרָה, Gen 4:7b). Readers desire to know more about the type of lifting (גֶּזֶר, 4:7a) that can take place even after anger enters the scene.\textsuperscript{27}

A second hint about alternatives to Cain’s anger-inspired violence is found in Cain’s response to God’s inquiry about the murder: “Am I my brother’s keeper (רָכָב)?”

\textsuperscript{26} J. Robert Cox, “The Die Is Cast: Topical and Ontological Dimensions of the Locus of the Irreparable,” \textit{Quarterly Journal of Speech} 68, no. 3 (1982): 227-239. Cox mentions that religious or sacred concepts of time, in which grace can overcome the worst evils, stand over against notions of the irreparable wherein one is left to face forever the consequences of one’s actions (ibid., 233). The book of Genesis in some ways resembles this notion of sacred time, esp. 50:20. However, it also presents irreparable evils. There is no reentry to Eden. It does not envision an afterlife that reverses the evils of the present realm. The irreparable is part of the world it envisions, even if some evils have the potential to be used for good.

\textsuperscript{27} See the stories of Abram and Lot (§5.2; Gen 13:6, 10, 14), Sarah and Hagar (§5.5.1; Gen 21:18), Jacob and Esau (§5.8; 32:21 [32:20 Eng.]), and Joseph and his brothers (§5.9; 50:17).
The key word is רֶםוּן, keeper, which is often associated with shepherding. It refers to watching over someone or something, providing sustenance and security. Obviously, being Abel’s keeper is the polar opposite of being his murderer. The former protects Abel from harm; the latter harms him unto death. By mentioning his own opposite, Cain alludes to the possibility that there may be alternatives to the path he himself has taken. His words hint that he may be a foil to other, greater characters, yet to come. As Cain’s disastrous life unfolds, readers long for one who will serve as an anti-Cain, fulfilling the role of being a keeper for his brothers, providing security and sustenance for family members in a harsh world (cf. §4.6.3 on the shaping of readers’ desires). The audience will receive a glimpse of someone serving this role in Abram (§5.2), but they will need to wait until Genesis’ conclusion before encountering Joseph, who fulfills this role and provides in a variety of ways for his brothers, even after a long history of anger, jealousy, and abuse (§5.9).

Genesis 4:1-16, in short, presents anger as a grave danger to the moral life. It brings death in the world. It is linked to the Bible’s first explicit mention of “sin” (תַּאֲשֶׁר, 4:7). It shatters what community existed beyond Eden. It wreaks havoc on Cain and destroys humanity’s first family. By presenting anger as a grave moral problem, the text whets readers’ appetites for alternatives to how Cain handled his anger. As readers engage the plots of Genesis, they desire to meet characters who will bring anger’s deadly

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28 Gen 30:31; 1 Sam 17:20; Jer 31:10.
30 See §8.8 for a discussion of the additional functions served by Cain’s question.
force to an end. They look for those who will respond to anger by doing good, providing for and protecting their family.

5.2 A Glimpse of a Keeper: Abram and Lot

Readers receive a glimpse of someone serving these roles the next time Genesis portrays anger in Gen 13. In v. 6, readers witness the continuing reverberations of YHWH’s curse of the ground, which occurred in response to the disobedience and sin of Adam and Cain (Gen 3:17; 4:11). The readers learn that the land is unable to sustain—literally “lift”—both Abram and Lot (תטלת באה/ קראים לברא as in Gen 13:16).31 In a land of insufficient resources, conflict breaks out between Abram’s and Lot’s shepherds.32 The text speaks specifically of contention (ErrorResponse), which as noted above (§3.3.7) is a term

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31 As Victor P. Hamilton, The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17 (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 391, points out, it is ironic that although Abram and Lot presumably can share the land with the Canaanites and Perizzites, they cannot share the land with each other.

32 One hopes that in the near future, biblical scholars will be introduced to the Burkean pentad, which is quite illuminating for the topic at hand. Briefly stated, Burke argues that human action and motivation can be fruitfully understood by using the metaphor of a drama. He explains:

[A]ny complete statement about motives will offer some kind of answers to these five questions: what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how [s/]he did it (agency), and why (purpose). (Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives [New York: Prentice-Hall, 1952], x; italics his)

Burke argues that these five terms—act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose—while very simple, have the capacity for great imaginative insight. Throughout this work, he explores how various schools of philosophical thought often emphasize a particular element of this “pentad” over others. For example, he shows how Platonists have highlighted purpose (“absolutizing” it) with their focus on the Absolute Good (ibid., 293-294). He also examines the interrelation of various pentadic elements, often using the term ratio to describe a correlation between two elements.

The book of Genesis has its own pentadic emphases. Its conception of anger would likely fit under Burke’s idea of agents (while also being a preparation for an act; cf. ibid., xiv). Genesis portrays a significant scene-agent ratio regarding anger. That is to say, Genesis depicts a world in which limitations lead in many cases to anger. The world characters inhabit profoundly influence the qualities they display and even the actions they take.

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closely associated with anger in the Hebrew Bible. Such strife apparently was quite common among shepherds of the ancient Near East.\textsuperscript{33} The earliest readers of this text most likely would have been familiar with occurrences such as this one.

Abram takes the initiative in response to this conflict by appealing to the bonds of brotherhood. Although Abram and Lot are technically uncle and nephew, the Hebrew word \textit{yxia;} is broad enough to encapsulate this relationship as well.\textsuperscript{34} The text reads:

\begin{quote}
[13:8] So Abram said to Lot, “Let there be no strife between me and you, or between my shepherds and your shepherds, for we are brothers. [13:9] Is not the entire land before you? Separate yourself from me. If to the left, then I will go to the right. If to the right, then I will go to the left.”
\end{quote}

Upon close examination, these verses and their broader context have many connections with the narrative of Cain and Abel. On a thematic level, both stories deal with the limitations of the land (4:11; 13:6), the emotion of anger (4:5-6; 13:7-8), the significance of brotherhood (4:2, 8-11; 13:8), and the necessity of relocation (4:12, 14, 16; 13:9-12).\textsuperscript{36}


34 See the useful discussion in Alonso-Schökel, \textit{Tu hermano}, 61-62.

35 Literally, Abram says, “For we are men—brothers.” The Hebrew words \textit{yxia;} and \textit{xv} are clearly in apposition, with the latter (\textit{xv}) clarifying the type of men that they are (cf. GKC §131b). In English, it is preferable on an idiomatic level to say simply, “We are brothers.” Cf. Wenham, \textit{Genesis}, 1:293, 297.

36 There is also a connection in that Cain and Abel make sacrifices (4:3-5), as does Abram in 13:4.
Likewise, Abram’s "Is not…” question in 13:9 is followed by an exceptionally concise “If… If…” construction depicting opposites—much like God’s question to Cain in 4:7. In fact, God’s words there contained the term "אֲפִן" ("lifting" from אֶפַן), which likely referred to the lifting of Cain’s face. Here, the verb אֲפִן appears twice in reference to the lifting of one’s face (esp. 13:10, 14; cf. 13:6).

These various parallels serve the purpose of shuttling readers back to the Cain and Abel narrative, particularly Gen 4:7: “Is it not true that if you do good, then a lifting up? But if you do not do good, then at the entryway to iniquity is a creature crouching down.” Abram faces these same options that Cain did. But unlike his predecessor, Abram chooses to do what is good. Although he inhabits a world of limited resources, Abram acts with generosity, humility, and even self-sacrifice, offering Lot first choice of land. Instead of giving priority to his own needs and exercising the prerogatives of the paterfamilias, he gives priority to his relationship with Lot and yields to his nephew’s wishes. His generosity counteracts the strife and anger between himself, his nephew, and their shepherds, introducing an alternate logic, a different means of relating that diffuses the anger and conflict.

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37 Hamilton, The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17, 392.

38 Walter Vogels, “Lot in His Honor Restored: A Structural Analysis of Gen 13:2-18,” EgT 10, no. 1 (1979): 5-12, suggests that Abram was actually the weaker party here (because of his age), unable to win a fight with Lot. He maintains that Abram appears generous but in fact is only interested in his own survival, believing “it is better to lose a part [of the land] than to lose the whole” (cf. Westermann, Genesis, 2:176). However, such an interpretation does not fit the evidence. In Gen 14, Abram appears much stronger than Lot: the nephew is unable to defend himself and is captured, whereas Abram takes the offensive and rescues Lot and his family. Furthermore, generosity forms a motif in Genesis, in which this story participates. See Isaac’s actions with the Philistines in Gen 26, Jacob’s actions with Esau in Gen 33, and Joseph’s and his brothers’ interactions in Gen 43 and 50. Cf. Janzen, Old Testament Ethics, 10.
God’s words to Cain in 4:7 tell him that if he does good, then there will be a “lifting.” Here in Genesis 13, both Lot and Abram experience a lifting. The text says that Lot, in response to Abram’s offer, *lifted* his eyes (וַיֶּנַח אֵלָיו) and saw the valley of the Jordan, which looked “like the garden of YHWH” (וְהָיָה מַגָּן הַגֵּרְרִיָּה, 13:10). He chooses that land and moves eastward (וַתָּמָר, 13:11). Abram, meanwhile, settles in Canaan (13:12), and it is there that YHWH tells him to *lift* his eyes (וַיַּנֵּח אֵלָיו, 13:14) and to behold the land, which shall be given to his countless descendents (13:15-17). The beginning of this pericope presented the crucial problem of the narrative by saying that the land could *not* “lift” (or “support”) Abram and Lot living together (וַיָּמֹר לָהוּ אֲנָתָן אֶת הָאָרֶץ לְפָנָי, 13:6). By its conclusion, however, there *is* a lifting for both Lot and Abram. The difficulty has been resolved, thanks to Abram’s generosity.

Previously, we noted that being a brother’s keeper entails providing both sustenance and security. Here in Genesis 13, Abram gives sustenance for his “brother” (cf. 13:8). Like a shepherd, Abram provides green pastures and fresh waters for his nephew (see esp. 13:10). In the next chapter, Gen 14, Abram provides security for Lot. When Abram learns that “his brother” (יָשָׁב, 14:14) has been taken captive, he leads 318 soldiers to rescue Lot from harm. After a long pursuit, Abram is able to bring back not only Lot, but also his nephew’s family and possessions. He fulfills the shepherd’s role,

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39 Moving eastward is significant given that numerous parties in Genesis are seen moving to the east as a result of separation. These include Cain (4:16), Isaac (26:17-23), Jacob (27:43; 28:10; 29:1), Laban (32:1 [31:55 Eng.]), and Esau (36:6-8). Cf. McEntire, *The Blood of Abel*, 27-28; Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 90-91.

40 One can note, nevertheless, that there is some debate over what precisely is the land that Lot chooses. See the discussion in Westermann, *Genesis*, 2:177-178.
rescuing Lot from danger. The text stresses that Abram again displays generosity. It says specifically that Abram “emptied out” (Hiphil of הָרָעַת) the trained men from his house (14:14), essentially leaving his immediate family and possessions vulnerable to attack and plunder. The text also emphasizes that after victory Abram took none of the possessions for himself—not “a thread or even a sandal strap” (14:21-24). Because he has done what is good, Abram receives both a blessing from Melchizedek (14:18-20) and a promise of “great reward” from YHWH (15:1).

In Abram, then, readers glimpse a clear alternative to Cain. They encounter someone who, at least on these occasions, responds to anger by doing what is good, serving as a רֶשֶׁת (“keeper”) for his nephew Lot. There are, of course, shortcomings to the ways that Abram provides for Lot. Most notably, the two have separated, and they never dwell together again. What community the “brothers” once had has been lost. Genesis makes clear that even for a figure like Abram, the limitations of this world often disallow brothers dwelling together, no matter how good and pleasing such unity may...

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41 Amos 3:12 says that when a flock is attacked by a lion, a shepherd will snatch from the lion’s mouth only an ear or a pair of legs. Abram, however, goes even further, bringing back not a remnant of his nephew, but “all the possessions” (כִּיָּהוּדְלָה).

42 Westermann, Genesis, 2:207, asserts that “the portrayal of Abraham in [14:12-17, 21-24] is a very far cry from the Abraham of the old patriarchal stories; it has practically nothing in common with him.” Such a statement is doubtful based on the observations here. In both Gen 13 and 14, Abram displays generosity and fulfills the role of being a brother’s keeper, providing sustenance in Gen 13 and security in Gen 14. The two chapters compliment each other nicely, even if there are significant stylistic differences.

43 As Alonso-Schökel, Tu hermano, 72, nicely observes, Abraham accepts no payment from the king of Sodom, only the “very great reward” given by YHWH (15:1).

44 As von Rad, Genesis, 171, notes, Abraham is exemplary in this narrative, even though there are many narratives where patriarchs are not.
be. Thus, while this text begins to satisfy readers’ desire to see an alternative to Cain, it leaves them hungry for more.

5.3 Land Limitations Revisited: Isaac and the Herders of Gerar

Genesis 26 is one of the few chapters in the Bible that depicts the character Isaac as an adult. Verses 12-33 describe conflict and strife between Isaac and the herders of Gerar. The narrative interacts in various ways with Gen 13. In each text, anger emerges after the patriarch (Abram in Gen 13, Isaac in Gen 26) has an awkward encounter with the rulers of another land regarding his wife (passed off as his sister). Either during this encounter or after it, the patriarch becomes wealthy and numerous. The land, however, does not expand with the increase in wealth and possessions.

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46 Although earlier scholars often viewed this chapter as a collection of formerly independent stories, many now emphasize its coherence in one way or another. See Wenham, Genesis, 2:185; George G. Nicol, “The Narrative Structure and Interpretation of Genesis XXVI 1-33,” VT 46, no. 3 (1996): 339-360; Westermann, Genesis, 2:423. On the relation of this story to Gen 34, which also deals with anger between tribal groups, see Wenham, Genesis, 2:186-187.

47 See the useful discussion on Wenham, Genesis, 2:187. Kaminsky, Yet I Loved Jacob, 31, writes, “In some sense the relationship between Lot and Abram foreshadows the coming battles between opposing siblings, opposing wives, and opposing spouses that occupy much of the rest of Genesis from chapter 16 forward.” One could add to Kaminsky’s observation that Lot and Abram’s interactions foreshadow not only conflicts within families, but also those across family and even tribal lines. Such is certainly the case here with Gen 26.


49 The text points not only to the limitations of the land (i.e., a reaffirmation of the curse of the soil in Gen 3-4), but also to what Brodie, Genesis as Dialogue, 301-302, calls “the ambiguity of riches,” where wealth brings not only an abundance but also various troubles.
insufficient resources, anger and jealousy break out, particularly among shepherds. In Gen 13, Abram deals with strife by appealing to the bonds of brotherhood, relinquishing power, and acting with generosity.

In Gen 26, however, Isaac does not have the same options his father did. The strife and jealousy he faces come not from a family member, but from the Philistines in whose land he dwells. He cannot appeal to the bonds of kinship in the hope of making peace as Abram did. Furthermore, he is not in the position to approach the Philistines, asking them which land they would like. The Philistines have already approached him, demanding that he vacate their land.\footnote{Hamilton, The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50, 200, astutely observes that Isaac’s wealth, not his lying and deception (26:7-11), leads to his expulsion from the Philistines.} He can either comply with their wishes or respond with force. Verses 12-16 (cf. 26:28-29) make clear that Isaac has the numbers and wealth at least to put up a fight with the Philistines.

He does not. Isaac responds to the Philistine’s anger, jealousy, and strife by vacating whatever land they ask him to leave. Three times, the text uses anger-related words, particularly \textit{\textit{anq}} (be jealous, 26:14; cf. §3.3.1) and \textit{\textit{byr}} (contend, 26:20, 21; cf. §3.3.7). After each encounter, Isaac agrees to what the Philistines want, rather than holding on to land at the cost of intensifying anger and bloodshed. He moves farther away from the Philistines and relinquishes both wells his father dug and those dug by himself.\footnote{For a description of the geographical conditions of the land in relation to this narrative, see Victor H. Matthews, “The Wells of Gerar,” \textit{BA} 2, no. 1986 (1986): 118-126.} Isaac finally settles himself at Beer-Sheba (26:23-25), where he is subsequently approached by Abimelech, the Philistine king, and two of his officers (26:26).
When they arrive, Isaac appears upset, confronting Abimelech and his officials about their past wrongdoings (26:27). Although Isaac agreed to vacate land as the Philistines demanded, he did not believe their demands were fair. He voices his complaints against them, observing that they have “hated” (ןָּשָׂא) him and “sent him away” (נָּשָׂא). He asks why they have even come to meet with him in Beer-Sheba. The Philistines respond by requesting peace, although the presence of Phicol, Abimelech’s military commander, suggests that they are prepared for alternatives. The Philistines note that when they sent Isaac away, they did so without violence. Isaac agrees to make peace, and the two parties form a nonaggression pact with one another, sharing in a feast and exchanging vows (26:30-31).

In this rare glimpse of Abraham and Sarah’s grown son, the text sets forth its drama on a limited stage. There is not enough to go around. Water is in short supply. Peoples compete. Characters’ actions are limited. They must make do with what they have, rather than awaiting an ideal opportunity in which they can act in ideal ways. Isaac never has the opportunity to take the initiative in making peace like his father did. He can vacate land even though it seems unjust, or else ignite anger and violence.

Although Isaac believes he has been wronged, he finds peace more attractive than fostering anger and violence. He relinquishes land, including land he could claim as his

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52 Some have characterized Isaac as among the most fearful, timid, and passive of the patriarchs (e.g., Wenham, *Genesis*, 2:192-193). While there may be some truth in such an assertion, it should not be taken too far. Many of Isaac’s actions have close parallels in the life of his father (e.g., chs. 13, 20, 21), and his bold confrontation of Abimelech at Beer-Sheba (26:27) suggests that he is not afraid to confront rulers when he deems it necessary.
family’s (cf. Abraham’s covenant with Abimelech in 21:22-34). When confronted by Abimelech and his officials at the end of this narrative, Isaac has the opportunity to hold on to past wrongdoings and dismiss the Philistines from his presence at Beer-Sheba. Instead, he makes peace. Isaac responds to the limited options he faces by avoiding violence whenever possible.

If Gen 13 points to the importance of seeking peace in response to anger when family members are involved, Gen 26 points to the importance of seeking peace when outsiders are involved. In both cases, the text suggests that it is better to relinquish land than to foster anger—a particularly bold message given the value and limited nature of fertile land in Palestine. Although YHWH has promised land to the patriarchs, Genesis does not advocate the seizure or retention of land through violent means. With the death of Abel lurking in the background, readers see characters who place the highest value on the preservation of life, no matter how limited the options before them. They take anger quite seriously, particularly its potential for great harm. Abram and Isaac respond to this emotion by doing what is right, finding a path that leads to הָתַן (peace, 26:29, 31), even though doing so involves personal sacrifice and hardship.

53 Genesis 21:22-34 has clear parallels with Gen 26:12-33 (e.g., Beersheba, wells, Abimelech, Phicol, covenant, vows), although terms for anger and relating to anger (such as רָע) are missing in the prior story. Those like E. A. Speiser, Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes (AB; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1964), 203, argue that one event lies in the background that was “differently reported in two independent sources.” Those taking a more literary approach see Gen 26:12-33 as the “sequel” to Gen 21:22-34 (e.g., Matthews, “The Wells of Gerar,” 122; cf. Wenham, Genesis, 2:187).

54 The boldness is quite striking, particularly when one considers it alongside the possible land disputes that likely took place amid the return from exile (cf. §1.5).

55 Many have understood Isaac to be a representation of the people of Israel (e.g., Westermann, Genesis, 2:429). If so, this story has nonviolent implications for not only individuals but also the people of Israel as a whole, particularly with regard to land holdings. The voices in the Bible advocating the seizures of land by force are at least partially counteracted by texts such as this one.
5.4 Keeping a Safe Distance: Jacob and Laban

Genesis 31 picks up on several themes found in previous episodes involving anger. In many ways, it offers a more in-depth treatment of hardships that transpire between shepherds, as well as the fierce anger that can in turn result. It also picks up on previous themes of brotherhood. Although Jacob and Laban are technically nephew and uncle, the Hebrew word for brother, פָּדָג, is used several times here to describe their relationship, just as it was with Abram and Lot (29:12, 15; cf. 31:54). Jacob and Laban interact with one another over the course of three chapters (Gen 29-31), and several injustices transpire during the twenty years they dwell together. Most notably, Laban deceives the deceiver, giving Jacob Leah as a bride rather than the expected Rachel (29:20-25). The wages for which Jacob works are also persistent concern. Laban’s sons feel Jacob has robbed their family (31:1), while Jacob feels it is Laban who has robbed his family (31:6-7). Faced with a history of wrongdoing that does not appear easily rectified, Jacob and his wives decide to depart. When they do so, Rachel steals Laban’s

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56 See the excellent characterization of Laban’s deception of Jacob in comparison with Jacob’s deception of Isaac in Hamilton, The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50, 261-262.


58 In 31:10-14, God plays a key role, instructing Jacob to flee. In 31:10, 12, the text speaks of Jacob lifting his eyes, which echoes previous episodes of anger, particularly Gen 4:7 and 13:10, 14.
teraphim,\textsuperscript{59} while Jacob “steals Laban’s mind,” that is, Jacob leaves Laban clueless about their departure (יְתַחֲטֵשׁ אֶת לַעֲלֹת בְּנֵי; 31:19-20).

When Laban realizes they have left, the text uses words with military connotations to describe Laban’s actions. He “pursues” (ירָכָה) and eventually “overtakes” (נָצָא) Jacob. However, God intervenes. Just as YHWH warned Cain and sought to protect Abel in 4:7, so God here confronts Laban in order to protect Jacob (31:24; cf. 4:6-7).\textsuperscript{60} Although these divine words curb violence, anger nevertheless erupts when Laban and Jacob finally meet. The two family members hurl accusations at one another in one of Genesis’ most detailed accounts of verbally expressed anger. Laban demands to know why Jacob left without a farewell, why Jacob carried away his daughters “like captives of the sword” (כָּבָשָׁה לְאָדָם; 31:26), and why his idol (the teraphim) was stolen (31:26-30).\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{59} The purpose of stealing the teraphim has been the subject of much debate. See the overview of various explanations in Anne-Marie Korte, “Significance Obscured: Rachel’s Theft of the Teraphim: Divinity and Corporeality in Gen. 31,” in \textit{Begin with the Body: Corporeality Religion and Gender}, ed. Jonneke Bekkenkamp and Maaike de Haardt (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1998), 147-182; Alice Ogden Bellis, \textit{Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes: Women’s Stories in the Hebrew Bible} (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 85-86; Wenham, \textit{Genesis}, 2:273-274; Ktziah Spanier, “Rachel’s Theft of the Teraphim: Her Struggle for Family Primacy,” \textit{VT} 42, no. 3 (1992): 404-412. There is a great deal of “guesswork” with many of these explanations (Jacob, \textit{The First Book of the Bible}, 210). One possibility, significant for the discussion here, is that the theft is an expression of Rachel’s anger toward her father (Sharon Pace Jeansonne, \textit{The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar’s Wife} [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990], 81).

\textsuperscript{60} In both cases, God sides primarily with the one who has less power (cf. 31:42). Westermann, \textit{Genesis}, 2:501 observes, “It is surprising that already in the patriarchal stories the God of the fathers is the one who stands by the weak and the one to whom the weak can have recourse when oppressed by the powerful.”

\textsuperscript{61} On translating כָּבָשָׁה in the singular, see 1 Sam 19:13, 16; ibid., 2:493. Fokkelman, \textit{Narrative Art in Genesis}, 166, memorably describes Laban’s accusations as follows: “This speech is a psychological portrait of thirteen sentences, in which rage and resignation, castigation and sweetness contend for mastery and eventually achieve an unstable equilibrium. Honest indignation here enframes the whole, v. 26 (first two words) and 30b.”
Jacob denies wrongdoing and asks Laban to substantiate his accusation concerning the teraphim (31:31-32).

Laban rummages through Jacob’s possessions in hope of finding the stolen god. At a key point, Laban comes to Rachel, who has placed the idol beneath the saddle on which she sits. In a particularly rich and multivalent statement, Rachel says, “Let not my lord be angry (אָרֵי אֱלֹיָהִי) that I cannot rise before you, for I have the way of women” (31:35). Jacqueline Lapsley interprets these words as an instance of what Bakhtin calls “double-voiced discourse.” To Laban, it would appear that his daughter is requesting that he not become angry that she cannot arise and show the proper respect because of menstruation. Rachel’s words, however, testify on another level to the marginalized status of women, who could not stand and express their anger toward men. Her words “constitute a discourse of resistance, a subtle protest against the patriarchal

62 There may be an implicit condemnation of idolatry here. As Gunkel, Genesis, 337, points out, “Rachel sits on the beloved idol and pretends to be in a state of extreme impurity (Lev 15:19ff.) in which a woman may not approach a god too closely, let alone sit on him (Lev 15:20!)."

63 Lapsley, Whispering the Word, 21-34. Other interpretations are possible. Esther Fuchs, “‘For I Have the Way of Women’: Deception, Gender, and Ideology in Biblical Narrative,” Semeia 42 (1988): 68-83, for example, understands this text as functioning much more patriarchally, failing to provide closure to this episode of Rachel’s deceptiveness, unlike episodes involving her deceptive male counterparts (esp. Jacob and Laban). While there certainly is some truth in Fuchs’ characterization of this passage, the text itself is not as monologic about issues of gender as Fuchs presupposes. As Ilana Pardes, “Beyond Genesis 3: The Politics of Maternal Naming,” in A Feminist Companion to Genesis, ed. Althalya Brenner; FCB 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 185, correctly observes, “while the dominant thrust of the Bible is clearly patriarchal, patriarchy is continuously challenged by antithetical trends.” Given the ways that the Bible functions authoritatively for many faith communities, it is essential that modern interpreters give attention to voices within the text that are more liberating. As Gerald West puts it in his echo of Gustavo Gutiérrez, “the question is not whether the Bible will survive but whether it will bring life or death and how we can ensure that it does indeed bring life” (Gerald O. West, “Review of R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World,” Review of Biblical Literature [2007]: 5. Cited June 13, 2008. Online: http://www.bookreviews.org). Or, as Lapsley, Whispering the Word, 10, similarly states, “The question is not, then, can the Bible be understood as making any positive contribution to ethical and theological reflection, even on gender issues, but how do we read in such a way that we are open to those contributions?”
discourse and social structures that attempt to silence her.\textsuperscript{64} (See §5.5 below for more on how Genesis challenges cultural assumptions regarding women and anger.) One could also note that on a third level, Rachel’s voice is perhaps the closest to the voice of God in this narrative. When she asks that Laban not be angry, she joins her voice with the deity who has pleaded with Laban not to harm Jacob.

Unable to substantiate his accusation, Laban now faces Jacob’s anger (παραδείγματα in 31:36 is a generic word for anger, cf. §3.5.2.2).\textsuperscript{65} Like other episodes involving quarreling shepherds, Jacob contends (ζητεῖν; cf. §3.3.7) with Laban.\textsuperscript{66} Jacob begins by asking his uncle what he has done wrong, demanding that Laban explain the nature of his “crime,” ἁμαρτία, and “sin,” ἁμαρτήματα (31:36). Laban is unable to answer. Jacob then moves beyond the immediate wrongdoings to describe a long history of injustices. Jacob speaks in detail of the harsh material conditions he has endured while dwelling with Laban (31:36-42). Jacob accuses his uncle of unfairly forcing him to bear the loss of animals himself (31:38-39)—something forbidden by both biblical and ancient Near Eastern

\textsuperscript{64} Lapsley, \textit{Whispering the Word}, 22.

\textsuperscript{65} Fokkelman, \textit{Narrative Art in Genesis}, 171, writes of Jacob’s response: “We have now come to the rhetorical climax of the Story of Jacob and even of the whole of Genesis: Jacob’s dispute.... Laban, the prosecutor, becomes the accused and Jacob leaves the defensive to take the offensive, a final, frontal, massive attack.” Although Fokkelman may overstate his case somewhat, Jacob’s speech has great significance in Genesis as a whole, particularly regarding the theme of anger.

