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OBSERVATIONS ON OLD TESTAMENT KINSHIP RELATIONS AND TERMINOLOGY[1]

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Introduction

In recent decades, biblical scholars have begun to apply insights drawn from specific disciplines of anthropology to interpreting the text of the Hebrew Scriptures. The underlying motivation for this relatively new approach to studying the Bible is the growing appreciation by scholars of the fact that ancient cultures, such as the one in which the Hebrew Scriptures were produced, often share common features and patterns of behavior or thought with certain cultures that exist today. Thus, an anthropologist who has studied some of these existing cultures may notice and understand what he encounters in the Scriptures better than a reader who is limited to the experience of only his own culture. Even a biblical scholar may not notice or comprehend certain phenomena in Scripture if his experience of the biblical cultures has been limited to the study of texts. Though Ancient Near Eastern documents from the cultures surrounding Canaan obviously help to interpret the Scriptures, they do not tell the whole story of how the ancient Semites perceived their world. However, the anthropologist who has been personally immersed in an existing culture similar in certain respects to that of ancient Israel can sometimes see a broader picture of how people in that culture thought, and thereby have a better understanding of lower-level cultural elements which were never considered important enough to have been explicitly documented in ancient texts.[2]

One very important field of anthropological analysis that can aid in interpreting biblical narrative is the study of kinship terminology and systems of kinship structure. Anthropologists realized early on that various cultures around the world perceive family relationships in radically different ways, and that the particular way in which a culture understands kinship structure can "exert great influence on the way people think and behave in both domestic and extra-domestic situations" (Harris 1995:122).

A major difference between the modern Western system of kinship and that of the ancient Hebrews is in the concept of descent. Descent can be defined as "the belief that certain persons play an important role in the creation, birth, and nurturance of certain children" (Harris 1995:120). All human societies have some notion of what relationships constitute a proper descent pattern. For Americans, Europeans and some other cultures, family descent is traced *bilaterally* (a person is equally related to both his father's and mother's side of the family). Thus, an American person's father's brother (FaBr)[3] and mother's brother (MoBr) are

1 I am indebted to Pete Unseth of SIL and David Clark of UBS for their valuable input concerning several of the issues at hand.

2 See the introduction to Lang 1985 for a fuller presentation of the usefulness of anthropology to biblical studies.

3 The abbreviations for kinship terms in this paper follow a standard common in anthropological literature: Fa = father, Mo = mother, Br = brother, Si= sister, Ch= child, So = son, Da = daughter, Wi=wife.

considered to have the same relation to that person, and both are therefore called "uncle" in English. There is no inherent distinction between the types of responsibilities that the mother's side of the family and the father's side of the family have toward the person.

For the ancient Hebrews, on the other hand, descent was traced unilineally, specifically *patrilineally* (a person shares clan affiliation with only the children of males on his father's side of the family). For example, a Hebrew would count his paternal grandfather as his clan relative, but not his maternal grandfather. Though the patrilineal descent system may seem strange to egalitarian Westerners, it is the statistically normal mode of social organization around the world (Harris 1995: 126). In fact, there is a close correspondence cross-culturally between the economic mode of a people group and its social organization, in that pastoral peoples and intensive agriculturists, such as the ancient Hebrews, are quite often patrilineal (Schusky 1972:25).

One major defining feature of unilineal descent groups in general (and thus of patrilineal ones in particular) is that they have a very well-defined membership core, as opposed to bilateral systems which tend to have kindred groups of undefined size. This leads to a heightened sense of group solidarity, and to an ideology of exclusive rights over resources and people (Harris 1995:126). Because of this tight group identity, many religious, economic, and political rights, as well as material goods, belong to the group as a whole, not to individual members of the lineage (Schusky 1972:25).

In all societies and descent systems, members have a certain status that is *ascribed* to them merely by virtue of their particular relationships to others in the society. An example of a wide-ranging ascribed status system is the traditional caste system in India. People belong to the same caste as their parents for the rest of their lives, and it is impossible for them to move up or down into another caste. A more universal example of ascribed status is that of "child." Every single person in the world has this status, without any choice on their part. Ascribed status differs from status which is *achieved* by members of a society through actions which they may perform in their lifetime. Thus, people can achieve the status of "spouse" by getting married, or the status of "parent" by either having their own children or adopting other people's children. In our own society, a person's career is usually considered to be an achieved status; this would not always be the case in the above-mentioned Indian caste system, where certain types of employment belong to ascribed status (for example, the street-sweeper caste.)

