

BTB Readers Guide: Kinship

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Abstract

The social domain of kinship covers a broad range of institutions: genealogy and descent, marriage and divorce, and dowry-systems and inheritance. Because kinship in the ancient Mediterranean impacted virtually every part of life and every other social domain, it is fundamental for readers of the Bible to have a solid grasp of how kinship functioned in these cultures. While one might assume that "family" is a straightforward concept determined by biology, it is, in fact, a social construction. Kinship studies provide analytical frameworks within which to interpret the biblical texts that assume the reader's knowledge of kinship transactions. This "Reader's Guide" introduces the secondary literature most helpful in beginning kinship analysis of these biblical texts.

I. Introduction

In a challenge to Jesus' honor and test of his Torah-acumen, the Sadducees (referring to Deut 25:5-10) pose a hypothetical situation:

"Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife, but leaves no child, his brother must take the wife, and raise up seed for his brother. There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died left no seed; and the second took her, and died, leaving no seed; and the third likewise; and the seven left no seed. Last of all, the woman also died. In the resurrection whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife." (Mark 12:19-23; par. Matt 22:24-28; Luke 20:28-33)

While the gospels relate this anecdote as a means of establishing Jesus' honor, (putting aside the topic of resurrection) it raises for the modern reader the issue of cultural assumptions. What sort of family configuration does this case presuppose? Why would brothers even consider providing their sister-in-law with children? What were ancient Judean marriage strategies and regulations?

What rules of inheritance does this story assume? In what ways is childbearing related to family honor? It is clear that this is not a middle-class U.S. family; so what would one need to know in order to understand this text on its own terms and in an ancient Palestinian context? My contention here is that a fundamental aspect of understanding ancient texts, such as those in the Bible, is knowing something about the kinship forms operant in those societies.

"Kinship" is an abstraction relating to the network of relationships based upon birth (either real or fictive) and marriage, and it forms one of the four foundational social domains which social scientists analyze. While families are a universal phenomenon, they are configured in a multitude of ways, are controlled by different mechanisms, and serve different functions. Because humans universally construct relationships with those to whom they are related by birth or marriage, "family" is perhaps the easiest set of relationships to misconstrue when observing another culture; it is the easiest place to ethnocentrically confuse biology and culture.

The social spheres or domains addressed by social scientists (politics, economics, religion, and kinship) are never discrete entities that operate in isolation from one another—they are interactive in every society. But beyond interaction, one sphere may be embedded in another. By this I mean that its definition, structures, and authority are dictated by another sphere. As Malina has demonstrated, religion in the ancient Mediterranean (and specifically with regard to Judean Yahwism) was always embedded in either politics or kinship (1986).

Kinship in ancient Israel and Judah, as well as in first-century Palestine, was affected by the political sphere especially in terms of law—mostly in terms of deviance—for example: incest (Lev 18:6-19), rape (Deut 22:23-29), adultery (Lev 20:10), marriage (Lev 21:7; Deut 25:5-10), divorce (Deut 24:1-4), and inheritance (Num 27:1-11; Luke 12:13). But kinship also affected politics, most notably in patron-client relationships (2 Sam 3:3; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.5.1 [§109]), faction building (1 Sam 18:17-19), and royal genealogies (2 Sam 3:2-5; Matt 1:1-17). Kinship was affected by religion in terms of purity, for example: intercourse regulations (John 7:53—8:11) and the status of spouses (Deut 7:1-4; Luke 1:5). And kinship affected religion (embedded in politics) in terms of descent: especially in the importance laid on the lineages of priests and their wives, but also by regulating cultic membership for the laity (Phil 3:5). And finally, kinship was interactive with the economic sphere in terms of occupations (Mark 1:16-20), and the distributions of dowry, indirect dowry, bridewealth, and inheritance (Luke 12:13). These configurations of kinship practices and norms are startlingly different from our modern Western experiences, and this is why such detailed analysis is called for.

It is essential for anyone studying other cultures to have a solid grasp of her/his own culture. If one wishes to understand ancient Judean marriage strategies, for example, one must understand that under U.S. law marriage to close kin (e.g., uncles and nieces, or first cousins) is illegal. It has been preferable in much of the Middle East, on the other hand, throughout history. For overviews of U.S. kinship issues, I recommend Williams (1970) and Schneider (1980). For an analysis of African American kinship, see Stack (1974). For a sociological/social psychological analysis of various immigrant families in the U.S., see Papajohn and Siegel (1975). The following chart highlights a few of the most significant variables in kinship analysis, and how twentieth century U.S. society contrasts to that of first-century Judea (for a discussion of many of these issues, see Malina 1993:119-26):

INSERT Comparative Chart HERE

But one must not underestimate how much American kinship is in the midst of change. As Jacoby's popular article points out (1990), the U.S. legal system—and U.S. society as a whole—has been confronted in the past twenty years with a host of issues which challenge the very definition of family: in terms of marriage—one parent families, same-sex marriages, high divorce rates; in terms of paternity and reproduction— invitro fertilization, surrogate motherhood, abortion, sperm banks, and DNA and blood comparison.

