

Cast Out and Cast Off: Hagar, Leah, and the God Who Sees

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Introduction

The patriarchal narratives of Genesis have long been read as paradigms of divine/human relationships. Abraham is often viewed as the exemplar of life in relationship with God, the man who follows God's initiative, believes God's promises, and is declared righteous as a result (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:1–25). Abraham's departure from Haran can be read as "a paradigmatic test of faith," while subsequent interactions with the LORD display "the human attitude toward the proffered salvation" that presents "in an exemplary and vivid fashion the activity and passivity of the person called."¹ Isaac and Jacob demonstrate, in different ways, God's ability and faithfulness to continue and protect divine promises in the face of various challenges and detours. Jacob is "a work in progress—another of God's reclamation projects" who "has done nothing to deserve God's attention" but who nevertheless receives God's presence and comfort.²

The stories of the matriarchs, on the other hand, have generally been viewed as ancillary to or dependent on the patriarchal narratives.³ Conventional interpretation sees Sarah, Hagar, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel as agents who play important yet marginal roles in the Genesis story, primarily through bearing sons. Yet, the biblical narrative often conveys its most powerful truths through stories that arise in counterpoint to those that carry the main plot. This is true particularly of the stories of the matriarchs. At key junctures in Genesis, women emerge as the subjects of their own stories, inviting readers into the lives of those who do not occupy center stage in the overall narrative.

While it is true that the stories of women are not prominent in Genesis, this does not mean that the stories are any less significant or exemplary. Rather, women's stories—and particularly those of the ancestral mothers—subtly destabilize the symbolic infrastructure of patriarchy by challenging the hierarchies of gender, ethnicity, and social class that configure it. In the metaphorical universe of patriarchy, women constitute the "other" necessary for the construction of male identity, the "is not" to the male "is," the peripheral as opposed to the central.⁴ As such, women in biblical texts often represent the powerless and marginalized in society.⁵

The stories of the matriarchs counter and subvert the operations of patriarchy by presenting a God who blesses women irrespective of their location within the world of men and who enters the lives of women to correct inequities. Hagar and Leah offer especially vivid accounts. Neither woman has value or voice as their stories begin, yet both receive dignity and compassion from the God Who Sees. Their stories may also be read as paradigms of the divine/human relationship, but from the periphery as opposed to the center. Hagar's account takes up the structure and themes of Abraham's story and repeats them to relate the LORD's blessing of an Egyptian slave woman. Leah's story portrays the LORD's determination to bring equity between the privileged and

the discarded. Together, the stories demonstrate that the LORD's commitments transcend the divisions and distinctions that define human worth in a world gone bad.

Hagar and Abram: the promise given

The first episode of Hagar's story (16:1–16) occurs between two passages in which the LORD makes a covenant with Abram and elaborates upon the promise to multiply Abram's seed (15:1–21; 17:1–27). The narrator introduces her by marking her identity within the three main categories that divide human beings from each other—gender, social class, and ethnicity—and naming the relationship that defines her place within the system: "she [Sarai] had a female slave, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar" (v. 1).⁶ Although the narrator affirms Hagar's personhood by mentioning her name, Sarai refers to Hagar only as "my slave girl" (v. 2), after which the narrator (in the Hebrew text) repeats her identity in reverse order ("Hagar, the Egyptian, her female slave," v. 3). Hagar is thereby cast as the opposite of Abram, the "exalted father" who stands at the center of the larger narrative. He is a wealthy Semitic man of means; she is an Egyptian slave woman. To emphasize this polarity, the narrator pointedly reiterates Hagar's outsider identity at key junctures in the story (16:7; 21:9–13) and at the final mention of Hagar in Genesis ("Hagar the Egyptian, the slave-girl of Sarah," 25:12). In the world of Abraham and Sarah, Hagar is the quintessential outsider.