\textsuperscript{66} Some commentators, e.g., Westermann, \textit{Genesis}, 2:490; Alonso-Schökel, \textit{Tu hermano}, 186-187; and esp. Charles Mabee, “Jacob and Laban: The Structure of Judicial Proceedings (Genesis XXXI 25-42),” \textit{VT} 30, no. 2 (1980): 192-207, have overstated the way this episode resembles a legal proceeding. The key word is ζητεῖν, which refers to strife, particularly when wrongdoings have taken place. Naturally, strife between parties will involve accusations and the seeking of justice. But such a concept need not take on legal associations, particularly when the setting has no judges or courtrooms in sight. As Wenham, \textit{Genesis}, 2:277, observes, it is not clear that this word ever refers to a “lawsuit” in the Pentateuch. In the text at hand, there is no judge—or if there is, it is God, who has already rendered judgment (see 31:42).
Jacob also accuses Laban of failing to pay him properly, a crime condemned throughout the Hebrew Bible (31:41). Jacob finishes his counterattack by asserting that when God warned Laban about harming him, God was rendering judgment against Laban, siding with the afflicted (31:42).

In this anger-charged context, Laban recognizes that he and Jacob have reached a point in their relationship marked by limited possibilities. There is the potential for physical harm and violence should these two remain in the same community (31:31, 42). Rather than an intensification of anger and ensuing violence, Laban proposes that they legally separate, establishing a border between each other. Jacob agrees, and he sets up a stone pillar (31:45), while Laban and his company—whom the text calls Jacob’s brothers (γυναικεῖοι)—make a mound of stones (31:46-47). They covenant not to see one another again, and Jacob promises not to harm Laban’s daughters. They all share a meal, stay the night together, then exchange kisses, and split apart.

The narrative does not shower praises on this permanent separation of family members, but it does suggest that such a “divorce” is preferable to additional anger and

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69 Cf. the use of “pursue” (παρατείνω) and “overtook” (πέρασα), which as noted above carry military connotations (31:23, 25).

70 Cf. Jacob, The First Book of the Bible, 216.

violence.72 Faced with limited options, as characters in Genesis typically are, Laban and Jacob agree to something that is not an ideal solution, but rather a realistic resolution for moving forward. The characters do not overestimate their own abilities to bring good out of a difficult situation. They are acutely aware of the threat that anger poses to them both. They do whatever they can to blunt the worst effects of anger. Characters accept their moral limitations and act accordingly. The narrative as a whole suggests that it may be better to separate than try to force good out of a situation that is beyond rectification. Like the other cases involving anger among shepherds, this story of Laban and Jacob suggests that peace apart is better than conflict together. Although Genesis affirms the importance of family, it does not uphold familial togetherness as the highest ideal. In a world of competing and incommensurate goods, nonviolence is (at least on this occasion) preferable to community.

5.5 Pushing Cultural Assumptions: Sarah's and Rachel's Anger

Although the Hebrew Bible never explicitly portrays anger among female characters (§3.2.3), the book of Genesis depicts Sarai/h and Rachel in ways that subtly push cultural assumptions about anger, inviting readers to see similarities between male and female experiences of emotion. These characters have striking similarities with one

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72 Petersen, “Genesis and Family Values,” 19-20, makes this point persuasively. On similar practices in the ancient Near East, see the useful overview in Gunkel, Genesis, 341-342.
another, as well as with male characters who experience anger in Genesis. A common humanity, of which anger is an integral component, underlies them all.73

5.5.1 Sarai/h’s Anger toward Hagar

As noted in §3.2.3, Sarai/h is not explicitly called angry, and yet, in Gen 16 and 21, most prototypical elements of anger are present. There are issues of wrongdoing (16:5; 21:9, 11), jealousy (21:10; cf. 16:4-5), authority and power (16:1-2, 9; 21:10), contempt (יִרְאֶה, 16:4, 5), affliction (נִגָּז, 16:6, 11), and mockery (לִפְנֵי, 21:9), which cumulatively result in separation (16:6; 21:10, 14), a very common outcome of anger. Sarai/h appears angry, even if the text does not specifically say that she is.74

Genesis 16 presents Sarai as a barren woman late in age with few good options.75 According to Gen 15:3, it appears when she and her aged husband die, their goods will be

73 This is not to say that Genesis consistently portrays women and men participating in a common humanity. As many have demonstrated, Genesis is a text that requires female readers to “read against themselves” (see Pamela J. Milne, “The Patriarchal Stamp of Scripture: The Implications of Structural Analyses for Feminist Hermeneutics,” in A Feminist Companion to Genesis, ed. Athalya Brenner; FCB 2 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993], 146-172, for a useful survey of scholarship). At the same time, Genesis is not monologic about gender relationships, and voices within the text that point toward equality need to be recognized.

While reference is made in the above statement to anger as a feature of a common humanity, one should keep in mind the warnings of §2. What Genesis says about anger can be metaphorically transferred to its audiences’ worlds (§4.6.1), but these worlds should not be conflated. What Genesis presupposes about anger differs from what other cultures and texts presuppose about it.

74 Many modern interpreters understand the text as implying that Sarai/h is angry. See, e.g., Brodie, Genesis as Dialogue, 237; Speiser, Genesis, 155.

given to a steward of the house. Rather than let this happen, Sarai gives Hagar to Abram that he might impregnate her (16:2-4). Sarai appears to have the best of intentions, trying to bring what good she can out of an immensely difficult situation. However, things go awry when the concrete realities of her sacrifice are set in motion (16:4-5; cf. Cain with his offering to YHWH). When Hagar becomes pregnant, she also becomes insubordinate, displaying contempt toward Sarai. The Hebrew verb used to describe this display of contempt, לָקַץ, means to make light or small (16:4-5). Sarai, who already knows too well how small her womb is, receives further belittlement from Hagar. Sarai naturally becomes upset. She explains to Abram what has transpired, who tells her to do whatever seems good in her eyes (16:6). Sarai afflicts (חָיָה) Hagar until the slave flees toward Egypt, her homeland (16:6). A messenger of YHWH meets Hagar in the desert, presenting a mixed message. On the one hand, Hagar is told to return and submit

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76 Bellis, Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes, 70, observes, “With the exception of [Potiphar’s wife], the women of Genesis are portrayed by the narrator relatively sympathetically.” She goes on to describe how Sarah, like other characters in Genesis, is portrayed as neither a hero nor a villain, but rather as an imperfect human being: “Sarah is beautiful, but she is desperate to have a son. She could be jealous and cruel. Nevertheless she is not vilified in the text” (ibid., 71). LaCocque, Onslaught against Innocence, 45, concurs. He suggests that the Yahwist is one of the Hebrew Bible’s more “feminist” voices.

77 Indeed, the Code of Hammurabi, §146, can be interpreted as forbidding Hagar’s type of behavior (so Speiser, Genesis, 117, 119-121).

78 Genesis 16:7 says that the messenger of YHWH finds her at the spring on the Road to Shur, which would take her toward Egypt. The word used to describe this affliction, חש, is quite strong and could even be translated “abuse” (so ibid., 116, 118).

79 On the term מַחְשִׁיָּה, see the useful discussion in Westermann, Genesis, 2:242-244.
on the other, the celestial being promises Hagar countless descendants—the only time a woman in the Hebrew Bible receives such a promise. The text also says that she converses with God, who “heeds her suffering” (16:11). She furthermore becomes the only person in the Hebrew Bible to name the deity.\footnote{This command raises disturbing ethical issues pertaining to the character of God. As Trible, \textit{Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives}, 16, memorably observes, “Without doubt, [the] two imperatives, return and submit to suffering, bring a divine word of terror to an abused, yet courageous, woman.” It obviously stands in tight tension with 16:11, which speaks of YHWH giving heed to her affliction (cf. Gen 29:32 for an analogous text).} She is at once told to suffer and to prepare for blessings.

Hagar returns to the house, but not all is well. In Gen 21, Sarah recapitulates her past actions during the feast to celebrate Isaac’s weaning.\footnote{Commonalities have been summarized by Jo Ann Hackett, “Rehabilitating Hagar: Fragments of an Epic Pattern,” in \textit{Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel}, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 16, and Sakenfeld, \textit{Just Wives}, 20, as involving [1] Hagar or Ishmael doing something that threatens Sarah; [2] Sarah responding angrily; [3] Sarah voicing her anger to Abraham; [4] Hagar (and Ishmael) being expelled to the wilderness either because of harsh treatment or banishment; [5] God (or a divine messenger) addressing Hagar in the wilderness; [6] God issuing a promise involving Ishmael; and [7] reference being made to a well.} When she sees Ishmael “playing” (םח, 21:9),\footnote{Interpreters have understood this word in three primary ways. First, some have suggested that Isaac is sexually abusing his brother (cf. the use of מח to convey sexual acts in 26:8). Second, some understand the text as saying that Isaac mocked his brother. Finally, some interpret Ishmael as either amusing his brother or acting like him, i.e., “Isaacing” (ףח, 21:9; Isaac). Key to interpreting this word is Gen 21:10, where Sarah says that she does not want Ishmael to share in Isaac’s inheritance. These words suggest that Sarah has perceived Ishmael either acting as though he were equal to Isaac or superior. They do not suggest something so serious as sexual abuse (Amanda Benchhuysen, Personal Communication, Oct. 29, 2008). Thus, it seems reasonable to see Ishmael’s actions as involving either the amusement or mocking of Isaac, nothing that would merit a potentially deadly banishment. On this interpretive difficulty, see Alonso-Schökel, \textit{Tu hermano}, 90-96. The position advanced here is favored by Speiser, \textit{Genesis}, 155; Hackett, “Rehabilitating Hagar,” 20-21; and Hamilton, \textit{The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50}, 79.} she becomes disturbed and confronts Abraham, commanding him to cast out Hagar and Ishmael. Sarah appears jealous, telling her husband that she

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\footnote{Ibid., 16, 18. As Boyung Lee, “When the Text is the Problem: A Postcolonial Approach to Biblical Pedagogy,” \textit{RelEd} 102, no. 1 (2007): 44-61, esp. 53, and many other feminist scholars have pointed out, interpreters have traditionally ignored these important features of the text, focusing more on Abraham and seeing Hagar as a minor character.}

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does not want Isaac to share Abraham’s inheritance with his older half-brother (21:9-10).
The text says that Sarah’s “speech was exceedingly wicked in the eyes of Abraham” (21:11).84 Abraham’s reaction is quite understandable. In essence, Sarah has asked Abraham both to become estranged from his son and to jeopardize Hagar’s and Ishmael’s lives.85 As the subsequent narrative shows, Sarah’s command approximates a death sentence for them both (21:14-21),86 hardly an appropriate punishment for a young person who engages in play or even mocking with his younger brother.87 The text makes

84 The Hebrew reads, רְשֵׁעָה יָרֵא הָאָדָם. While many translate רְשֵׁעָה as “the matter,” Sarah has just spoken to Abraham, making it reasonable to translate this word as “the speech” or “the word.”

85 As Westermann, Genesis, 2:340, puts it, “[Sarah’s] demand is cruel for all concerned, the father, the mother, and the child.” Although there are ancient Near Eastern precedents for freeing or selling a maidservant after she gave birth for the husband of her superior, there were in some cases laws against it (see discussion in Tikva Simone Frymer-Kensky, “Patriarchal Family Relationships and Near Eastern Law,” BA 44, no. 4 [1981]: 209-214, esp. 211-212; cf. Hamilton, The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17, 443-446).

86 When Gen 16:7 describes Hagar’s location after her voluntary flight from Sarai, it says, “A messenger of YHWH found her at the spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the road to Shur.” When Gen 21:14d describes her location after her forced expulsion, it says that Hagar “walked and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-Sheba.” Geographically, the two passages describe the same region. However, literally, the first one signals that Hagar is “at the spring on the road to Shur.” She is headed back to Egypt and has (at least for the time being) the necessary access to water. The second text, on the other hand, talks of Hagar wandering, which gives the impression that she is not on any road but rather alone in the southern, dry wilderness of Palestine, an acutely dangerous place to be (Amanda Benckhuysen, Personal Communication, Oct. 8, 2008). As Trible, Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives, 25, observes, “While the wilderness [Hagar] chose in [Gen 16] was hospitable, yet fleeting, the wilderness imposed upon her in [Gen 21] is hostile, yet enduring.” The text itself speaks of the expectation of death in a variety of ways (see not only Hagar’s prayer in 21:16, but also the language of “leaving” [לָא] Ishmael under a shrub, which is terminology used in the Hebrew Bible to describe the setting of someone in his or her grave; cf. Hamilton, The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50, 83).

87 Hagar and Ishmael have come nowhere near the sin of Cain, and yet they are forced to share his fate, driven out (וַיָּפָר, 4:14; 21:10) to wander in the dessert. Some interpreters have tried to blame Hagar for her harsh fate, such as Steinmetz, From Father to Son, 76-78, who claims that Hagar “rejected the opportunity to participate in God’s covenant.” Steinmetz goes on to make unfounded claims such as, “[Hagar] has not seen God. Hagar is blind to divine destiny.” Steinmetz’s quest to find fault with Hagar is not only exegetically problematic; it also resembles the racism biblical scholarship has displayed against non-Israelite peoples (documented by Whitelam, The Invention of Ancient Israel, e.g., 84).
clear that anger can have unfair and disastrous consequences for those with little or no power.  

Surprisingly, God tells Abraham not to be troubled by the matter and to do what Sarah commands because “through Isaac [Abraham’s] descendants shall be named” (21:12-13). While the deity’s speech may contain a degree of capriciousness toward Hagar and Ishmael (cf. 16:9), the deity’s actions also display a degree of care for them as well. God does not have Abraham send them into the wilderness so that they might die. Rather, the deity reiterates for Abraham the promise made previously to Hagar: Ishmael shall become a “great nation” (21:13; cf. 16:10-12). Furthermore, the subsequent narrative shows God personally caring for Hagar and Ishmael in the desert (21:14-19). The word נָשָׁה, lift, which was a key word in Gen 4:7 and 13:6, 10, 14, appears again in

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88 Exum, “The Accusing Look,” 143-171, esp. 151, asserts, “the biblical narrator manages the reader’s sympathy with Hagar and Ishmael, keeping it at a minimum.” She cites as an example the little attention given to the actual expulsion in 21:14. While it is true that the narrator gives virtually no access to Hagar and Ishmael’s point of view, Exum’s characterization is not exactly accurate. First, giving little attention to a key element in the plot is quite common for this narrator, not evidence that s/he is attempting to influence the readers against seeing it as significant. For example, the murder of Abel is recounted in a solitary verse (4:8; cf. also Gen 22 and its being “fraught with background”), but that does not mean the text is trying to influence readers to side with Cain. Second, the events themselves speak sufficiently to elicit sympathy; one need not know the inner workings of Hagar and Ishmael’s psyches to know they are distressed. Third and finally, much of the art that Exum discusses in this article illustrates how interpreters and artists have felt sympathy toward the slave and her son. Exum does not sufficiently explain where this consistent element of sympathy comes from if it is not elicited by the text.

89 Von Rad, Genesis, 233, notes, “One could call vs. 12 f. the ‘tense moment’ in the structure of the narrative, for the reader has not expected that God would be on Sarah’s side, but rather on Abraham’s.” Similarly, Gerald O. West, Genesis: The People’s Bible Commentary (Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2006), 119, mentions, “The narrator empathizes with Abraham’s pain,” meaning readers are all the more surprised when God takes a position opposite that of the narrator.

90 One aspect of this personal care is that, in the words of Hemchand Gossai, Power and Marginality in the Abraham Narrative (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995), 14, “Yahweh does what Abram and Sarai fail to do, namely to enter into conversation with Hagar.” Amid this episode, readers of the Pentateuch are reminded of the manifold times God provides water in the wilderness following the exodus. Westermann, Genesis, 2:344, writes of Gen 21, “The old story wants to narrate that there is no doing away with the harshness and cruelty of [hu]mankind, whereas the merciful God does not abandon the outcasts but lets them experience God’s miraculous deliverance.”
this anger-charged episode. Hagar lifts her voice (נָגַנְתָּה, 21:16), and God provides both by opening her eyes to a spring of water and by telling Hagar to “lift up” (נָגַנְתָּה) her dying son because he will become a great nation (21:18). The text concludes by suggesting that this divine encounter was no anomaly: “God was with the boy as he grew” (21:20).

Although God tells Abraham to follow Sarah’s command, God is also actively involved in softening the blows of Sarah’s anger, caring for those who lack the power to defend themselves. This text joins others in Genesis (esp. 4:6-7 and 31:24, 42) in portraying God as attempting to help weaker parties endangered by the anger of someone with more power. The present narrative is not monologic, and it by no means offers a definitive statement of liberation from slavery or patriarchy.91 Yet, it does bear witness to the unfair hardships that can result from anger in disproportionate power relationships. As Gerald West has pointed out, simply describing the problems resulting from inequalities may itself constitute a significant act of resistance.92 The text testifies that not all is right when individuals lack equal power. Slaves who have done little or nothing wrong may find themselves suffering unjustly because of their masters’ anger—something readers see later with Joseph and Potiphar (Gen 39:17-20; see §5.6 below).

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91 As Margaret D. Kamitsuka, “Toward a Feminist Postmodern and Postcolonial Interpretation of Sin,” JR 84, no. 2 (2004): 179-211, esp. 205, puts it, “It goes without saying that Sarah and Hagar are ‘sinned against’ structurally in ways that cry out for an insurrection of subjugated knowledges.” The point of the commentary above is not to deny the ways Sarai/h and Hagar are trapped within patriarchal systems. Rather, it is to point out one small way that Genesis displays an openness to assigning women equal emotional experiences as men. For more on the complex power dynamics at work in these narratives, see Gossai, Power and Marginality in the Abraham Narrative, 1-33.

92 West, The Academy of the Poor, 45.
Elsewhere, texts in Genesis uphold separation as the best way to deal with anger when other solutions are not available. This text, however, adds some qualifications. The narratives of Abram and Lot, Isaac and the Philistines, and Jacob and Laban suggest that separation can prevent anger from erupting into violence, but here with Sarai/h and Hagar, separation borders on being an act of violence in itself. Even though YHWH allows and even helps the separation to happen, the text makes clear that Sarah’s word was evil in the eyes of Abraham, something requiring an act of God to prevent it from killing Hagar and Ishmael. The text thus illustrates once again the dangerous nature of anger. It can quickly become violent and lead to the splintering of families.

Although elements within the text fault Sarah’s anger, the narrative does so in a way similar to how it faults most male characters who become angry, that is, by showing the disastrous consequences to which their anger can lead. By hinting that Sarah is angry, the text takes an important step forward to challenge cultural assumptions and to acknowledge Sarah’s humanity—even if particular elements of this humanity are morally problematic.

### 5.5.2 Rachel’s Jealousy of Leah

Sarah is not the only woman whom Genesis implies is angry. In the character of Rachel, the text comes even closer to associating a woman with this emotion. As §3.3.1

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93 See the excellent treatment of separation in Petersen, “Genesis and Family Values,” 5-23, esp. 18-23.

94 Wenham, *Genesis*, 2:88 writes, “Of all the characters, Sarah evokes [the] least sympathy.” His point is true, although one can keep in mind that Sarah herself is entrenched within a patriarchal system, operating as a courageous figure seeking self-realization (so Lee, “When the Text is the Problem,” 54).
explains, jealousy is linked very closely with anger in the Hebrew Bible. It may even be considered a subset of anger. Genesis 30:1 says specifically that Rachel is jealous, and in so doing, it constitutes the only verse in the Hebrew Bible where a female character is explicitly called jealous. The verse reads, “When Rachel saw that she bore no children for Jacob, Rachel became jealous (אֲנֵאָתָא) of her sister. So she said to Jacob, ‘Give me children, or if there is nothing, then I shall die.’” Like Sarai/h’s anger, Rachel’s jealousy stems from her barrenness vis-à-vis another woman who has children with her husband.

Elsewhere in Genesis, readers see that sibling relations often lead to anger, particularly with sets of brothers: Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, and Joseph and his brothers. In Gen 30, anger and jealousy emerges among sisters. Here, Rachel remains barren while she watches Leah give birth four times (29:31-35). One is reminded of Cain receiving no attention from YHWH while Abel obtains God’s favor. After the text characterizes Rachel as jealous, it says that she demands children from her husband. Jacob, in turn, experiences anger himself (הָעֲרָץ, a common expression for anger, cf.

95 Ironically, it is when Rachel gives birth that she dies (35:16-19; Athalya Brenner, “Female Social Behaviour: Two Descriptive Patterns within the ‘Birth of the Hero’ Paradigm,” VT 36, no. 3 (1986): 257-273, esp. 263). Commenting on 30:1, Christiana de Groot, “Genesis,” in The IVP Women’s Bible Commentary, ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 20, remarks, “Her cry reflects the doubly precarious position of women valued primarily for childbearing. If they don’t have children, they have no life; and if they have children, they risk losing their life.”

96 On the conjecture that Sarah and Rachel (along with Rebecca) chose to remain childless throughout much of their lives because they were revered as priestesses, see Teubal, Sarah the Priestess, e.g., 140. For the author’s interpretation of Hagar, see Savina J. Teubal, Hagar the Egyptian: The Lost Tradition of the Matriarchs (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990).

97 One could perhaps add Ishmael and Isaac, although the primary focus in Gen 16 and 21 is on their mothers. Note also that Abram and Lot, as well as Jacob and Laban are referred to as “brothers” or “kin” (אֲנֵאָתָא). With the exception of Abram and Lot, one can note the recurrent theme of the younger sibling/kinsperson being preferred over the elder.
§3.5.2.2), asking Rachel, “Am I in the place of God, who withheld from you the fruit of the womb?”⁹⁸ Rachel then repeats the actions of Sarai in Gen 16, giving her husband her slave that he might impregnate her. Here in Gen 30, however, one does not read of the type of conflict that Sarai/h experienced with Hagar. Instead, Rachel interprets Bilhah’s births as signs that God has vindicated her and that she has prevailed over Leah (30:5-8).

Although this text is brief, it provides insights into anger with its focus on the inner workings of family life.⁹⁹ Rachel responds to the limitations of her barrenness the best she can, giving Jacob her slave in the hope, as she puts it, “that [Bilhah] will give birth on my knees” (30:3).¹⁰⁰ Although God will later open Rachel’s womb (Gen 30:22-24; 35:16-18), Rachel has no diviner’s cup to predict the future. Like other characters in Genesis, she needs to make decisions amid her present realities, where no miracles are in sight. She does the best she can in the barren land outside the Garden of Eden. Genesis never reveals ideal solutions to life’s most difficult problems. It does, however, give readers a realistic picture of the hardships and limitations of a cursed world, so that they at least know what they might face. They become more aware of anger, its causes, and its attendant moral difficulties.

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⁹⁸ This verse illustrates, among other things, that fertility was understood as a blessing from God (cf. Gen 16:2; 20:18). In 50:19, Joseph asks a similar question to his brothers, although there it pertains to exacting vengeance not bringing about pregnancies (see also 2 Kgs 5:7; John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* [2nd ed.; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930, 1910], 386).

⁹⁹ Westermann, *Genesis*, 2:474, observes that this brief text is the only glimpse readers receive of Rachel and Jacob interacting as a married couple: “To think that after the beautiful, gentle love story of 29:1-20 this angry exchange between the two is our first and only experience of their marriage!”

In the broader scope of Genesis, barrenness is related to God’s word of punishment to Eve in Gen 3:16.¹⁰¹ In the following verses (3:17-19; cf. 4:11), God issues a word of punishment to Adam, which pertains to the soil. Interestingly, the limitations of womb and soil lead to much of the anger in Genesis.¹⁰² One sees Sarah and Rachel implicitly angry over issues stemming from their barrenness. Likewise, readers see Abram and Lot, as well as Isaac and the Philistines, angry over issues stemming from the inability of land to provide for all. Famine, an overwhelming failure of the land, appears frequently enough in Genesis that some interpreters name it as one of the book’s motifs.¹⁰³ Although modern readers may not closely associate the barrenness of womb and soil, readers in the ancient Near East certainly would have. Numerous myths focus on fertility and portray a god such as An, Enki, or Baal impregnating the soil with rain.¹⁰⁴ The narratives of Genesis are also concerned with soil, wombs, and fertility, but rather than explaining barrenness in polytheistic terms, it portrays a world that God has cursed because of the disobedience of humans. The limitations of womb and soil described at

¹⁰¹ Although יָסִפְתָה and בָּשַׁב in 3:16 have traditionally been associated with the pains of actually giving birth (cf. 1 Chr 4:9), they can carry emotional connotations (cf. Prov 15:1, as well as instances of the verb בָּשַׁב [i.e., the root of יָסִפְתָה and בָּשַׁב] in Gen 6:6; 34:7; 45:5), which suggests that this verse may be about not only the toil of labor but also the emotional pain of barrenness. The same is true of יָסִפְתָה in 3:17. Its primary sense pertains to the physical labor, exertion, and suffering associated with working the ground, but the larger context (e.g., the reference to death in 3:19) make clear that realities like famine have connections with this passage (cf. also the expulsion in 3:24 from a garden, presumably to a land less fertile).


the outset of Genesis reverberate throughout the rest of the book, causing deep distress and often sparking anger.

5.6 Exposing the Plight of the Powerless: Anger Toward Slaves

Above, we noted that the narratives of Sarai/h and Hagar acknowledge that those without power are often placed in extremely difficult situations, ones they do not appear to deserve, because of anger on the part of their superiors. Such a message is reaffirmed in Gen 39, where Joseph encounters the anger of Potiphar. The story is one of power, sex, and injustice. Potiphar’s wife repeatedly attempts to seduce Joseph, who resists her advances. On one occasion, when the two are alone in the house, she physically seizes him. Joseph manages to flee, but without his garment (39:7-12). When Potiphar returns home, his wife claims that Joseph tried to seduce her, presenting the garment as evidence against Joseph (39:16-19). Thus, for the second time (cf. 37:31-33), a garment is used deceitfully to cover a crime against Joseph. In response to his wife’s allegations, Potiphar becomes angry (אֲבֵדָה נֹשֵׁב) in 39:19 is a common, somewhat nondescript expression for anger; cf. §3.5.2.2) and has the slave imprisoned (39:20). Joseph first

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105 This story has very close parallels with the opening plot of Egyptian tale of “The Two Brothers” (AEL 2:203-211). It portrays the wife of an older brother attempting to seduce the younger brother, who refuses. The wife, in turn, wrongly accuses the younger brother of trying to seduce her, which enragés the older brother and leads to fraternal separation. While there are other ancient Near Eastern stories with similar motifs (J. Robin King, “The Joseph Story and Divine Politics: A Comparative Study of a Biographic Formula from the Ancient Near East,” JBL 106, no. 4 [1987]: 577-594; Susan Tower Hollis, “The Woman in Ancient Examples of the Potiphar’s Wife Motif, K2111,” in Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel, ed. Peggy Lynne Day [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002], 28-42), the parallels in phraseology between “The Two Brothers” and Gen 39 make it possible that the Egyptian story influenced the composition of Gen 39 (so Westermann, Genesis, 3:64-65).

suffered at the hands of his brothers, then faced sexual harassment amid slavery, and now is the victim of false accusations and wrongful imprisonment.\textsuperscript{107}

When Gen 39 is read alongside Gen 16 and 21, several interesting patterns emerge. Joseph and Hagar may not initially look like similar characters, given their differences in origin, gender, power, and status with respect to election. Yet, there are striking analogies. One of them is a slave \textit{from} Egypt \textit{in} the house of Abraham, while the other is a slave \textit{in} Egypt \textit{from} the house of Abraham. Both Hagar and Joseph are asked to become involved in sexual acts by superiors with little regard for their own will. Both characters face anger from their superiors. Both suffer as a result of this anger, facing banishment. Neither deserves such punishment. However, as slaves, they are unable to defend themselves. Yet, even in their places of banishment, both Hagar (along with Ishmael) and Joseph experience God’s presence. Genesis 21:20 says, “God was with the boy [Ishmael] as he grew.” Similarly, Gen 39:21 says, “YHWH was with Joseph” (cf. 39:23).\textsuperscript{108}

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{107} Writing from the context of South Africa where he has worked extensively with the marginalized, West, \textit{Genesis}, 188, observes the following:

Some scholars have felt uncomfortable with this [portrayal of Potiphar’s wife], suspecting that here is just one more story in which the woman is blamed for sexual promiscuity. But those who have experience of the slavery and domestic work in the homes of the powerful know that both women and men are the victims of predatory sexual abuse from their masters and madams. Potiphar’s wife is the madam who sexually harasses her servant. She may not have much power in the patriarchal world of her time, but she certainly has power over a foreign slave.