With these different types of status are associated different *roles* which people are expected to perform in order to be considered by other members of society as acting properly. In American middle-class society, parents are expected to raise, nourish, and provide for the needs of their children until they finish high school. However, parents are then expected to let their children loose to pursue independent lives. This society does not expect the parents to find spouses for their children; in fact, when parents try to do this, they are considered to be meddling in their children's personal lives. This role is very different from that of parents in many other cultures, where they are expected to arrange marriages for their children. If they do not fulfill this obligation, they are looked upon as bad parents who have failed to provide a vital necessity for their children.

In this article, I would like to apply some of these anthropological concepts to help us better understand (and thus to produce better translations of) certain passages from the Hebrew Scriptures. I will first examine an important issue in translating kinship terminology. Then I will focus our attention on two particular kinship relations that we encounter in the Hebrew Scriptures as ascribed statuses. In looking at these relations and the roles entailed by them, I take the "internal perspective"—the point of view of the individual inside the ancient Hebrew patrilineal descent system. This is opposite to the "external perspective" which some biblical scholars take on kinship descriptions in the Scriptures, namely that the kinship relations described should be understood as merely symbols of how the author's contemporary sociopolitical system was formed (that is, the author's historical hindsight molded his construction of the kinship roles in the text.)[1] Though the external perspective may be valid in certain cases (for example, Esau's marriages with foreign women [Gen 26.34] as one of the reasons for the separation of Edom from Israel), the internal perspective is very important to understand as well. The ancient author would surely present the kinship relations and roles in a pattern that his audience would understand and be able to evaluate as acceptable or not. Even if he did invent mythical unions to justify political issues, we would at least expect that the structure presented matched that of Israelite society of his own day.

Kinship terms

A proper understanding of kinship terminology is very important to a correct understanding of kinship structure in a society. The way that people in a specific culture verbally categorize their relatives is usually closely related to how they classify their familial relationship and obligations to these individuals. With each different type of kinship system, there is a different emic (culturally internal) correspondence between the terms used and the people they can refer to within a family. For example, it is cross-culturally typical in unilineal descent groups to distinguish the terminology between cross cousins and parallel cousins (Harris 1995:129), since each type of cousin has different actual and potential roles to fulfill. In American English, however, we do not distinguish between these two types of relatives, calling both "cousin."

Despite the importance of understanding kinship terminology, very little research has been done in this field for biblical Hebrew[2]. This lack of emic awareness on the part of some biblical scholars has led to misunderstandings and misinterpretations of certain passages in Scripture where kinship terms are involved. For example, there is an assumption made by some commentators on Genesis that the accounts of Rebekah's family relationships in Genesis belong to divergent traditions[3]. This is supported by noting contradictions in references to kin relations such as the following. In Gen 24.47, Rebekah claims to be "the daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son," while in the next verse, Abraham's servant

1 See Steinberg 1993:6-7, for a more detailed description of these perspectives. Steinberg succinctly states her own position on page 19, fn.30, that though she does not believe the Genesis accounts to be historical, she assumes "a correspondence between the ideology in the texts and the society responsible for producing them."

2 From the existence of good translations, though, we can see that the differences between Hebrew and European language kin terms have been understood intuitively by some scholars.

3 See commentary on Gen 24.48-50 and 29.5 in Westermann 1985.

refers to her as "my master's brother's daughter," understood by some to mean "Abraham's niece" (cf. REB). Similarly, in Gen 29.5, Jacob refers to Laban as "son of Nahor," whereas in 28.2 and other passages, he seems to be the son of Bethuel, who is the son of Nahor.

