

“Abortive Violence” Motif: A Re-Reading of Jacob’s Narrative

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Abstract

Violence is a global challenge if not a global threat to continued existence of humans. Violence comes in different forms and types; from the family setting down to national and international echelon of relationships violence is experienced. Sexual violence against women and minors, wife battering, armed robbery down to issues of murder and terrorism are all various shades of violence entrenched in human societies today. The fact that interpersonal conflicts are the little spark that does degenerate to full scale violence is the philosophy behind this study; that if interpersonal conflicts are properly handled, full scale violence could be prematurely aborted. While the Old Testament contains a great deal of stories of violence, it is fascinating to note that one of the themes that could be traced from the narratives of one of the three great patriarchs of ancient Israel is the theme of abortive violence. Therefore, the purpose of this work is to re-read Jacob’s narrative as a story of potential violence that never materialized. Deploying historical-critical and historical-grammatical methods of Bible interpretation the story comes alive in a less traditional but illuminating and exciting form. Literary, theological and didactic implications of the abortion of violence in the narrative were spelt out with a conclusion that the quest for personal social relevance and economic prosperity do constitute the reasons for conflict and violence against fellow human, but with third party intervention this could be checkmated.

Keywords: Abortive violence, Jacob narrative, Patriarchal, Genesis 25:19-35:29, conflict.

1. Introduction

Jacob’s narrative keeps its first time reader glued to reading in anticipation of possible tragic ending of the main character whose conception, birth and life style makes the narrative a unique one in the entire patriarchal narrative. The event of antenatal discomfort Rebekah experienced as she carried the twin brothers, Esau and Jacob sets the tone for inevitable life of violence. Mathews (1996:379) correctly notes that, three events came up early in the narrative that shows the battle of wills that ran antithetic to the piety of Isaac and Rebekah and eventually fractured the family. According to Mathews (1996:379) the events were “the struggle in the womb, the tussle at birth and the contentious sale of the birth-right.” Conversely, as events of his life unfold and crescendo for possible outburst of violence is in sight, the situation gets aborted owing to either, human or divine intervention.

The rhythmic pattern of this situation in the narrative in question arouses the curiosity of this researcher to ask the following questions: firstly, what is the significance of this motif in the narrative? Secondly, must all potential violence situations always result in violence? Thirdly, what is the place of a third party intervention in averting violence?

The purpose of this study is to point out that despite the prominence of occurrence of violence in the Old Testament (Fretheim, 2004:18), it also contains situations of averted violence and thereby advance a biblical method for nipping violence at the bud for the Nigerian community. This becomes germane, given the fact that violence has been part of human society and the intensity of it globally in recent times is alarming. Nigeria is thoroughly having her share of violence that comes in different categories; interpersonal violence, inter-community violence, inter-tribal violence and inter-religious violence and political violence. Meanwhile, our primary focus is on inter-personal violence which is the fundamental form of violence that most often than not dovetails to other forms of violence.

Historical-grammatical and historical-critical methods of exegesis and Biblical interpretation are employed in analysing the passages of potential violence situations in the narrative. The study is achieved under the following subheadings; definition of terms, historicity of patriarchal narratives, Esau-Jacob’s birth, analysis of the aborted violence situations in the narrative and relevant lessons for contemporary use.

2. Definition of Key Terms

2.1. Patriarchal Narrative

The word Patriarchal in our study means pertaining to Patriarchs. Patriarchs in our context refer to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as progenitors of covenant relationship with Yahweh and its attendant blessings as found in the Holy Bible, the sacred literature of the Judeo-Christian faith. Therefore, patriarchal narratives refer to the history of these founding fathers of Israel (patriarchs) as contained in Genesis 12-50 and as complimented by archaeological findings.