As in the surrounding texts, the central concern of this story is offspring, although in this case it is Sarai's anxiety rather than Abram's that propels the plot (cf. 15:2–5). Sarai is childless. She demands that Abram go into Hagar, and Abram complies. Hagar for her part has no voice as her body is bartered to serve the desires of others. Hagar's pregnancy, however, precipitates a renegotiation of relationships between the two women and Abram (v. 4). Having been elevated to the status of a wife, Hagar seems to see herself more as Sarai's equal than Sarai's slave.⁷ Sarai, though, will have none of it. She rebukes Abram, reasserts Hagar's status as a slave, and appeals to the LORD (v. 5). Abram responds by reaffirming the original hierarchy ("your slave-girl is in your power") and granting Sarai the authority to do as she pleases with Hagar (v. 6). This Sarai does with a vengeance, and Hagar flees (v. 7).

Hagar's flight into the wilderness is remarkable in many respects. First, it is the only instance in Genesis in which the LORD

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(through the agency of the angel) carries on a conversation with a woman. Second, the LORD promises to multiply Hagar's seed greatly (v. 9b), an astonishing turn of phrase, as "seed" issues from males, not females, in the thinking of the time.⁸ Third, she is the only individual in Genesis who names the LORD (v. 13a), significant not only because the LORD elsewhere names himself, but also because naming may suggest to a hierarchal mindset an elevation of the one naming over the one named (cf. Gen. 3:20, 17:3-5, 32:28-29, 35:10-12).

Remarkable as well are the parallels with the story of Abram's calling (Gen. 12:1-9). Hagar's journey into the wilderness echoes Abram's journey from Haran. Like Abram, Hagar leaves a household by her own volition (albeit under duress) and journeys into a strange land with no specific destination in sight. The LORD speaks to her as he does to Abram, issuing a command followed by a promise (vv. 9-11; cf. 12:1-3), the core of which speaks of descendants of such a vast number that they cannot be counted (v. 9; cf. 12:1, 15:5). Finally, the biblical narrator marks the place of the promise as a sacred site, as is the case when Abram enters the Promised Land at Shechem (vv. 13-14; cf. 12:6-8).

Hagar's story, however, takes the parallel elements in opposite directions. The LORD begins his speech to Hagar with a question about her destination ("Where have you come from, and where are you going?" v. 8a), while the LORD instead directs Abram to an undisclosed location ("Leave your country, your kindred, and your father's household toward the land I will show you" 12:1). The LORD's promise and command initiate Abram's journey from Haran. The LORD's promise of descendants comes to Hagar, however, while she is already on her journey, and the LORD's command directs her to go back rather than go out (v. 9b); Hagar thus returns to suffering in her household rather than leaving her household propelled by the blessing of God. The LORD speaks to Abram about a land and a destiny that associates descendants with blessing (12:1-3). To Hagar, on the other hand, the LORD speaks of an unsettled and contentious future for her son; "his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him" (16:12) counters the promise that "all the families of the earth will be blessed by you" (12:3). Finally, Abram's encounter with the LORD occurs in Haran, a major urban center, while Hagar's takes place in the unbounded space of the wilderness, a symbolic place of transition and reconfiguration. In short, the first episode of Hagar's story incorporates the motifs of theophany, promise, and journey that configure the first episode of Abram's story, but re-orient these motifs in opposing directions. The LORD comes to Hagar with commands and promises, just as he does to Abram, but proclaims a future for each that emanates from their particular experiences and circumstances.

Hagar and Abraham: the promise tested

The second episode of Hagar's story (21:8-21) is nestled between two texts that recount Abraham's dealings with outsiders named Abimelech (20:1-17, 21:22-34) and shortly before the sacrifice of Isaac (22:1-19). Here again, conflict with Sarah propels the plot. At issue this time is not the status of the women in relation to Abra-

ham, but the status of their sons. Once again, Hagar's opposing identity comes to the fore. The narrator explicitly identifies Hagar by her ethnicity ("Hagar the Egyptian," v. 9), while both Sarah and the LORD refer to her by her gender and social class ("slave girl," vv. 10-13).⁹ Sarah observes "Hagar's son" laughing and commands Abraham to expel both mother and child.¹⁰ In this instance, however, Sarah's command provokes distress rather than immediate compliance in Abraham. The LORD intervenes, directing Abraham to heed his wife and banish the son while assuring him that Ishmael will become the progenitor of a great nation.