This type of misunderstanding is based on the faulty principle of translating kinship terms with a one-to-one lexical correspondence between Hebrew and European languages. Commentators who consider these cases to be contradictions seem to have ignored the fact that Hebrew has both primary and extended references[1] for many of its kinship terms. The term *'āḇ*, usually translated "father" in English, also has a common vertically extended reference, by the principle of *lineal extension*, to any male predecessor directly in a person's lineage. The term "ancestor" is thus a much more appropriate translation in many cases, since contemporary English uses the term "father" exclusively for the primary reference to a person's direct progenitor. The term *bēn*, usually translated "son," extends vertically down a person's lineage, including any male descendant, regardless of how many generations come between. The same is true of *baṯ*, "daughter" and "female descendant." In the case of Gen 29.5, "Laban, *bēn nāḥôr*" should be translated "Laban, Nahor's grandson" (cf. NIV, REB, TEV), since this specific relationship has already been clearly established in previous passages (Gen 24.29; 28.5).

A principle analogous to lineal extension is *generation extension*. By this principle, some primary kin terms are extended to collateral (horizontal) kindred groups belonging to the same generation. In Hebrew, the term *'āḥ*, whose primary reference is "brother," can be extended by a combination of the lineal and generational extension principles, even outside of a person's patrilineage. This is why a person can call his MoBr simply *'āḥ* (Gen 29.12; Judg 9.3), as well as *'āḥ 'ēm*. A catch-all translation into English, a language that does not use these extension principles for most primary kin terms, used by the RSV for this term is "kinsman." The Living Bible translates even more generally as "relative." Using one of these broad translation equivalents when it is justified can reduce misinterpretations such as those caused by the above-mentioned passages in Genesis.

Parallel-cousin relations

A very important practical consequence of a unilineal descent system is that it segregates the children of opposite-sex siblings into different categories (Harris 1995:121). While in Western societies, a cross cousin (MoBrCh and FaSiCh) has the same social relationship to a person as does a parallel cousin (MoSiCh and FaBrCh), the scriptural data indicate that this was not the case for the ancient Hebrews. The patrilineal nature of their society dictated that patrilateral parallel cousins belonged to the same clan, since their fathers were brothers. This did not apply to matrilateral parallel cousins, since even though the mothers of the children were sisters, the children belonged to the patrilineage of their respective fathers, which would always be different patrilineages (except for the case of two brothers marrying two sisters or some other unusual cases.) Cross cousins, both patrilateral and matrilateral, usually would not belong to the same patrilineage either, since their respective fathers could not be brothers.

1 See Merrifield 1983:375-378 for a full discussion of primary and extended reference.

Another important cultural factor related to the differences in cousin relationships was that the ancient Hebrews preferred *endogamous* marriage. Parents would try to have their children marry only spouses belonging to their own descent group. This practice is reflected in the commandment concerning the daughters of Zelophehad in Num 36.6, "Let them marry whom they think best; only, they shall marry within the family of the tribe of their father." That this practice was seen as desirable by the Hebrews can be seen in Judg 14.3, where Samson's parents lament the fact that their son wants to marry a Philistine woman—"Is there not a woman among the daughters of your kinsmen, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" This text shows certain levels of endogamy preference. Ideally, Samson's spouse would be a woman from his kinsmen (that is, his patrilineage); if he did not want to marry one of them, his parents would have preferred any Hebrew woman, rather than for Samson to marry a foreigner. Another text that may be taken as confirming the Hebrew preference for endogamous marriage is Judg 12.9, which specifically mentions that Ibzan gave his children away in marriage "outside" (*haḥûṣāh*), probably to another tribe of Israel, but possibly to foreigners. This passage occurs in the section of Judges which is detailing the rapid moral decline of the Israelites after entering Canaan. There would seem to be no reason for this detail to be mentioned here unless the author was trying to use it as an instantiation of this moral decline. Besides these explicit passages dealing with issues of endogamy, several tribal-endogamous marriages are recorded in the Scriptures (for example, Exod 2.1, Moses' parents both of Levi; Luke 1.5, Zechariah and Elizabeth both of Levi; Joseph and Mary both of Judah, if the Luke 3 genealogy is of Mary).