See also Heather A. McKay, “Confronting Redundancy as Middle Manager and Wife: The Feisty Woman of Genesis 39,” \textit{Semeia} 87 (1999): 215-231, esp. 226-228, for an account of Potiphar’s use of “coercive” and “appealing” violence against Joseph.

\textsuperscript{108} In addition to having continuity with Joseph, Hagar also has continuity with the people of Israel. Trible, \textit{Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives}, 21, writes, “When plagues threatened the life of his firstborn son, Pharaoh cast out (\textit{grš}) the Hebrew slaves. Like that monarch, Sarah the matriarch wants to protect the life of her own son by casting out (\textit{grš}) Hagar the slave.

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With these various parallels centering on injustices resulting from anger, the text provides at least subtle critiques of disproportionate power relationships, exposing some of the moral problems inherent with slavery and servitude. Again, it is worth noting that simply describing the problems of unequal power relations may constitute a significant act of resistance.\textsuperscript{109} Moreover, these texts portray God as actively concerned for marginalized individuals who suffer unduly. Although it is easy to fault Genesis for not doing more to counteract unequal social relations (particularly verses like 16:9; 21:12), resistance literature usually works in subtle ways to question the existing status quo.\textsuperscript{110}

Such is the case both with Genesis’ texts that subtly affirm the emotional experience of women and with its texts that show how unequal power relations lead to mistreatment of the powerless particularly around issues of anger. Elements within Genesis counteract some of the more problematic cultural features of its time.

Indeed, Gen 39 gives a word of warning to those who read from the perspective of Potiphar. The narrative shows that the human desire to punish the guilty and to free one’s home from immorality may in fact have the opposite effects when anger is involved. When Potiphar receives news that his servant Joseph has attempted to seduce his wife, he naturally becomes angry, and he acts in a way that from his perspective seems just and reasonable. He takes care of the

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\textsuperscript{109} West, \textit{The Academy of the Poor}, 45.

matter not by physically harming his slave, but by imprisoning him.\textsuperscript{111} However, the readers of this narrative know something Potiphar does not: Joseph is innocent; the allegations are false. The narrative shows that even when characters act carefully on their anger in order to bring about justice, injustice can instead occur.\textsuperscript{112} The problem appears to be compounded by differences in power. Potiphar acts unilaterally while Joseph is unable to defend himself.

The same sort of problem may be signaled by Pharaoh’s anger toward his two officials in Gen 40:2 and 41:10, which is conveyed by the term $\textit{\text{w}}$ $\textit{\text{r}}$, a term used exclusively of those in power (§3.5.3.1). The exact circumstances surrounding this anger are not revealed in the text. Yet, it is clear that Pharaoh imprisons two of his servants, only to restore one to his previous position while killing the other. Such a course of events raises questions about whether Pharaoh rightfully imprisoned them both at the start. Was the cupbearer innocent all along, and imprisoned only by mistake (like Joseph)? Were the breadmaker’s actions so problematic that he really deserved death? Why does Pharaoh initially give these servants the same punishment, only to reverse

\textsuperscript{111} As Speiser, \textit{Genesis}, 304, observes, this punishment is “surprisingly mild.” Jacob, \textit{The First Book of the Bible}, 267, claims that the punishment was mild because Potiphar suspected his wife was lying and punished Joseph only to save face (cf. Ron Pirson, “The Twofold Message of Potiphar’s Wife,” \textit{SJOT} 18, no. 2 [2004]: 248-259; McKay, “Confronting Redundancy,” 215-231). More likely, a punishment of this nature is prescribed both because of what it teaches about anger (i.e., even moderate acts while angry can still be morally problematic) and because the subsequent narrative necessitates the imprisonment of Joseph (so Skinner, \textit{A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis}, 459; cf. Susan Niditch, “Genesis,” in \textit{Women’s Bible Commentary}, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe; expanded ed. [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998, 1992], 28).

\textsuperscript{112} One is reminded of Aristotle’s teaching about anger:

\begin{quote}
Any[one] can become angry—that is easy… but to [do this] to the right person, and to the right amount, and at the right time, and for the right purpose, and in the right way—this is not within every[one]’s power and is not easy; so that to do these things properly is rare, praiseworthy, and noble. (Aristotle, \textit{The Nicomachean Ethics}, esp. 110-111, §2.9.2)
\end{quote}
course suddenly, freeing one and killing the other? The text does not answer such questions, but it leaves open the possibility that Pharaoh’s anger leads to undue suffering with his servants, much like that experienced by Hagar and Joseph.

5.7 When There Are No Good Options: Dinah’s Brothers

A consistent element in Genesis’ stories about anger is that characters do not face limitless possibilities, but often are forced to make the best out of situations that are exceptionally difficult. Genesis 34 continues this line of the book’s conversation about anger, affirming that there are cases when anger presents no good options for those who experience it. This passage has been analyzed a number of times earlier in this dissertation (§2.4; §4.2), so it needs only to be summarized here. Shechem appears to rape (or at least disgrace) Dinah, which enrages her brothers and leads to their killing the residents of Shechem’s city.113 The narrator describes their anger as intense (הָלַבְּלִי רֵאָה; 34:7), while Jacob characterizes it as overwhelmingly fierce, using the term רָע repeatedly, then switching to the term רָעָב, which refers to unrestrained anger, and furthermore using the adjective רע (“fierce”) and the stative verb רָע (“be severe”).114

Many have condemned the brothers’ anger and what they do with it, including Jacob when he uses these various terms (Gen 34:30; 49:6-7). But as shown above (§2.4),

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113 As noted above (§2.4), I am sympathetic with those like Scholz, “Rape in Genesis 34,” 182-198, who argue that the text depicts rape. At the same time, I do recognize a degree of ambiguity in the text, which makes possible other interpretations, such as that offered by Bechtel, “Dinah Is Not Raped,” 19-36.

114 See §3.3.9; §3.5.2.1; §3.5.3.3.
the text itself is much more ambiguous, presenting anger as a complex emotion that does not always have easy solutions. Although the brothers clearly have reason to be angry, it is not clear what they should do with such rage. The Shechemites appear ready to make some level of reparations. In fact, Shechem’s father Hamor makes Jacob and his family the most generous offer in Genesis, essentially agreeing to whatever they ask (34:9-12). While generosity frequently assuages the worst effects of anger in Genesis (see §5.2 above, §5.8-§5.9 below), it does not have this effect here; the text makes clear that generosity is not a magic solution to anger’s worse problems. For Dinah’s brothers, there is nothing that can be done to rectify the outrage that has occurred. They agree to Hamor’s offer only so that they can slaughter all the inhabitants of his city, grossly distorting the rite of circumcision in the process.

The narrative refuses to speak monologically about the brothers’ response. It gives voice to Jacob’s perspective, who condemns them in both Gen 34:30 and 49:5-7. Yet, it does not allow this voice to triumph over the brothers, who are given the last word of the narrative (but not the last word of the book). When confronted by their father in 34:30, they ask, “Should he make a whore out of our sister?” (34:31). Neither the narrator nor Jacob is able to answer this question directly. It lingers for readers to wrestle with, unanswered and perhaps unanswerable. It is wrong to slaughter the innocent, but it is also wrong to pretend that Shechem is guiltless. Amid the limited world that characters in Genesis inhabit, the brothers’ desire for justice (punishing Shechem) ironically leads to injustice (punishing all the other inhabitants of his city as well). Characters inhabit a broken world where the right course of action with anger is not always apparent or even
possible. Genesis does not place a veneer over the difficulties of the moral life or present a world where moral perfection is still possible. In the cursed land outside of Eden, humans often face few possibilities and must deal with anger’s deadly force even when all options are morally troublesome.  

5.8 Short-Lived Reunion: Jacob and Esau

A recurrent theme in many episodes of anger is separation. In the narratives involving Jacob and Esau, Genesis explores whether the estrangement caused by anger can be overcome. It does so in realistic ways that poignantly depict the difficulty and pain that can accompany attempts at reconciliation. The exchanges between Esau and Jacob bear witness to the limitations that humans face and the difficulty for all parties in rebuilding the community that anger and its attendant issues have previously driven apart. The text comes close to envisioning forgiveness and reconciliation, but ultimately it stops short, testifying to the lasting impact of anger.

The hostilities between the two brothers begin in Rebecca’s womb (25:21-26). In Gen 25:29-34, they sharpen when Jacob forces his own brother to sell his birthright in

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115 At times, commentators do not do justice to the realities and difficulties of moral living in Genesis. For example, Jacob, The First Book of the Bible, 176, writes, “All conflicts in the story of the patriarchs end in harmony and reconciliation. Regarding Abraham this is true of his conflicts with Pharaoh, Lot and Abimelech; regarding Isaac of his conflict with Abimelech; regarding Jacob of his conflicts with Laban and Esau; regarding Joseph of his conflicts with the brothers.” Benno Jacob’s observation is certainly not true of the conflict between Dinah’s brothers and the Shechemites, where there is not harmony and reconciliation, only bloodshed and violence. One can also question whether Genesis truly envisions harmony and reconciliation with many of the examples Jacob specifically mentions. Only with Joseph and his brothers does the text envision the enduring restoration of community. In every other instance, there may be peaceful agreements, but there is frequently estrangement and lasting separation.

116 As noted in §3.2.4, separation is a prototypical outcome of anger.
exchange for lentil stew.\textsuperscript{117} In Gen 27, the strife between brothers reaches a pinnacle as Jacob, operating under Rebecca’s direction, deceives his father Isaac and robs his brother Esau of his blessing.\textsuperscript{118} In Gen 27:41-42, Esau appears poised to recapitulate the sin of Cain.\textsuperscript{119} The text uses the verb \textit{~jf} to signal that Esau harbors anger against Jacob and intends to harm him (cf. §3.5.3.4), and it mentions the verb \textit{grh} (27:41, 42), which is the same word used to depict Cain’s murder in 4:8.\textsuperscript{120} Also like Gen 4:1-16, this text uses the word \textit{brother} (やす) several times in an exceptionally short amount of space (five appearances in as many verses, 27:41-45). In 27:41, Esau says to himself, “Let the days of my father’s mourning draw near, and then I shall kill Jacob my brother” (יִרְבָּה יָבֹא עַל אָבִי).\textsuperscript{121} However, Rebecca intervenes, again looking out for Jacob’s well-being while thwarting Esau’s plans. She warns Jacob of Esau’s intentions, telling

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{117} As mentioned in §4.5, many Western commentators who likely never experienced life-threatening hunger quickly condemn Esau’s selling his birthright in this passage (e.g., Gunkel, \textit{Genesis}, 291-293; Goldin, “The Youngest Son,” 36; cf. Steinmetz, \textit{From Father to Son}, 97-98, 150; Kaminsky, \textit{Yet I Loved Jacob}, 45, 56). These interpreters fail to notice that Esau faces limitations and restraints on every level. He inhabits a world whose soil has been cursed and whose land does not always provide the sustenance one needs. Facing life-threatening hunger (25:32), Esau enters Jacob’s kitchen, only to be exploited by a brother who uses Esau’s vulnerability to his own advantage. Facing difficulties and limitations on every level, Esau is forced to sell his birthright simply to survive.
\item \textsuperscript{118} On the possibility that Isaac is not really deceived, but rather seeks to test his sons to see which one is most capable of handling the blessing, see Adrien Janis Bledstein, “Binder, Trickster, Heel and Hairy-Man: Rereading Genesis 27 as a Trickster Tale Told by a Woman,” in \textit{A Feminist Companion to Genesis}, ed. Althalya Brenner; FCB 2 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press), 282-295.
\item \textsuperscript{119} Cf. Jon D. Levenson, \textit{The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 63, 75.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Although it could have used words like \textit{xc;r’}, the Hiphil of \textit{tWm}, or \textit{hkn} (which is far more common in the Hebrew Bible than \textit{grh}), the verb \textit{grh} calls to readers’ minds the Bible’s first death. See also §3.3.3.
\item \textsuperscript{121} The word \textit{yxia’}, my brother, functions similarly to \textit{^n>Bi}, your son, in Gen 22. It is unnecessary in the sense that readers already know that Jacob is Esau’s brother. The word is present to drive home what anger does to Esau, even though Jacob is a close member of his family.
\end{itemize}
her younger son to flee to her brother Laban until Esau’s anger subsides.122 She describes Esau’s emotion both with the generic term for anger רָעָת and with the term מְרִיע, which is often used of grave anger that has the potential for deadly violence (§3.5.2.1, §3.5.2.3).

Twenty years pass.123 When Jacob is forced back home, Esau initially appears ready to kill him. In two places, the text makes clear that Esau approaches Jacob with 400 men (32:6; 33:1). If Abram was victorious in rescuing Lot from several armies with 318 trained men in Gen 14, then Esau’s 400 men appear more than enough to exact vengeance on Jacob and his family here in Gen 32-33. The younger brother naturally fears for his life. He does all he can to counteract his past actions. First and foremost, he follows in the footsteps of his grandfather Abram, acting with generosity to diffuse an anger-charged situation. Jacob offers droves of animals (550 total) to Esau as a gift (32:13-21; 33:8-11). The Hebrew word מְרִיע, gift is highly significant, appearing here for the first time since it was used in the narrative of Cain and Abel (32:14, 19, 21, 22; 33:10; cf. 4:3, 4, 5).124 Whereas Cain and Abel’s gifts to God led eventually to a rage-filled murder, Jacob’s gifts to Esau serve the opposite purpose, preventing such a murder. It is clear that Jacob has robbed Esau of what was rightfully the older brother’s. Now, in an

122 In Genesis, Jacob’s movement from one location to another frequently signals a change in character. For more on this literary device of linking personal and geographical transformation, see the discussion of chronotopes in Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, 84, 111-115, 120.

123 Gen 29:18, 30; 31:38. Such an elapse of time is a clear contradiction of Sarah’s prediction that the separation would last only “a few days” (יָדַעְתָּ יָמִים; Gen 27:44; Hamilton, The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50, 230).

124 As ibid., 325, correctly observes, the Hebrew noun should here be translated as gift rather than tribute: “As gift, Minhâ is given voluntarily. As tribute, Minhâ is exacted.”
act of significant sacrifice, Jacob offers Esau something akin to reparations. Jacob specifically commands Esau to take his blessing, הֶרְבָּחָה (33:11), the very thing he stole from Isaac and Esau in Gen 27. Jacob shows that he is no longer one to steal from Esau, but rather one to give to Esau. This act of generosity alters Esau’s perception of Jacob and past wrongdoings, facilitating an alleviation of Esau’s prolonged anger. Esau sees that Jacob has changed.

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125 See vv. 12, 35, 36 [x2], 38, 41; cf. הֶרְבָּחָה in vv. 4, 7, 10, 19, 23, 25, 27 [x2], 29 [x2], 30, 31, 33, 34, 38, 41. As Fishbane, Text and Texture, 52, puts it, “By [saying “take my berakhah”], Jacob confesses his guilt and verbalizes his inner conflicts. What he says, in effect, is “Take [back] the blessing which I have tricked from you.” Cf. Greenspahn, When Brothers Dwell Together, 127.

126 Giving is presented as a way of alleviating anger and hostility not only here in Genesis (see also §5.2, §5.9), but also in other biblical texts (e.g., Prov 21:14; 25:21-22), the ancient Near East (“The Story of Idrimi, King of Alalakh,” [ANET, 557-558]; “Emesh and Enten: Enil Chooses the Farmer-God,” pages 49-51 in Kramer, Sumerian Mythology; “Horus and Seth” [AEL 2:214-223, esp. 215, 222]; “Counsels of Wisdom,” Pages 96-107 in W. G. Lambert, Babylonian Wisdom Literature [London: Oxford University Press, 1975, 1967, 1970], 101, lines 41-45), and different parts of the modern world (e.g., Lutz, Unnatural Emotions, 175; Petersen, “Genesis and Family Values,” 20).

127 In The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism, Regina Schwartz reflects at length on the limitations portrayed by Genesis and other texts of the Hebrew Bible. She argues that the scarcity it envisions provides the impetus for violence in the Bible. On this point, she is essentially correct. In this narrative, the scarcity of one birthright and one blessing nearly leads to fratricide. However, what she does with this exegetical observation is fundamentally flawed. Schwartz calls for her readers to abandon the Hebrew Bible’s portrayal of a world of limitations, maintaining that they should instead embrace a utopian ideal of plenitude, which she believes will foster generosity and counteract greed and violence (Regina M. Schwartz, The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997], 34, 77-83, 176).

There are three key problems with Schwartz’s ideal of plenitude. First and foremost, it is no more than wishful thinking. The ancient writers and readers of Genesis knew how difficult it is simply to survive. They knew the potential for death in every childbirth, every famine, and every conflict. They appropriately observed that God allows no reentry into paradise (3:24). Second, Schwartz ignores how Genesis is concerned precisely with the problem she outlines. She misses how Genesis zeroes in on anger, which serves as a crucial link between scarcity and violence. Though the writers of Genesis did not believe much could be done about the inherent scarcity of the world, they did believe that individuals could prevent the resultant anger from erupting into violence. Third, Schwartz never makes clear why generosity would be necessary in the world of abundance she envisions. There is no reason to share when everyone has more than enough. Genesis, on the other hand, presents things quite differently. It envisions generosity as a necessity precisely because there is not enough to go around. In Genesis, generosity flows not from whimsical notions of abundance, but as a concrete means of ameliorating anger and preventing it from causing violence.
In addition to giving significant possessions, Jacob’s gestures and speech illustrate a willingness to give up the power he has taken from Esau. This relinquishing of power is particularly evident when one compares Isaac’s blessing of Jacob with the text at hand. In 27:29, Isaac blessed Jacob by saying, “May your mother’s children bow down to you.” Here in 33:3, 6-7, however, Jacob and his family bow down to Esau.\textsuperscript{128} Isaac’s blessing of Jacob also contained the words, “Be lord over your brothers” (27:29), but here, Jacob refers to Esau as “my lord” repeatedly (32:5, 6, 19; 33:8, 13, 14, 15), while calling himself “your servant” (32:19, 21).\textsuperscript{129} In speech and deed, Jacob is giving back what he previously took from Esau, voiding the blessing he received through deceit.\textsuperscript{130} The younger brother who once demanded his brother’s birthright now asks only to receive grace in his brother’s eyes (33:8, 10, 15).

Jacob’s generosity and humility have a profound impact on Esau. Although the elder brother appeared poised to kill the younger in a Cain-like act of anger, Esau instead embraces Jacob, kisses him, and together the two brothers weep (33:4).\textsuperscript{131} In Gen 32:21


\textsuperscript{129} Jacob refers to Esau and himself in this way even though Esau addresses him as “my brother” (cf. Hamilton, The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50, 345).

Note that different Hebrew words have here been rendered “lord.” Gen 27:29 uses יְדַבָּר, while Gen 32:5, 6, 19; 33:8, 13, 14, 15 uses יְדַבָּר. While there is not a lexical match, there is a conceptual parallel.

\textsuperscript{130} Terence E. Fretheim, “Genesis,” NIB 1:572-573, disagrees, claiming that Jacob retains his blessing and has it in such abundance that he shares it with Esau. While there may be some ambiguity about Jacob’s actions, the specific reversal of power relations and Jacob’s commanding Esau to take his blessing (33:11) suggests that Jacob is at least partially undoing the actions of Gen 27. See also Wenham, Genesis, 2:283, 288-289, 298-299; Fishbane, Text and Texture, 51-53.

\textsuperscript{131} The BHS apparatus suggests that reference to Esau kissing Jacob is perhaps an addition, based on the puncta extraordinaria (see also LXX). It also suggests that one read יָרֵע (he wept) instead of יָיָע (they wept). Westermann, Genesis, 2:523, does not find it necessary to deviate from the MT.
(32:22 Eng.), the night before Jacob and Esau confront one another, the younger brother says that he hopes Esau, in response to his generosity, will “lift my face” (אֲנַפְּךָ גַּלְאְנִי). The phrase refers to acceptance, perhaps even forgiveness. Esau’s actions in ch. 33 suggest that Jacob experiences exactly that for which he hoped.132 Not only does Esau embrace and kiss Jacob, Esau also demonstrates his acceptance of Jacob by inviting him to journey together (33:12), in marked contrast to Jacob’s solitary journey in Gen 27:45. The invitation appears to be an offer for the two to dwell together in community.133 Readers are thus offered a glimpse of anger overcome—a case where brothers live in unity despite the grave transgressions their relationship once endured.

The glimpse, however, is fleeting. Jacob turns down his brother’s offer, saying that he would not be able to keep pace with Esau if they traveled together.134 Jacob says he would like to meet with his brother later at Seir, something that the text never records occurring (33:13-14). In response, Esau offers essentially to be like a keeper (רְפָאִים) for Jacob, saying that he would like to leave soldiers with him, presumably to protect him.

This act of kissing echoes Jacob’s making of peace with Laban (32:1 [33:54 Eng.]), and it foreshadows subsequent forgiveness with Joseph and his brothers (45:15). Hamilton, The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50, 343, observes, “the kiss is possibly not just a display of joyous feelings but an indication of forgiveness (cf. 2 Sam. 14:33).” See also Brodie, Genesis as Dialogue, 323. Note, however, that the language used here may also point back to the nocturnal wrestling in the previous chapter (Norman J. Cohen, “Two That Are One—Sibling Rivalry in Genesis,” Judaism 32, no. 3 [1983]: 338).

132 Through his repentance, Jacob has done what is right, resulting in a lifting. In this sense, there is a fulfillment of God’s words to Cain: “If you do what is right, then a lifting” (רָאשׁ רַוְעָה 4:7a).

133 Thus, there is the reference to “until I enter my lord’s place at Seir” in 33:14. As Westermann, Genesis, 2:526, puts it, “Esau takes it for granted that they will now go on together. He does not name the destination; but when he says he will go on ahead, he can mean only (and this is confirmed by v. 14) that Jacob will live in the place where he is now living.”

134 Jacob’s words appear primarily to be a ploy, giving him an excuse for not staying with Esau. Nevertheless, there is some truth in his assertion. Jacob is still limping after his wrestling match in Gen 32. He is in a weak, vulnerable, and humbled position. He wants distance, not togetherness.
Jacob again refuses Esau’s offer, perhaps out of fear that Esau is secretly planning to kill him, or else out of a sense of shame and guilt for past wrongs. Although readers were concerned that Esau’s anger would prevent reconciliation between the brothers, Esau’s anger is not the final problem. In a poignant twist of the narrative, it is fear, shame, and guilt by Jacob that prevents a lasting reunion. The conclusion of the episode says that Jacob and Esau dwelt in separate places (33:16-17). Much later, the text echoes Gen 13:6 and says that Esau separated himself from Jacob because the land could not “lift” (or “support”) the two of them together (Gen 36:6-8).135

In these accounts of Jacob and Esau, readers encounter variations on previous themes. Anger is presented as a deadly and ominous force that is particularly dangerous within families. Genesis 33 shows readers that the estrangement resulting from anger need not be permanent, although it makes clear that sacrifices are required to find a way beyond past wrongdoings. At the cost of many possessions, intense fear, and great risk to himself and his family, Jacob gains some sense that he has favor in the eyes of his brother. But the reconciliation is short-lived at best. The brothers soon go their separate ways. While there is a moment of forgiveness here, the narrative is painfully realistic about the difficulty, demands, and dangers of attempting to assuage anger. Genesis does

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135 As Kaminsky, Yet I Loved Jacob, 54-56, mentions, scholars have debated whether Jacob and Esau are reconciled. Kaminsky aims for a middle ground, asserting that some level of reconciliation takes place. In contrast, Petersen (“Genesis and Family Values,” 21), interprets this passage as Jacob engaging in “a verbal jousting match” to disarm Esau who seeks to kill him. While Petersen on the whole does very important work with this passage, his emphasis on Esau’s continually trying to kill his brother does not match well with Gen 33:4, where he embraces Jacob. The text is much more ambiguous than Petersen admits, likely reflecting the uncertainty of the characters. It appears that Esau is willing to forgive, but Jacob has difficulty trusting in a new beginning. Can the brothers trust one another that no more harm will come? Can they let the past remain in the past? These are questions for readers to wrestle with concerning not only Esau and Jacob, but also themselves in their own attempts at reconciliation (cf. §4.6.4).
not portray anger or forgiveness in simplistic terms. It minimizes neither the force of anger nor the prolonged impact it can have on human lives. The desire patterned in readers for one to provide sustenance and protection for family members again comes up short, as individuals’ limitations, along with the limitations of the land, prevent the possibility of brothers dwelling together.

5.9 Joseph, A Brothers' Keeper

Only in Joseph and his brothers do readers finally see characters overcoming the worst effects of anger. These prolonged narratives provide a capstone to the preceding episodes of anger in Genesis. They expound upon many ideas mentioned previously. Specific words and phrases are echoed, while particular events are recapitulated. Through these echoes and recapitulations, these narratives reinforce and qualify what previous episodes teach about anger, drawing attention to both common motifs and the broader ethical significance of the matter at hand. In many ways, these narratives

136 As Brodie, Genesis as Dialogue, 351, puts it, the Joseph story “is not a special pearl, different from the rest of Genesis…. It is Genesis breaking into full bloom, a blossoming that builds on all that precedes.” Similarly, James G. Williams, “Number Symbolism and Joseph as Symbol of Completion,” JBL 98, no. 1 (1979): 86, observes, “the Joseph figure is one that combines and embodies many of the features of the portrayals of the preceding patriarchs and matriarchs. In combining and embodying these features he transcends his predecessors. He is like them and he is more than they.” See also the useful discussion in Kaminsky, Yet I Loved Jacob, 72-78.

I have chosen the plural word “narratives” to signal an awareness that Gen 37-50 involves a diversity of materials. While there are connections between these materials, the differences should not be overlooked. Cf. George W. Coats, “Redactional Unity in Genesis 37-50,” JBL 93, no. 1 (1974): 15-21.

137 Both Benjamin D. Sommer, A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66 (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), esp. 6-31, and Richard B. Hays, Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), esp. 29-32, provide excellent discussions of allusions and echoes within texts. While they focus on how different works influence each other, their work is useful for determining how some parts of Genesis influence other parts. Sommer draws particular attention to the purpose of allusions. Hays, meanwhile, proposes seven tests to verify whether a particular text echoes
involving Joseph and his brothers offer resolution to the problems encountered earlier. It is only here that brothers find a way to regain the community that anger and jealousy previously tore apart.

While Genesis thus presents a sort of resolution in these narratives, it never loses sight of how difficult the moral life is. Although solutions to prior problems are found in the Joseph narratives, so are the harsh realities found elsewhere in Genesis. There is no return to Eden. There are no saints in Genesis. Joseph and his brothers eventually

another one (availability, volume, thematic coherence, historical plausibility, history of interpretation, and satisfaction). (On tests, see also Benjamin D. Sommer, “Exegesis, Allusion and Intertextuality in the Hebrew Bible: A Response to Lyle Eslinger,” *VT* 46, no. 4 [1996]: 479-489, esp. 483-485.) Such insights inform the discussions below about how Gen 37-50 forms a capstone to previous narratives about anger, although some of the specifics of Sommer’s and Hays’ works (e.g., Sommer’s technical definition of “echo”) are not retained.


It is not the niceness of Genesis that makes it attractive to generation after generation of readers. Quite the contrary, it’s the gut-wrenching quiddity of the narrative that draws us in year after year. Genesis is all those dirty little secrets we know about one another strung into a ‘family’ narrative. This family is so ‘nuclear’ it’s fissile. Genesis is R, it’s NC-17. Genesis is what spouses hide from the neighbors, hide from the children, hide from each other. The narratives of Genesis are roiling in repressions we refuse to tell our therapists. It’s not pretty, it’s not nice, it’s not for polite company—and it’s canonical Scripture for hundreds of millions of Jews and Christians, the background for a revelation to hundreds of millions more Muslims, and the inspiration to zillions more secular folks who just happen to enjoy reading Western literature.