For those wanting an overview of the sub-discipline of kinship analysis in the social sciences, I would suggest several possible entry points. To become acquainted with the larger field, introductions to anthropology usually include sections on kinship. Howard, for example, has two relevant sections entitled "Kinship" (185-205) and "Sex, Marriage, and the Family" (206-38). Overview essays are also available in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (Sills 1968) and *The Social Science Encyclopedia* (Kuper & Kuper 1985) on descent, family, household, kinship, and marriage.

For more thorough discussions of the theoretical issues, introductions to kinship will be helpful. Fox (*Kinship and Marriage*, 1967) provides a readable overview, focusing especially on different types of descent principles. But he also includes a detailed analysis of incest as a persistent issue in anthropological studies (54-76). Keesing's volume (*Kin Groups and Social Structure*, 1975) is also a widely used introduction. He includes excellent charts and diagrams, as well as a good introductory bibliography. Another useful feature is the inclusion of twenty-two case studies: summaries of other anthropologists' ethnographies that illustrate various kinship principles. Goode (*The Family*, 1982) employs a sociological rather than anthropological methodology; but the overlap of the methods is also evident here. He covers such issues as the biological bases of the family, legitimacy/illegitimacy, mate selection and marriage, household forms, role relations, divorce and death, and changes in family patterns. This is an excellent complement to the anthropological treatments.

For an analysis of kinship issues in contemporary Middle Eastern cultures (which have many parallels to ancient Israelite and Judean practices), one should consult Eickelman (1989:151-78) and Hildred Geertz (1979). Eickelman stresses how "family" is construed in a variety of ways, and that "blood-ties" are often metaphorical constructs for other types of association. His overview of marriage strategies and weddings in the Middle East is also informative. After addressing how earlier kinship studies have treated the Middle East, Geertz analyzes three sets of issues which are especially significant: living arrangements (the use of space and social networks), cultural constructs of "family"—including its relationship to patronage and friendship, and marriage strategies. This provides a more dynamic view of kinship transactions and their social significances than one finds in most studies.

For a narrative account of families in a Middle Eastern peasant village, it is difficult to overestimate the usefulness of *Guests of the Sheik* (Fernea 1965). Among the many issues relevant to kinship that Fernea describes are: marriage and weddings, dowry arrangements, polygyny, and male and female space.

One aspect of kinship studies one should be aware of is that they employ a highly specialized vocabulary. Terms such as "affine" (relative by marriage), "consanguineal" (relative by birth), or "endogamy" (marriage to close kin) may easily confuse the novice. The glossaries in Schusky (1964:71-79) and Keesing (1975:147-51) are concise guides through this linguistic maze. Furthermore, since each culture's kinship terms express different interests, relationships, and sometimes overlapping meanings, it is also helpful to analyze the semantics and socio-linguistics of the "native" terminology; for a helpful guide to asking these questions, see Fox (240-62). As an example of this type of problem, *'ab* (Hebrew), *'abba* (Aramaic), *patros* (Greek), and *pater* (Latin) are all translated "father" in English; but each of them has a different semantic range (see Barr 1988).

Williams draws our attention to three different aspects of kinship analysis (1970:48). "Kinship structure" is the overall term referring to the full range of kinship norms and organization. The "family system" deals with the configuration of the basic kinship unit, for example: polygamous or monogamous; patrilocal, matrilocal, or neolocal; patriarchal or matriarchal. A text that raises these types of questions is Leviticus 18 on incest regulations. And "family groups" refer to actual manifestation of kinship practices in particular forms and permutations, for example the marriage strategies of Solomon (1 Kgs 3:1-2; 11:1-3).

At the most general level, kinship has two basic social functions: group formation and inheritance (Howard 1989:204). But group formation has a variety of dimensions: production (work and food), reproduction and childrearing, protection, worship, sociality/belonging, patronage, and play. Neither should inheritance be construed too narrowly as receiving money from dead relatives. One of the most important aspects of ancient Mediterranean culture is that status in the form of ascribed honor derives from one's family (Matt 13:54-57; Mark 6:3; John 7:40-44; Malina 1993:33-39; see below). Another factor to consider is that for peasants, the primary issue of inheritance was land, not money. Naboth, for example, is offended at Ahab's offer of money for his ancestral land (1 Kgs 21:1-3). But women's dowries need also to be figured into this inheritance picture (see below).

At the most basic level of kinship is the household. Elliott's treatment of 1 Peter in *A Home for the Homeless* (1981; 1991) includes a major section analyzing households in the ancient Mediterranean as a unit of social organization of conjugal families, as well as fictive kin-groups of different types (165-266). He interprets the importance of the *oikos* ("household") as the unit of identity, solidarity, and status, and how this impacts the use of household as a metaphor of other types of relationships.