An important reason for preferring endogamous marriage was that it kept the inheritance within the patrilineage (Steinberg 1993:12, 139), as commanded in Num 36.6-9. If a father gave away his daughter to marry a man outside of his clan, he would be giving away not only her dowry, but also her children, a very valuable resource, to another patrilineage. This concern with maintaining a proper inheritance pattern was primary for the Hebrew patriarchs, mostly because the promise they received from God had as an essential component the possession of the promised land. Exogamous marriage of an Israelite woman to a foreign man resulted in the children of this union leaving the promised land to live in their father's house. Exogamous marriage of an Israelite man to a foreign woman resulted in fewer appropriate bridegrooms for Israelite women. Only endogamous marriage within the tribe and within the nation of Israel insured that both the material resources and the people would remain in the same place, and not add to the danger of ethnic/national fragmentation.

The issue of endogamy may have been involved in the selection of the son through whom the inheritance would pass in the Genesis narratives (Prewitt 1981:92; Steinberg 1993:11). Ishmael and Esau both married exogamously (although Esau tried to rectify this problem by later marrying Ishmael's daughter, Gen 28.6-9), while their respective siblings Isaac and Jacob married endogamously.[1] From a theological point of view, these choices were not

1 Another example may be Joseph's exogamous marriage to the Egyptian Asenath, which may explain why Israel had to formally re-accept Ephraim and Manasseh into his lineage (Gen 48.5-6). But see Franz Steiner, "Enslavement in the Early Hebrew Lineage System," in Lang 1985, for a different explanation.

necessarily the cause of the rejection of Ishmael and Esau, each the first-born son, from the lineage inheritance; after all, God made it clear to Rebekah that the younger son would rule over the elder even before they were born (Gen 25.23). Rather, the improper marriages of Ishmael and Esau merely confirmed that they were not the chosen sons.

This framework helps us understand why patrilateral parallel-cousin marriage seems to have been the preferred type of marriage union for the ancient Israelites throughout their history, at least up to the Babylonian Exile. The scriptural texts are replete with parallel-cousin marriages. Many of these, however, are what anthropologists call "classificatory cousin" marriages, which means that formal, generational differences can be ignored for the purposes of classifying a union if the relative age of the potential spouses is appropriate for their marriage to each other. Thus, any marriage to someone within the same patrilineage could be considered parallel-cousin marriage. Some examples are:

- Nahor's marriage to Milcah, the daughter of Nahor's brother Haran (Gen 11.29). Even though Milcah was technically Nahor's niece, she fit as a classificatory cousin.
- Isaac's marriage to his classificatory parallel cousin Rebekah, who was his FaBrSoDa (Gen 24.15). Abraham sent his servant specifically to obtain a wife for Isaac who was from Abraham's kindred (*môleḏeṯ* Gen 24.4).
- Jacob's marriage to Leah and Rachel. On the surface, this looks very much like a matrilateral cross-cousin marriage, since Leah and Rachel are the daughters of Laban, Jacob's MoBr. This is the interpretation that both Prewitt (1981:91) and Oden (1983:195) take in their articles on the Genesis genealogies. It seems to be outwardly supported by Isaac's command to Jacob in Gen 28.2: "Go at once to Paddanaram to the house of Bethuel, your mother's father; and take as wife from there one of the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother." However, there are several reasons for understanding this marriage too as a parallel-cousin union. Leah and Rachel are FaFaBrSoSoDa (classificatory parallel cousins) to Jacob through Isaac as well as MoBrDa (cross cousins) through Rebekah. This duality in tracing relationship is one of the complications that occasionally comes in a kinship system where cousin marriage is the preferred arrangement. Isaac's words to Jacob in Gen 28.2 do not necessarily show that he saw Laban solely as Jacob's MoBr; his reference to Bethuel at the beginning of that verse demonstrates that he was consciously aware that the genealogical link was traced back through the males on Laban's side of the family, the same patrilineage from which he himself had obtained Rebekah as wife.

Referring to Laban as Jacob's MoBr was probably the most convenient way for Isaac to designate Laban, and the highlighting of this particular relationship probably hints at the problems that Jacob would have with Laban later on (see below on the dynamics of the Mother's Brother-Sister's Son relationship). Also, as Steinberg points out, scholars who see this union as evidence for matrilateral, cross-cousin marriage "fail to note that preference for marriage to a mother's brother daughter [sic] is a characteristic of matrilineal societies" (1993:8), whereas ancient Israel is unquestionably patrilineal. Likewise, cross-cousin marriages for the sake of allying two independent patrilineages (suggested to be the case in the Jacob-Laban story by Prewitt 1981:91) are typical in exogamous

societies, whereas the scriptural accounts show a clear preference for endogamy. Thus, it makes much more sense to understand Jacob's marriage to Leah and Rachel as parallel-cousin (in conformity to the pattern seen elsewhere) than as cross-cousin.