139 Some interpreters have attempted to portray the characters of Genesis in this light. For example, Jacob, *The First Book of the Bible*, repeatedly portrays Joseph in saintly terms, suggesting that Rachel’s first son would never “invent malicious words” about his brothers (249), wants nothing more than good will for his brothers (253), “shows no desire for revenge” (284), “overflows with love” for his brothers (284), is “neither excessive, nor dangerous” (287), does not engage in divination because “This would not fit Joseph’s religious character” (296), and “had always been confident of regaining all of” his brothers (302). Such characterizations do not fit easily with a Joseph who brings back “a bad report about them” to their father (37:2), “speaks harshly to them” (42:7), accuses them falsely several times despite their pleas to the contrary (42:9, 12, 14; cf. 42:16, 30), imprisons them for crimes they did not commit (42:17), and makes them appear as thieves (44:1-15). Gunkel, *Genesis*, 424, correctly concludes after reviewing those who claim Joseph is out to test or reform his brothers, “The ancient narrator thinks much more simply: Joseph wants to punish his brothers.” Meanwhile, Aaron Wildavsky, “Survival Must Not Be Gained through Sin: The Moral of the Joseph Stories Prefigured through Judah and Tamar,” *JSOT* 62 (1994): 37-48, esp. 38, writes, “if anything, Joseph is more of an anti-hero demonstrating for all to see the path the Hebrew people ought not to take.” Such a characterization may go too far (i.e., some things
move beyond anger, but they all display morally problematic behavior with this emotion along the way. The text explains that anger can subside, but only after great difficulties.

The narrative begins in chapter 37 by recounting Jacob’s favoritism toward Joseph (37:3). Much like God’s favoritism toward Abel, Jacob’s preferential treatment results in hatred and jealousy among those less favored (אָנֹק in 37:4, 5, 8; אָנֶף in 37:11, cf. §3.3.1). This ill feeling is compounded when Joseph boasts of dreams that depict himself as superior to his older brothers and even his parents (37:5-10). As with Cain, jealousy leads Joseph’s brothers to thoughts of fratricide. When they see the “master dreamer” approaching from a distance, they plan to “kill” him (37:18; the word is יָ֫שֶׁת, יָ֫שֶׁת).

Joseph does are positive), but it certainly rings true for some parts of Joseph’s character (e.g., Gen 47:13-26). For more on ways the text characterizes Joseph, see Mark A. O’Brien, “The Contribution of Judah’s Speech, Genesis 44:18-34, to the Characterization of Joseph,” CBQ 59, no. 3 (1997): 429-447; George W. Coats, From Canaan to Egypt: Structural and Theological Context for the Joseph Story (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1976), 82-83, 88. See also Daniel Judah Elazar, “Covenant and Community,” Judaism 49, no. 4 (2000): 387-398, esp. 396, who observes, “most of the midrashim about Joseph cited today attempt to clean up Joseph’s act. In fact, the rabbinic sages were quite bothered by his behavior as midrashim that are less attended to nowadays attest.” He goes on to suggest that it is perhaps because of Joseph’s actions, esp. in 47:13-26, that the Israelites are enslaved.

The opening lines of this story include the words יָ֫שֶׁת אֵלֵי אֵת בְּדֵי הָאָרֶךְ תּוֹרָן (37:2). On the surface, it appears that this sentence should be translated, “Joseph … was a shepherd with (= יָ֫שֶׁת) his brothers among the flocks.” However, as Duane L. Christensen, “Anticipatory Paronomasia in Jonah 3:7-8 and Genesis 37:2,” RB 90, no. 2 (1983): 261-263, esp. 263, points out, the syntax leaves open the possibility that it could be rendered, “Joseph was shepherding (יָ֫שֶׁת = marker of the definite direct object) his brothers among the flocks.” Given that Joseph later acts as a shepherd for his brothers, providing them with nourishment and security, it is possible to understand this verse in terms of anticipatory paronomasia, foreshadowing what is to come. (See also §5.1 on the connections between shepherding and acting as a keeper [יָ֫שֶׁת].)

While the narrative of Cain uses neither the words יָ֫שֶׁת (be jealous) nor יָ֫שֶׁת (hate), these emotions are at least implicitly present. Cain is obviously jealous of his brother’s blessing; his name itself has close phonetic connections with jealousy (יָ֫שֶׁת; יָ֫שֶׁת). Likewise, he obviously has murderous intent, which is connected with יָ֫שֶׁת in the Hebrew Bible (so Jacob, The First Book of the Bible, 250-251; Deut 4:42; 19:4).

The same word as 4:8; 27:41, 42). Those responsible for killing Shechem and his people now appear ready to kill their own brother. However, first Reuben and then Judah persuade the others to take alternate courses of action, which they do by throwing Joseph into a cistern and later selling him into slavery.

Both Reuben and Judah mention the word דם, blood, in their appeals for the brothers to desist from killing Joseph. Reuben urges his brothers, “Pour out no blood!” (37:22), while Judah asks his brothers, “What is the profit if we kill our brother and cover his blood?” (37:26). There are only two cases previously in Genesis where the word דם, blood, is used. One is in Gen 4:10-11, where YHWH confronts Cain about Abel’s blood crying out from the ground. The other is in 9:4-6 amid the Noahic covenant, where the text forbids the shedding of human blood, with particular reference to one’s brother (9:5). The narrative appears to be echoing these texts, appealing to a broader conviction that bloodshed is a particularly grave crime.

After Joseph’s brothers sell him into slavery for twenty pieces of silver (37:25-30), readers encounter a variety of subplots involving Judah and Tamar (ch. 38), Joseph and Potiphar’s wife (ch. 39), and Joseph’s imprisonment and eventual rise to power (chs.

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143 As noted above, the writers of Genesis had many words to use in describing killing, such as כָּבָד, the Hiphil of כָּבַד, and דָּם (the last one is far more common than דם, in the Hebrew Bible). The verb הָוָס calls to readers’ minds the Bible’s first death (4:8), as well as other anger-inspired deaths (27:41-42 [hypothetical]; 34:25-26 [actual]). See also §3.3.3. One could also note that here in Gen 37, as well as in Gen 4 and 27, plans to kill are directed toward the individual who has received disproportionate favor, not to the one who gives out this favor unfairly (cf. Westermann, Genesis, 3:37).

144 See esp. 42:22, where Reuben, following a series of misfortunes in Egypt, says to his brothers “Did I not say to you, ‘Do not sin with the boy’? You did not listen. Now his blood—behold—it is sought (תָּפֵק מִי יַעֲשֶׂה נָהָר).’ The end of this speech echoes the language of Gen 9:4-6, which talks of YHWH seeking דם blood that has been shed.

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40-41). In chapter 42, the brothers flung apart by jealousy are again in each other’s presence. The limitations of land are once more quite obvious. Amid famine and drought, Joseph’s brothers face starvation and go to Egypt for food (without Benjamin; 42:1-5). Joseph, in charge of food distribution, recognizes his brothers but pretends that he does not (42:6-8). The brothers fail to recognize him, and Joseph deals very harshly with them, much as his father Jacob did when approached by his starving brother (42:7-17; cf. 25:29-34).

Unlike the last interchange between Joseph and his brothers, Joseph now holds all the power. His brothers bow before him (42:6), referring to themselves as “your servants” (42:10) and to Joseph as “lord” (42:10). While Jacob’s humility ameliorated Esau’s anger in ch. 33, humbleness is not so efficacious this time. Joseph is unmoved by their actions, and he begins to inflict great retributive harm upon them. At the outset of the Joseph narratives, the text says that Joseph’s brothers “were unable to speak to him peaceably” (לִבְדַּרְכֵא נְרָפָא, 37:4). With calculated revenge, Joseph now speaks harshly with them (לִבְדַּרְכֵא נְרָפָא, 42:7). He falsely accuses them of being spies several times.

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146 Alternatively, it is possible that Judah recognizes who Joseph is. The text never says so much, but as P. J. Berlyn, “His Brothers’ Keeper,” JBQ 26, no. 2 (1998): 73-83, has demonstrated, some of the narrative’s dynamics make better sense if one assumes that Judah suspects the governor is Joseph.

147 Fred Guyette, “Joseph’s Emotional Development,” JBQ 32, no. 3 (2004): 181-188, esp. 188, characterizes Joseph’s emotional dispositions as follows: “although his early life had been dominated by narcissism, he grew in compassion for others, and his awe for God’s design also grew to be boundless.” While Guyette’s assertions are not baseless, he could have said more about the anger and hostility Joseph displays toward his brothers when he initially encounters them.

148 On the unusual use of the suffix in לַבְדֵרָךְ, see GKC §115c. The BHS textual apparatus proposes (following the LXX) the reading לַבְדֵרָךְ (י).
times, despite the brothers’ pleas to the contrary (42:9, 12, 14; cf. 42:16, 30). Just as Potiphar imprisoned Joseph following false accusations (39:17-20), so now Joseph imprisons his brothers on fraudulent allegations (42:17). After letting them suffer for a period of time, Joseph releases his half-brothers (save Simeon) on the condition that they bring back his sole full-brother Benjamin, who is in Canaan with their father (42:18-20, 24-26). The brothers, unaware of who this Egyptian ruler actually is, nevertheless suspect that the hardships befalling them result from how they treated Joseph many years ago (42:21-22). They are more correct than they realize. The brothers assume Joseph has died (42:22), but he ironically controls their lives.

When Joseph hears the brothers refer to their treatment of him, he turns away and weeps (42:23-24). Once his composure is regained, he returns, gives them grain, and secretly returns the money they used to purchase the grain (42:25). While this act may foreshadow Joseph’s subsequent generosity (43:16-44:3; 45:10-11, 21-23; 47:11-12; 149 Westermann, *Genesis*, 3:108, observes, “the constant repetition of the accusation is meant to unnerve the accused and break down his resistance.” When the brothers claim in their defense that they are “honest men” (‘אֲנִי מְדִיבִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל; 42:11), their words do not set well with readers, who know of their guilt-concealing dishonesty in 37:31-35 (cf. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, 521).

149 On the dynamics of evil producing evil and good producing good in this narrative, see the useful discussion in Mignon R. Jacobs, “The Conceptual Dynamics of Good and Evil in the Joseph Story: An Exegetical and Hermeneutical Inquiry,” *JSOT* 27, no. 3 (2003): 331-335. The Hebrew Bible repeatedly depicts a moral correspondence between individuals’ actions and outcomes. To name one salient example, in Numbers 11, the people are portrayed as greedy for meat, and their punishment is that they receive quail in such numbers that it “comes out of [their] nostrils and becomes loathsome” (11:20). Cf. Koch, *The Prophets*, 1:64-65, who speaks of a “level of moral causality … through the connection between action and outcome—between what one does and what happens to one in life.”

150 Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 164, writes, “The entire dialogue between Joseph and his brothers is remarkable for the way that words, creating the fragile surface of speech, repeatedly plumb depths of moral relation of which the brothers are almost totally unaware and which even Joseph grasps only in part.”

151 West, *Genesis*, 199.
50:15-21), his returning the brothers’ money is best understood in the immediate context as another way that he unsettles and disturbs his siblings.\(^{153}\) Indeed, when the brothers discover the money, the text says that their heart sank, they trembled, and they asked each other, “What is God doing to us?” (42:28; cf. 42:35). Joseph’s brothers once sold Joseph into slavery for financial gain (37:26-28). In an act of symmetrical retribution, Joseph strikes fear into their hearts by giving them money they do not deserve and should not rightfully possess. The brothers, who have already been falsely accused, now fear what will happen next. Money once led the brothers to harm Joseph, and now Joseph uses money to harm them.

When the brothers return to their father, they explain what transpired. The text focuses initially on Reuben and then on Judah, the same brothers the text focused upon when describing Joseph’s harsh treatment and enslavement in Gen 37. Upon their return, Reuben urges their father to let them go back to Egypt with Benjamin, offering his own sons as a surety of Benjamin’s safety. But Jacob, who has lost both Joseph and now Simeon, is unwilling to part with Benjamin. Time passes. When the family is again on the verge of life-threatening starvation (43:8), Judah steps forward, requesting that they go to Egypt. He offers himself as surety for Benjamin’s safety (43:9-10).

\(^{153}\) Gunkel, *Genesis*, 426, takes a position similar to the one advanced here. There is, of course, an element of ambiguity in Joseph’s actions, which likely reflects the ambiguity he feels toward his brothers (Jacobs, “The Conceptual Dynamics of Good and Evil in the Joseph Story,” 324-325). Thus, Westermann, *Genesis*, 3:111, suggests that “the narrator is presenting that inextricable intertwining of harshness and readiness for reconciliation which has determined Joseph’s conduct from the moment that he saw his brothers before him.” Meanwhile, Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 293-294, raises some good points, although his claim that Joseph is set on gauging his brothers’ degree of repentance is problematic. Joseph appears much more torn between his desire for vengeance and his love of family. Cf. von Rad, *Genesis*, 384.
Jacob reluctantly agrees, and he encourages his brothers to respond to the situation with a tactic that alleviated the anger of his brother Esau years earlier: the offering of gifts. As 43:11 puts it, “Then their father Israel said to them, ‘If it must be so, do this: take some of the best products of the earth (םּוֹרֶדֶרֶז יִבְנָה) in your bags. Bring them to the man as a gift (הָנִּים).’” The language of this verse calls to mind the other references to הָנִּים, a gift, in the book of Genesis, which appear only in Genesis’ narratives describing the possibility of fratricide, that is, the stories of Cain and Abel (4:3, 4, 5) and Jacob and Esau (32:14, 19, 21, 22; 33:10). In contrast to Cain, who brought only “some fruit from the ground” (יִבְנָה יִבְנָה יִבְנָה יִבְנָה), Joseph’s brothers are instructed to bring “some of the best products of the earth” (םּוֹרֶדֶרֶז יִבְנָה). This contrast gives readers a hint that the outcome may be different from what happened with Cain. Giving may, on this occasion, lead to reconciliation rather than violence.

In addition to gifts from the land, Jacob also tells his sons to take double the money needed: “Take in your hand twice (שְׁלֹשׁ) the silver, and take in your hand the silver that was returned in the mouth of your sacks. Perhaps there was a mistake (שְׁלֹשׁ; 43:12).” The word שְׁלֹשׁ, mistake, is carefully chosen. It is a rare word that serves several functions. It forms an audible and visual pun with the word שְׁלֹשׁ (“twice”) earlier in the verse. It also carries a variety of shades of meaning. On the most literal level, the phrase אָרָא שְׁלֹשׁ (“Perhaps it was a mistake”) suggests that the Egyptian viceroy or his officials may have made a mistake when money was placed in their sacks. In the passage’s broader context, however, the reference to money being a mistake alludes to
the grave error the brothers committed previously in selling Joseph for twenty pieces of silver.154

The brothers follow their father’s command, returning to Egypt with both gifts and Benjamin. When Joseph sees his brothers, he immediately arranges for a meal (43:16). The brothers, however, do not know of Joseph’s intentions. They approach the steward of Joseph’s house at the door (43:19; πηθ), fearful that punishment may be coming.155 The steward comforts them (43:23),156 in contrast to their fearful expectations.157 As Joseph approaches his brothers for the meal, they present their gifts from home, bowing down before him, just as Jacob did with Esau (43:26, 28; cf. 33:3, 6-7). Although the brothers face extreme famine, they give away what little food they have (honey, spices, nuts) as gifts for Joseph. After being deeply moved upon seeing his brother Benjamin (43:29-31), Joseph eats with them, providing food from his own table and allowing them to eat and drink freely (43:34).

Elsewhere in Genesis, episodes involving anger frequently depict people sharing in a meal just prior to some sort of separation (Hagar and Ishmael from Sarah and Abraham in 21:8, cf. 21:14; Isaac and Abimelech from one another in 26:30; Jacob,

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154 Although this word can refer to a simple error or mistake, it can also refer to more significant moral wrongdoings. The verbal form of this word is used, for example, in Saul’s (second) confession of sin for seeking to kill David (1 Sam 26:21).


156 The steward specifically greets them with the word ἐπιτηδεύω (“peace”), which is significant because Gen 37:4 says specifically that the brothers were unable to speak “peaceably” (ἐπιτηδεύω) to Joseph.

157 Cf. God’s words to Cain in 4:15.
Rachel, and Leah from Laban in 31:54; Joseph and his brothers in 37:25). Here in ch. 43, this glimpse of the brothers reunited in fellowship appears about to give way to another separation. Joseph seems only interested in a long-term reunion with Benjamin, not his abusive half-brothers (44:10, 17). He sends them on their way, placing his silver cup with Benjamin’s belongings so that he has an excuse for keeping Benjamin with him.

Joseph’s plan appears to be working. After the brothers depart, his officials catch up with them and locate the cup in Benjamin’s possessions. The brothers return to Egypt, where Joseph asks them, “What is this deed that you have done?” (44:15). The words are a close echo of God’s words to Eve in 3:13 and to Cain in 4:10. Like God’s words there, Joseph’s question is a call for reflection on the moral significance of all that has transpired, both in the immediate and distant past. Thus, Joseph’s question uses plural pronouns, addressing all of his brothers, even though Joseph claims that he is only interested in the one who took the cup (44:17).

158 For an insightful analysis of food as a leitmotif in Genesis, see Heffelfinger, “From Bane to Blessing.”

159 Cf. Laban’s inability to locate what was stolen in 31:30-37. As Gunkel, Genesis, 337, points out, there are close similarities between Gen 31:32 and 44:9.

160 The question is also asked in the wife-sister episodes (12:18; 20:9; 26:10).

161 Somewhat surprisingly, the text stresses that this cup was used in divination (44:5, 15). Several reasons can be given for this description. First, as West, Genesis, 206, notes, this emphasis may serve to frighten the brothers further, showing that they have offended not only a political but also a religious ruler. Second and similarly, von Rad, Genesis, 391-392, notes that stealing a religious object is a particularly serious crime. It would have further compounded the brothers’ fear. Third, divination may be mentioned as a way of explaining Joseph’s prior actions with his brothers, such as his arranging the brothers at the table in their order of birth (43:33). Finally, by describing the perceived theft of a religious object, this narrative echoes the events of Gen 31, where Rachel took Laban’s teraphim.

The description of the cup as silver is also significant. Joseph was sold for silver (37:28). Joseph tormented his brothers by returning silver to them (42:25, 28, 35). Here in ch. 44, silver leads to their (potential) rearrest. Concerning these repeated episodes involving silver, Brodie, Genesis as Dialogue, 387, memorably writes, “Ever since [selling Joseph into slavery], the silver seems to stick to [the brothers],
Amid this tense moment, Judah approaches Joseph with a confession: “God has found the guilt of your servants” (44:16). He appears to be confessing wrongdoing regarding the “stolen” cup, but his words can also be understood as referring to the iniquity of selling Joseph into slavery. Judah says that he and all his brothers shall become Joseph’s servants. Joseph refuses. He wants only Benjamin to stay with him. Judah then begins the longest speech in Genesis, and he does so by urging Joseph not to be angry (44:18). Like Rachel’s word to her father in 31:35, this plea not to be angry is typical when an inferior speaks to a superior (cf. 18:30, 32; §3.2.1, §3.2.3). Yet, given the theme of anger throughout this book, as well as Judah and Joseph’s past, Judah’s words take on a broader significance than what the common idiom normally conveys. They express the desire of Judah (and readers), who long to see an ending to anger and a peaceful resolution.

Judah recounts his father’s deep concern for Benjamin—who he thinks is Rachel’s only surviving son (44:19-31). Next, Judah offers himself in Benjamin’s place (44:32-34). In so doing, Joseph learns that Judah is not the same person he was many years ago. The brother who once sold him into slavery (37:26) is willing to become a slave himself to prevent a recurrence of past evils. In this poignant moment,

Like Lady Macbeth, unable to get the blood of the murdered king off her hands, they cannot get away from the bloody silver.”

162 Westermann, Genesis, 3:134.

163 The speech contains 14 references to their זָקַק, father (Wenham, Genesis, 2:425). As noted earlier, Genesis at times refers repeatedly to a family member in a short amount of space, such as the references to בָּן, brother, in 4:8-11 and 27:41-45.

As J. S. Randolph Harris, “Genesis 44:18-34,” Int 52, no. 2 (1998): 178-181, esp. 179-180, points out, death is a key theme in Judah’s speech. Death is obviously the most fundamental problem associated with anger, and in this pivotal speech within the Joseph narratives, it is addressed directly.
Joseph reveals his identity (45:3-4). As he does so, he urges his brothers not to be dismayed or angry with themselves on account of their wrongdoing (45:5). He offers them land so that they may dwell together (45:10) and provisions lest they become dispossessed (45:11). Then Joseph embraces and weeps over them the same way that Esau wept over his father. Genesis 45:15 reads, “He kissed all of his brothers and wept upon them, and afterward his brothers spoke with him.” The reference to the brothers’ speaking serves two purposes. First, the narrative said earlier that the brothers were stunned to silence when Joseph first revealed his identity to them (45:3). The text signals that they are finally able to speak. Second, on a broader level, this reference to the brothers’ speaking with Joseph is significant because Joseph and his brothers were previously unable to speak peacefully with one another (37:4; 42:7; cf. 37:2).

News of the brothers’ reunion reaches Pharaoh, who offers to give the brothers the best land so that they may eat “the fat of the land” (45:18; cf. 4:3-4). Joseph sends his brothers back to retrieve their father, giving them provisions, vehicles, clothing, and money for the journey (45:21-23). As they depart, Joseph encourages them, on a literal level, not to “shake on the journey” (45:24). The word used for shake here is רונח. It is often used of emotions including not only anger but also fear and turmoil (§3.5.1.1). Given the conflict that brothers have been prone to elsewhere in Genesis, it is

164 On the central significance of this verse (and the ones immediately following it) to the Joseph narratives, see Jacobs, “The Conceptual Dynamics of Good and Evil in the Joseph Story,” 309-338, esp. 313-316.

When Joseph tells his brothers not to be angry with themselves, he uses not only the word🎉 but also בבר, which also appear in tandem in 34:7. Cf. §3.3.2.

165 The linguistic connections between 45:14-15 and 33:4 are striking (cf. 46:29).
appropriate to understand Joseph’s words as encouraging them not to be angry with one another, just as he did in 45:5. However, his words may also contain overtones that signal he does not want them to be afraid or in turmoil. Such overtones also match Joseph’s words elsewhere (45:5; 50:19, 21) and furthermore signal an awareness of the emotional difficulties that can persist even after a reunion has been attempted among previously estranged parties (cf. Jacob and Esau).

The brothers return with their father, receiving land and provisions from Joseph (46:31-47:12). Yet, the brothers live in fear. After Jacob dies, Joseph’s brothers are afraid that Joseph has harbored anger against them, waiting until this moment to exact vengeance, just as Esau planned to do with Jacob following Isaac’s death (27:41; 50:15). Indeed, the word used to describe Joseph’s harbored anger is identical to that of Esau just prior to the death of Isaac (מָרַע; cf. §3.5.3.4). Although the Joseph narratives have previously described reunions between the brothers, they never specifically mentioned forgiveness. That changes in 50:16-17. Joseph’s brothers claim in a message, perhaps deceptively, that their father has ordered Joseph to “forgive” (גָּזֵר) their “crime” (עָנָא) and “sin” (מָרַע).  

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166 See Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 85, for a striking account of what this journey meant for Jacob, particularly the sacrifices the elderly father had to make. Even amid the most joyous events, Genesis does not lose sight of the pain that accompanies human existence.

167 Earlier, we noted that fear may have been experienced by Jacob in his reunion with Esau, causing him to decide against going to Seir.

168 These words for “crime” and “sin” were used in tandem by Jacob in his angry confrontation with Laban in 31:36 (Wenham, *Genesis*, 2:277). Further parallels with Jacob exist. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, 702, observes, “The closest parallel to Joseph’s brothers sending a message to Joseph, rather than going themselves, is to be found with Jacob sending messengers with a message to Esau (Gen. 32:4ff. [Eng. 3ff.]). In both cases the one sending the message (Joseph’s brothers, Jacob) is extremely apprehensive about how the offended brother (Joseph, Esau) will react when at last the two groups meet.” While it is true that communication with officials (like Joseph) frequently took place via
When Joseph hears their words, he weeps (50:17). The brothers, who saw their father Jacob offer himself as Esau’s servant in 32:18, 20, now offer themselves as Joseph’s servants (50:18). Joseph responds by telling them not to be afraid (50:19, 21). Readers recall that fear likely played a key role in Jacob’s decision not to reunite with his brother (ch. 33, §5.8). Joseph, unlike Esau, assures and reassures his brothers that they need not fear. He makes clear that he is no threat to them. He asks, “Am I in the place of God?” (יִשְׂעֵל אִי בְּאֶמֶנַי; 50:19). Such a question was asked by Jacob when Rachel demanded that he give her children (30:2). The implication then was that God is ultimately responsible for fertility. The implication here is that God is ultimately responsible for punishing wrongdoers (cf. Lev 19:18; Deut 32:35).\(^{169}\) The text suggests that Joseph has not harbored anger against his brothers precisely because he has entrusted God with the responsibility of vengeance.\(^{170}\) Although Joseph has been appointed with power over all of Egypt (Gen 41:39-45), he sees retribution as God’s responsibility, not his own. He leaves the angry impulse to punish others in the hands of God. He has borne witness that God has brought good out of the wickedness the brothers committed (50:20).

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\(^{169}\) Indeed, many of the sins in Genesis can be understood as ways that humans (and the “sons of God” in Gen 6:1-4) attempt to take on divine responsibilities. Thus, the serpent in Eden says that God does not want Eve and Adam to eat from the tree lest they “become like God, knowing good and evil” (3:5). Cain takes human life (4:8), which God alone should do. Similarly, the tower of Babel is condemned because through it humanity attempted to reach the heavens (where God resides) and make a great name for themselves (cf. YHWH; 11:4). Cf. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, 705.

Joseph also knows that the brothers have suffered, and he has witnessed their changed character. He comforts and speaks graciously with them (50:21; in sharp contrast to 37:4; 42:7). For the third time in these narratives, Joseph reassures his brothers that he will provide both for them and for their children (50:21; cf. 45:11; 47:12). It is a moment of reconciliation offered just before the book closes, letting readers see Joseph as an anti-Cain—a brother who has all the power and all the reasons to harm his brothers but instead turns away from anger and, despite the inherent difficulties, offers forgiveness.\(^\text{171}\) After a long history of jealousy, anger, sin, and violence, Joseph and his brothers are reconciled.\(^\text{172}\) Whereas Cain implied he never was and never should have been his brother’s keeper, Joseph shows himself in precisely the role of יְתַּנֶּה חֲרֵב, providing provisions and protection for his family in a foreign land.\(^\text{173}\)

At the outset of Genesis, God told an angry Cain, “If you do what is right, then a גנין, lifting.” In that context, as well as in many other episodes of anger, the verb גנין refers to the lifting of one’s face.\(^\text{174}\) However, the narrator of Genesis uses this word because it provides something akin to what Mikhail Bakhtin calls “a loophole,” that is, a

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\(^{172}\) Sol Schimmel, “Joseph and His Brothers: A Paradigm for Repentance,” *Judaism* 37, no. 1 (1988): 60-65, faults the brothers for failing to measure up to his definition of repentance. While the text does not portray the brothers as perfect models, Genesis does not portray anyone, Joseph included, as a perfect model.

\(^{173}\) Berlyn, “His Brothers’ Keeper,” 83, suggests that Judah is actually the one serving as a keeper for his brothers in this narrative, given his role in bringing the family back together again. Judah does not, however, provide for his brothers the same way that Joseph does on multiple occasions (45:11; 47:12; 50:21).

literary construction that allows one to alter a word’s meaning at a later point in time.\(^{175}\)

The word נָאָם can also refer to forgiveness, and here, at the conclusion of the book, after many episodes dealing with anger in many ways, readers are able to see the truth of God’s word to Cain in a new light: “If you do what is good, then forgiveness (נָאָם)” (4:7). After nearly killing their brother and then selling him off into slavery, Joseph’s brothers have committed evils that cry out to be punished. Joseph appears willing to act on his anger and pay back his brothers evil for evil (cf. Gen 44:4). The brothers, however, do what is good. They are willing to give back silver that they do not rightfully deserve. They offer gifts of food though they face grave famine. The brothers who once dominated Joseph now kneel in submission, calling him “my lord.” Judah is willing to become a slave himself instead of allowing a younger brother to be enslaved wrongfully. Joseph, in return, also does what is good. He is reluctant at first. Gradually, however, he begins speaking graciously with them. He provides nourishment for them. He urges them not to be angry or afraid. He offers them food, land, and protection in a harsh world. As a result of doing what is right, the brothers experience forgiveness (נָאָם; 50:17).\(^{176}\) Cain did not do what is right, but Joseph and his brothers eventually do, and they experience forgiveness just before the book closes. There is thus a chiastic interplay between Gen 4:7 and the book of Genesis as a whole, moving from fratricide to forgiveness (Figure 3).