II. History of Research

Focussed research on kinship began in the mid-nineteenth century in both the U.S. and Europe. Lewis Henry Morgan's *League of the Ho-dé-no-sau-nee or Iroquois* (1851 [1961]) was the culmination of work he had been doing for a decade on the Iroquois tribes. The five major works which emerged in the following two decades began the discussion which has continued since (NB: the foreign works in this list have all appeared in translation): Henry Summer Maine, *Ancient Law* (1861 [1970]), Johann Jakob Bachofen, *Das Mutterrecht* (1861 [1954]), Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *La Cité Antique* (1864 [1980]), John Ferguson McLennan, *Primitive Marriage* (1865 [1970]), and Morgan's *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (1868). Most of these scholars were lawyers by training, and they were especially interested in the aspects of kinship represented in law, as well as upon genealogical and descent principles. For an overview of these early years of kinship analysis, see Trautmann (1987).

A. R. Radcliffe-Brown's structural-functionalist approach to kinship was first articulated in his ethnography of Australian tribal groups (1930-31). Here he introduced a solidly synchronic methodology, in contradistinction to the previous century's thoroughly historical approach. In examining the social structure of kinship, Radcliffe-Brown argued that these structures had to be analyzed in relationship to the total social organization. In this series of articles he employed a set of four variables—respect, joking, avoidance, and familiarity—identifying each with a specific category of family relationships. For a discussion of Radcliffe-Brown's contribution see Fortes (1969:42-59), who argues that these variables remain useful in kinship analysis.

Claude Levi-Strauss, proposed in *Elementary Forms of Kinship* (1949 [1969]) to subsume genealogy and descent to marriage relationships in the organization of kinship: so-called "alliance theory." He pursued the question of the relationship between the incest taboo and marriage alliances in primitive cultures, arguing that the incest taboo in primitive bands was a means of imposing exogamy (marrying outside one's close kin) in order to create ties to other groups through marriage. By giving up sexual access to females within their own group, males of one group contracted access to females of other groups, thereby creating political and economic interdependence and encouraging common language and culture. "Exchange," he argues, is the universal key to marriage prohibitions. Rather than choosing between descent and exchange as the fundamental principle of organization, Fox points out that these can be seen as viewing kinship from two different angles (1967:23-24). While Levi-Strauss's ethnographic analyses, as well as his conclusions, have been seriously critiqued, many of his insights have continued to influence kinship analysis.

Jack Goody has been a leading advocate of synthesizing synchronic (systemic) and diachronic (historical) approaches (see Goody 1969): "Any human institution is best understood if one can examine not only its meaning and function in a particular society but its distribution in space and time" (1976:2). In his *Production and Reproduction: A Comparative Study of the Domestic Domain* (1976) Goody attempts several things: (1) to provide cross-cultural correlations between different variables especially marriage, inheritance (including dowry), and economic structures; (2) to map out a structure of roles, differentiating categorical roles and behavioral roles: e.g., how a wife fits into a genealogical and descent schema of a particular society vis à vis how she functions within the family; and (3) to integrate statistical/mathematical analysis with ethnographic interpretation.

In *The Oriental, the Ancient and the Primitive: Systems of Marriage and the Family in the Pre-Industrial Societies of Eurasia* (1990) Goody pursues his interests in marriage, inheritance, and economics by addressing four major regions in a sweeping cross-cultural analysis: China, India, the Near East, and Greece and Rome. Here he is again interested in providing a synthesis of synchronic and diachronic interpretation.

Several books of collected essays provide the reader with a diversity of methods and ethnographic detail. *Readings in Kinship and Social Structure* (Graburn 1971) includes fifty-nine entries grouped under sixteen headings. These essays and excerpts from books cover a century of kinship analysis from the 1860s to the 1960s and include historical, psychological, sociological, and anthropological approaches. The articles in *Kinship and Culture* (Hsu 1971) all discuss the importance of dyadic relationships in the interpretation of kinship structures (e.g., father-son) proposed by the editor. Especially relevant is F. Barth's article "Role Dilemmas and Father-Son Dominance in Middle Eastern Kinship Systems" (Hsu 1971:87-95). *The Character of Kinship* (Goody 1973) is a Festschrift for Meyer Fortes, and includes thirteen articles on: Kinship and Descent, The Nature of Kinship, The Nature of the Family, and Marriage and Affinal Roles. And the articles in *Mediterranean Family Structures* (Peristiany 1976) include ethnographic analyses by anthropologists on a variety of Mediterranean societies and sub-groups.

III. Family Systems

The work of Emmanuel Todd is significant because he proposes a typology of the basic family forms throughout the world in *The Explanation of Ideology: Family Structures and Social Systems* (1985). Building upon the model of an eighteenth-century sociologist, Frédéric Le Play (1806–1882), Todd makes a bold proposal that identifies the basic family types with different ideologies:

A universal hypothesis is possible: the ideological system is everywhere the intellectual embodiment of family structure, a transposition into social relations of the fundamental values which govern elementary human relations . . . One ideological category and only one, corresponds to each family type (1985:17).