Jacob and Laban's interchange in Gen 29.15-20 includes an explicit affirmation of parallel-cousin marriage as the ideal arrangement in the ancient Hebrew culture. In this passage, Laban's question concerning Jacob's wages seems to be a leading question, part of an understood culturally-conditioned script of arranging a marriage. Laban identifies himself as Jacob's kinsman (*'āḥ*) at this point in the text, intending that Jacob should start thinking along the lines of family responsibilities and roles, which include the responsibility of marriage that Isaac sent him to accomplish (Gen 28.2). Laban's offer is followed by a parenthetical, editorial comment introducing the reader to Laban's daughters, even though Rachel has already been introduced earlier in the text. Jacob understands perfectly well what Laban's initial question is getting at, as his request for Rachel indicates. Laban's answer shows that Jacob's response was exactly what he wanted to hear: "It is better that I give her to you than to any other man." This statement is not based on Laban's evaluation of Jacob as a particularly great guy; it is a reflection of the ideal of parallel-cousin marriage in this culture.

- Esau's marriage to Mahalath, who was his FaBrDa (Gen 28.9). As mentioned earlier, this was Esau's attempt to regain his parents' favor after marrying exogamously at first (Gen 26.34).
- The daughters of Zelophehad married the "sons of their father's brothers" (Num 36.11).
- Othniel married his FaBrDa, Achsah, as a reward for conquering Kiriath-sepher (Josh 15.17; Judg 1.13).
- David's son Jerimoth married his FaBrDa, Abihail (2Chr 11.18).
- Rehoboam married two of his FaBrDa, Mahalath and Maacah (2Chr 11.18-20).

After the Babylonian Exile, the evidence concerning marriage preference is somewhat more ambiguous, but seems to point to a continuation of the practice of parallel-cousin marriage.

- In 1Chr 23.21-22, a detail is mentioned that may point to the fact that parallel-cousin marriage was no longer the social norm: "The sons of Mahli: Eleazar and Kish. Eleazar died having no sons, but only daughters; their kinsmen [*'āḥēyhem*], the sons of Kish, married them." This parallel-cousin marriage arrangement may have been mentioned because the Chronicler found it unusual; however, it is more likely that he included this detail as an example of the Levites' faithfulness in obeying the injunction of Num 36.1-12. In this case, there would be nothing culturally irregular about the union; in fact, it would be a praise for how the sons of Kish acted most appropriately.
- In Esth 2.7, where the MT reads that Mordecai took Esther in as his daughter (*ləḇaṯ*), the LXX renders *eis gunaika* ("to become his wife")! Rather than positing a textual variant in the LXX *Vorlage*, this rendering can be explained as the LXX translator's culturally-aware interpretation of the situation. Esther was Mordecai's parallel cousin, and was very beautiful as well. It seems that

the translator understood the implicit possibility that Mordecai was intending to marry Esther,[1] and rendered this explicitly in the text.

Mother's brother - Sister's son relations

The relationship between a man and his matrilateral uncle (MoBr)[2] also seems to have entailed a particular closeness that carried with it certain forms of prescribed behavior[3]. The two men in this relationship could usually be expected to belong to different patrilineages, since they were related to each other through a woman, while descent was reckoned only through males in the Hebrew patrilineal system. But despite identifying with different patrilineages, there was still a special bond between these men. Anthropologists call this type of relationship *complementary filiation*, the emotional tie of offspring to the lineage of the parent through whom descent does not pass to the offspring (in the Israelite case, the mother's lineage.) Thus, filiation belongs to the domestic/affective domain of family relations rather than to the jural domain (Barnard 1984:73).