\(^{175}\) Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 233.

\(^{176}\) Note also the way the verb נָאָם is used in the Joseph narratives to describe the carrying of provisions and the transport necessary for the family to become reunited (Gen 42:26; 43:34; 44:1; 45:19, 23, 27; 46:5).
God’s first words in a post-Edenic world lay the framework for all that follows. From Cain killing his brother to Joseph forgiving his brothers, Genesis shows the grave dangers of anger while realistically depicting ways its worse effects can be counteracted. Readers encounter not only dramatic and compelling stories. They also gain imaginative experience for handling anger, witnessing both its worst and its best possible outcomes. They walk away from the text with a better understanding of the immense threat that anger presents for all parties involved, and they have encountered a variety of ways that anger can be handled so that it does not lead to violence. Reading Genesis is an act of moral education.

### Figure 3: Genesis 4:7 and the Macrostructure of Genesis

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genesis 4:7</th>
<th>“Bookends” of Genesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>If you do what is good,</em></td>
<td>Cain, Fratricide, Estrangement (Gen 4:1-16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>then</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>If you do not do what is good,</em></td>
<td>Joseph, Forgiveness, Reunion (Gen 50:15-21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>then at the door of sin is</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>a creature crouching down.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Hope in a World of Limitations: Synthesis and Conclusion

To understand both anger and ethics in Genesis, interpreters need to lay aside traditional Western assumptions. In the Hebrew Bible, irrationality is not a hallmark of emotion. Anger is not something best left to psychologists for interpretation. One does not need Freud to understand how this emotion works. Rather, anger is a common feature of the fractured world and imperfect humanity that Genesis envisions. It is a permanent mark of the exile from Eden. Anger cannot be avoided. It must be engaged, lest it ruin morality, community, and even life itself. Anger is thus not “merely a feeling.” It is an ethical matter of the first degree.

To understand what Genesis teaches about the ethics of anger, one must lay aside modernist assumptions about not only emotions but also the ethical task. Genesis offers no set of principles for approaching this emotion, only stories of imperfect individuals wrestling with anger’s destructive power. Genesis never presents the highest good—only scenes where good and evil are inextricably intertwined. Genesis does not uphold ideal images for simple emulation; it instead presents fallible individuals who must struggle simply to prevent evil from destroying their lives.

Because of its realism about the human condition, the stories of Genesis are well suited to serve as “metaphors for life.” The characters it portrays are not lofty, saintly types who remain forever separated from the rest of the human race. They are limited, fallible, and imperfect. Genesis is an anthology of moral shortcomings. It is a collection of stories where individuals face limitations of every type and must take extreme
measures to prevent the eruption of violence in their midst. Genesis is not an ethical training manual for the morally elite, but a survival guide for an imperfect humanity. Genesis depicts archetypal features of the human condition, but at the same time, it is also aware of the diversity of human experience. Thus, it does not present a solitary rule for guiding people about their anger or even a single narrative. Instead, it gives readers approximately a dozen encounters with this emotion. Readers see anger among brothers, sisters, spouses, kinsfolk, superiors, and groups of people. While not comprehensive, this sampling of imaginative experiences provides readers with a lush pool from which they can make metaphoric transferences to their lives.

Among these stories, particular themes emerge and re-emerge. Readers who experience the world of Genesis find themselves on a stark landscape. They encounter a world of profound and pervasive limitations that frequently give rise to anger. Abundance and plenitude remained locked within the forbidden garden. Worshippers find a God who ignores sacrifices. Women find themselves unable to have children. Shepherds find land that will not support them. Children find parents who love others more than themselves. Families find separation the only possible alternative to violence. Everyone finds morality in short supply.

Readers furthermore experience anger as one of the most devastating forces known to humanity. As soon as readers exit Eden, they see an angry individual killing his own brother, welcoming death into the world. Time and again, anger threatens to result in additional violence. The emotion imperils the house of Abraham and jeopardizes the heirs of divine promise. When it does not lead to bloodshed, anger tears
apart the families of Genesis. This emotion presents a particular threat to the most vulnerable, regardless of how innocent they may be. God may intervene to help the innocent, but God will not overrule human freedom, even if it means that one of God’s favorites dies in fratricide.

Genesis gives no simple solutions for a force so complex and so destructive. It never suggests that individuals can somehow become anger-immune, achieving an *apatheia* that sets them apart from worldly concerns. Rather, the book shows that every patriarch and even a number of the matriarchs must wrestle with this emotion simply to survive. All who share in the humanity depicted by Genesis need to engage this emotion, lest it lead to the loss of morality, community, and life.

By presenting anger with the potential for such great harm, Genesis shapes the desires of its readers so they long for alternatives to this emotion’s worst outcomes. When they witness it tearing families apart and resulting in carnage, they yearn to see anger engaged in ways that entail neither estrangement nor death. Readers of Genesis do not, however, have this desire fulfilled quickly or easily. Once anger’s plots are set in motion in Gen 4, readers must wait until the book’s penultimate episode, just prior to the death of Joseph, before they finally see the worst effects of anger overcome. Only there do readers find brothers living together in unity, forgiven and reconciled after a lengthy history of abuse, deception, and violence.

By presenting so many cases of anger where full forgiveness is not achieved, Genesis makes clear that the happy ending found with Joseph and his brothers is not always possible. Yet, it suggests that at least violence can sometimes be avoided through
a variety of means. The first is presented subtly in God’s initial words to Cain: “Why are you angry? Why has your face fallen?” Cain refuses to respond to this invitation to express his anger directly to the one responsible for it. He turns down the opportunity to complain to the God who ignored his sacrifice. His anger festers until it issues in violence against Abel. Readers, however, are given alternatives. They can take a path different from the one Cain took, directly confronting God for the injustices of life.

Another alternative to persistent anger is found with the book’s final protagonist, who eventually entrusts vengeance to God. Initially, Joseph appears ready to repay evil for evil, harming his brothers just as they harmed him. However, as he learns of their changed character, Joseph changes as well. When his brothers fear that Joseph will punish them following their father’s death, Joseph asserts that such punishment is God’s business, not his own. The one with power over the entire land of Egypt leaves vengeance to God.

Genesis also presents voluntary separation as a way of possibly preventing the worst effects of anger. Many characters in Genesis deem separation better than remaining together with the possibility of anger erupting into violence. Abram and Lot, Isaac and the Philistines, and Laban and Jacob all face limited options. Amid their shortcomings, they do not overestimate their moral abilities or try to force good out of fractured relationships. They choose to separate to prevent bloodshed. The subsequent estrangement is far from ideal, but it avoids violence in a world of limited possibilities.

Readers also see that humility may prevent anger from leading to violence. Displays of humility are perhaps most prominent when Jacob encounters Esau in ch. 33
and when Joseph’s brothers appear before Joseph in chs. 42, 44, and 50. A humble spirit also appears both in Abram’s willingness to relinquish his rights as *pater familias*, giving Lot the first choice of land, and in Isaac’s refusal to boast of his numbers and threaten the Philistines when they ask him to leave. Although these acts of humility do not in themselves heal all wrongdoings, they introduce dynamics that allow anger to dissipate. They signal alternative attitudes that allow for new ways forward.

Finally, readers learn that generosity can sometimes curb the worst effects of anger, particularly when paired with humility. Abram is obviously generous with Lot, offering him first choice of the land. His son Isaac displays something akin to generosity when he is willing to cede land rather than cause violence. Later, Isaac’s son Jacob gives his brother 550 animals. This generosity, combined with Jacob’s humility, illustrates his changed character to Esau, demonstrating his willingness to give back the blessing stolen by deceit. Jacob’s sons similarly find in generosity a way beyond past wrongdoings. Joseph’s brothers are willing to give gifts of choice food in the midst of a severe famine and to return silver they did not deserve. Judah makes a generous offer to be enslaved in the place of Benjamin. Through their generosity, Joseph learns they are not the cruel individuals they were years earlier. Joseph, in return, showers his family with gifts and provisions. In Genesis, humility and generosity frequently combine to facilitate new beginnings.

Yet, Genesis is careful not to present acts of separation, humility, and generosity as simplistic solutions to anger. It makes clear that separation, particularly when forced upon those with little power, does not so much counteract violence as constitute it. The
text also makes clear that humility does not immediately correct all wrongs. For Joseph’s brothers, it takes many acts of humility and a variety of other factors before forgiveness is achieved. With generosity, the narratives show that it sometimes diffuses anger, but readers also see Shechem’s father Hamor making the most generous of offers, only to have Dinah’s brothers exploit it for bloodshed. Genesis presents no universal solutions for engaging anger. It speaks dialogically about this emotion, inviting readers to converse with the text and with themselves about the best ways to handle this destructive force.

The end of the last chapter observed that God’s word about anger to Cain in 4:7 chiastically corresponds to the beginning and end of Genesis. One can note, as a way of closing, that it also reverberates through many of the other stories in Genesis. The verse reads:

יִהְיֶהָ אֲשֶׁר יָרְמָהָ שֶׁאֶלְלָה לֵאמָר לִפְקָדָה לֶחָה רְבֵה לִפְקָדָה וְלֵאמָר הָאֲלָלָה הָשָׁפְחָה הָאֲלָלָה הָשָׁפְחָה

Is it not true that if you do good, then a lifting up? But if you do not do good, then at the entryway to iniquity is a creature crouching down. Its craving is for you, but you can rule over it.

In and of itself, this verse does not appear particularly insightful. It emphasizes doing good over the alternative. Yet, when the cumulative weight of the book of Genesis is brought to bear on this verse, it comes to life and sheds insights into one of humanity’s most perplexing emotions. It makes clear that even when individuals become angry through no fault of their own, they remain accountable for their actions. There is a dangerous attraction between anger and evil that can lead to grave outcomes.
But anger does not damn people to its worst consequences. For those who do what is good amid their limited resources and finite possibilities, there will be a lifting (אָנָה) ... a lifting of eyes beholding lush land like the Garden of YHWH (אָנָה, 13:10),
a lifting of eyes that see an expansive land promised to countless descendants (אָנָה, 13:14),
a lifting of a slave boy, cast out into the wilderness and forsaken by all but God and his mother, nearly dead—but now near springs of life (אָנָה, 21:18),
a lifting of the face of a brother who once grabbed all he could but now wants to give back what he wrongfully took (אָנָה, 32:21), and a lifting of the crimes and sins of eleven brothers who have nothing but themselves to offer the one they once enslaved (אָנָה, 50:17).

Amid the generations torn apart by the most destructive of emotions, Genesis offers realistic glimpses of hope. The good it envisions is neither guaranteed nor easily achieved. But it is nevertheless present amid self-sacrifices, suffering, frailty, limitations, and evil. Genesis never hides the destructiveness of anger. Nor does it abandon hope, even for those who wander east of Eden.

The preceding discussion, especially §3.3, presents several statistics about the likelihood of particular terms to appear with terms for anger. This appendix explains the methods and results of this approach. Utilizing the advanced search engine on Bibleworks 6.0.012r, I conducted a series of Boolean searches that allowed me to take all of the verses containing a word for anger and see how many of these verses contained appearances of other terms. For example, the search I conducted with words from the root קָנַּ֣ם is as follows:

![Figure 4: Example of Boolean Search](image)

Searches like this one revealed the total number of verses in the Hebrew Bible containing a word or collection of words (in the case of קָנַּם, קָנַּּ, and קָנַּּ, 70 verses), as well as the number of verses that also contain a term for anger (in this case, 23 verses).
With these numbers in hand, I examined the specific results with particular attention to “false positives,” that is, instances where a term that can refer to anger does not refer to anger (e.g., Gen 2:7 where פ is means nostril, not anger). Of the 639 verses that contain a term for anger, only 517 verses refer to anger in both form and meaning. Thus, 122 verses do not actually refer to anger though they contain a term that often is translated anger or something similar. With a list of these false positives, I recalculated the numbers produced by the Boolean searches, subtracting any false positives. (In the case of מ, I did not need to reduce any.)

Using these numbers, I determined the percentage of verses that a particular term (or collection of terms) appears with a term for anger, as well as the percentage that the 517 verses containing a term for anger contained a particular term (or collection). Furthermore, using the total number of verses in the Hebrew Bible (23,213), I was able to determine the likelihood that a given word would appear in a verse from the Hebrew Bible as a whole. I then compared that number with the likelihood that a given word would appear in a verse containing a word for anger.

The third row of the table below (Table 6) further explains how numbers were calculated. The last row lists the median value for all words appearing 100 times or more in the Hebrew Bible (to offer a point of comparison). Key values are in bold.

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1 The number 639 was reached by searching for the words פ (nominal forms), מ, נ, ק, ה, ה (Hithpael forms), נ, כ, ה, ר, ו, ח, ו, ח, ו, ח.

2 The difference between these two numbers can be illustrated with the word פ. Of the 19 verses containing this word, 10 of them contain a term for anger, or 53%. Of the 517 verses containing a word for anger, however, only 1.9% (10 of 517) contained פ.
### Table 6: Detailed Statistics of Terms Associated with Anger

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
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<td><strong>Search Term/s</strong></td>
<td><strong>Verses with Search Term/s &amp; Anger Term/s</strong></td>
<td><strong>Verses with Search Term/s in the HB</strong></td>
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<td><strong>% of Verses Containing Anger Term/s</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Times More Likely for Search Term/s to Appear with Anger Term/s than in HB as a Whole</strong></td>
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*(Table 6 is continued on the next page.)*
Table 6: Detailed Statistics of Terms Associated with Anger (Continued)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Search Term/s</th>
<th>Verses with Search Term/s &amp; Anger Term/s</th>
<th>Verses with Search Term/s in the HB</th>
<th>% of Verses Containing Search Term/s That Contain Anger Term/s</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

³ Because of the complexities, these median values were calculated without respect to false positives. However, because I adjusted both the number of matches and the number of verses containing terms for anger, the information here should still provide useful approximate points of reference.
8. Appendix B: Interpretive Issues in Genesis 4:1-16

Genesis 4:1-16 is an exceptionally difficult text to interpret. On the one hand, its extreme brevity leaves much unsaid, creating various ambiguities that interpreters have spent centuries trying to sort out. On the other hand, its words possess tremendous depth, frequently functioning on more than one level. As a result, this passage merits extended treatment, more than could be afforded in the anger-focused discussion in §5.1. This appendix discusses this passage in greater detail, offering supporting arguments to the interpretation provided previously.

8.1 Translation and Text Critical Issues

The most basic problem with Genesis 4:1-16 is how to translate it. The following translation provides a useful starting point. Text critical matters are discussed in footnotes.

[v.1] The man¹ knew his wife Eve. She conceived and gave birth to Cain, for she said, “I have gained² a man³ with YHWH.”⁴ [v.2] She gave birth again, to his brother Abel.

¹ The LXX lacks the definite article and thus would be translated simply “Adam.” This absence of the definite article is not uncommon with Ἄδωνις. See Gen 2:19, 20, 23; 3:20, 22.

² In Hebrew, there is a clear phonetic connection between qayin (Cain) and qānitî (literally, “I have acquired”). In this translation, I have rendered qānitî “I have gained” because there is a phonetic connection in English between “Cain” and “gained.”

³ It is not altogether apparent why the text includes the word ἄνήρ (“man”). Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 32, suggests that this word was chosen to form a parallel with ἄνδρα (“woman”) in 2:23.
Abel was a shepherd of the flocks, while Cain was a worker of the ground.

[v. 3] In the course of time, Cain brought some of the fruit from the ground as a gift for YHWH. [v. 4] However, Abel for his part brought some of the firstborn of his flock and some of their finest portions. YHWH paid attention to Abel and his gift, [v. 5] but he gave no attention to Cain and his gift.

So Cain became very angry, and his face fell. [v. 6] So YHWH said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why has your face fallen? [v. 7] Is it not true that if

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4 Genesis 4:1 contains the vague phrase “with YHWH.” This designation likely provides a link to the preceding chapters, where YHWH was portrayed as the one creating human life. Though humanity has been expelled from Eden, YHWH remains responsible for the (pro-)creation of humanity, even though human agency obviously plays a key role as well (v. 1a).

The Septuagint has τὸ θεό ("God") rather than τὸ κυρίον ("the Lord"). There are times in this passage when the Tetragrammaton is rendered with a form of κύριος (4:3, 13), but there are also several cases where the LXX instead displays a form of θεός (4:1, 4, 9, 16) or κύριος ὁ θεός (4:6, 15[x2]).

For discussions of whether Cain and Abel were twins, see Kaminsky, Yet I Loved Jacob, 20-21; Cohen, Self, Struggle and Change, 42; LaCocque, Onslaught against Innocence, 93.

5 Cf. HALOT (study ed.), 2:1119.

6 The LXX renders Cain’s gift (πυρπός) with the Greek word for sacrifice, θυσία, both here and in v. 5. All other appearances of πυρπός in Genesis, including the reference to Abel’s gift in v. 4, are translated δῶρον. The reason for rendering Cain’s offering differently is not clear. See the discussion in Susan Ann Brayford, Genesis (Septuagint Commentary Series; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 249-250.

Similarly, πῦς in v. 4b and 5 is translated differently in the LXX. The first appearance is translated with ἐφοράω, to look upon, while the second is rendered with οὖ προοίμω, pay attention to. See ibid., 250.

7 Whereas the MT has רָצִיבָם, three manuscripts from Cairo Geniza, as well as the Samaritan Hebrew Pentateuch have the plene spelling רָצִיבָם. The BHS textual apparatus suggests possibly reading the Hebrew as a singular (רָצִיבָם), literally, “and some of their fat.” However, there are insufficient reasons for departing from the MT. Whileexistent tends to be singular (e.g., 1 Sam 15:22), it can be plural (e.g., Lev 6:5), which is what one also finds in the LXX.

8 The Hebrew term רָצִיב lacks an adequate counterpart in English. It often refers to looking favorably upon something (e.g., Isa 17:7), although there are instances when the text refers to a sensory perception other than sight (e.g., Exod 5:9 refers to hearing). Given the prominent connection between sacrifice and smell in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Gen 8:21), it is possible that the term here in Gen 4:4-5 refers to smelling a savory aroma.

9 For reasons that are unclear, the LXX uses 20 terms to represent πυρ, the most common being θυμόω (be angry; 30x) and ὄργιζομαι (be angry; 27x) (Freedman, Lundbom, and Botterweck, TDOT 5:172). Perhaps the difficulty of finding adequate counterparts for terms of emotion in another language is
you do good, then a lifting up? But if you do not do good, then at the entryway to iniquity is a creature crouching down. Its craving is for you, but you can rule over it.”

partially the cause (see §2.2 above). Here in Gen 4, one finds the verb λυπέω in 4:5 and the verb γίνομαι with the adjective περίλυπος in 4:6. Of the 93 appearances παρα makes in the Hebrew Bible, the LXX renders it with λυπέω only five times (Gen 4:4; Neh 5:6; Jon 4:4, 9 [x2]), and there are no cases besides 4:6 where the LXX renders παρά with περίλυπος. These Greek words tend to refer to sorrow, grief, and pain, which as noted above (§3.3.2, §3.5.1) is an associated commonplace of anger in Biblical Hebrew. The Greek terms can also, at times, refer to anger (e.g., LXX of 1 Sam 29:4; 2 Kings 13:19; Dan 2:12). Given the connections between Gen 3 and 4 (see §5.1), particularly the parallelism between 3:16 and 4:7, it is possible that a translator chose words from the root λυπέω here in Gen 4:4-5 in order to echo 3:17, where ἐν λύπαις is used to translate γὰμπρα. Aquila and Symmachus use forms of ὀργίλος and ὀργίζω, respectively, which more accurately reflect anger (see John William Wevers, Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis [SBLSCS; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1993], 54, n. 9). The alternate rendering found in the LXX may have resulted from translators being unaware of the various ancient Near Eastern cultural connections that anger shares with other elements in this passage.

10 According to Etan Levine, “The Syriac Version of Genesis IV 1-16,” VT 26, no. 1 (1976): 70-78, esp. 73, various features in the Syriac version portray Cain as a satanic figure, such as its saying that Cain’s face darkened (rather than fell).

11 I here depart slightly from the MT, favoring παρά πέπην over παρά πέπην (i.e., seeing πείνα in construct with the noun that follows). The reasons for this departure are stated below in §8.7.2.

12 As noted in §2.1, no translation is free of violence. The term here rendered “a creature crouching down” is a single participle in Hebrew, γεννά. While it could be rendered “a croucher” or “one who crouches,” these phrases are somewhat unclear and not the most idiomatic of expressions. While the rendering “a creature crouching down” possibly introduces an element not present in the Hebrew (“creature”), conceptually it is closer to what ancient readers of the Hebrew likely understood, particularly given the allusions conveyed by this word. See §§7.2-§7.3.

The LXX has a different take on many parts of this verse. It reads οὐκ ἔδωκεν ἰδίως προσκινήσεις ὀρθῶς δὲ μὴ διέλθη ἡμικρατίας ἡσύχασον, which can be translated, “If you have rightly offered but have not rightly divided, have you not sinned? Be still.” It [1] presupposes that the word for sin here is not a noun but a second-person perfect verb (which is possible with a different pointing), [2] assumes different vowels with other words (e.g., the imperative γεννά instead of the MT participle γεννά), [3] reads παρά, to divide/distribute, instead of παρά, at the doorway (presumably, a case of graphic confusion), and [4] understands there to be one conditional statement with a compound protasis, rather than two conditional statements.

For several reasons, the MT is preferable. On semantic grounds, the LXX is unlikely. For it to work, παρά must refer to the offering of a sacrifice. Yet, there is no case in Genesis where this word or any verbal form of παρά refers to sacrificial offering(s), despite nearly 50 appearances of such forms. Many of these appearances in Genesis refer to the lifting of one’s face or a part thereof. See not only Gen 19:21; 32:21, but also the following, which refer to similar concepts, especially the lifting of the eyes: Gen 13:10, 14; 18:2, 22:4, 13; 24:63, 64; 31:10, 12; 33:1, 5; 37:25; 39:7; 40:13, 19, 20; 43:29. Outside of Genesis, many verses use παρά specifically in conjunction with a form of παρέ : Lev 19:15; Num 6:26; Deut 10:17; 28:50; 1 Sam 25:35; 2 Sam 2:22; 2 Kgs 5:1; 9:32; Job 11:15; 13:8, 10; 32:21; 34:19; 42:8, 9; Prov 6:35; 18:5; Isa 3:3; 9:14; Jer 44:22; Mal 1:8, 9; 2:9. Furthermore, there are syntactical reasons to avoid the LXX translation. The ἀκ… ἀκ construction almost always signifies two separate conditional statements in the
[v. 8] Later, Cain said to his brother Abel, [“Let’s go to the field.”]15

When they were in the field,16 Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.

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13 The word ḥq’wvt. appears only three times in the Hebrew Bible: Gen 3:16, 4:7; Song 7:11. Context makes clear that the word in Gen 3:16 and Song 7:11 refers to attraction between a man and woman. Karel Adriaan Deurloo, “tswqh ‹Dependency›, Gen 4,7,” ZAW 99, no. 3 (1987): 405-406, esp. 406, however, suggests that the word refers to “dependency, dedication, directedness,” which he claims better matches the meaning found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. When one reviews the manuscripts containing these words, however, there is no compelling reason for departing from the traditional translation “desire” or its synonyms like “attraction” or “craving.” For example, the War Scroll talks about “angels of destruction” (1QM XIII, 12) and “all the nations” (XV, 10), saying that “their desire is for it [i.e., darkness]” (יִרְבֶּחֶת [יְדִיבוֹן]; cf. XVII, 4).

14 The BHS apparatus suggests that אֶת־הָעֵצֶּמֶת־אָדָם אֲנַחֲנוּ (‘Its attraction is for you. You yourself must rule over it.’) was originally אֶת־הָעֵצֶּמֶת־אָדָם אֲנַחֲנוּ, which could be translated (assuming the verb is pointed as a Qal; a Niphal makes little sense), “And his attraction will be for you [fem. sg., i.e., ‘sin’], and you [fem. sg., i.e., ‘sin’] will rule over him.” The apparatus proposes that these sentences were a gloss added that would parallel the final words of 3:16. While this is possible, it is more likely that the text alludes to 3:16 without using identical language. The allusion reinforces other connections between this passage and Gen 3 (see §5.1). There are insufficient reasons for departing from the MT.

15 Both the Masoretic Text and 4QGenb (i.e., the only Dead Sea Scroll containing this text) fail to recount Cain’s speech, which is quite odd, given that ṭm, in the Hebrew Bible is almost always followed by direct speech. Wevers, Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis, 56, and Kenneth M. Craig, “Questions Outside Eden (Genesis 4.1-16): Yahweh, Cain and Their Rhetorical Interchange,” JSOT 86 (1999): 118, point to verses containing ṭm, that lack references to direct speech (e.g., Gen 22:7, Exod 19:25; 2 Sam 21:2; Ps 71:10), claiming that Gen 4:8 operates similarly. However, in these verses, what is said is typically implied (or shortly forthcoming), which is not the case in Gen 4:8.

A variety of other suggestions have been offered, most of which have little supporting evidence. Albert Ehrman, “What Did Cain Say to Abel?,” JQR 53 (1962), esp. 165, argues that ṭm, in 4:8 should be understood as referring to anger. He sees the verb ṭm, as a polemical verb that can denote both “to praise” and “to be angry.” Howard Jacobson, “Genesis iv 8,” JT 55, no. 4 (2005): 564-565, meanwhile, suggests something similar: “Cain plotted against his brother Abel.” For her part, Pamela Tamarkin Reis, “What Cain Said: A Note on Genesis 4.8,” JSOT 27 (2002): 107-113, translates the phrase as “Cain spoke against.” While such interpretations are possible and certainly fit with context, ṭm, functions in these ways very rarely, whereas the Hebrew Bible is filled with cases where ṭm, refers to direct speech. Thus, these various proposals, while possible, are not particularly probable.

The Samaritan Pentateuch, the LXX, and the Vulgate have the respective equivalents of ἔρχομαι ἀπόδοτως (“Let us go into the field”). Likely, the Hebrew text contained this phrase (or something similar), but then lost it in transmission due to a combination of haplography and graphic confusion wherein the at the outset of this phrase was confused with the that immediately follows (cf. Richard J. Clifford and Roland E. Murphy, “Genesis,” NJBC, 13).

[v. 9] Then YHWH asked Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?”

He replied, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?”

[v. 10] He responded, “What have you done! Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground. [v. 11] And now, you shall be cursed away from the ground, which opened its mouth to take the blood of your brother.

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16 Targum Pseudo-Jonathan adds many details throughout this text. The most significant is an extended philosophical debate between Cain and Abel that transpires just before Cain kills his brother. In it, Cain wrestles with theodicy and displays atheistic tendencies, doubting whether the world is ruled by fairness and whether there even is a divine judge. Abel, meanwhile, defends God, arguing that the superior quality of his offering is why his was accepted with favor over against Cain’s. See Michael Maher, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis: Translated, with Introduction and Notes (ArBib; Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 31-35, esp. 32-33. For variants of Abel and Cain’s argument in the Codex Neofiti I, the Fragmentary Targum (2TJ), and the Cairo Geniza fragments of the Palestinian Targum, see Jouette M. Bassler, “Cain and Abel in the Palestinian Targums: A Brief Note on an Old Controversy,” JSJ 17, no. 1 (1986): 56-64; Bruce Chilton, “A Comparative Study of Synoptic Development: The Dispute between Cain and Abel in the Palestinian Targums and the Beelzebul Controversy in the Gospels,” JBL 101, no. 4 (1982): 553-562; Sheldon R. Isenberg, “Anti-Sadducee Polemic in the Palestinian Targum Tradition,” HTR 63, no. 3 (1970): 433-444. Targum Onqelos does not contain this debate between the brothers.