The LORD thus sends Hagar on a solitary journey with her son in much the same way he will send Abraham and Isaac to Moriah in the following chapter (22:1-19). Interpreters have long recognized that an intricate tapestry of structural, lexical, and thematic parallels connects the binding of Isaac to Hagar's expulsion.¹¹ In both episodes, Abraham arises early in the morning to provision a journey (21:14a, 22:3) that by all appearances will result in the death of his son (Ishmael by thirst, Isaac by sacrifice). Both stories poignantly lift up the turmoil, actual and potential, that the parents endure as they contemplate the deaths of their children (21:16, 22:4-8). In both cases, God intervenes at the last moment and miraculously spares the sons, allowing the parents to see with their own eyes the manner of God's deliverance (21:19, 22:10-14).

The parallel stories link God's salvation with the promises God makes originally to the parents, although again there is variation within the common structure. In the case of Isaac, the Angel of the LORD stops Abraham from plunging the knife into his son, and the father then sees a ram caught in a thicket (22:12-13). The story concludes with an expansive repetition of the promise God gave Abraham when he was called from Haran (22:17-18). In the case of Ishmael, the mother sits passively at a distance waiting for her son to die. God responds to the mother's weeping, and the Angel of God appears to her, reiterating succinctly the divine promise that Ishmael will become the father of a great nation (21:18). The mother then sees a well that will save the life of her son, and the water revives him.

Another parallel structure links the second episode of Hagar's story to the first, in this case joining the end with the beginning by telling the second story in the same manner as the first. The two episodes of Hagar's story appropriate a two-part structure that begins with conflict between Hagar and Sarah (16:4, 21:9). In both cases, Sarah's protest to Abram/Abraham results in a declaration that she may do with Hagar as she pleases (16:5-6a, 21:10-12). As a consequence, Hagar leaves the household and goes into the wilderness (16:6b; 21:14). The plot then shifts direction when the Angel of the LORD/God appears to Hagar, asks a question, and consoles her with a promise that her son will be great (16:10-12, 21:17-18). The common story concludes with a reference to a well (16:13-14, 21:19).¹²

A similar technique is utilized to join the binding of Isaac (22:1-19) with the call of Abram (12:1-9). As in Hagar's story, structural and lexical allusions connect the beginning and end of the Abraham cycle to bring the story full circle. In both episodes,

Abraham responds promptly to a divine command to go to a land and a place that God will reveal (a destination called Moreh in the first instance and Moriah in the second).¹³ In both cases, he goes without protest or question.

The various structural and thematic parallels that connect all the stories convey, via subtlety, a crucial point: The journey the honored father takes with the LORD is not unique. God enters the life and circumstances of the outcast mother in much the same way, with command and promise, turmoil and testing, and salvation and assurance. Abraham's story and Hagar's story are one and the same, the only substantive difference being that Abraham's represents the view from the center, and Hagar's represents the view from the periphery. Hagar, like Abraham, has received the promise that her seed will be great, and the LORD precipitates a crisis in her life as well. She also must face the death of her son and the promise he personifies. A powerless outcast, she enters the wilderness through no choice of her own and can manage only a cry of despair (21:16). Abraham, by contrast, is the central figure in the household—and in the larger story—and journeys, in response to a divine command, with quiet faith and determination. Both, however, experience the LORD's deliverance and find the LORD faithful to the promises he has made. Hagar's expulsion completes her story with deliverance and confirmation, just as the binding of Isaac completes Abraham's. In this way, the narrator elevates the Egyptian slave woman to an equivalency with the ancestral father. The message is unmistakable: Human hierarchies of ethnicity, class, and gender make little difference in the way the LORD speaks to and interacts with those at the center and those on the periphery. God takes the paradigmatic outcast on a journey of promise and salvation, just as he does the paradigmatic insider.

Leah and Rachel: the LORD takes sides

Leah's story relates a different kind of leveling. Here again, the story concerns women enmeshed in a system that values one over the other. Leah and Rachel, however, do not so much represent the insider/outsider polarity as they do competing valuations within the system; both are insiders. The narrative of the two women, furthermore, presents contrasting encounters with the LORD rather than parallel ones. In this case, the LORD takes sides to elevate the status of one against the other and ultimately to bring justice for the rejected one.