2.3. Birth right

This implies the cultural privilege operative in the ancient Near Eastern world and particularly in Biblical Israel that allows the first son in a family higher portion of the father's estate after the latter's demise. According to Davis (2008:81), "the most common understanding of this greater part in the Jewish literature is a double portion, which is twice the amount given to each of the other sons." Walton and Mathews (1997:55-56) explained how the double portion of the inheritance is derived this way; "The inheritance was divided into the number of sons plus one. The eldest son then received a double share." Meanwhile, beyond material inheritance, Horton (1994:225) indicates that family leadership in worship and war were part of the privileges in birth right. Also, in relation to Jacob and Esau, he asserts that "in this chosen line, the birth right included the promise and blessing given to Abraham (Gen 28:4) as well as the privilege of carrying on the line that would bring salvation-blessing to the whole world." It was the battle for this birth right that strained the relationship of the twin brothers in our study, hence the potential violence situation that ensued in the narrative.

2.3 Violence

Fretheim (2004:19) defines violence as "any action, verbal or nonverbal, oral or written, physical or psychical, active or passive, public or private, individual or institutional/societal, human or divine, in whatever degree of intensity, that abuse, violates, injures, or kills." This definition is an attempt to capture both human and divine violence for it is believed that God also employs violence for the salvation of a people as well as for the punishment of the erring. Also, the definition demonstrates that actions qualified to be tagged violence should not be limited to physical assault, it includes psychological assaults. Therefore, Fretheim's definition aligns well with the counsel of Gill (1995:875) who riding on the strength of the implication of the Latin etymology for the word violence claim that a comprehensive definition should capture both the psychological and physical condition of the victim of violence. He actually defines violence as "intentional, forceful action that causes unwelcome physical injury to another human being," it could include actions that "compel or prevent another's action against his or her will, whether or not physical injury results." These definitions are very relevant to our studies in the sense that Jacob was a subject of intended violence from human (Esau and Laban) and of actualized violence from a celestial being which left a physical scar on him.

3. The Question of Historicity of Patriarchal Narratives

Traditional Jews and conservative Christians do not query the existence of the Patriarchs; according to Livingston (1974:151), "scholars have long recognized that the patriarchs lived during the first half of the second millennium B.C." But since the advent of rationalistic approach to the study of religious claims, the authenticity of the historicity of the Patriarchs has become a subject of intense debate. Wellhausen (2002:183) contends that no historical knowledge of the Patriarchs could be obtained from Genesis; they are rather glorified mirage, which in his trademark manner claimed was anachronistically reported in variance to its original post-exilic era. Tradition critics have thereby reduced the Patriarchs to mere literary motif, invented to give an already established Kingdom of Israel, a sense of heritage, and a right to the land of Canaan (Merrill, 1996:45). Broadly, Evolutionary theorists think the claim that all men descended from one man is fictitious. Consequently, it is asserted that what we have as Patriarchal figures is simply a product of "self-portrayal and self-idealization of the latter people of Israel during the time of the kingdom." (Vos, 2007:66) It is an effort to mirror themselves as a distinct people from other nations.

Several alternative views to the traditional one that sees Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as true personal names of historical persons have been perpetuated. One of such views sees those names as those of tribal groups and thus

movements ascribed to the individual are interpreted as tribal movements. Another view advances that the three patriarchs had no original connection whatsoever with Hebrew genealogical history, rather, they are names of Canaanites demigods (considered by the Canaanites tribes as their ancestors and worshipped as such in different places.) Identification of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob with Hebron, Beersheba and Bethel respectively were fraudulent and fictitious assigning of the Canaanites shrine to their purported ancestors by the Jews in order to personalize and lay legal claim to ownership of those places in history. Also, attempt has been made to explain these names from Babylonian antecedents of mythology. Sarah was the goddess of Haran and Abraham its god; Laban was moon god and the four faces of the moon were the four wives of Jacob; the twelve sons of Jacob were the twelve months of the year; the seven sons of Leah were the seven days of the week etc., (ibid, 67).