17 A minor error should be pointed out in Eugene Ulrich and Frank Moore Cross, Qumran Cave 4.VII: Genesis to Numbers (DJD XII; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 37, which claims that תָּשַׁב belongs at the beginning of line 12 of frg. 3, col. i of 4QGenb (4Q2). A careful analysis of the photograph provided in ibid., pl. VIII, reveals two key reasons why תָּשַׁב must instead belong at the end of line 11. First, if one assumes it belongs there, then lines 10-12 are roughly the same length, rather than line 11 being significantly shorter than the others. Second, the top of the lamed in תָּשַׁב in line 12 appears near the end of the word התומד in line 11, meaning there is room for the word תומד at the end of line 11. The way the scroll has been unrolled in this photograph is somewhat unfortunate and may have been responsible for the error in DJD. The section of the scroll containing frg. 3, col. ii is not aligned parallel to the larger section containing frg. 3, col. i. As a result, the margin between the two columns, visible in lines 6-9, is not perpendicular to the lines. As things stand, imaginatively extending the margin down to lines 11-12 gives the impression that those lines end earlier than they actually do. However, if one mentally adjusts the section of the scroll containing frg. 3, col. ii so that its lines are parallel to those in frg. 3, col. i, then it is clear that there is ample room for תומד at the end of line 11.

18 Another possible translation is “you shall be more cursed than the ground” (cf. Gen 3:14; NJPS 8). The text that follows stresses that because of how the ground is cursed, Cain shall become a drifter. Given this emphasis, it seems likely that the י-particle should be rendered away from (so “הָרָא,” BDB 577-583, esp. 578).
from your hand. [v. 12] When you work the ground, it shall no longer give you its power. You shall be a vagrant and a vagabond on the earth.  

[v. 13] Cain replied to YHWH, “My punishment is too heavy to lift. [v. 14] Consider—you have driven me from the face of the ground, and I shall be hidden from your face. I shall be a vagrant and a vagabond upon the earth. Anyone who finds me shall kill me.”  

[v. 15] YHWH replied to him, “Not so. Anyone who kills Cain shall suffer a sevenfold vengeance.” Thus, YHWH established a sign for Cain, lest any who find him strike him down.  

[v. 16] So Cain went away from YHWH and lived in the land of Vagrancy, east of Eden.

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20 The LXX, Symmachus, Theodotion, the Peshitta, and the Vulgate have the respective equivalents of πεπερασμένος (“Not so”), rather than the MT’s מ"ח (“Therefore”), giving rise to a syntactical construction as one finds in Gen 48:18. The MT is not impossible (cf. Targum Onqelos), particularly if מ"ח were translated “in that case” or “then” (providing the introduction to the apodosis that follows from Cain’s implied protasis, i.e., If anyone who finds you will kill you, then that person will suffer a sevenfold vengeance); the dialogue in 2 Kgs 22:18-19 displays something roughly similar. Nevertheless, one doubts that the Greek, Syriac, and Latin translators would each have rendered the passage the way they did if מ"ח was in the Hebrew text before them.

21 Although this מ"ח is traditionally rendered as a locative (“a sign on Cain;” cf. the Peshitta), it could be understood equally well as functioning as a lamed of specification (“a sign for Cain;” cf. IBHS, 205-207, §11.2.10b, d; Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003], 110, 113, §4.1.10[b, h]). As noted below (§8.8), R. W. L. Moberly, “The Mark of Cain—Revealed at Last?,” HTR 100, no. 1 (2007): 11-28, esp. 11-21, takes this approach, arguing that the preceding divine words represent the sign that God established for Cain.

22 Jacob J. Rabinowitz, “Susa Tablets, the Bible and the Aramaic Papyri,” VT 11, no. 1 (1961): 55-76, esp. 56, suggests, based on parallels with the Susa Tablets, that מ"ח can be rendered was banished.

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8.2 Is Genesis 4:1-16 a Story about Humanity or a Particular Tribe?

The interpretation in §5.1 suggests that Cain serves as an archetypal figure and that Gen 4:1-16 as a whole operates on a symbolic level of describing the fundamentals of human nature and existence. Some have claimed, quite to the contrary, that the narrative of Cain and Abel is more a description of localized peoples than a description of features fundamental to humanity. Sigmund Mowinckel, for example, follows in the footsteps of H. Ewald, J. Wellhausen, and others, maintaining, “the interpretation of the legend cannot be based upon its present form if we would ascertain its real meaning.” He claims that this narrative is less about all of humanity and more about the legendary primogenitor (i.e., Cain) of a Bedouin tribe mentioned in the Hebrew Bible a dozen times as the Kenites (יְקִיטֵי).

In contrast to these assertions, few contemporary interpreters understand Genesis 4 as primarily a text about the Kenites. While many recognize that the text may have at one point served such a purpose, most understand it to be a narrative about the beginnings

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23 Sigmund Mowinckel, The Two Sources of the Predeuteronomic Primeval History (JE) in Gen. 1-11 (Oslo: I Kommisjon Hos Jacob Dybwad, 1937), 25-26. Mowinckel betrays his own racism against particular Palestinian groups when he describes the Kenites. He writes, “Such detached bands of vagrants—the scum of the poorest Bedouins or fugitives from the resident population, who know how to profit by vagrancy—have at all times existed amidst the residents of Palestine” (ibid., 31-32). For more on the bias of biblical scholarship against Palestinian groups, see Whitelam, The Invention of Ancient Israel e.g., ch. 3.

For a useful review of scholarship before Mowinckel holding to the belief that this story is primarily about the Kenites, see Claus Westermann, “Kain und Abel, die biblische Erzählung,” in Brudermord: Zum Mythos von Kain und Abel, ed. Joachim Illies (München: Kösen-Verlag, 1975), esp. 24.

of time, describing features fundamental to humanity.\textsuperscript{25} Such an understanding is based on several factors. First, Genesis does not divide humanity into groups of people until its tenth chapter, making it unlikely that the story of Cain and Abel is about a particular group. Second, this narrative’s location in Genesis points to its universality. It provides readers’ first glimpse of humanity outside of the garden. It is the first indicator of post-paradise realities, the initial account of what life is like in the here and now.\textsuperscript{26} Third, this narrative has many close structural, linguistic, and thematic parallels with Genesis 2-3, as discussed in §5.1. Just as Adam and Eve are representatives of all of humanity, so are their children. Genesis 4 should be understood, along with Gen 2-3, as an initial attempt to describe what is wrong with humanity. In Cain, readers see the evil of which humanity is capable, and in Abel, they witness the fragility of human life.\textsuperscript{27} The text thus operates on a symbolic level of describing the fundamentals of human nature and experience.


If Cain must be identified with a group of people, there may be better options than assuming a previous form of the text envisioned Kenites. Given that Genesis likely reached its final form in the wake of the exile (see §1.5 above), many ancient readers may have seen parallels between the violent Cain and the Babylonians, and then between the divinely favored Abel and the Judeans. Alternately, it is possible to see Cain’s punishment by God and subsequent exile to the East as reminiscent of the plight of those uprooted to Babylon.

\textsuperscript{26} This is not to say, however, that everything about Gen 4 matches current realities. There obviously are differences between the pre- and post-diluvial world (e.g., lifespan), and 6:1-4 has a more mythic quality that seems removed from the present state of affairs. Yet, the differences between the pre- and post-diluvial world seem to be relatively minor in comparison with the difference between the Edenic and post-Edenic world. For more on the significance of this narrative, given its location, see Alonso-Schökel, \textit{Tu hermano}, 34.

\textsuperscript{27} One could note furthermore that the etiological approach fails to explain the significance of Abel in the story. Because the younger brother does not have an etiological role, the older brother may not either. Jacob Stromberg, Personal Communication, Oct. 22, 2008.
pointing to the archetypal features of existence. As such, it is particularly suited to the type of metaphoric transference described in §4.6.1.

8.3 Cain and Abel’s Names (4:1-2)

The names of Cain and Abel are charged with significance and merit a fuller treatment than was possible in §5.1. In Gen 4:1-2, the narrative makes a transition from Adam and Eve to their sons, recounting the latter’s births, names, and professions. The text naturally mentions the elder brother first. Eve names him לירא. Like many other names in Genesis, the text includes a brief note about why this name was chosen: “She said, ‘I have gained (לירא) a man with YHWH.” In the Hebrew, there is a clear phonetic connection between לירא (Cain) and לירא (“I have gained” or “I have produced”). As readers continue to see this name reemerge in the course of this narrative, they slowly see how ironic it is. While Cain’s name initially refers to the

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28 Thus, Joachim Illies, ed., Brudermord: Zum Mythos von Kain und Abel (München: Kösen-Verlag, 1975), 9, talks of jealousy, hatred, and evil standing at the beginning of human history, and how they have continued ever since. See also Steinmetz, From Father to Son 31; Janowski, “Jenseits von Eden,” 282; Cohen, Self, Struggle and Change 37; Alonso-Schökel, Tu hermano, 21; Westermann, “Kain und Abel,” 13-28, esp. 13; Van Seters, “The Theology of the Yahwist,” 219-228, esp. 221.

29 Genesis 4:1 contains the vague phrase “with YHWH.” This designation likely provides a link to the preceding chapters, where YHWH was portrayed as the one creating human life. Though humanity has been expelled from Eden, YHWH remains responsible for the (pro-)creation of humanity, even though human agency obviously plays a key role as well (v. 1a).


31 It is not altogether apparent why the text includes the word לירא (“man”). Sarna, Genesis, 32, suggests that this word was chosen to form a parallel with לירא (“woman”) in 2:23.

32 As McEntire, The Blood of Abel, 18, n. 2, observes, the connection here is more alliterative than philological.
gaining, acquisition, and creation of life, he tragically is responsible for the losing, taking, and destruction of life. With Cain, Eve gains a man. With Cain, she also loses one.

The significance of Cain’s name does not end there. It shares close phonetic similarities not only with הָנָה (the root of רְאָה), but also with חָנָה, the Hebrew word for jealousy. As mentioned in §3.3.1, jealousy is closely related to anger in Hebrew. It borders on being a subset of anger, arising in response to a perceived violation of who should receive or possess what. The text, which portrays Cain as angry over his brother receiving divine favor that he does not, invites readers to see the elder brother as jealous of his younger sibling.33 Cain wants to gain what Abel already has.34

The name חָנָה is closely related to a couple of other words that in the context of Gen 4 anticipate the death of Abel. Foremost among these are the verb חָנָה, which in the Polel refers to singing a funeral song, and its related noun חָנָה, which refers to a dirge. It is striking that words closely associated with death are quite similar to the name of the individual who brought death into the world. Furthermore, it may not be accidental that Cain’s name is a homophone of the noun חָנָה, a rare word used in 2 Sam 21:16 to describe one of the weapons with which Ishbi-benov intends to kill David.35 Although readers are never told the means by which Cain strikes down his brother (v. 8), the fact that Cain’s

33 Many sources describe Cain as jealous, even though they do not all mention the phonetic connection between his name and the Hebrew word for jealousy. Westermann, “Kain und Abel,” 19; Kaminsky, Yet I Loved Jacob, 24-25; Léonard-Roques, Cain et Abel, 10; Hemleben, “Der Brudermord als Stufe des Sündenfalls,” 156-161, esp. 158.

34 As noted in HALOT (study ed.), 2:1109-1112, חָנָה and חָנָה are related to a similar set of Semitic words.

35 This weapon is likely a spear, which would be the same weapon that the elder brother uses to try to kill his younger brother in the Egyptian tale of “The Two Brothers” (AEL 2:203-211, esp. 205-206).
name sounds like an instrument of death does not bode well for Abel. Given the
collections that Cain’s name shares with gaining, jealousy, death, and killing, one could
not have chosen a more appropriate name for the character in this narrative.36

Abel’s name (ḇeft) likewise carries a great deal of thematic significance. It
ominously foreshadows the events to come. The Hebrew noun ḫōb means “warm breath,
vapour, breath, vanity.”37 This word tends to carry negative connotations (cf. its
associations with idolatry, e.g., 2 Kgs 17:15; Jer 2:5). It is not the life-giving breath that
God blows into Adam (יהוה הנפש, Gen 2:7). Rather, it refers to that which is temporary,
passing, and fleeting. It appears in Psalm 144:4, which has clear resonances with this
passage: “Humanity (זרע) is like a breath (_wf). Its days are like a passing shadow.”38
Assigning Abel the name ḫōb gives readers clues about his fleeting existence.39 Indeed,
his role in this story is primarily functional: he is present so that Cain has someone to kill;
he illustrates the fragile nature of human life.40

Although the text only briefly gives an explicit account of Cain’s name and gives
none of Abel’s, the language used in this context is filled with suggestive imagery. Cain

36 Cain’s name may also be related to the professions of his ancestors. See Léonard-Roques, Caïn
et Abel, 8. Meanwhile, Manfred Görg, “Kain und das ‘Land Nod’,” BN 71 (1994): 5-12, esp.11-12,
suggests a possible connection with the Egyptian word qmj, meaning “strong.”

37 HALOT (study ed.), 2:236.

38 See also Psalm 39:6 (39:5 Eng.).

39 Bruce Vawter, On Genesis: A New Reading (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1977),
91, mentions that Abel’s name may also be related to his being a shepherd, given the similarities between
his name and the Syriac word halba (meaning “shepherd”).

40 As Mowinckel, The Two Sources, 30, puts it, “Hebel is really a ‘novelistic’ figure, who is only
there in order to be killed.” LaCocque, Onslaught against Innocence, 2, suggests to the contrary that Abel
is a representation of innocence. While there may be a small bit of evidence supporting LaCocque’s claim,
it is largely conjecture.
and Abel’s names both look back to Gen 2-3, reinforcing the idea that humanity is both formed (cf. יָּהָד) and fleeting (cf. יַּעַנְתָּ). The names of these primal brothers bring home the message of Gen 3:19, “From dust you were taken and to dust you will return.”

They also look forward, anticipating the death of Abel that is to come at the hands of his jealous brother who resorts to violence in a flawed attempt to gain the divine favor that has escaped him.

These names are, to adopt phrases used by Crenshaw, “‘pregnant’ terms” that are “brimming with implication.”

8.4 Why does YHWH prefer Abel’s offering (Gen 4:3-5)?

After briefly describing the births, names, and occupations of Cain and Abel (4:1-2), the text recounts how both brothers brought offerings to YHWH and how only Abel’s gift received the deity’s attention (4:3-5). No explicit reason is given for why Cain’s

41 Heyden, “Die Sünde Kains,” 86.

42 The phrase אֶת־נַעַת יָנִּים אֱלֹהִים, at the beginning of 4:3 similarly foreshadows what is to come. A literal translation of this phrase is “And it happened from the end of days.” Koehler and Baumgartner explain that it is best rendered, “After some time,” and this translation is consistent with how this phrase appears elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (HALOT [study ed.], 2:1119; cf. 2 Sam 14:26; 1 Kgs 17:7; Neh 13:6; Jer 13:6). The previous act described by the narrative was Eve’s birthing of Cain and Abel (vv. 1-2), and this phrase signals to readers that a substantial amount of time has passed. While “After some time” is thus the primary sense of this phrase, it is significant that the narrative also describes the final period of Abel’s life. With clever foreshadowing, the narrative uses an idiom whose literal meaning points to “the end [of Abel’s] days.”

43 Crenshaw, Samson, 56.

44 There is debate about whether Cain’s offering was outright rejected as many claim, e.g., Levenson, The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son, 73-74, or whether instead Cain’s offering simply did not receive the attention and preference that Abel’s offering does. Linguistically, it is safer to speak of YHWH’s regard for Abel’s offering and the ignoring of Cain’s offering (see §8.1). For further discussion, see LaCocque, Onslaught against Innocence, 29; Alonso-Schökel, Tu hermano, 29-31; cf. Leon R. Kass, “Farmers, Founders, and Fratricide: The Story of Cain and Abel,” First Things 62, no. 1 (1996): 19-26, esp. 22. For more on the nature of the brothers’ sacrifices, see LaCocque, Onslaught against Innocence, 19-29.
offering was not favorably regarded by the deity. Rather, readers encounter here one of many ambiguities in this text. As Wiesel, *Messengers of God*, 40, puts it when describing this text, “No other Biblical situation contains so many questions or arouses so many uncertainties.”

A close examination of the narrative reveals possible clues that may explain why Abel’s offering was preferred. In the end, however, the evidence is not conclusive. The readers, like the humans adjusting to life outside the garden, can only form working hypotheses about the nature of God, humanity, and the world. Theological certainty is difficult to grasp. By presenting a variety of possibilities, the text serves as a springboard for formative dialogue, inviting readers to a conversation about reasons that divine favor falls on some but not others (cf. §4.6.4 above).

### 8.4.1 An Evil Disposition?

One explanation given by scholars for YHWH’s disregard of Cain’s offering is that Cain’s attitude or character was not right. This understanding of the text has ancient roots. It is promoted by the New Testament (Heb 11:4; 1 John 3:12, Jude 11), Josephus (*Ant.* 1:52–62), and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan. In differing ways, these documents portray Cain as lacking faith, displaying a negative attitude, offering tardily, and/or being covetous. This type of interpretation continues to be embraced by many. While some who favor this interpretation do so on questionable grounds, J. C. de Moor has offered

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45 As Wiesel, *Messengers of God*, 40, puts it when describing this text, “No other Biblical situation contains so many questions or arouses so many uncertainties.”

46 For example, Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 219, rules out alternative interpretations by his presuppositions, asserting that God would only reject Cain if he had character flaws. Similarly, Balmary, *Abel ou la traversée de l’Éden*, 115, is not on the most solid exegetical grounds when she argues that Cain did not offer himself in his offering, saying that he presented a gift from the earth, unlike Abel who presented a gift from his flock (4:3–4). See also the faults bestowed upon Cain by Heinrich Spaemann, “Kain und Abel, ein biblischer Typos Variationen und Perspektiven,” in *Brudermord*, ed. Joachim Illies
solid reasons why one would take this approach. He examines biblical and ancient Near Eastern sources to understand the grounds by which a sacrifice might be rejected by a deity. He observes that such rejection occurs only when sacrifices are either imperfect or improperly conducted, or if the one offering them is disobedient or unfaithful. He finds no basis for divine beings arbitrarily rejecting offerings. Thus, he suggests that Cain’s “personal attitude” is to blame in Gen 4. He bolsters his argument by observing [1] that YHWH regards not only Abel’s offering but also Abel himself in 4:4 and [2] that 4:7 can be interpreted as implying that Cain’s behavior and disposition need to change. In the light of the evidence that de Moor presents, it is possible that the text invites readers to see Cain as having character flaws. However, the text does not make this clear, and this interpretation is not the only possibility.

8.4.2 An Inferior Sacrifice?

A number of others also find fault with Cain, but see the problem less with his disposition and more with his sacrifice. Several interpreters maintain that God would have preferred blood sacrifices over vegetable offerings, suggesting that God simply

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47 J. C. de Moor, “The Sacrifice Which Is an Abomination to the Lord,” in Loven en geloven. Opstellen van collega’s en medewerkers aangeboden aan Prof. Dr. Nic. H. Ridderbos ter gelegenheid van zijn vijfentwintigjarig ambtsjubileum als hoogleraar aan de Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam (Amsterdam: Bolland, 1975), 211-226. De Moor limits his study to sacrifices, and he does not deal with the other ways that YHWH appears to act arbitrarily in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., election). LaCocque, Onslaught against Innocence, 11, makes arguments similar to de Moor.

48 De Moor, “The Sacrifice Which Is an Abomination to the Lord,” esp. 223. While this is a possibility, it is unlikely. Readers are never told that Cain did anything wrong.
would have found meat to have a more pleasing aroma.49 Others advance the opinion that God prefers herders to agriculturalists and thus also prefers the meat offering of Abel the shepherd to the vegetable offering of Cain the farmer.50 While it is true that some texts appear to value blood sacrifice over vegetable offerings (e.g., Lev 5),51 Genesis 4


50 Asserting that the text depicts conflict between farmers and nomads, and recalling the memory of Israel’s nomadic past, these interpreters tend to understand God’s high regard for Abel and his offering as linked to God’s high regard for Israel (Gunkel, Genesis, 43; S. T. Kimbrough, “Reconciliation in the Old Testament,” Religion in Life 41, no. 1 [1972]: 37-45, esp. 38; Speiser, Genesis, 31; Joel Litke, “The Messages of Chapter 4 of Genesis,” JBQ 31, no. 3 [2003]: 199; cf. Gowan, From Eden to Babel, 64, and Kaminsky, Yet I Loved Jacob, 22). In support of this interpretation, it is true that God tends to favor siblings associated with shepherding in Genesis (e.g., Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, cf. Rachel).

However, this view has fallen under harsh criticism in more recent times. First, this account does not fit the textual evidence very well. Genesis describes less-favored brothers as shepherds as well (esp. Joseph’s brothers, 37:12, 13, 16; 46:32-34). Furthermore, if YHWH is predisposed against agriculture, then why is Eden depicted as a garden? If Cain is a representative of sedentary agriculturalists, why is he associated with a nomadic lifestyle in 4:12, 14? If his occupation contrasts with shepherding, then why is his descendant Jabal described as “the father of those who dwell in tents with cattle” (4:20)? A second and equally problematic feature of this interpretation is that sociological data from the ancient Near East has raised many questions about the degree of conflict between nomadic peoples and those in permanent settlements (Levenson, The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son, 72-73; H. C. Brichto, “Cain and Abel,” IDBSup 121-122; see also Greenspahn, When Brothers Dwell Together, 91). While the text opens a variety of ways for understanding God’s preference for Abel, this one is not the most satisfactory. It may, in fact, be precluded by the evidence.

51 When Leviticus 5 outlines the instructions for a sin offering, it specifies that one should bring flour for the offering only if one cannot afford to sacrifice two birds or a small animal from the flock (Levenson, The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son, 73-74). However, such evidence should be viewed cautiously: at least in the canonical order of things, texts like Leviticus 5 come significantly later than the text at hand.
does not make clear that Cain’s offering was disregarded because he should have brought meat. Vegetable offerings were acceptable under certain circumstances in the Hebrew Bible, and there is no evidence in the text that Cain’s offering fell outside of these circumstances.

Others see Cain’s offering as problematic not because God craved meat, but because of the associations Cain’s offering shares with the ground, which Gen 3:17-19 (cf. v. 23) describes as cursed.\textsuperscript{52} In favor of such an interpretation is the frequency with which the word הַגָּדֶּשׁ occurs throughout Genesis 4, describing the occupation of Cain (v. 2b), his offering (v. 3), his crime (v. 10-11), and his punishment (v. 12, 14). This interpretation is perhaps the most attractive one examined so far. The associations relating to the soil in Genesis 3 and 4 suggest that readers should see connections between the two passages. While such linkages may merely be an invitation to see Cain as continuing in the ways of his parents, they may also point to something more specific, such as Cain’s offering being problematic because of its associations with the cursed ground. The text allows readers to see the connections between Cain’s offering and the ground as a possible reason for the divine disregard of it.


Detractors have asked, Why would Cain’s vegetable offering be rejected when other vegetable offerings (elsewhere in the Torah) are not? Those taking this approach explain that according to Gen 5:29 and 8:21, the divine curse on the ground was at least partially reversed with Noah and his offering, giving an allowance for subsequent vegetable offerings (Herion, “Why God Rejected Cain’s Offering,” 53, 64; Spina, “The ‘Ground’ for Cain’s Rejection,” 332).
However, the narrative refuses to abandon all ambiguity. In fact, one can examine the same evidence and come to nearly the opposite conclusion. Thus, Sidney Breitbart observes that Cain’s offering can be seen as more meritorious than his brother’s sacrifice. Because the ground was cursed, Cain’s vegetable offering is the result of his toil and hard labor (3:17-19), unlike Abel’s offering, which did not require the same degree of personal difficulty. Cain worked very hard to produce these fruits, and he naturally becomes angry when YHWH displays little interest in what he offers.

Yet, the text’s ambiguity gives rise to another possibility. Abel’s offering can be seen as preferable because he brings some of the firstborn of his flock, but Cain brings some of the fruit of the ground. There are many ways that the narrative could have made clear that the brothers brought gifts of equal worth. It uses

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Throughout Gen 4:1-6, the text employs a chiastic structure that alternates between Cain and Abel (cf. McEntire, The Blood of Abel, 19-20). Such a structure allows readers to make quick comparisons between the brothers. With regard to the offerings, the text presents this comparison:

Cain brought some of the fruit from the ground as a gift for YHWH. However, Abel for his part brought some of the firstborn of his flock and some of their finest portions.

A variety of clues suggests that the text intends to contrast the type of offering presented by the two brothers. First, the inverted word order (subject preceding the verb) at the outset of v. 4 suggests that the waw attached to הלוח is adversative, serving to distinguish what the two brothers bring (Hiphil of עב). Second, although v. 4a lacks the phrase אלוהים, נַיבְרָת, “a gift for YHWH,” its inclusion of for his part, makes clear that both brothers are engaging in a similar type of ritual. What is left to compare, then, is the type of offering. When this comparison is made, it becomes clear that Abel’s is of higher quality.

The narrative could have stated that Abel offered some of the animals of his flock, cf. Gen 26:14; 2 Chr 32:29, which would suggest Cain and Abel were offering something of relatively equal worth. Alternately, the narrative could have said that Cain offered some of the first
none of them. A number of scholars have thus suggested that the narrative is subtly critiquing those who fail to sacrifice their very best.56

Some objections have been raised to this interpretation. Jon Levenson asserts that if the text wanted to stress the importance of offering one’s best, it certainly would contain an etiology for such practices.57 However, Levenson misses key features of the text. The narrative’s extreme brevity leaves much unsaid. One should not expect an explanation of each significant feature of this text when the text’s style is not to describe everything (cf. Abel’s name). Contrary to Levenson’s claim, one cannot rule out the possibility that Cain’s offering receives less attention because it is of lesser quality than his brother’s is. Readers are thus left with some realistic possibilities of why Abel’s offering was preferred: the younger sibling may have a better disposition, his sacrifice is not as closely linked to the cursed ground, and he appears to make a sacrifice of higher quality.

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56 Note also the connections that the phrase הָדוֹתָהּ הָאָרָם has with Deut 26:1-10. This phrase in Deut 26:2, 10 instructs listeners to bring not just “some of the fruit of the ground” as an offering, but “some of the first of all the fruit of the ground” (הָדוֹתָהּ הָאָרָם וּשְׁפֶרְתָּהּ מִבָּאָרִים). Cain does not bring the first fruits in Gen 4:3-5, which, when read beside Deut 26:1-10, may offer clues of why God is displeased with his offering.


57 Levenson, The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son, 72.
Yet, the text’s lack of an explicit explanation suggests that God’s preference for Abel may be arbitrary. Claus Westermann takes this approach, interpreting the text in a light favorable to Cain, blaming the deity for arbitrarily and undeservedly failing to treat Cain as well as Abel. For Westermann, it only makes sense that Cain be angry with a deity who treats him wrongly. Like the other approaches, there is some merit in admitting a degree of arbitrariness in God’s actions. Cain and Abel never receive instruction about the types of offerings that they should make. As mentioned in §5.1, if Cain’s offering fails to measure up to God’s will, readers never learn precisely what part of the divine will has been violated. Given that anger tends to arise in response to a perceived wrongdoing (see §3.2.1), it appears likely that Cain perceives something arbitrary and unfair about God’s actions.

In fact, nothing in the text assures readers that Cain’s offering would have been accepted under any circumstances. The audience is unsure about whether Cain should

58 Cf. God’s choice of Abram and passages such as Deut 7:6-7. Gowan, *From Eden to Babel*, 67; Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, 22-23; Clifford and Murphy, “Genesis,” 13; Goldin, “The Youngest Son,” 27-44, esp. 32-33; Léonard-Roques, *Caïn et Abel*, 10. See also the useful survey provided by Heyden, “Die Sünde Kains,” 88-91. For Heyden’s critique of these approaches and my response, see §8.4.2 above.

59 As Westermann, “Kain und Abel,” 17-20, esp. 20, puts it, “His outrage is justified” (translation mine). Klein, “How Job Fulfills,” 40-43, esp. 41, echoes this type of sentiment: “God’s behavior was more than unfair, it was unjust.” See also Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (IBC; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 56, who writes, “The trouble comes not from Cain, but from YHWH, the strange God of Israel. Inexplicably, YHWH chooses—accepts and rejects. Conventional interpretation is too hard on Cain and too easy on YHWH.” An example supporting Brueggemann’s point can be found in Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*, 74-75, who accepts God’s actions as at least partially mysterious and inequitable, but blames Cain (not the deity) for his inability to accept this type of God.

have improved his character, sacrificed an animal, or offered his first fruits. The narrative thus portrays a world where firm theological conclusions are elusive. What can be known about YHWH is partial at best. In this cursed world outside of Eden, expressions of worship do not always bring blessing. Even at the altar, making sacrifices to God, one can be distant from the divine. One can reach toward God and experience nothing in return. Individuals are left uncertain about whether they could do more to win God’s favor, or if their efforts would be met with silence regardless of how hard they try. Readers who imaginatively experience this episode are witnesses to the elusiveness of divine blessing and the difficulties of understanding divine ways in a flawed world. They find a world that from its beginnings is marked by inequalities and ambiguities.