Leah appears in the narrative only after the narrator has introduced Rachel in considerable detail, with an emphasis on the latter's relationship to the men at the center of the larger story (i.e., Jacob and Laban; 29:1–14). She makes her entrance in a section that emphasizes Rachel's desirability. We are twice informed that Jacob loves Rachel (vv. 18, 20) to such an extent that he is willing to indenture himself to Laban for seven years.¹⁴ Leah is described in counterpoint to Rachel, and the descriptions of both women focus on their physical attributes. Rachel is a woman of "striking figure and striking appearance," but Leah's salient attribute is

her "weak eyes" (29:17). The meaning of the Hebrew phrase here translated "weak eyes" is obscure, but it cannot be complimentary, for, as the following episode strongly suggests, Laban apparently cannot obtain a husband for Leah apart from subterfuge.¹⁵

The introduction via physical description thus contrasts the two women according to one of the ways men value women within the patriarchy—that is, their physical attractiveness and sexual desirability.

The terse account of Leah's wedding to Jacob (29:21–30) accentuates the contrast between the two women, who now find themselves bound in an unequal relationship with the same man. Jacob expresses consternation, if not outrage, that Laban has saddled him with Leah (v. 25) and has tricked him into working an additional seven years for Rachel (vv. 27–28, 30). We are, therefore, invited to enter Leah's circumstances and ponder her plight. She is bound to a man who has been trapped into marrying her and who loves someone else, an agonizing situation that the narrator sums up with the understated comment that Jacob "loved Rachel more than Leah" (v. 30a).

The loved/unloved opposition, however, becomes the hinge on which the narrative turns (vv. 30–31). The LORD enters the story on the side of the one who is unloved and evens things up by elevating Leah's worth and diminishing Rachel's. In the world of men, a woman's ability to produce more males also makes her valuable. Observing that Leah is unloved, the LORD opens her womb and closes Rachel's. In so doing, God intervenes on behalf of the one who, up to this point, has had no say in the fundamental decisions that affect her life. Rachel has been valued and loved because of her physical attractiveness. The LORD now works so that Leah, too, may find worth, particularly in the eyes of her husband.

Up to this point, Leah has not spoken within her own story, reinforcing our sense of her isolation and powerlessness. With the naming of her children, however, she speaks with words that express both her anguish and the hope the LORD has given her (29:32–35). She has had no say in being joined to a man who does not love her. Yet, as she names her children, we begin to realize the depth of her longing and isolation as well as the comfort she now takes in knowing that the LORD cares for her. Her joy at the birth of her first child is so overwhelming that she can do little more than utter an exclamation: "Look! A son!" (Reuben). Then she speaks for the first time of her deepest desire and of the recognition that God sees her: "The LORD has noticed my torment; my husband will surely love me now" (v. 32). The birth of a second son, however, suggests that her suffering continues and her desire is yet unrealized: "The LORD heard that I am rejected" (v. 33). The name she gives this son thus evokes the LORD's "hearing" (Simeon). At the birth of a third son (Levi), we realize that she tenaciously holds to her hope that Jacob will finally be joined to her as she is joined to him: "Now this time my husband will be bound to me, for I have borne him three sons" (v. 34). Finally, with the birth of Judah, she confirms her faith in the source of her hope, the God who knows and cares about her plight: "This time I will thank the LORD" (v. 35).

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The LORD has not been so kind to Rachel. Having enjoyed the attention of men and the affection of her husband, she now experiences the humiliation of childlessness and grows jealous, finally exploding with her own words of anguish: "Give me sons, or I will die!" (30:1). Jacob, however, knows that the LORD is to blame for Rachel's childlessness and snaps back in anger, "Am I in the place of the LORD, who has denied you the fruit of the womb?" (v. 2). The LORD's intervention on Leah's behalf thus also results in conflict and a degree of separation between Rachel and Jacob. Jacob may not yet be "bound" to Leah, but he is no longer as bound as he was to Rachel. And Rachel now endures some of the degradation that Leah has experienced in a man's world.