In some patrilineal cultures, the relationship of a man can be much closer and freer emotionally with his MoBr than with male relatives on his father's side. This is due to the fact that with a lineage relationship in which descent and inheritance are at stake, the father may be culturally prescribed to be harsh and demanding of his son in order to make him into "a real man" who will carry on the honor of his family. The matrilateral uncle, however, does not belong to the same patrilineage as his nephew, so he can lavish attention on him without worrying that he will negatively influence his own children's inheritance or honor.

The expressions of such an affective closeness do not necessarily have to be uniform in a culture. They may change according to the particular context in which this relationship is actualized. The following three cases of MoBr-SiSo relationships recorded in Scripture demonstrate several facets of the social roles in ancient Hebrew culture acted out by the men involved:

a) Abimelech and the Shechemites

In Judg 9.1-6, Gideon's son Abimelech wanted to gain complete political power over Israel instead of sharing it with his 70 half-brothers. So he approached the citizens of Shechem, his mother's hometown, to ask for loyalty and help in seizing power for himself. At first glance, it seems strange that in a patrilineal society Abimelech would approach his mother's brothers (*'ăḥēy 'immô*) instead of his father's to get assistance of this sort. But this can be explained by the fact that Gideon's relatives could not be expected to help Abimelech wholeheartedly, since they owed family loyalty to all of Gideon's sons, inasmuch as each of them equally belonged to Gideon's patrilineage despite having different mothers.

Abimelech reminded the Shechemites in v. 2 that he was of their "bone and flesh" (*ʿeṣem ûḇāśār*), an expression referring to corporate, familial

1 This interpretation adds a certain amount of pathos to the story, in that the king's search for a new queen took away Mordecai's intended bride.

2 Interestingly enough, there is no single-word term for MoBr in Hebrew as there is for FaBr = *ḏôḏ*.

3 An example of prescribed behavior in American culture is that a woman is expected to have conflict with her mother-in-law. Now, of course, this expectation is not always realized, but because of issues of control and allegiance in American families, it is common and not considered to be something unusual to find a wife relieved when her in-laws finally leave her house after visiting.

unity that is not necessarily limited to immediate blood relations. This phrase was used by the entire nation of Israel when they anointed David as king in Hebron (2Sam 5.1 = 1Chr 11.1); David himself used it when seeking reconciliation with the tribe of Judah (2Sam 19.12). Interestingly, the other times when this phrase is used in Scripture are Gen 29.14 and 2Sam 19.13, both in context of a MoBr-SiSo relationship.

The Shechemites approved Abimelech's request for help because it offered them political empowerment, so they affirmed their allegiance to him in v. 3 by saying "he is our kinsman" (*'āḥiynû*). Theoretically, this may be an example of what anthropologists call "fictive kinship," the acknowledgment of non-existent family relationship for the purpose of creating social proximity.[1] It is possible, however, that they actually did consider Abimelech to be their close relative despite the fact that he belonged to a different patrilineage. If the latter was the case, then complementary filiation had an objective, not merely emotional, reality of family relationship in the Israelite culture.

b) Laban and Jacob

In some cultures where MoBr-SiSo relationships carry a distinct cultural role, the interaction between the two men involved is best described as a "joking relationship." This institutionalized behavior ranges in various cultures from mild forms which complement respect to extreme forms of "obligatory joking relationships," or "permitted disrespect," which may carry the potential to develop into hostility (Schusky 1972:61). This relationship is characterized by some lack of restraint, teasing, jesting, or causing embarrassment.

It is reasonable to suggest that there was some element of such a "joking relationship" present in the interaction between Jacob and Laban[2]. Laban tricked his nephew into marrying Leah instead of Rachel after Jacob performed seven years of bride-service (Gen 29.21-28). When Jacob struck a bargain with his uncle concerning his wages for tending Laban's flock, Laban agreed but secretly tried to cheat Jacob (Gen 30.35-36). Jacob then reciprocated by outwitting Laban and turning his trick against him (Gen 30.37-43)[3]. When Jacob was finally back in Gilead, Laban confronted him, naturally assuming that it is Jacob who has stolen his household gods (Gen 31.30) in accordance with the pattern of their relationship to that point.

Despite the likelihood of some level of cultural acceptability in their joking relationship, it is obvious that Jacob and Laban's relationship seriously deteriorated from their repeated abuse of each other[4]. Jacob did not at all want to be married to Leah, nor to be compelled to serve Laban another

1 Laban also called Jacob his *'āḥ* in Gen 29.15, but in that case, the men actually did belong to the same patrilineage.