Whether or not one accepts Todd's hypothesis of a one-to-one correspondence between family form and ideology, his typology of family forms is useful to analyze large, cross-cultural patterns. He employs the variables of spousal choice (determined by custom, parents, or individual choice), spousal relationship (exogamy or endogamy), division of inheritance (equality or unequal shares), and cohabitation of married sons with their parents. His typology yields seven basic family forms:

- 1) Exogamous Community Family: equal distribution of inheritance; cohabitation of sons with parents; and exogamous (33-54)—e.g., ancient Roman, China, and Russia.
- 2) Authoritarian Family: unequal distribution of inheritance—one son inherits; cohabitation of the married heir with parents; and exogamous (55-98)—e.g., Germany, Japan, and Korea.

3) Egalitarian Nuclear Family: equal inheritance delineated by rules; no cohabitation of married children with parents; and exogamous (99-132)—e.g., northern France, northern Italy, and Greece.

4) Absolute Nuclear Family: no definite inheritance rules; no cohabitation of married children with parents; and exogamous (99-132)—e.g., U.S., the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands.

5) Endogamous Community Family: equal inheritance delineated by rules; cohabitation of married sons with parents; and endogamous (133-54)—e.g., ancient Israelites, and the traditionally Muslim countries of the Middle East.

6) Asymmetrical Community Family: equal inheritance rules; cohabitation of married sons with parents; and restricted endogamy—matrilateral cross-cousins (155-70)—primarily southern India.

7) Anomic Family: uncertainty about brothers' equality—inheritance rules egalitarian in theory, flexible in practice; cohabitation of married children with parents rejected in theory, but accepted in practice; and the possibility of endogamy (171-90)—e.g., Indonesia, Philippines, and native South Americans.

One should keep three factors in mind when employing Todd's typology. First, these are dominant forms in a given society, not necessarily practiced by every single family. Secondly, the typology is significant for historical studies because family forms are relatively constant over time; this is especially true in peasant societies. And thirdly, Todd has not fully taken into account the role dowry systems play in inheritance practices.

IV. Genealogy and Descent

"Genealogy" is a particular sub-genre of the genre "list" (note also in the Bible: king list, administrative list, booty list, itinerary). They are lists of relatives arranged by generation, but may skip any number of generations for a variety of reasons. Genealogies may be oral or literary in origin, and organize relatives (literal or fictive) into their appropriate relationships by generation and parentage. Their importance in the biblical tradition is pervasive, usually embedded in narratives: in the Pentateuch (e.g., Gen 5:4-32), the Deuteronomistic History (e.g., 2 Sam 5:13-16), the Chronicler's History (e.g., 1 Chron 3:10-24), the short story (e.g., Ruth 4:18-22), the Apocrypha (e.g., 1 Macc 2:1-5), and the gospels (e.g., Matt 1:1-17).

Wilson has analyzed the biblical genealogies in terms of their social functions and uses in traditional cultures (1977). He provides a cross-cultural comparison of the biblical genealogies to those of other traditional peoples (for a brief summary of his conclusions, see Wilson 1992). Wilson's work is significant, not only for the specifics of his analysis, but also for leading the way among biblical scholars in employing cross-cultural analysis.

Segmented genealogies (those which identify more than one member per generation) seldom extend beyond four or five generations, even in written form. They can serve a number of different functions, separately or simultaneously. They are important in traditional cultures to defend a claim to honor (articulating the web of significant family relationships), identify social roles and obligations, establish inheritance rights, identify eligible endogamous marriage partners or actual exogamous partners, and within the family to indicate birth order, honor order, or motherhood (important in polygynous families).

Linear genealogies (those tracing only one member per generation) are not as diverse in their interests. Wilson argues that they have one function: "to ground a claim to power, status, rank, office, or inheritance in an earlier ancestor. Such genealogies are often used by rulers to justify their right to rule and by office-holders of all types to support their claims" (Wilson 1992:931). Wilson also identifies several metaphorical uses of genealogies: political relationships, economic or cultic status, and geographical location (1992:931; see also Gottwald 1979:334-37).

It is fundamental to note, however, that genealogies are always social constructs, not objective reflections of reality. That is to say, a variety of factors affect genealogy construction: how many generations one covers, whom one includes (all known kin, only males, only the narratively significant), excludes (females, embarrassing relatives, the narratively insignificant), puts first and last (the current generation or apical ancestor), and whether they are patriarchal, matriarchal or cognatic—all of these issues are choices in composing genealogies and say something about the interests of those who compose or repeat them. How one composes a genealogy reflects one's social values, perspective, and specific goals. As Wilson says: "All of them are accurate when their differing functions are taken into consideration" (1975:182). But one must add to Wilson's caveat that they are all "accurate" given their particular construction of reality and cultural matrix. This comports with another of Wilson's conclusions: "All genealogies, whether oral or written, are characterized by fluidity" (1992: 930), although writing tends to limit this fluidity (931). Johnson analyzes the genealogies in terms of their theological functions (1988 [1st ed. 1969]), Robinson in terms of literary function (1986), Auffrecht in terms of history (1988). For an analysis of the Herodian family's genealogies and a discussion of descent principles, see Hanson (1989a). Brown's detailed treatment of Jesus' genealogies in Matthew and Luke is a classic treatment in terms of history, theology, and literature, but includes no social analysis (1977).