On the heels of Jacob's response, Rachel takes matters into her own hands. The LORD's action and inaction generate a spirit of competition, as Rachel tries to even things up herself. The two women give Jacob sons through their slaves, who act as surrogates.¹⁶ Left unexplained is why Leah responds in kind to Rachel's giving of her slave. Why does Leah give her own slave to Jacob in turn? Why has Leah stopped bearing sons?

The story of the mandrakes (30:14–21), in which Leah negotiates for Jacob's conjugal attention, suggests an answer. When Leah's son Reuben finds mandrakes, a plant believed to enhance fertility, Rachel demands that she be given some. Leah, however, responds with a vehemence that brings to the surface the indignation she feels: "Isn't it enough that you've taken my husband? Now you want my son's mandrakes as well?" Rachel, however, sees an opportunity to strike a deal and offers to trade a night with Jacob for the mandrakes. The deal ostensibly works to the benefit of both women and intimates why Leah has stopped bearing sons. If she must barter for a night with Jacob, she has not been sharing his bed.

When Jacob returns from a hard day's work, Leah meets him and informs him that he will be sleeping with her that evening. Her straightforward command injects reversal into the account; in this polygamous culture, it is the man who tells the women who will share his bed on any given night. The command also gives Leah a significant measure of agency which, in a sense, settles the score with Jacob. Leah had no say in the nocturnal fiasco that consummated her marriage to Jacob, for the initiative lay with Jacob (29:21–25). Now, however, as her story reaches its consummation, Leah seizes the initiative and orders Jacob to sleep with her. Having once been the object of a transaction between two men, Leah now renders Jacob the object of a transaction between two women (cf. 29:26–30).

One night of lovemaking does the trick, gives the LORD the opportunity to work, and reminds Jacob why he had slept with Leah earlier: Leah produces sons (30:17). The narrator subsequently presents evidence of Jacob's renewed interest in her. After the birth of her fifth son, Leah bears a sixth, whom she names Issachar and Zebulun, respectively. Significant in the naming of these children is the fact that Leah continues the shift in perspective from Jacob to the LORD, which she signaled at Judah's birth (29:35). In naming the three older sons, Leah expresses her hope of being joined to Jacob; in the names of the younger three, she

acknowledges the God who has raised her to honor by giving her sons (30:20). A seventh child, a daughter, renders a sense of completion for Leah.

Only after this completion does God open Rachel's womb (30:22). The comment that God "remembered" Rachel indicates that the LORD has not been unaware of the suffering she has endured because of her inability to bear sons (cf. 1 Sam. 1:11, 19). The LORD has not been "against" Rachel, but, instead, has intervened to bring parity between the two women. Rachel's beauty attracted her husband; Leah's unsightliness turned him away. Rachel was loved; Leah was unloved. The LORD's opening and closing of wombs, however, has evened things up. Leah produces sons; Rachel is childless. Rachel receives harsh words from her husband; Leah directs Jacob to her bed.

While the thread of interaction between the two women ends with the birth of Joseph (30:24), the reports of their deaths extend and complete the leveling impulse of the birth stories. The narrator later elaborates the circumstances of Rachel's death during the birth of her second son (35:16–20). Rachel dies on the way to Ephrath and is buried, alone, at a site that Jacob marks with a pillar. Information about Leah's death, however, appears indirectly, and not until Jacob's story nears its end. Facing his own death, Jacob gives his sons instructions to bury him in the plot of ground where his parents and grandparents are buried (49:29–33). As he does so, he mentions Leah, and so symbolically enfolds her within the patriarchal household: "There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife. There they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife. And there I buried Leah" (49:31). Leah thus completes the burial formula in relation to Jacob, who mentions her in the same breath as Sarah and Rebekah. Later generations will finish the formula with, "There they buried Jacob and Leah his wife." In the end, Leah is also remembered and honored. Rachel sleeps with Jacob in life; Leah sleeps with him in death.