2 Oden 1983:200-202, also sees marks of a particular avunculate relationship in the Jacob-Laban story, but he interprets it more in terms of property rights than in terms of a joking relationship.

3 It is probable that Jacob intended to pull this trick on Laban all along, despite his claim of honesty in Gen 30.33. It would be quite unlike the crafty Jacob to make an agreement as detrimental to himself as he did in Gen 30.32 if he did not have an ulterior motive in mind.

4 That both men tended to carry their trickery too far is confirmed by the fact that they alienated other close members of their families as well through their conniving. Jacob enraged Esau by tricking him out of his birthright (Genesis 27), while Laban used up all of his daughters' inheritance (Gen 31.14-16).

seven years as payment for marrying Rachel. He was outraged, and explicitly expressed his anger at Laban (Gen 29.25). After pulling off the self-profiting trick with Laban's flock, Jacob "saw that Laban did not regard him as favorably as he did before" (Gen 31.2). Finally, Laban may have even tried to physically harm Jacob if God had not prevented him from doing so (Gen 31.24, 29). Because of God's intervention, though, the men ended up merely hurling verbal abuse at each other before Laban relented and made a parting covenant with Jacob concerning his daughters' welfare (Gen 31.25-55).

c) David and nephews

In the reign of King David, recorded in the books of Samuel and the first two chapters of Kings, there is an interesting pattern of interaction between several of the major characters which can be better understood in light of their kinship relations to each other. David had two sisters, Zeruiah and Abigail (1Chr 2.16). Zeruiah had three sons—Abishai, Joab, and Asahel. Abigail had one son—Amasa (1Chr 2.17). Thus, David counted Abishai, Joab, Asahel, and Amasa as his SiSo. Presumably, David had "parallel nephews" (BrSo) also through his numerous brothers, but there is no mention anywhere in Scripture of any role they played. Though an argument from silence, this fact points to the likelihood that the MoBr-SiSo relationship had a special status during David's time as well, possibly entailing an emotional closeness not present in the FaBr-BrSo relationship.

David showed particular favor to each of these four nephews by assigning them to his inner circle of military men[1]. He made Joab the commander of his army (2Sam 8.16), Abishai the chief of the Thirty (2Sam 23.18), and swift-footed Asahel one of the Thirty (2Sam 23.24). When David was upset with Joab for chastising him, he made Amasa the new commander of his army (2Sam 19.13), despite the fact that Amasa had just been heavily involved in Absalom's revolt against David (2Sam 17.25)!

Even though Joab was personally responsible for killing both Absalom (David's son; 2Sam 18.14) and Amasa (David's SiSo; 2Sam 20.10), David could not bring himself to justly avenge their deaths by killing Joab, since Joab continued to possess the ascribed status of SiSo despite his crimes. This is why David commanded Solomon to punish Joab after David's death (1Kgs 2.6). As cross cousin to Joab, Solomon did not have the same degree of closeness through filiation to him as did David, so he could kill him without feeling that he has killed a family member (1Kgs 2.31-33). In the same way, since Absalom was Joab's cross cousin and Amasa was his matrilateral parallel cousin, Joab did not consider either relationship to be a deterrent to killing these men.

Concluding implications for translation

1) The interaction between certain characters in the Scriptures can frequently be understood better in light of the internal Hebrew system of kinship relations and roles. Understanding this system can also clarify the function of certain texts that

1 Such nepotism was not limited to nephews only, of course; Saul had Abner, his parallel cousin, command his army (1Sam 14.50).

may otherwise appear somewhat irrelevant to translators. For example, the purpose of genealogical references in the Scriptures can be understood as having not only referential value, but also emotive value for the original readers, who would judge the appropriateness or inappropriateness of certain marital unions according to how well the characters fulfilled the roles prescribed to them by their status.

2) Translators should pay attention to potential mismatches between Hebrew kinship terms and terms in translations which are used as base texts (for example, RSV, TEV in English; Synodal translation in Russian) by translators who do not know Hebrew.