Nevertheless, opposing arguments have been advanced by situating the biblical accounts of the Patriarchal narratives within the first half of the second millennium BC (also known as the Middle Bronze Age). Daunting parallels between the Patriarchal stories and social customs and laws of the Bronze Age have been employed to affirm the historicity of the Patriarchs (Livingston, 1974). Lot of credits in this respect go to W.F Albright, Cyrus H. Gordon and Ephraim A. Speiser – those whose view received support from John Bright, Roland De Vaux. The work of Walter C. Kaiser, *The Old Testament Documents* contains explicit and concise discussion of such parallels that include social comparison, law, names of people and places, (Kaiser, 2001: 84-96).

In view of the detrimental implication that denial of the historicity of the Patriarchs have on the relevance of the history of redemption plus the archaeological supports for their historicity, we maintain the traditional position that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were real historical persons whose record of existence are contained in Genesis 12-50. Jacob Narrative is located in Genesis 25:19-35:29 of the entire scope of Patriarchal narratives. Situating it in the broader context of Genesis, it is found in the *tōlēdōt yīshāq ben 'abraham*, the eighth of the eleven *tōlēdōt*¹ that make up the entire Genesis. Although this section is named after Isaac, the greater part of it discusses his younger son, Jacob. In summary, we align with Merrill (1996:45) who specifically reacting to the “legend tag” on Jacob’s story by tradition critics, submits:

Nevertheless, a straightforward reading of the narrative creates no insuperable historical problems. There are miracles in the story, indeed, not least of which is the direct intervention of the Lord in behalf of Jacob and his wives. The integrity of the account however, can be denied only by a positivistic reading of history. Yet if God be absent from this story, then there is no way to see his hand anywhere, and the Old testament becomes here and everywhere a mere work of fiction no matter how pious its intent.

4. Esau-Jacob’s birth

The prenatal struggle of the twin brothers in their mother’s womb introduces Esau-Jacob cycle of narrative as fundamentally a story of conflict. In fact, two of the three prominent themes throughout the cycle, which are “strife” and “deception”, substantiate this. Strife and deception appear to have been necessitated by the longing for “blessing” which is the third theme. The description of their physiological appearance is strongly contrasted to set the tone for strife; Esau was named according to his physical appearance, (the hairy one) and Jacob according to his behaviour (for he held Esau’s heel). Thus Jacob’s name, characterizes him both as a fighter (“heel-grabber”) and as a deceiver (“sup planter”; cf. 27:36) says McKenzie (1980: 225). However, caution not to interpret the heel grabbing literally but figuratively has been advised by Preuss as cited by Reisenberger (1997:1548). Meanwhile, Smith (1990:465) thinks it is literal grabbing but not of the heel but of Esau’s genitals. So for him, heel has been used in the text euphemistically for genitals. He reasons that this understanding is what

¹ *toledoth* is the Hebrew term translated, “this is the account of” or “these are the generations of” in the book of Genesis. It is the schematic term of formula used by the author of Genesis to present his material. The entire fifty chapters of Genesis are literarily divided into eleven *toledoth*. They are *toledoth* of Heavens and Earth (2:4-4:26); *toledoth* of Adam (5:1-6:8); *toledoth* of Noah (6:9-9:29); *toledoth* of Shem, Ham, and Japheth (10:1-11:9); *toledoth* of Shem (11:10-26); *toledoth* of Terah (11:27-25:11); *toledoth* of Ishmael (25:12-18); *toledoth* of Isaac (25:19-35:29); *toledoth* of Esau (36:1-37:1); and *toledoth* of Jacob (37:2-50:26).

adheres firmly with the spirit of the narrative and thoroughly portrays Jacob as a supplanter. He buttresses his point as follow:

Since in ancient Hebrew thought the sexual organs were regarded as the seat of a man's procreative power, the suggestion that in the story Jacob is gripping Esau not by the heel but by the genitals would aptly prefigure the narrative plot as a whole: by any means at his disposal Jacob wants to appropriate his brother's power for himself, thereby inheriting God's promise to Abraham of countless descendants. Jacob's act of gripping his brother's genitals is symbolic of his desire to assume this procreative power.