Descent is the series of links which connects the members of a kin-group to a common ancestor; it defines who constitutes a family intergenerationally. But Sahlins broadens our perspective here:

[D]escent in major residential groups is a political ideology and not a mere rule of personal affiliation. It is a way of phrasing political alignments and making political differentiations. It is a charter of group rights and an expression of group solidarity. And quite beyond relating man to man [sic] within the group, the descent ideology makes connections at a higher level: it stipulates the group's relation, or lack of relation, to other groups (1968:55).

But societies are interested in different sets of ancestors. The different principles of descent exemplified throughout the world have attracted the attention of anthropologists; indeed the overviews of kinship spend a great deal of space on analyzing the possibilities (Fox 1967:77-174; Keesing 1975:9-100). The primary types are patrilineal, matrilineal, and cognatic. "Patrilineal descent" traces the kinship associations through the father's ancestors, "matrilineal descent" through the females, and "cognatic descent" through a combination of male and female ancestors (Keesing 1975:17; Hanson 1989a:81-83). For the standardized patterns of visually diagramming kinship relations, see Howard (1989:186-88). Reading texts that refer to Israelite, Judean, Greek, Egyptian, Roman, and other families calls for attention to the variations of descent principles in these societies.

The consequence of eastern Mediterranean cosmology and anthropology, employed in both Israelite and Christian writings, is that descent can only be passed through the generating male (see e.g., Delaney 1987). This impacts the Mediterranean customs of genealogies, inheritance, residence patterns, gender-role differentiation, and pollution ideologies.

Studying the biblical genealogies calls for attention to detail with regard to why the author/redactor has included it, how it is structured, and whose honor and interests it manifests. Rather than just boring lists to be quickly passed over, genealogies are important texts which pass on key information to the reader. In the present text of Ruth, for example, it becomes clear that, given the genealogy in 4:18-22, the story stands in the interests of the Judean monarchy. The

genealogies of Jesus in Matt 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38 are also structured differently and have different apical ancestors, and therefore different intentions.

V. Marriage and Divorce

In traditional societies, the marriage of a male and female is seldom (if ever) an arrangement between individuals. It is a social contract negotiated between families, with economic, religious, and (occasionally) political implications beyond the interests of sexuality, relationship, and reproduction. As a Moroccan informed Hildred Geertz: "Arranging marriages is a highly serious matter, like waging war or making big business deals" (Geertz 1979:363). The three primary strategies for choosing a spouse are: custom (e.g., preference for close kin), the choice of the parents, and the choice of the marrying individuals. But even where custom is a heavy determinant, the parents or other relatives may play a key role in the precise choice. One cannot say that one of these strategies fits all of the biblical texts, since the Bible covers such a long time-period and diverse cultural pressures. Malina has summarized some of the key shifts in the following chart (1993:144):

INSERT Malina Chart HERE

I have argued that, in the "defensive" strategy practiced among Judeans of the second temple period, endogamy had become the dominant practice (Hanson 1989b:143-44), which comports with what Malina identifies with the symbol of "holy seed" (above). This is demonstrable in the apocryphal books of Judith (8:2) and Tobit (1:9; 3:15-17; 4:12-13), as well as Jubilees (second-century B.C.), which retells biblical stories. Of the fifty-one known marriages within the Herodian family twenty-four of them were endogamous (1989b: 144). For help through the maze of issues (and secondary literature) on cousin-marriage in the Middle East, one should consult Holy (1989). Divorce is the severing of the marriage bond. And just as marriage in the ancient Mediterranean was the negotiating between and binding of families, divorce also has broad social ramifications. It potentially affects the disposition of the woman's dowry, the change of residences, the ability to find another spouse, and the honor of the families.

The gospel texts relating to divorce provide two different perspectives. In Mark 10:2-9 the Jesus-saying indicates that divorce was allowed under no circumstance. Matt 5:31-32 and 19:3-9 allow divorce in the case of the wife's adultery, paralleling the rabbinic school of Shammai (m.Git. 9.10a).