8.5 Was Cain Angry or Depressed (Gen 4:5b)?

Anger and jealousy are common features of any world marked by inequalities. When some receive more than others do, jealousy is quick to follow. When injustices are perceived, anger draws near. Given the limitations of divine favor in 4:4b-5a, Gen 4:5b reads:

[v. 5b] So Cain became very angry, and his face fell.

61 Although Bakhtin tended to see the Bible as fixed and closed (cf. Lapsley, Whispering the Word, 30), Genesis 4 actually depicts a world where theological conclusions have (to borrow Bakhtin’s own words about other texts) “an indeterminacy, a certain … openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present)” (Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, 7). Similarly, it is with much affection that Bakhtin quotes Dostoevsky as writing. “Reality in its entirety is not to be exhausted by what is immediately at hand, for an overwhelming part of this reality is contained in the form of a still latent, unuttered future Word” (quoted in Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, 91, see also 100 n. 102). Genesis portrays a world where “what is immediately at hand” is not the entirety of reality, one where readers are hungry for what has not yet been uttered.
Some interpreters, such as Mayer Gruber, claim that Cain is not so much angry as depressed. Applying a Freudian understanding of depression as “anger turned inward upon the self,” Gruber maintains that the expression ב גשא found in Gen 4:5-6 means “to be depressed,” in contrast to the expression א ז גשא, which means “to be angry.” He also argues that the reference to Cain’s face falling further supports the idea that Cain was depressed, referring to several ancient Near Eastern texts.

On the one hand, Gruber’s claim has some merit. As noted in §3.3.2 and §3.5.1, anger is associated with sadness in Biblical Hebrew, more so than in American English. Many of the words for anger in Hebrew (most notably י גשא [§3.5.1.1], א גשא [§3.5.1.2], and א גשא [§3.5.3.3]) can in certain instances refer to sadness. Thus, גשא refers to being troubled and carries angry connotations when a socially superior individual is troubled by an inferior, but it carries connotations of sadness when a socially inferior individual is troubled by a superior. Given these types of associations between anger and sadness, it is possible that sadness plays some role in what Cain experiences.

Nevertheless, Gruber goes too far in asserting that Cain’s emotion is primarily one of experiencing depression. While other features of this text are ambiguous, the narrative is quite clear that Cain’s emotion is primarily one of anger. Gruber’s approach

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63 Gruber, “The Tragedy of Cain and Abel,” passim.
has several weaknesses. First, he assumes that the Western Freudian theory of depression as anger against oneself is universally valid. As pointed out in §2, interpreters need to guard against assuming that Western models of emotions are universal and operative within non-Western texts.

Second, it is not clear that the phrase וַיַּעֲלֵהֶל ("and his face fell") actually refers to sadness. Although Westerners equate sadness with a downcast posture, and while (as Gruber appropriately notes) some ancient Near Eastern sources may point in that direction, texts in the Hebrew Bible—which provide the closest temporal, linguistic, and geographic parallels to Gen 4—suggest otherwise. In the Hebrew Bible, the raising of one’s face entails friendly attachment (e.g., Num 6:26). The lowering of one’s face in Biblical Hebrew likely means the opposite, a form of withdrawal that could entail anger as much as sadness.64 Jeremiah 3:12 supports this point. It is the only verse in the Hebrew Bible (other than Gen 4:5-6) that describes someone’s face as falling (many verses speak of falling upon [וָעַל] one’s face but not of the face itself as falling). It reads literally, “I will not cause my face to fall against you” (בעזרת יָדָו יִנָּשֶׁר), which most modern translations such as the NRSV and NJPS appropriately translate as “I will not look on you with anger.” The conclusion of Jer 3:12, which stands parallel to this section of the verse, makes clear that divine anger and vengeance (יָצָא; cf. §3.3.2), not sadness, is being conveyed by this idiom of a face falling.

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64 Westermann, “Kain und Abel,” 19. Jeremiah 3:12 speaks of the falling of God’s face. It is difficult (although not impossible) to understand this text as a reference to divine pathos. More likely, it refers to divine anger. LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence*, 59, 103, 117, observes that shame and fear may be part of Cain’s emotion in Gen 4.
Third, there is little merit in Gruber’s assertion that לחרות means “to be depressed,” while כהרות means “to be angry.” As pointed out in §3.5.2.2, לחרות in the Qal stem always refers to anger. Many even see כהרות as implicit in the expression לחרות.65

Finally, the emotion experienced by Cain in 4:1-16 more accurately matches the prototypical account of anger in the Hebrew Bible than that of sadness or depression. For example, the prototypical response to anger is violence and/or separation (§3.2.4), whereas the prototypical response to sadness and depression in the Hebrew Bible is lamentation, “psychomotoric retardation,” eating and sleeping disorders, and thoughts of one’s own death.66 Cain’s emotion leads to violence (4:8) and separation (4:16), which obviously correlates with anger more than with sadness or depression.67 Cain’s emotion should thus be seen primarily as anger and only secondarily as sadness. In both the preceding and following verses, the narrator portrays Cain’s anger in prototypical terms, thus inviting readers to see Cain as an archetypal figure whose anger can potentially be quite similar to their own.

8.6 How is God's question to Cain in 4:6 best understood?

God warns Cain about this anger in 4:6-7. God begins, as the deity frequently does in Genesis 3-4, with a question. In this case, it is a slight adaptation of 4:5b:

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65 E.g., Freedman, Lundbom, and Botterweck, *TDOT* 5:171-176, esp. 5:171.
67 See §5.1 for more on the ways that Cain’s anger matches the prototypical script of anger in the Hebrew Bible.
These questions have been interpreted in different ways. Kenneth Craig maintains, “Yhwh allows no time for answers to [these] two questions about anger and a fallen countenance.” He asserts that the deity refuses Cain the “opportunity for questioning the favor of one offering over another.” However, there is little if any evidence in the text to suggest that YHWH rushed through these questions with no interest in Cain’s point of view. Rather, the text portrays YHWH as interested in conversing with Cain. Hence, even after Cain has murdered his brother, YHWH still exercises care and concern for Cain’s well being (see esp. 4:13-15). It seems improbable, therefore, that YHWH asks these questions in v. 6 without any interest in Cain’s response.

More likely, God’s questions are a genuine invitation for Cain to express his anger directly to the one who has caused it. As several interpreters point out, YHWH invites Cain to express his anger lest it continue unabated and result in life-devastating

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69 Although the נבזַי of v. 7 signifies that the following question is primarily rhetorical in nature (GKC §150e), it is not clear that the questions of v. 6 expect no answer. There are many cases in Genesis 3-4 where a question is asked that expects and receives a response (Gen 3:1-2, 9-10, 11-12, 13; 4:9-10). Something quite similar may be at work with v. 6.

Furthermore, God’s questions to Jonah in Jonah 4:4, 9 are quite similar to the ones asked of Cain. When God does not receive an answer in 4:4, God asks again in 4:9 and finally does receive an answer from the prophet just before the book closes. Given the similarities, one may suspect that God expected an answer here as well.

One should also note that in the Egyptian story of “Horus and Seth,” which contains many parallels with the story of Cain and Abel (AEL 2:215, 216, 218, 219, 220), there is a point when Seth, the elder brother, stands before the Ennead (the divine council). Like YHWH’s interrogation of Cain in 4:6-7, the Ennead asks Seth, “Why are you angry? Is it not true that…?” (ibid., 2:218). Given the context of the Ennead’s questions, they can be interpreted as primarily rhetorical, intending to persuade Seth of the council’s position more than asking for his response. Nevertheless, Seth still responds, “cry[ing] aloud to the Ennead in anger” and asking whether his younger brother should in fact receive privileges he does not. Such a parallel suggests that Cain could have and perhaps should have responded to God’s words, even if he were to disagree with the deity.
Throughout Genesis, YHWH appears particularly open to human conversation, even when it involves questioning divine ways. The same appears to be the case here. Thus, the divine questions in Gen 4:6 can be understood as an attempt to elicit the types of complaints found in the Psalms, the book of Job, and many of the Latter Prophets.

8.7 Genesis 4:7

While 4:1-6 raises a number of complex issues, the most difficult verse of the Cain and Abel narrative is what comes next in 4:7. At least at first glance, the verse looks like a puzzle with no pieces that fit together. Indeed, many have echoed Procksch’s observation that this verse is the most obscure one found in all of Genesis. The Talmud, meanwhile, names this verse as one of five in the entire Hebrew Bible whose syntax is too difficult to result in a clear translation. For his part, Gunkel makes

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70 LaCocque, Onslaught against Innocence, 38-39, 118; Wiesel, Messengers of God, 63-64; Waskow, “Brothers Reconciled,” 42-46, esp. 42; Basset, Holy Anger, 22, 24, 35.

71 See esp. Genesis 18, where the deity appears quite open to Abraham’s questioning the ethics of divine extermination.

72 Granted, the Hebrew Bible displays considerable diversity, even regarding the extent to which one should complain against God (e.g., Num 14:26-37). One should not assume, therefore, that simply because other texts invite the expression of anger against God, the same dynamics are at work here. Nevertheless, the widespread presence of complaint psalms in the Hebrew Bible suggests that it was a fundamental feature of Yahwism. It thus would be fitting for a text like Gen 4:1-16, which focuses on the fundamentals of humanity in relation to God and each other, to pick up and reinforce a key theme of Yahwistic religion.

73 Otto Procksch, Die Genesis (KAT; Leipzig: A. Deichertische Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1913), 46, refers to it as “Der dunkelste Vers des Kapitels, ja der Genesis.”

74 Yoma 52a-b; for an English translation, see The Talmud of Babylonia: An American Translation: V. B: Yoma Chapters Three through Five, (trans. Jacob Neusner; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1994), 94-95.
suggestions about interpreting a few words in the verse, but then he concedes that the rest of it “seems entirely irremediable.” Various others, seeing the present text as difficult if not impossible to interpret, maintain that it is corrupt. The key difficulties of this verse may be stated as follows:

**Concerning the first conditional statement:**

1. What is the meaning of “do good” (העשה)? To what is it referring?
2. What is the meaning of “a lifting” (עגשה)? To what is it referring?

**Concerning the second conditional statement:**

3. What is the meaning of “at the doorway” (לכלשה)? To what is it referring?
4. Why does the feminine singular noun “sin” (פשע) disagree with the masculine singular participle that follows (הרמנ)?
5. Does the participle refer to a demon? If not, what is its referent?

**Concerning the final part of the verse:**

6. What is the antecedent of the third-person masculine singular pronouns at the end of v. 7 (“his/its craving,” וינאש; “over him/it,” ו)?
7. Why is the language of similar to Gen 3:16?
8. What is the meaning of “his/its craving” (פשע) and “you shall rule” (משלח)?

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75 Gunkel, *Genesis*, 44. Similarly, Jacob, *The First Book of the Bible*, 34, writes of this verse, “a satisfactory explanation of the linguistic difficulties in the Hebrew text has not yet been found.” See also van Wolde, “The Story of Cain and Abel,” 31; Westermann, “Kain und Abel,” 20. Gowan, *From Eden to Babel*, 68, suggests that these words are obscure because their subject matter (evil) is obscure.


77 See also Wenham, *Genesis*, 1:103-106, and Westermann, *Genesis*, 1:298-301, both of which usefully outline the issues and possibilities.
Although it is difficult to find a perfect solution to all of these questions, a careful examination of linguistic, literary, and comparative data leads to some promising results and suggests that at least the consonantal text can be understood without resorting to major emendations. God’s words in 4:7 serve a twofold purpose. In their immediate context, they warn Cain that his anger has placed him in a morally dangerous position. In the broader scope of Genesis, they also serve an additional purpose, as mentioned in §5.9: these words present the opposite extremes of what can happen with anger, pointing to Cain’s murdering his brother (4:8) and Joseph’s forgiving his brothers (50:15-21).

8.7.1 Gen 4:7a "Is it not true that if you do good, then a lifting up?"

Genesis 4:1-16 as a whole is marked by extreme brevity, but the author’s concision is most noticeable here in Gen 4:7a. Rarely does one find such a succinct conditional sentence in the Hebrew Bible. The beginning of the question, אִיּוּם ("Is it not true that…"), makes clear that what follows is considered absolutely certain by the speaker. Next, one finds a conditional clause consisting of the words אֲשֶׁר הָיִיתָם ("…if you do good…"). These words make clear that Cain’s anger has not doomed him to

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78 One of the more promising emendations has been offered by Ramaroson, “A propos de Gn 4:7,” 233-237, who suggests the word רמא belongs with the first conditional clause, not the second. Another possibility, suggested by von Rad, Genesis, 105, and Van Seters, Prologue to History, 138 (cf. Procksch, Die Genesis, 47), is that the text should be read as נֵאמָר רֶמֶת ("sin crouches"), not as נֵאמָר רֶם. However, it is possible to understand the consonantal text as it stands without altering it.

79 Cf. Dillmann, Die Genesis, 93-94.

80 For one of the rare occasions when a verse contains conditional statements of comparable brevity, see Gen 13:9.

81 GKC §150e.
evildoing.\textsuperscript{82} A realistic possibility is that he can do what is good.\textsuperscript{83} This passage thus portrays anger less as a sin in itself and more as a force that places someone in a potentially sinful situation. Cain has the possibility of ruling over (cf. \textit{הָרֵעָל} in 4:7c) what threatens his moral being.

Should he do so, there will be a lifting up (\textit{ottesville}). The concision of this apodosis makes its meaning somewhat unclear. Some suggest that it refers to forgiveness or a similar concept.\textsuperscript{84} In the immediate context, however, Cain has not yet committed any known sin. His offering may not have been of the same quality as Abel’s, but it was not (to his or the readers’ knowledge) sinful. More likely, in the context of 4:1-16, \textit{.createStatement} refers

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}

Alternately, it is possible that the verse is saying that Cain can do right by improving his character, sacrificing an animal, or offering his first fruits. However, it is not clear that Cain or Cain’s offering is problematic, as discussed in §8.4.

\item Klein, “How Job Fulfills,” 40-43, esp. 43, suggests that even though Cain fails to actualize this possibility of doing good, the possibility is realized with Job, who did what is right despite the unfairness he faced. As argued in §5.9, Joseph provides another, perhaps even better, example of one who realizes the possibility of doing good.

\item There are several verses that connect the forgiveness of sin with the verb \textit{ aantal }, such as Gen 50:17; Exod 10:17; 32:32; Josh 24:19; 1 Sam 15:25; Ps 25:18; 32:5; 85:2. In the immediate context, Gen 4:13 has been interpreted this way (“My iniquity is too great to be forgiven”), although other interpretations are also possible. As discussed in §8.8, there are significant reasons for favoring the translation, “My punishment is too heavy to lift.”

Hamilton, \textit{The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17}, 227, suggests that the infinitive refers to both forgiveness and acceptance.

Meanwhile, Van Seters, \textit{Prologue to History}, 138, asserts that the reference is to divine favor. For his part, Brueggemann, \textit{Genesis}, 62-63, contends that reconciliation is envisioned, although one should note that he here is providing an interpretation of both Gen 4:7 and Matt 5:21-26.

McKnight, “Cain,” 109, argues that the lifting up alludes to both Cain’s countenance and divine acceptance.

Robert Alter, \textit{The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary} (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), 30, proffers that \textit{/owl} is related to \textit{/owl} (a gift or cultic offering), but he does not specify the nature of this relationship.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
to Cain’s face, described in the previous verses as falling. 85 As noted above, the text’s
description of Cain’s face falling likely refers to withdrawal and detachment from others.
By telling Cain that there will be an uplifting, God’s words communicate that Cain’s
anger and its effects need not last forever. 86 Both this emotion and its attendant dangers
can dissipate.

8.7.2 Gen 4:7b “But if you do not do good, then at the entryway to
iniquity is a creature crouching down.” (חֲזָה לָא חַטָּב לְפָנָיו כָּרוֹעַ רָבָּה)

Here in Gen 4:7b, Cain is warned of the alternative, that is, the dangers that can
come from his anger. These words constitute perhaps the most obscure part of the most
obscure verse of Genesis. Many prefer a different translation than the one above,
rendering it something like, “If you do not do well, then sin is crouching [or a croucher]
at the door.” 87 Here, *door* or *entryway* ( xt; P ) is seen as an absolute noun, rather than a
construct noun in a chain with *sin* ( taJ; x ). The Masoretes clearly understood the text in

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85 See not only Gen 19:21, 32:21, but also the following, which refer to similar concepts,
especially the lifting of the eyes: Gen 13:10, 14; 18:2; 22:4, 13; 24:63, 64; 31:10, 12; 33:1, 5; 37:25, 39:7;
40:13, 19, 20; 43:29. Outside of Genesis, many verses use שָׁנַח specifically in conjunction with a form of
שָׁנַח: Lev 19:15; Num 6:26; Deut 10:17; 28:50; 1 Sam 25:35; 2 Sam 2:22; 2 Kgs 5:1; 9:32; Job 11:15; 13:8,
10; 32:21; 34:19; 42:8, 9; Prov 6:35; 18:5; Isa 3:3; 9:14; Jer 44:22; Mal 1:8, 9; 2:9.

Of these, Job 11:15 is particularly significant. The broader context (11:13-15) refers to themes
also present in Gen 4:7, and Job 11:15 speaks specifically of the lifting of one’s face (cf. Van Seters,
*Prologue to History*, 138; see also Warren Malcolm Clark, “Flood and the Structure of Pre-patriarchal
History,” *ZAW* 83, no. 2 [1971]: 184-211, esp. 199, n. 166).

Many interpret *lifting* as a reference to Cain’s face: Heyden, “Die Sünde Kains,” 97; Castellino,

86 One finds something similar in the story of “Horus and Seth,” where the Ennead (i.e., the divine
council) reminds Isis that her anger can abate and that doing right will be beneficial (*AEL* 2:216).

this way; thus, they give לָכֶה a definite pointing with a disjunctive accent (the שֶׁפֶחַ), while giving לָכֶה a conjunctive accent (the שֶׁפֶחַ), so that the text reads: לָכֶה נְחָשָׁהוּ בְּרֹאָה.

While this approach is possible, it raises the question of what to make of the word לָכֶה. Several talk about it as the door of Cain’s heart, conscience, life, or soul. Some even believe it is an obscure reference to the womb or the right of primogeniture. Clifford, meanwhile, understands לָכֶה to mean “in your [i.e., Cain’s] path.” However, these interpretations suppose that לָכֶה is here functioning in a way different from how it functions elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Of the 164 times that the noun לָכֶה appears in the Hebrew Bible (not counting Gen 4:7), the immediate context always specifies the type of door that is envisioned. It usually appears in its construct form (139 of 164 times), followed by an absolute noun or a possessive suffix that identifies the type of door at hand (e.g., לָכֶה מָזוֹן in Gen 18:1, 2, 10). In the cases where לָכֶה appears as an absolute


Other creative proposals have been made. Joaquim Azevedo, “At the Door of Paradise: A Contextual Interpretation of Gen 4:7,” *BN* 100 (1999): 45-59, asserts that the door refers to the door of paradise and that the verse is telling Cain that a male sacrificial animal (הֶבֶשׁ) is at this door. On the possibility that לָכֶה does not refer to sin itself, see Castellino, “Genesis 4:7,” 444, which argues that it refers to the tendency toward sin.

90 Clifford and Murphy, “Genesis,” 13.

91 See also KAI 10:4-5. Note: I have included the reference to לָכֶה in Ps 119:130 here, which likely should not be understood as a lexeme independent of לָכֶה (R. Bartelmus, “לָכֶה; לָכֶה; לָכֶה; לָכֶה; לָכֶה; לָכֶה; לָכֶה,” *TDOT* 12:173-191, esp. 187).
term, the context leaves no doubt about the structure to which the door is attached.\textsuperscript{92}

While נָעַץ is occasionally employed metaphorically in the Hebrew Bible, these metaphors speak of an entry, door, or opening into something specific, such as “a door to hope” (Hos 2:17 [2:15, Eng.]; cf. Mic 7:5; Ps 119:130).\textsuperscript{93} There are no examples in the Hebrew Bible where נָעַץ is used metaphorically to speak of a door on one’s heart or conscience. Likewise, there are no cases in classical Hebrew where this noun is used to speak idiomatically about the right of primogeniture, the womb, a path, or a course of action.\textsuperscript{94}

In the post-biblical period, נָעַץ is used by itself to speak metaphorically about courses of action and possibilities that arise, but it is not used this way in the biblical period.\textsuperscript{95} One suspects that the Masoretes were influenced by post-biblical idioms to point the text the way they did—an anachronistic rendering of the text.\textsuperscript{96}

\textsuperscript{92} There are 25 appearances of נָעַץ (not counting Gen 4:7) in its absolute form. The only case where the immediate context does not specifically name a physical structure to which the נָעַץ is attached is Job 31:34. Even here, the context makes clear that the speaker is referring to the door on his own house, expressing fear of going outdoors. Here in Gen 4:7, it is unclear whether Cain is outside (where the sacrifice presumably was made) or inside (where he may have been if his words to his brother [missing in the MT] suggested to Abel that they go outside).

\textsuperscript{93} See also the metaphorical uses of the noun נָעַץ in the Qumran manuscripts, which speak of נָעַץ הַנָּבָה, “to a gate to hope” (1QM XI, 9; 4Q434 frg. 3, II, 2); and נָעַץ הַיָּיָה, “from her [i.e., wisdom’s] gate” (11Q5 XVIII, 5).

\textsuperscript{94} One could argue that Job 31:9 uses the word in this sense, but most translations understand it as a reference to the “neighbor’s door” (e.g., NRSV, NJPS, Marvin H. Pope, \textit{Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes} [3rd ed.; AB; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1973, 1965], 225). If there is symbolism in this verse, it likely has to do with how the word נָעַץ can carry sexual connotations (i.e., refer to a bodily opening; cf. Prov 5:8; Song 7:14 [7:13 Eng.]; 4Q184 frg. 1, 10), not with the idea of going down a path or taking a course of action (cf. Bartelmus, \textit{TDOT} 12:175, 185).

\textsuperscript{95} For example, in the Sifre to Deuteronomy (SDt 3:24 §27), the speaker says, “You have opened a door (נָעַץ) for me, so that…” which clearly means, “You have given me the opportunity to…” or “You have opened the possibility that…” See Str-B 3:484; cf. Hans Bietenhard and Henrik Ljungman, \textit{Sifre Deuteronomium} (Judaica et Christiana 8; Bern: Peter Lang, 1984), 62.

\textsuperscript{96} On the broader phenomenon of later (i.e., post-biblical) Hebrew influencing the Masoretes, see J. Hughes, “Post-Biblical Features of Biblical Hebrew Vocalization,” in \textit{Language, Theology, and the
The consonantal text can be pointed in another way, which fits much better with biblical idioms: לָשׁוֹן הָעַד הרֶץ (
“at sin’s doorway is a croucher”). Unlike the other approaches to this phrase, this pointing gives readers a text that matches other uses of בּוֹרֵר in the Hebrew Bible, particularly the metaphorical uses mentioned above. Furthermore, this interpretation resolves a question that has troubled interpreters for centuries: why does רֶץ (sin), which is typically a feminine noun in Hebrew, fail to agree with both the masculine participle בּוֹרֵר (croucher) here in 4:7b and the masculine pronouns in 4:7c? This perplexing question is not an issue if one understands a construct chain to be at work. Then, רֶץ (sin) modifies בּוֹרֵר (door), rather than serving as the subject of בּוֹרֵר. This interpretation thus has fewer syntactical difficulties.

Readers are then left with the following: “But if you do not do good, then at iniquity’s entryway is a בּוֹרֵר.” The meaning of בּוֹרֵר is not immediately obvious, particularly to those removed from the ancient Near East. Typically, the verbal root refers to the posture of animals lying down. It can describe both predatory (e.g., Gen

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97 Cf. Janowski, “Jenseits von Eden,” 277-278; Heyden, “Die Sünde Kains,” 99. Again, Hosea 2:17 (2:15 Eng.) is particularly noteworthy. It speaks of “a door to hope” (ַוֵּעַתּוֹ הָיְאֹת), which is conceptually and syntactically similar to “a door to sin” (בּוֹרֵר בּוֹרֵר בּוֹרֵר) here.

Bartelmus, *TDOT* 12:185-186 asserts that בּוֹרֵר is an absolute term, but the interpretation that follows speaks of an “opening” for sin, which arguably fits better with reading בּוֹרֵר in a construct state.

98 The syntactical difficulties here may be overstated by some commentators. Many, following the lead of Gesenius (§145u), see בּוֹרֵר as functioning as a substantive, which would not require gender agreement with רֶץ. Furthermore, as Alonso-Schökel, *Tu hermano*, 33, astutely points out, רֶץ is not always understood as a feminine noun. In Leviticus 4:23, 28, this noun is the subject of a masculine verb.

99 Only about seven of the 34 appearances of בּוֹרֵר in the Hebrew Bible are associated with something other than an animal. These include “the deep” (דְּמֵעָת, Gen 49:25; Deut 33:13), individuals (Isa 14:30; Prov 24:15; Job 11:19), stones (Isa 54:11), and a curse (Deut 29:20). (The הָאָדָם הַגָּדוֹל [*great
49:9) and non-threatening (e.g., Gen 29:2) animals. To determine what type of creature is envisioned here, it is useful to consider its close proximity to the phrase מְרַכּוֹ, at a door. In the ancient Near East, two types of creatures were associated with crouching down beside doors: demons and lions. Ancient readers of Genesis 4:7b would likely have caught one or both of these associations and understood the verse as warning Cain about the potential consequences of his anger by alluding to these threatening creatures.

There are several reasons for understanding בּּרֵכָּ as an allusion to the demonic. First, the Hebrew participle בּּרֵכָּ bears close similarities with the Akkadian participle rabitsu, a term that refers to demons on a fairly general level. Second, this Akkadian type of demon crouched at the foundations and doors of houses, waiting to ambush humans. It thus would fit naturally with the reference to the door in this verse.

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100 Some have made alternate suggestions. For example, Van Seters, Prologue to History, 138, understands this text to envision a domestic animal that is attracted to its owner but which must be held in check. He suggests there is a parallel between what Genesis here envisions and Plato’s equating passion with a wild beast that must be guarded (Van Seters, Prologue to History, 147, n. 111). Others assert that the text points to a wild, not a domesticated, animal (van Wolde, “The Story of Cain and Abel,” 30-31; Wénin, “Adam et Ève,” 3-16, esp. 15-16), which is similar to the argument here. Janowski, “Jenseits von Eden,” 277, interprets it as a reference to Abel.

101 I would like to thank Joel LeMon of Emory University for initially persuading me that the verse may refer to the demonic.


Third and finally, in ancient Mesopotamia, malevolent demons were seen as entities that act on behalf of deities to punish individuals for their sin. These associations certainly fit the context of Gen 4:7b, where God warns Cain of the consequences of failing to do good.

As is well known, allusions frequently refer to things indirectly, depending on readers to recognize the complex ideas communicated with just a few words. Although some have maintained that the verse refers directly to a rabitsu demon, it seems preferable to understand the reference as allusive. YHWH’s speech briefly and

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Aspects of Religious Belief and Practice in Babylonia and Assyria (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1911), 310.

104 The Assyrian literature speaks specifically of these demons as watching doors, as striking those who enter living quarters, and as those who are placed at the gate (“rābisu,” CAD 14:23).


106 Cf. Thomas S. Kane, The New Oxford Guide to Writing (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 224-225. Although this source describes allusions in modern English prose, allusions have ancient roots, and much of what is said here is applicable to the biblical text as well.