The popularity of the identity of Jacob's name with his character as a supplanter following the word *play*¹ in the text beclouds the fact that Jacob actually is a shortened form of Jacob-el, which means "may God protect." His subsequent struggles and deceptive character in his interpersonal relationship with people especially Esau, Isaac and Laban could not have been better understood without this background about his birth, naming and most significantly, the Prophetic projection that places the younger ahead of the older.

5. Aborted Violence with Esau

In Genesis 25-27 we have the first Esau-Jacob cycle of the narrative. It is the first of the several instances of Jacob's working against individuals. This section continued with the tone set in Gen 25: 19-26. It contains a vivid contrast in appearance, personality and character between the two brothers. Also, parental preference of one child above the other heightens the inevitability of strife between the twin brothers. While Isaac had Esau as his favourite because of the former's appetite for venison from the latter's hunting job, the reason for Rebekah's choice of Jacob is not mentioned, but may not be divorced from the availability of Jacob at home in assisting her with domestic chores as well as her privy to the prophetic pronouncement that places Jacob ahead of Esau as the heir of the covenant.

Two important events necessitated a violent response from Esau to Jacob; he took advantage of Esau's need of a meal to negotiate off the latter's birth right and later deceived Isaac to receive the blessing intended for Esau. Each of the two events demonstrated the cunning and desperate attitude of Jacob for ascendancy of seniority and thereby aroused the wrath of Esau against him.

Largely, Esau was always castigated for being carefree with his birth right, but a careful assessment of the condition that made him trade off the birth right and the response of Jacob to a sibling in such a precarious situation provoke some measure of sympathy for Esau and indict Jacob. A lexical study of the verses in question will be helpful at this point.

Esau's predicament is brought to fore with the choice of vocabularies: "faint," "feed me," and "die." Esau returned home (obviously from a fruitless hunting activity) fainting as a result of hunger and needed to be fed as a matter of urgent priority. The first mention of faint in the passage (Gen 25:29) belongs to the pen of the author of this book or the reporter of this incidence who we believe was divinely inspired to do the writing. Therefore, contrary to the usual castigation of Esau, we can confidently say that the second mention which came from the mouth of Esau was an expression of his true experience at that moment. The word translated faint is the Hebrew word *'ayif*. The word has 17 occurrences in the BHS² of which the first two mentions are in this passage. Carl (1980:664) opines that the word is mostly used to describe physical exhaustion traceable to hunger and intense exertion. Such exertion is understandable from the experience of the nation of Israel with the Amalekites. Deuteronomy 25:18 suggests that it was the physical exertion of the Army of Israel conveyed by the term *ayif* that the Amalekites exploited against Israel.

Also, in the case of soldiers of David in II Samuel 16: 14; 17:29 as well as the men of Gideon's army in Judges 8:4-5, the same kind of exertion is noted and interestingly, the quest for refreshing substance such as water, milk, honey and food were indicated as subsequent to the unpleasant experience. Its figurative usage in Psalm 63:1;

¹ In Genesis 25:26, the Hebrew word translated heel is *'aqeb* and it is widely regarded as forming a powerful word pun with the name *ya'aqob* (Jacob).

² BHS is the acronym for *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartentia*, the name given to the standard Old Testament text in the original language, Hebrew. It is an edition of the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible.

Psalm 143:6 and Jeremiah 31:25 buttress the fact that the physical experience communicated with the choice of this vocabulary cannot be separated from desperation for survival as a matter of first priority. However, Walton (2001:551) queries whether a skilled hunter like Esau was “truly on the brink of starvation, or is he simply using careless hyperbole?” He thinks the terms used here may not be very helpful in determining the true condition of Esau since they are capable of describing being famished as well as “experiencing life-endangering hunger.” However, he still agrees that Esau should be given the benefit of the doubt, from his assessment; his life must have been threatened by hunger. No matter the situation Esau was going through at the time, the intrinsic value attached to birth-right beyond utility value of it in that cultural setting probably outweighed his decision to jettison the priceless privilege the birth-right bequeathed to him. This may be the reason for the evaluation comments of verse 34; “Esau despised his birth-right.”