For example, Hebrew *dôḏ* (FaBr) was usually rendered by the Russian Synodal translation as *dyadya,* a Russian term which refers to either patrilateral uncle or matrilateral uncle. The translators of the Tuvin (south Siberian Turkic) Old Testament, working from this Russian base text to produce the first-draft translation, consistently rendered this with *daai*, a term that means MoBr, because this is a distinct primary reference term in Tuvin, whereas the term meaning FaBr, *aky*, has a primary reference of "older brother," and refers to FaBr only by extension. If a translator is aware of terminology mismatches such as these when preparing his first draft, the work of the editors and consultants will be easier in this respect.

3) Translators should note cases in which a specific kinship relation functions differently in the source text culture and receptor culture. A radical example can be given of cultures in which the natural father is so remote from his children that the title of God as heavenly Father might be better understood by readers if substituted in the translation by "heavenly maternal uncle"! However, many translation teams would be uncomfortable with a rendering that is so far removed from the concepts prevalent in the source text culture. If a translator decides to keep the rendering close to the original, then keeping the original text's primary reference and footnoting the role difference may be a viable option. This is the case in the Tuvin translation of Ruth, where a footnote explains to traditionally exogamous readers that marriage to certain close relatives was not considered by the ancient Hebrews to be incest, but rather a very desirable union.

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ANOTHER LOOK AT THE TRANSLATION OF MATTHEW 16.19

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Introduction

The interpretation and translation of Matt 16.19 have generated a lot of controversy among NT scholars. In their examination of this difficult text, Roman Catholic and Protestant exegetes have arrived at conclusions that are quite intriguing.[1] The paper takes a look at some existing translations of Matt 16.19 that have influenced the theologies of receptor audiences with particular reference to the interplay of divine and human authorities. It is being argued that a valid interpretation and translation of the text necessitates a careful analysis of its rare periphrastic constructions.[2] A "model translation" is finally suggested which, in the present writer's opinion, is capable of generating a theology that does full justice to the Greek text.

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1 The literature on this subject is vast. But the text has been conventionally understood as the authority initially conferred on Peter to admit or exclude others from God's kingdom. From a rabbinic perspective, it has also been interpreted as the ability to unveil and teach the true divinely ordained Torah. For an interesting link to rabbinic thought, see H. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch Bd I: Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1978), 730-746. A good summary of various other interpretations, including exorcism, is provided by R. H. Hiers, "Binding and Loosing: The Matthean Authorizations," in *JBL* 104 (1985): 233-250. The closely related text in Matt 18.18 is usually viewed as a reference to the corporate authority conferred on the church to discipline/excommunicate recalcitrant members. J. A. Burgess, *A History of the Exegesis of Matthew 16:17-19 from 1785 to 1965*, Ph. D. diss., University of Basel, 1966, provides a comprehensive summary of discussions by previous generations of Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians that have examined this text particularly in relation to the question of apostolic succession and the papacy. The figure of Peter in Matthew's Gospel has featured prominently in such discussions, and until the middle of the 20th century, confessional interests dominated the agenda. Later exegetical approaches to the text have, in the wake of modern ecumenical scholarship, produced two dominant schools of thought, namely:

(a) That Matthew portrays Peter, in the wake of developments within contemporary Pharisaic Judaism, as the "supreme Rabbi" to whom Jesus has entrusted the authority of teaching = office of the keys, and on whom Jesus has built his church. For a good discussion, see C. Kähler, "Zur Form-und Traditionsgeschicte von Matth. xvi. 17-19," in *NTS* 23 (1976-1977): 36-58; D. Senior, "Directions in Matthean Studies," in D. E. Aune (ed.): *The Gospel of Matthew in Current Study* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 8, would also like us to consider "the Pharisaic reform as an immediate and direct context for Matthew's Gospel."

(b) That Peter, as representative or spokesman, provides the Matthean community with an example of what it means, both positively and negatively, to be a Christian. See P. S. Minear, *Matthew: The Teacher's Gospel* (N. Y.: The Pilgrim Press, 1982), 97; J. D. Kinsbury, "The Figure of Peter in Matthew's Gospel as a Theological Problem," in *JBL* 98 (1979): 67-83.

2 Reference will be made to the closely related text of Matt 18.18 for comparative purposes.