For an analysis of Roman divorce practices, one should consult the essays by Treggiari and Corbier in Rawson (1991:31-46; 47-78). On the freedom and social evaluation of divorce Treggiari concludes:

[I]n the classical period, it was an option available in law to both husband and wife. Both marriage and divorce were free. No automatic social stigma attached to the spouse who divorced or the spouse who was divorced. The upper class, at least, may show a tendency towards not attributing blame in unilateral divorce and towards preferring bilateral divorce *bona gratia*. (in Rawson 1991:46)

And Corbier sees divorce and adoption in the larger framework of Roman acquisition of honor, power, and social networks. They were

. . . used by the Roman aristocracy as special, additional strategies among a whole range of other strategies aimed at regulating the circulation of women and wealth, the formation of alliances between families and between individuals, and the definition of legitimacy in the context of political power. (in Rawson 1991:77)

These factors are important to early Christian writings since they would have heavily influenced the cultural ethos of the first-century Mediterranean. The Pauline and other epistles have a great deal to say on marriage and divorce (e.g., 1 Cor 7:1-16; Eph 5:21—6:9; Col 3:18-4:1; 1 Thess 4:3-8; 1 Pet 3:1-8; 1 Pet 3:1-7).

VI. Dowries, Bridewealth, and Inheritance

"Dowry" is the property that a bride's family provides the bride or couple (usually under the control of her husband) at the time of marriage. This might be movable property (such as bedding, cooking utensils, jewelry, animals), immovable property (land and buildings), cash, or a combination of these. It is mentioned in the Bible in the context of the patriarchal narratives as well as the early Israelite monarchy (Heb. *šilluchim*, lit. "those things which are sent" or "gifts"; Gen 30:20; 31:14-16; 1 Kgs 9:16). We also find evidence for dowries in the literatures of Babylonia, Nuzi, Ugarit, Greece, Rome, and Judah. For a cross-cultural analysis of these ancient societies' dowry systems, see Hanson (1990); for dowry systems in Eurasia, see Goody and Tambiah (1973).

Three cross-cultural studies of pre-industrial societies have appeared which inform our understanding of dowry. Goody was the first to demonstrate that dowry has broader implications than just as one aspect of a marriage transaction. It is, in fact, a payment of a daughter's share of the family inheritance (full or partial) given to the daughter at the time of marriage (see e.g., Gen 31:14-16; Josh 15:18-19; and m. Ket. 6.6).

Women in traditional, patriarchal societies shift from being "embedded in" (under the authority, legal responsibility, and care of) their fathers to their husband (e.g., m. Ket. 4.4-5). Thus the groom was given the woman's property to administer (the legal term is "usufruct"); but it nonetheless belonged to her and was passed to her children, as distinct from the personal property of the husband, or his kin-group, or his children from other marriages. This is nowhere made clearer than in the Code of Hammurapi (CH §§137-184), where the laws of inheritance, dowry, indirect dowry, and bridewealth are all interconnected. For examples, see Tobit (third/second-century B.C.), Mibtachiah's dowry arrangements in the Elephantine papyri (fifth-century B.C.), and the Babatha documents from the Trans-Jordan (second-century A.D.).

Harrell and Dickey build upon Goody's work by further elucidating the functions and intentions of the dowry (1985). They argue that the dowry is not only an economic transaction, but is also an expression of the family's honor on the occasion of a daughter's wedding. The size of the dowry demonstrates to the community how wealthy the family is, and is one signal of their publicly displayed honor. This is not hoarded wealth, but transmitted wealth, providing the daughter with her portion of the family's goods, money, and property. Schlegel and Eloul extend the discussion of honor beyond the public display of wealth: a dowry may also be the means of acquiring honor or a client: a son-in-law of higher status increases the family's honor, or one of lower status may enlist him and his family as clients (1988:301).

They go on to define the economic character of marriage more precisely. They approach marriage transactions as "a function of the kind of property relations within the society" (294), and as a means of adjusting "labor needs, the transmission of property, and status concerns" (305). They conclude that several characteristics are exhibited by societies that utilize dowry and indirect dowry:

1. They are "complex agricultural and commercial pastoralist societies," rather than foragers, horticulturalists, or subsistence pastoralists (294)
2. They have substantial private property (294)
3. They have three or more social classes (297)
4. They are patrilocal (298)

5. Women play a minor role in subsistence (299)

It is clear that all of these characteristics are evident among first-century Judeans, and thus provide a social profile to accompany the marriage transactions one observes in the biblical kinship arrangements.

"Bridewealth" is a term that covers a wide range of transfers of goods and services from the groom's kin to the bride's kin. And, as Goody makes clear, these diverse transactions have very different implications for social structure (1973:2). Like dowry, bridewealth is also attested in texts from ancient Israel (Heb. *mohar*; e.g., Gen 34:12), post-biblical Judea (e.g., m. Ket. 1.2; 5.1), as well as in Babylonia, Nuzi, Ugarit, and Greece—but not Rome.

"Indirect dowry" is property and/or cash given by the groom's kin either directly to the bride or indirectly through her kin; it may be all or part of the bridewealth. The story of Isaac's betrothal to Rebekah demonstrates both indirect dowry (in the form of silver and gold jewelry, and clothing) as well as general bridewealth given to her mother and brother (Gen 24:53; see possibly Luke 15:8-10).