Nevertheless, we cannot rule out the fact that, Esau at that time had an intense need of refreshment. In verse thirty, Esau pleaded tenaciously to be fed with the stew of Jacob as a matter of urgency. The particle of entreaty, *nah* (now, pray) reinforces the precarious situation he must have been at the time. The NIV translates the particle as “quick,” KJV uses “pray,” NKJV translates it “please” same as in CJB, the Amplified version uses “beg,” a word that is very contemporary with our understanding of entreaty in this part of the world. The intense entreaty is justified in verse thirty two with the statement *'anoki holik lamuth* (I am at the point to die or I am at the point of death). The word *lamuth* is *Qal* infinitive construct of *muth* prefixed with the inseparable preposition *le*. The infinitive construct of this kind is used inceptively. This means that it indicates that an action is about to take place (Practico & Van Pelt, 2007:244). In this regard it is the termination of the life of Esau that was about to occur, since *muth* means “to lose one’s life.”

Although, it has been observed that such negotiation to secure inheritance right from Esau was in accordance with Nuzu customs (Schultz, 1960:36), conversely, Jacob’s response to his twin brother was a total departure from the spirit of hospitality to complete strangers which supposedly characterized that historical milieu, at least as demonstrated by Abraham, their grandfather. The following vocabularies depict the desperation of Jacob to lay hold of Esau’s birth right; “sell,” “today,” and “swear.” It is interesting to note that, Jacob was the first to use the word *makar* (to sell) in the Old Testament; this is the first time in the Old Testament that the vocabulary for the verb “to sell” (Gen 25:31) occurs from its 80 entries in the BHS. The use of second person masculine singular imperative, *mik^erah* (sell) is indicative of the desperation of a calculative schemer. *mik^erah* is an inflection of the verb *makar* which means “to sell” in the context of merchandizing or to surrender in figurative sense (Holladay, 1991:194). We would like to understand the usage here in the figurative sense rather than the sense of barter exchange conveyed by a number of English translations that translates it as “sell.” Bible in Basic English and Good News Translation for instance come close to our usage as both translate the statement in question as “first of all give me your birth-right” and “I will give it to you if you give me your rights as the first-born son” respectively. The singular meal definitely was not worth the value of the birth-right that Jacob demanded from Esau and Jacob knew it, hence the introduction of the idea of oath to seal the deal. Therefore, what Jacob did was to take advantage of the momentary predicament of Esau to cause the later to relinquish his right to the privileges of the first son in the family. For Jacob, it was a deal that must be sealed immediately, so he demanded that the surrendering be done *kayom* (this day). Our submission is that if Esau was an uncouth despiser of tradition, Jacob did not fare any better, he was a wily exploiter (Wenham, 2003:58). Esau’s reference to this event at the instance of Jacob’s taking of the blessing from Isaac attests to the former’s helplessness at the time he let go of the birth right: Esau said, “Isn't he rightly named Jacob? He has deceived me these two times: He took my birth right, and now he's taken my blessing!” Then he asked, “Haven't you reserved any blessing for me?” (Gen 27:36).

Furthermore, Isaac’s Blessing on Esau projects violence and a life of struggle for Esau (Gen 27: 37-40). It was at this time that the animosity of Esau against Jacob heightened (Gen 27:41) as he resolved to deploy a life-terminating violence against his twin brother. The terms *wayistom* (and he hated) as well as *we’ahargah* (and I will slay him) indicate grudge and intended murder respectively as clear indication of potential violence in this narrative. But as the plot was being nurtured, it was nipped at the bud through the agency of Rebekah, their mother; she set up the plan for the escape of Jacob to Laban, just as she set up the plot for the hijacking of the paternal blessing in favour of Jacob. Thus Jacob escaped with an ill-gotten blessing (Briggs, 2012:33).