God and the matriarchs

The LORD's response to the rejected and outcast in the persons of Hagar and Leah illustrates his involvement in a world where distinctions of gender, class, and ethnicity privilege some and oppress others. The LORD speaks words of blessing and promise to both the insider and the outcast. When the promise seems all but lost, the LORD proves faithful and brings deliverance for both the exalted father and the banished mother. The LORD enters a world configured by corrupted systems of value and brings justice for the unloved and ignored. The LORD is the God who sees the rejected and the neglected, who views people differently. In the LORD's eyes, people matter more than human hierarchies. Read as paradigms, the stories of Hagar and Leah challenge us to align our vision of human worth with God's over against a warped vision that assigns value according to the divisive systems and operations that configure a fallen world. As portraits of the LORD's activity within the world, these stories also encourage us to participate in the mission of the God who is at work in the world to dignify the disadvantaged and correct inequities.

Notes

1. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, rev. ed., Old Testament Library, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster, 1956), 166, 190.
2. John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001), 574.
3. Feminist interpreters, on the other hand, have read the patriarchal stories as worthy of attention in their own right. See, for example, the relevant chapters and essays in Tammi J. Schneider, *Mothers of Promise: Women in the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2008); Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Just Wives: Stories of Power and Survival in the Old Testament and Today* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2003); Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster John Knox, 1994); Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1993); Kathryn Pfisterer Darr, *Far More Precious than Jewels: Perspectives on Biblical Women* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1991); and Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1984).
4. See, for example, Carol A. Newsom, "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1989), 142–60.
5. Ruth, Rahab, and the widow of Zarephath stand out among many examples.
6. All translations are the author's.
7. The Hebrew text that reports Hagar's attitude toward Sarai has been uniformly translated as though Hagar acted haughtily or contemptuously. The particular perspective, however, cannot be specified with certainty. It could also mean that Sarai had been lowered in Hagar's eyes; that is, that Hagar as a wife no longer respects Sarai's authority.
8. "Offspring" or "descendants" often translate the Hebrew word for "seed." In the thought-world of the ancient Near East, the womb was the earth in which the man's seed took root and grew into "fruit." The other exceptional reference to a woman having seed occurs in the LORD God's declaration to the serpent that he would set enmity "between your seed and her (Eve's) seed" (Gen. 3:15).
9. Neither Abraham nor Sarah ever utters Hagar's name.

10. The fact that Ishmael's name is not given suggests that Sarah does not regard him as a person, or at least as the equal of her son, Isaac. It is not clear what kind of laughing Ishmael is doing. Translators draw various conclusions, that is, that Ishmael was teasing or playing. The point is that Sarah perceives Ishmael's laughing as a threat to Isaac's ability to inherit. The threat is accentuated by the participial form of the same verb that makes up Isaac's name; Ishmael also becomes "one who laughs."

11. Hugh C. White, "The Initiation Legend of Isaac," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 91 (1979), 1–29, subsequently elaborated by Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1984), 34–35; Gordon W. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1994), 99–101; S. Nikaido, "Hagar and Ishmael as Literary Figures: An Intertextual Study," *Vetus Testamentum* 51 (2001), 219–29; David W. Cotter, *Genesis*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2003), 146–51.

12. These and other parallels have led many interpreters to the conclusion that the two episodes reflect different versions of a single event. T. D. Alexander, however, has argued persuasively that significant elements of both stories indicate that they report different events; "The Hagar Traditions in Genesis xvi and xx," in *Studies in the Pentateuch*, ed. J. A. Emerton (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 131–48. It is probable that two different events have been rendered according to a common pattern for literary effect.

13. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1972), 2:310; Karel A. Deurloo, "Because You Have Harkened to My Voice (Genesis 22)," in *Voices from Amsterdam*, Semeia Studies (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1994), 113–30.

14. Rachel is presented as a commodity bartered between men in order to solidify a mutually advantageous relationship (vv. 15, 18–20).

15. For the view that the term is complimentary, see Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 258–59.

16. The allusion to Hagar in the persons of Bilhah and Zilpah unites these stories poignantly and provocatively and reminds the reader that privilege and power configure the system in multiple ways. Having entered Hagar's story, we can identify with Bilhah and Zilpah as well.

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