One may discount arguments that ancient cases of indirect dowry constituted the sale of the bride. Finley has demonstrated that ancient Greek marriage transactions could not be construed in terms of sale (1981 [1955]). The Hebrew, Akkadian, and Greek technical terms are all associated with "gift-giving" rather than "sale." Bridewealth was used in Jewish society to purchase furniture and household goods for the couple. This does not, however, lead us to conclude that a daughter was a free-agent in the marriage transaction in the ancient Near East, nor that her rights were the same as that of a son.

Dowries and indirect dowries, as already noted, originate in opposite families. On the other hand, they have the same (or similar) economic result by bestowing property on the new couple. This gives each family a vested interest in the new couple. Bridewealth that is not handed over to the bride is utilized in some societies to secure wives for the bride's brothers, if she has any: "Indeed it involves a kind of rationing system. What goes out for a bride has to come in for a sister" (Goody 1973:5).

The place of indirect dowry in combination with dowry in agonistic societies (such as those in the Mediterranean) is a procedure for balancing honor concerns. By these means both contracting families avoid becoming too indebted to the other (read: becoming the client of the other); see Schlegel and Eloul (1988:303).

In her provocative historical and anthropological synthesis on the roots of patriarchy, Lerner outlines the importance of taking class and economics into any analysis of marriage arrangements. She makes it clear that the stratification of society is perpetuated by dowries and bridewealth: homogamy (marriage within the group of one's own social level) circulates property and wealth within particular social classes (1986:108). Furthermore, concubinage and slavery serve to keep a segment of the women disenfranchised and powerless. In this vein, it is important to note that the regulations for early Christian families assume that household slaves are an integral part of the family structure (see Eph 6:5-9 and Col 4:1).

Goody (1973:21) summarizes the variables involved in bridewealth and dowries (direct and indirect) in pre-industrial societies:

INSERT Goody Chart HERE

INSERT diagram HERE

For a collection of essays on dowry and bridewealth in cross-cultural perspective, see Comaroff (1980). In Comaroff's introduction, previous theories and approaches are evaluated (1-47).

Inheritance is the disposition of movable and immovable property, most commonly at the death of the male head of the family (e.g., Gen 25:29-34; Sir 33:23; Luke 12:13; 15:11-12). But, as discussed above, Goody has also demonstrated that dowry is a means of "pre-mortem inheritance" given to the daughters at the time of their marriage.

Emmanuel Todd's methodology is demonstrably sexist when it comes to determining inheritance traditions (under his rubrics of "equality" and "inequality" [1985:7]). He fails to take two variables into account. In dowry-giving societies, such as those represented in the Bible and much of the ancient Mediterranean world, the dowry functions as pre-mortem inheritance (viz. a daughter's share of the family wealth given before her father's death). And secondly, while Todd attempts to construct a kinship typology of the whole world, he fails to consider that in many societies (including ancient Roman and the U.S.) both sons and daughters may inherit equally at the parents' death; he only speaks of sons inheriting (see also Numb 27:3-4; Job 42:15). Note that the wife is included neither in the Numbers prescriptive list, nor in most ancient lists of successors. The reason is that her portion was her dowry and indirect dowry.

Deut 21:17 designates a double portion for the eldest son. This was also practiced in late Judaism (m. B.B. 8:3-5), as well as in Nuzi and Old Babylonia, but not in Greece or Rome.

VII. The Israelite/Judean Family

For overviews of the kinship issues in the Bible, see Patai (1959/1960), Malina (1993: 117-48), Hanson (1989a; 1989b; 1990), and the articles in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* by Collins, Hamilton, Wilson, and Wright (1992). Among those treating the biblical texts, only Patai, Malina, Hanson, and Wilson employ social scientific methods. The others take a basically descriptive or historical approach; the usefulness of these others resides in their identification of historical shifts and the listing of texts.

Patai aims to provide a comprehensive overview of biblical texts related to kinship; his citation of texts is nearly exhaustive for each topic: marriage and divorce, sexuality, child-bearing and rearing, childhood, the life cycle, and inheritance.

Malina provides the reader with a brief introduction to kinship analysis along with its importance for biblical studies (1993:117-48). Besides the synchronic/diachronic chart of marriage strategies (see above), one of the most helpful features of Malina's treatment is his comparison of the main structural features of ancient Judean and modern U.S. kinship systems (119-26).

For a detailed analysis of the levels of Israelite society as it relates to kinship, one should consult Gottwald (1979). Here Gottwald analyzes the configurations of the "tribe" (Heb. *ševet*), a territorial and organizational grouping (245-56); the "clan" (*mišpachah*), a protective association of extended families (257-84); and the "father's house" (*bayith/beth 'av*), the extended, residential family (285-92). He also argues persuasively that Israel never manifested the exogamous clan (298-315).

Goody provides an analysis of the marriage strategies in Genesis and Ruth and their implications (1990:242-60). And Pilch contrasts the parenting styles and strategies of the modern U.S. to those articulated in the Bible, especially in Proverbs and Ben Sira (1991:71-94; 1993); note especially his helpful charts (1991:75-76; 1993:102-3).