107 A generation ago (and earlier), many understood גֵּזֶן as an Akkadian loanword incorporated into the text and thus thought that the verse at hand made a direct reference to the rabitsu demon, offering an interpretation like, “If you do not, then sin is the demon at the door” (so Speiser, Genesis, 33). Such an interpretation was favored because interpreters (failing to recognize sin as operating in construct with the door) were looking for a reason why the feminine noun פִּקְדַן disagrees with the masculine participle גֵּזֶן. If גֵּזֶן is considered a direct reference to a particular demon, then gender agreement is not expected. See Duhm, Die bösen Geister im Alten Testament, 8-10; Closen, “Der ‘Dämon Sünde’,” 442; A. L. Oppenheim, “The Eyes of the Lord,” JAOS 88, no. 1 (1968): 173-180, esp. 179.

The chief problem with seeing an explicit reference to the rabitsu demon is that of the 34 appearances that גֵּזֶן makes in the Hebrew Bible, there are no other cases where this word is clearly functioning as the Akkadian loanword rabitsu. Rather, most readers would have associated this word with animals, as it modifies them approximately three-fourths of the times that it appears in the Hebrew Bible (see below). Furthermore, because the Akkadian word rabitsu could also refer to a benevolent demon or even a ruler (cf. Black, Green, and Rickards, Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia, 63, esp. 17, Fig. 9; Barré, “Rabitsu,” 683), it is not altogether clear that readers would have immediately understood גֵּזֶן as a reference to a malevolent demon even if they made the connection with the Akkadian term (although context would have surely helped them). In any event, one should be cautious about assuming the reference in 4:7 is more than an allusion. For further review and critique of seeing Gen 4:7 as referring directly to a demon, see Janowski, “Jenseits von Eden,” 272-276.
indirectly appeals to a common belief in threatening beings that punish sin in order to communicate the dangers that lie before Cain: if he fails to do what is right, punishment will come quickly. Cain’s anger is not just a threat to Abel, but to himself as well.

It is quite possible that some of the ancient readers of this text would have missed its allusion to the demonic. After all, the Hebrew Bible associates the term יבּוֹ (yibo) with animals approximately three-fourths of the time. Ancient readers who missed the text’s allusion to a demon would likely have caught a related allusion, understanding the yibo as an indirect reference to a lion or similar beast of prey. This verb appears in

Westermann, “Kain und Abel,” 20-21; Westermann, Genesis, 1:299-300, suggests that in a previous form, this narrative referred to the demonic, but that it no longer does. Rather than assuming such a binary scheme wherein the text either does or does not make reference to a demon, it is preferable to recognize that literarily, there are varying degrees of intertextuality, and that the narrative at hand likely is making an indirect, allusive reference.

One should note that YHWH is not necessarily endorsing belief in demons, so much as appealing to such belief. Individuals today can speak, for example, of David and Goliath without any presumption about their reality as historical figures.

While a few verses using יבּוֹ may refer to something mythological (Ezek 29:3, perhaps Gen 49:25; Deut 33:13; cf. Deut 29:20), this word’s close associations with animals may have prompted many to think of the zoological realm, rather than the demonic.


One should keep in mind that the distinction between the leonine and demonic was not as sharp in the ancient Near East as it is for modern readers. Not only did ancient Near Eastern mythology speak of a “lion-demon” (cf. Anthony Green, “A Note on the ‘Lion-Demon’,” Iraq 50 (1988): 167-168), but also gate-lions (discussed in greater depth below) were understood to have “godly, demonical, or punitive powers” (David Ussishkin, “The Syro-Hittite Ritual Burial of Monuments,” JNES 29, no. 2 [1970]: 124-128, esp. 127). Furthermore, as Othmar Keel, The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms (trans. Timothy J. Hallett; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 85 (italics his), observes, “From the most ancient times, demons have been portrayed in the form of lions.” Finally, there is a piece of iconographic evidence that depicts the rabitsu demon in leonine form (Edzard and Wiggermann, RIA 455, §3.3). See also Carl Frank, Lamastu, Pazuzu und andere Dämonen: Ein
conjunction with leonine vocabulary several times in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 49:9; Ps 104:22; Ezek 19:2; cf. Isa 11:6; Hos 13:7). However, some have ruled out this possibility because the text talks about a γῆρ at the door. In 1892, for example, August Dillmann asserted that because lions do not naturally lie at doors, one should not understand this passage as containing leonine imagery. On strictly zoological terms, Dillmann may be correct. However, archaeology since Dillmann’s time has revealed that throughout the ancient Near East, lions were portrayed in iconography as crouching beside doors and gates. Surprisingly, this evidence has received little, if any, attention by those examining Gen 4:7.

Leonine imagery constitutes a widespread feature of ancient Near Eastern architecture, appearing prominently at the doorways of temples, palaces, and city gates,

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Beitrag zur babylonisch-assyrischen Dämonologie (MAOG 14/2; Osnabrück: O. Zeller Verlag, 1972, 1941), 33-36.

111 There are also many times when the Hebrew Bible refers to flocks (or cattle) as crouching (γῆρ). However, flocks and cattle were not known for crouching beside doors and gates (παπαῖ) the way that iconographic lions were in the ancient Near East.

112 Dillmann, Die Genesis, 94. Others, e.g., Van Seters, Prologue to History, 138, have also claimed that this verse cannot be perceived as threatening Cain because γῆρ refers more to animals at rest than those about to attack. There may be some truth in this claim (e.g., Ps 23:2). However, Gen 49:9 makes clear that a resting, crouching animal can quickly become a threatening animal.

not uncommonly in crouching positions.\textsuperscript{114} See, for example, Figure 5 below, a photograph of an orthostat from Hazor, which depicts a crouching gate-lion.\textsuperscript{115}

**Figure 5: Lion Orthostat from Hazor**

Leonine figures such as this one served a predominantly apotropaic purpose.\textsuperscript{116}

They present a threat to those outside the gate or door, warning that entry may entail


\textsuperscript{115} Image used with permission from Carl Rasmussen, “Basalt Lion,” *Holy Land Photos*: Cited Aug. 5, 2008. Online: www.holylandphotos.org. I would like to thank Dr. Rasmussen for his kindness and hard work in making photographs like this one available to the public. This orthostat is on display at the Israel Museum, where the photograph was taken.

It is clear that this life-size statue (weighing more than one ton) originally was attached to the right side of a gate (as one enters), because the other side of it lacks carving. It most likely adorned the entrance to the Canaanite temple or the royal palace at Hazor following its creation in the 15th or 14th centuries, BCE. Apparently, around the 8th century, BCE, this lion was separated from its mate, although scholars have differing opinions about the matter. See Ussishkin, “Syro-Hittite Ritual Burial,” 124-128; Strawn, *Stronger than a Lion*, 86-87, figs. 3.17-20; Bonnie Rochman, “The Pride of Hazor: Lion Statue Regains Its Long-Lost Mate,” *BAR* 23, no. 6 (1997): 25; Amnon Ben-Tor and Teresa Rubiato, “Excavating Hazor: Part II: Did the Israelites Destroy the Canaanite City?,” *BAR* 25, no. 3 (1999): 22-39, esp. 34.
great harm to themselves. By evoking this leonine imagery, Gen 4:7 briefly but vividly makes clear the warning given to Cain. Should he approach sin’s doorway, his life will become endangered.\textsuperscript{117} In what follows 4:7, Cain enters the doorway to iniquity by killing his brother (4:8), and he consequently fears for his life (4:14), much as God’s words here forecasted. Understanding the γῆρ of Gen 4:7 as alluding to a lion furthermore fits with the types of imagery evoked in texts from the ancient Near East that deal with brotherly conflict, anger, and fratricide.\textsuperscript{118} The author of Gen 4:1-16 appears to have drawn upon a variety of cultural themes and ideas to present this initial narrative of life outside of Eden.

Nevertheless, some may object to this interpretation. Would ancient readers of the Hebrew Bible connect the word γῆρ with demons and/or lions? After all, there are no unambiguous cases in the Hebrew Bible where the verb γῆρ refers to the demonic,\textsuperscript{119} and

\textsuperscript{116} Granted, there is some tension between this allusion, which evokes what drives off demons, and the allusion of demons themselves. In both cases, however, God’s words to Cain serve to warn the human of the dangers of failing to do what is right. Furthermore, this tension most likely would not have been a problem for the early audiences of this text, given that (as also quoted in a footnote above) “From the most ancient times, demons have been portrayed in the form of lions” (Keel, The Symbolism of the Biblical World, 85, italics his).

\textsuperscript{117} The associations between lions and death are vividly illustrated in various iconography. For example, an image dating to approximately 700 BCE shows a crouching lion surrounded by disembodied animal heads. See Brent A. Strawn, “Psalm 22:17b: More Guessing,” JBL 119, no. 3 (2000): 439-451, esp. 451, fig. 8. Cf. Keel and Uehlinger, Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel, 82-83, 267-269, illuss. 99-100, 267a-c.

\textsuperscript{118} The Hebrew Bible itself connects anger with a threatening lion in Prov 19:12, Jer 25:38 (cf. Prov 20:2). Sirach 21:2, 27:10 also has resonances with this text, as it metaphorically portrays sin as a lion (Alonso-Schökel, Tu hermano, 33-34). In the broader ancient Near East, stories of brotherly conflict frequently portray anger using imagery of a lion or leopard (on their relation see Hos 13:7; Jer 5:6), including “Prism B of Esarhaddon” (ANET 289-290, esp. 289); the story of “Horus and Seth” (AEL 2:209); the Egyptian tale of “The Two Brothers” (AEL 2:205). (Cf. ANET 601-604, esp. 603-604, line 247.)

\textsuperscript{119} As noted in a footnote above, a few verses using γῆρ may refer to something mythological (Ezek 29:3; perhaps Gen 49:25; Deut 33:13; cf. Deut 29:20), but this word’s close associations with animals may have prompted many to think of them, rather than demons.
this verb is used more frequently to describe the posture of sheep, goats, donkeys, and cattle in the Hebrew Bible than to describe lions or leopards. However, the question is not, Would ancient readers automatically associate the word יָרָה (in and of itself) with demons and/or lions? Rather, given the context of the passage, the most appropriate question is, What type of creatures would readers in the ancient Near East associate with crouching (ייָרָה) at a door ( xt; p,l.)? The evidence presented above makes clear that demons and lions would be the leading answers to such a question. Furthermore, demons and lions fit very well with both the literary and the historical context of the passage.

To summarize this interpretation of Gen 4:7b, then, it forms a key section of God’s warning to Cain, informing the human of the disastrous consequences of failing to do what is right. The author has chosen a highly suggestive image, that of a creature crouching, which in the present context can be understood as alluding to a sin-punishing demon or a life-threatening lion. In utilizing this image, the author has created a clear spatial contrast between 4:7a and 4:7b. Cain is told that if he does good, there will be a lifting up. He is also told that if he does not do good, then there is a creature crouching down. The verse thus speaks of opposites: doing good and not doing good; a betterment of one’s condition (abatement of anger) and a worsening of one’s condition.

120 For instances where יָרָה is associated with flocks, herds, and related animals, see Gen 29:2; 49:14; Exod 23:5; Num 22:27; Isa 13:20; 17:2; 27:10; 65:10; Jer 33:12; 50:6; Ezek 34:14-15; Zeph 2:14; Ps 23:2; Song 1:7.

One could also object to this interpretation by noting that guardian lions appear to be depicted more frequently in a standing position than in a crouching position. There, too, the question is not whether readers would automatically connect guardian lions with יָרָה, but rather with what they would connect something crouching at the door.

(threat); lifting up and crouching down. Although the language is exceptionally succinct and requires considerable unpacking, it is filled with rich meaning that fits the broader context of this passage.

8.7.3 Gen 4:7c "Its craving is for you, but you must rule over it."

The final section of 4:7 raises its own share of issues. The antecedents of the third-person masculine singular pronouns are not immediately clear. Furthermore, the phrases here are quite similar to God’s words to Eve in Gen 3:16, “Your craving will be for your man, but he will rule over you” (וְאַתָּה לָאָדָם תְּרָעֵהוּ יִרְעֶהוּ), which raises the question of why such a close parallel exists. It is not immediately clear, either, why there is talk of craving and ruling here in 4:7.

A number of scholars have suggested that the antecedent of the third-person pronouns is Abel. Thus, Benno Jacob proffers the following:

The younger [brother] has a desire to cling to the older; the older may guide him, make requests of him, and command him. The meaning seems to be: why do you angrily turn away? You could command him as your right; he would willingly obey you.122

Perhaps the greatest strength of this interpretation is that it easily explains the connection between this verse and 3:16. Both represent the social order: the verse in ch. 3 explains the relationship between husband and wife, while the verse in ch. 4 describes the relationship between older and younger siblings.123

122 Jacob, The First Book of the Bible, 35.

123 Heyden, “Die Sünde Kains,” 99-100; cf. LaCocque, Onslaught against Innocence, 2.
However, there are several reasons why this interpretation seems unlikely. First, Abel has not been mentioned since 4:4, when the text says that God rejected Abel’s offering. It seems unlikely that the pronouns’ referent lies that far removed from the text at hand, particularly when there are other possibilities. Second, the couple of references to the word הַּרְעָם in the Hebrew Bible point in the direction of bodily attraction, and it is not clear why Abel would have this type of craving for his older brother. Third and finally, this interpretation is difficult to reconcile with the broader themes and messages of Genesis. Throughout the book, younger siblings (Isaac, Jacob, Rachel, Joseph) are depicted as having superiority over elder siblings (Ishmael, Esau, Leah, Joseph’s brothers), often with divine approval (e.g., Gen 21:10-12). It would be odd for God, at the outset of this book, to tell Cain to rule over his younger brother when God is so frequently in favor of the younger child ruling over the elder (e.g., ch. 37).

If one does not understand Abel as the antecedent of these pronouns, then what should be made of the parallels between this text and Gen 3:16? As shown in §5.1, a variety of connections exist between Genesis 2-3 and Genesis 4. This parallel is one of many that portray Cain as continuing in his parents’ primeval disobedience. It should not be isolated from the many other parallels between these texts. One does not need to assume that this particular parallel points to analogous social relations between spouses and siblings.124

If Abel is not the antecedent of these pronouns, then the most likely candidate is רָעָם, *the creature crouching down*. Both the demonic and leonine imagery evoked by this

language fits well what this text says. Cain is warned that the creature’s craving is for him. Like a beast attracted to its prey, the demon/lion wants to pursue and harm Cain. Consequently, Cain must rule over it. Use of the word ṣur (rule) is not accidental. The Akkadian word rabitsu can carry connotations of ruling and even, in certain contexts, refer not to a demon, but to a ruler.125 Similarly, ancient Near Eastern leonine iconography frequently evokes themes of mastery, rule, and dominance.126 The Hebrew Bible even depicts Solomon’s throne as decorated with leonine images in 1 Kgs 10:18-20.127 Additionally, there are many artifacts that depict a deity standing or sitting over a lion in a position of dominion.128 Because of the connections that demons and lions had with rulers and even deities, the text (“You must rule over it”) appears to tell Cain that he will need a kingly or even godlike power to conquer the threat that he faces. Indeed, as one learns in the next verse, he is unable to muster the strength to ward off this ominous force.

Thus, Gen 4:7 portrays Cain as occupying a dangerous space because of his anger. He is not doomed to suffering and evil; he can do what is right, and he can rule


126 As Strawn, Stronger than a Lion, 227, puts it when concluding his discussion of leonine figurines on gates or doors, “by far the most frequent use of the lion is in images of power and threat, whether that power and threat is depicted as dominating someone/something or as being dominated by a superior power, most notably the monarch/mighty one or deity.”

For images of lions being dominated or defeated by a ruler or deity, see Keel and Uehlinger, Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel, 169; Keel, The Symbolism of the Biblical World, 86, figs. 102, 103, 135, 163.

127 Keel and Uehlinger, Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel, 169; Keel, The Symbolism of the Biblical World, 86, figs. 102, 103, 135, 163.

128 Keel and Uehlinger, Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel, 190; ANEP, figs. 470-473, 486, 522, 526, 530, 534; Strawn, Stronger than a Lion, 189-200, figs. 4.94, 186, 221-273, 289.
over the crouching creature. However, doing so will require great strength. He will need
to master the lurking, threatening, demonic force that desires him. He will find himself
pulled toward the doorway to iniquity, even though he has been informed that
punishment and peril will accompany his entry through that door. Anger presents a great
threat to his moral life, and readers are left wondering whether Cain—or anyone else in
Genesis—will find the strength to rule the crouching beast at the door to sin.

8.8 What are the outcomes of Cain's anger?

Continuing with its laconic style, the narrative devotes only one verse to the
murder of Abel, even though it represents the climax of the story. The elder brother
fails to do what is right and enters the doorway to iniquity. In the field, Cain rises up
and strikes down his brother. The brevity typical of this passage gives no clue as to how
Cain murdered his brother. Was a weapon used? Did Abel put up a struggle? All
readers know is that Cain killed his brother. The focus of this text is thus less on the

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129 A nice summary of J’s laconic style is found on LaCocque, Onslaught against Innocence, 7-8, cf. 13.

130 Others have proposed, perhaps because Cain’s murder is told in such a succinct,
straightforward way, that the climax comes in 4:10, when YHWH reveals that Abel’s blood cries out from
the ground. E.g., Westermann, “Kain und Abel,” 22.

131 This location is significant for two reasons. First, it permits the vivid imagery that follows,
wherein God speaks of the ground essentially drinking the blood of Abel. Second, it connects the fratricide
here with other stories of fratricide in the Hebrew Bible, which also take place in (or in connection with)
fields. See esp. 2 Sam 14:6; 1 Kgs 2:25-26; Richard Elliott Friedman, Commentary on the Torah: With a

132 As Westermann, “Kain und Abel,” 21, points out, this account of Cain’s killing Abel contrasts
sharply with other texts speaking about killing, such as 2 Kgs 9:30-37, which graphically and shockingly
recounts the death of Isabel.
means of murder and more on the ethics of fratricide. It explains the events that made Cain angry toward God and jealous of his brother. It recounts God’s intervention and warning Cain of his proximity to sin. Then, with only a dozen words, it tells of the fratricide. Notably, two of the twelve Hebrew words mention that Abel is Cain’s brother.\(^{133}\) Like Genesis 22’s reminding readers of Isaac being Abraham’s son, this chapter reminds readers of Abel being Cain’s brother.

In contrast to the brevity with which the narrative recounts the murder, considerable time is spent on the moral and ethical consequences of what has transpired. In what many consider a prototypical lawsuit,\(^ {134}\) God responds to Cain’s murder not by hurling accusations, but with an invitation to confession: “Where is Abel your brother?” The human claims ignorance: “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” Cain’s response, particularly his question, is filled with significance. The key word is רֵעַ, *keeper*, which refers to watching over someone or something, providing sustenance and security. Cain implies that he is not his brother’s keeper, and that therefore he has no business knowing his brother’s location. In the context of this passage, Cain’s words have a sarcastic dimension. The word רֵעַ is often associated with shepherding (Gen 30:31; 1 Sam 17:20; Jer 31:10). Readers know from 4:2 that Abel, not Cain, tended to the flocks. When the elder brother asks if he is his brother’s keeper, he sarcastically

\(^{133}\) On the repetition of the word *brother* in his passage, see Gowan, *From Eden to Babel*, 63-64; Cotter, *Genesis*, 43.

alludes to this contrast. In essence, Cain asks if he should be a shepherd for the shepherd.\(^{135}\)

In addition to this sarcasm, Cain’s words also have an accusatory tone. They suggest that YHWH should have protected Abel if the deity truly cared for him. Several times in the Hebrew Bible, YHWH is portrayed as the keeper (שָׁמַר) of his people.\(^{136}\) Psalm 97:10, for example, describes YHWH as the “keeper of the lives of his faithful ones” (שָׁמַר יְשָׁרֵי תְמֵד), a God who “delivers them from the hand of the wicked” (נַגֵּד יָדֹן וְלָכָל). It is clear from Gen 4:8 that YHWH did not protect Abel or deliver him from the hand of Cain. The elder brother thus implies that if YHWH has a problem with the killing of Abel, then the deity should have prevented it, protecting the favored brother.\(^{137}\) Cain’s sarcastic and accusatory tone is somewhat shocking—not what one normally expects when individuals are confronted by their Maker. Cain’s words stress that his anger toward the divine has not abated even after the shedding of blood.

Finally, Cain’s words are significant because, as noted in §5.1, they allude to the possibility that there are alternatives to the path he himself has taken. His words hint that he may be a foil to other, greater characters, yet to come. In the text at hand, however, YHWH responds forcefully to Cain’s loaded question: “What have you done!” (4:10a). This question, like Cain’s, functions on more than one level. Most basically, it is a

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\(^{136}\) This theme is especially prominent in the Psalms: See 12:8; 41:3; 97:10; 116:6; 121:5, 7, 8; 140:5; 145:20; 146:9.

rhetorical question requiring no answer; YHWH, Cain, and the readers all know that Cain has killed his brother. On another level, the question asks both Cain and the readers to reflect on the implications of humanity’s first explicit sin. Cain has reified the disobedience of his parents. He has brought death into the world. He has irreparably shattered the human community. He has soaked the ground \((מָכָה)\) with his brother’s blood.

In 4:10b, YHWH presents the damning evidence: “Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground.” Abel has said nothing during this entire narrative, but now, after death, his blood cries out. While there is a figurative dimension in this narrative’s portrayal of blood crying out (cf. the creature crouching in 4:7), blood in the Hebrew Bible and ancient Near East carried magical associations connecting it with both life and death, as is the case here. The Hebrew word for *cries out* derives from the root \(נָאָס\), which frequently refers to the cry of the oppressed that beckons divine intervention.

Although YHWH did not prevent the slaughter of Abel, the deity brings punishment on the one who caused it:

\[

\text{v. 11} \quad \text{And now, you shall be cursed away from the ground, which opened its mouth to take the blood of your brother from your hand.} \\
\text{v. 12} \quad \text{When you work the ground, it shall no longer give you its power. You shall be a vagrant and a vagabond on the earth.}
\]

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138 The same is true of the analogous question in Gen 3:13.

139 Brayford, *Genesis*, 252-253.


This curse intensifies the punishment received by Cain’s parents in 3:17-19. In both cases, God’s punishment spills over humanity and onto the ground. As a result of Adam’s disobedience, difficulty, harm, and thorns will come from the earth. Because of Cain’s sin, the earth will be rendered powerless, unable to give its strength to Cain. McEntire suggests that the ground is, in essence, treated as an accomplice in Cain’s act of murder. It is blamed for swallowing Abel’s blood, and so it suffers punishment with Cain. No longer shall the ground be the source of nourishment and life for the one who used it for murder.

In what follows, Cain utters his final rebuttal against the ways of God (4:13-14):

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\text{In v. 13] Cain replied to YHWH, “My punishment is too heavy to lift. [v. 14] Consider—you have driven me from the face of the ground, and I shall be hidden from your face. I shall be a vagrant and a vagabond upon the earth. Anyone who finds me shall kill me.”}
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Some have interpreted these verses as Cain engaged in an act of repentance. Thus, Sailhamer sees this verse as pertaining to repentance because, he argues, God’s mercy in 4:15 can best be understood as a response to repentance. He furthermore points to the possibility of repentance in that Cain’s words could be translated, “My iniquity is

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142 McEntire, The Blood of Abel, 27-28. Alternatively, LaCocque, Onslaught against Innocence, 96, argues that the ground is on the side of Abel, punishing Cain for what he does.

143 Although the text does not use a verb like מָלַל (swallow) or מַגְדָּה (drink), it is difficult to escape this image when the text speaks specifically of the ground “open[ing] its mouth to take the blood from [Abel’s] hand” (מַגְדָּה אֱלֹהִים לֶחַת אֲדֹנִי אָדָם מַגְדָּה).  

144 The ground had already been cursed, appearing reluctant to yield its strength (3:17-19). Here, the curse intensifies as it will not yield at all for Cain.

too great to forgive” (מעשה וереיה). This translation would be possible, were it not for the lack of supporting evidence in the context. When one examines the content of Cain’s speech, he appears concerned only with his own livelihood. Everything in his speech expresses his worry about the harsh nature of his punishment. Indeed, the punishment is harsh, affecting virtually all parts of human existence, leading to desolate fields, homelessness, and being alone. He replies to this punishment with neither lamentation for Abel nor sorrow for his sin, but with words focused on himself.

Nevertheless, God answers Cain with words of assurance in v. 15:

[תהליה ותאשא קלח לא] לֹא דִּבְרֶה לוֹ אֵל וְלֹא חֲדְרֵיהָ וְלֹא נְשָׁה יָד וְלֹא לֹא מִתֶּה אֶת יהוה replied to him, “Not so. Anyone who kills Cain shall suffer a sevenfold vengeance.” Thus YHWH established a sign for Cain, lest any who find him strike him down.

Readers familiar with the Hebrew Bible’s law codes would expect Cain to face capital punishment for his murder. Even Cain appears to expect the same when he expresses fear for his own life. However, like his parents, Cain does not receive death as punishment, contrary to readers’ expectations. YHWH appears unwilling to take life as Cain did. In fact, this passage may be seen as at least a subtle critique of


147 Even fear of being hidden from God’s face is likely an expression of concern for his own well being. As passages like Num 6:24-26 illustrate, the divine face can be understood as a means of blessing. Its hiddenness, by implication, entails a lack of blessing, which concerns Cain here.

148 See the excellent discussion in Heyden, “Die Sünde Kains,” 106.

149 E.g., Exod 21:14; Lev 24:21; Num 35:30.
Deuteronomistic theology, doing more to emphasize the role of mercy in divine punishment.  

Yet, divine mercy is not limitless.  In Gen 4:7-8, YHWH did not prevent the killing of Abel; the divine being simply made clear that punishment would come if Abel was harmed.  Here, YHWH similarly does not ensure that Cain will never face violence; God merely promises that punishment shall follow those who commit such violence.  The text says that God established נְאַ מְלֵא כַּן, a Hebrew phrase that could be interpreted either as meaning “a sign on Cain” or “a sign for Cain.”  The former interpretation has been popular for many centuries, giving rise to speculations about ways that YHWH may have altered Cain’s appearance.  More likely, God’s words themselves constitute the sign, functioning as a lasting promise (see Job 21:29 for an analogous use of נְאַ; cf. Josh 2:8-14).  

Although God softens the punishment, Cain is not let off the hook.  The passage concludes in v. 16:


151 The א here could function as a locative lamed (“on”) or a lamed of specification (“for”).  Cf. \textit{IBHS}, 205-207, §11.2.10b, d; Arnold and Choi, \textit{A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax} 110, 113, §4.1.10[b, h]).  


153 See the persuasive arguments offered by Moberly, “The Mark of Cain,” 11-28, esp. 11-21, the details of which need not concern us here.
So\textsuperscript{154} Cain went away from YHWH and lived in the land of Vagrancy,\textsuperscript{155} east of Eden.

This concluding verse looks back to Adam and Eve’s expulsion from Eden. Cain has amplified the evil they committed. For while they ate a forbidden fruit, Cain has murdered his own flesh and blood. Later, in Cain’s descendent Lamech, readers see human violence increasing even further when Lamech boasts of killing a boy (4:23-24).\textsuperscript{156} As Alonso-Schökel observes, it is not just humanity that becomes fruitful and multiplies; violence does the same.\textsuperscript{157} In Gen 6:11-13, the constantly escalating violence of humanity causes God to send a worldwide flood. However, neither the flood nor the covenant that follows (which stresses nonviolence, 9:5-6) is able to expel the ghost of Cain. To address the issue of violence, the text must ultimately address what causes violence, namely, anger. The text focuses on this emotion repeatedly with the hope of preventing the murder and chaos that threaten human survival.

\textsuperscript{154} Cases have been made that the waw-particle always expresses consequence or dependence (IBHS, 470-475, §29.5). While such a claim is overstated and not always valid (ibid.), here at the outset of 4:16, the waw clearly expresses the consequence of Cain’s murder and God’s judgment. It thus functions on the intersentential level, working macrosyntactically to signal the conclusion and consequence of YHWH’s confrontation of Cain (cf. ibid., 634-635, §38.1e-h).

\textsuperscript{155} See Görg, “Kain und das ‘Land Nod,’” esp. 11-12, on the possible connections between the land of Nod (translated above as “Vagrancy”) and the Egyptian place-name Nedit.

\textsuperscript{156} The reference to a “sevenfold vengeance” in God’s promise to Cain (4:15) is echoed here with Lamech’s boast (4:24).

\textsuperscript{157} Alonso-Schökel, Tu hermano, 323.
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