Using the Herodian family as a test case, I explored the main issues in kinship studies with regard to ancient Israel and Judah through the second temple period: genealogy and descent (Hanson 1989a), marriage and divorce (1989b), and the economics of kinship: inheritance and dowry systems (1990). These each include cross-cultural comparisons to Mesopotamian, Ugaritic, Greek, Roman, and U.S. practices.

Steinberg analyzes the marriages in Gen 11–50 using both anthropology and literary criticism (1993). Her work is important for the way in which she integrates issues of descent, marriage, and inheritance. She argues that the marriage strategies manifested in these texts are employed in order to provide continuity of descent and to establish heirship. She organizes her analysis by the wives and marriage strategy: Sarah & Hagar (polycoity), Rebekah (monogamy), and Rachel & Leah (sororal polygyny).

VIII. The Greek Family

A wide-ranging analysis of the family in archaic and classical Greek society is carried out by W. K. Lacey (1968). The macro-structure of the book is historical and geographical in sequence: archaic (Homeric) Greece (33-50); the development of the city-states (51-83); Athens (84-176); Plato's ideal state, Sparta, and Crete (177-216); and other states (217-33). The micro-structure is synchronic, dealing with the *oikos* ("household"), marriage strategies, children, property, the life-cycle, aristocracy, law, the status of women, etc. An important complement to Lacey's study is that of Hunter (1993), who explores the social implications of law in comparison to actual practice of Greek kinship structures and the impact these both had on the lives of Greek women.

Other relevant studies on particular aspects of ancient Greek kinship are: kinship patterns (Humphreys 1986), marriage and family (Wolff 1944; Thompson 1967), sibling relationships (Cox 1988), inheritance and dowry (Levy 1963; Herzfeld 1980), blood-ties (du Boulay 1984), and women's roles and rights (Schaps 1979; Humphreys 1983; Visser 1986; Versnel 1987; Henry 1989).

Campbell provides an outstanding ethnography of kinship among modern Greek peasants kinship in his *Honour, Family and Patronage* (1964:36-212). His analysis is especially illuminating with regard to family structure and roles. Friedl's *Vasilika* (1962) provides a useful complement to Campbell. She covers issues of family economics, consumption, dowries, and inheritance (18-74). These works, though modern, are helpful because of the many historical continuities in Greek social structure; and the examples they employ are from real families in real situations, and complement reconstructions from law codes, literary works, and archaeological remains.

The importance of Greek kinship issues for biblical studies is two fold. Firstly, Greek culture affected the entire eastern Mediterranean, and as far east as India through the hellenization policies of Alexander the Great and his successors (esp. the Seleucids in Syria and the Ptolemies in Egypt), who controlled Judah for approximately two hundred years. Secondly, many of the earliest Christian communities were formed in Greece: e.g., Corinth, Thessalonica, and Philippi.

IX. The Roman Family

The details of Roman kinship have been of particular interest to anthropologists through the years for several reasons: the specificity of Latin legal terminology for kinship relations and arrangements, the comprehensiveness of Roman law, and the influence of Roman law on Western culture. For a brief overview of the Roman family and household, see Garnsey and Saller (1984:126-47).

Two volumes of collected essays edited by Beryl Rawson provide detailed studies of Roman kinship issues. In *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives* (1986) nine scholars contribute essays from general overviews (Rawson 1-57) to examinations of individual cases for their broader implications (e.g., Suzanne Dixon, "Family Finances: Terentia and Tullia," 93-120). The bibliographic essay by Binkowski and Rawson (243-57) will guide the researcher through the massive literature. And the extensive bibliography will be of special interest to those wishing to pursue detailed issues (258-72).

In the second volume, *Marriage, Divorce and Children in Ancient Rome* (Rawson 1991) nine more essays are offered. Again, they range from overviews (e.g., Rawson, "Adult-Child Relationships in Roman Society," 7-30) to very focussed ethnographic/archaeological analyses (e.g., Wallace-Hadrill, "Houses and Households: Sampling Pompeii and Herculaneum," 191- 227). One should note that all the contributors to these two volumes are classicists/social historians rather than anthropologists.

X. Conclusions

In examining kinship issues (or any other social phenomena), it is important not to treat them in isolation. Social institutions do not exist in a vacuum: they interact with, overlap, and change in response to other institutions. Social institutions form a network or web of relationships. Economics at the local level in ancient Palestine was controlled largely by kinship institutions: what a person's parents did for a living usually determined what that person did—farmers' children became farmers, potters' children became potters. Kinship also interacted with politics since traditional monarchies followed patrilineal descent principles. And religion interacted with kinship in that membership in the Israelite cultic community was based upon birth, as was membership in the priesthood.

The nuances of laws, group regulations, and preferences are distinctive in each society and historical period. Kinship studies provide an analytical framework within which to ask questions, organize data, and make cross-cultural comparisons. The characters we find in the Bible lived and worked in families far different from our own; and if we want to understand their experiences, perspectives, and values, we will need to understand the different kinds of families in which they were socialized.

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