6. Averted Violence between Laban and Jacob

The reader of the story of Jacob's pilgrimage under his maternal uncle, Laban, senses a potential violence situation as early as Genesis 29:16-17 where the beauty of Rachel was described as towering above that of her elder sister Leah in anticipation of Jacob's bargain for her hand in marriage as exchange for his service to Laban (Gen 29:18-19).¹ To have a younger sister go into marriage ahead of the older customarily do engender animosity in some cultural settings in Africa. In the same manner, Laban advanced cultural alignment for giving out Leah and not Rachel on the night of the wedding. This deceit demonstrated by Laban to Jacob was enough to breed contempt and conflict leading to violence, much more that several occasions of shift in contractual agreement were witnessed in the relationship of Laban and Jacob (Gen 31:7,41). Jacob's manipulative scheme that made the strong animals birth young ones in his favour with regard to the new contract with Laban after the first two contracts expired plus the concern of Laban's sons that Jacob had taken over their father's flock heightened the suspicion of an imminent violence (Gen 30:25-31:2) (Merrill, 1996:44-45). The decision of Jacob to leave Laban's home was most reasonably to avert violence, but the execution of the departure without prior information given to Laban once again resumed the reader's expectation of possibility of violent attack on Jacob (Gen 31:17-21). Laban's pursuit of Jacob when he got the whims that Jacob had fled as well as the warning of Yahweh to him in a dream establishes our position that violence was actually looming at this time (Gen 31:22-24). On this occasion, God himself was the agent who averted violence. The description of what played out on this occasion is succinctly captured by McKeown (2008:150):

During the journey God warns Laban in a dream to "say not a word to Jacob, either good or bad" (31:24). This is an example of merism, an expression that uses two opposites to include everything in between. Thus, to say nothing either good or bad means to say nothing at all. This seems to be an idiomatic expression warning Laban not to harm Jacob. On Laban's own admission he has power to harm Jacob, but he takes the nocturnal warning seriously. God protects Jacob and his family from Laban's hostile intentions.

Beyond the immediate check of violence done by God, the two characters took further step to pre-empt future occurrence of violence between the two parties. The step was necessary because the dialogue between the two party shows frantic effort to fix blames as each of them strove to establish self-justifying appraisal of what had transpired in their relationship for twenty years. In fact, the momentary peace experienced at the dialogue meeting was indicative of smoke screen that blurred unresolved animosity. An oath was taken and stone of demarcation was set up as a memorial pillar and a boundary not to cross thereby preventing the possibility of coming close to accomplish evil intention against each other. Horton (1994:301) expatiates on the implication of the oath by saying "The covenant involved Laban's not going south of the line marked by the memorial pillar and witness heap to harm or steal from Jacob, while Jacob would not go north of it to act against Laban." God's name was invoked as watchers of the actions of the two parties from that moment on.

7. The Wrestling with an Angel and reunion with Esau

At the eve of his re-union with Esau, his exploited and jilted twin brother, Jacob, most assuredly hunted by his ignoble act of twenty years ago anticipated a violent confrontation. His thought was confirmed by the report that Esau was coming to meet him with four hundred men; a number of people in the similitude of the crowd that Laban led to confront him not too long ago. This concern led him to devise a method of appeasing Esau in a strategic manner and arrangement that would made his most preferred wife, Rachel the last victim of his brothers

¹ Jacob's offer of his service as bride price for Rachel was an unusual form of payment for herding contracts known in that cultural milieu; however, Laban embraced the offer, (Morrison, 1983:160).

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wrath had his peace-making gifts to Esau failed to accomplish its purpose (Gen 32). The potential violence at this point was described by the intense fear and distress that came upon Jacob. *tsarar* translated distress in Genesis 32:7 describes “the strong emotional response that one experiences when pressed-externally by enemies or internally by wrong decisions or passions.” Also, his soliloquy was a contemplation of violence; He thought, “If Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape.”(Gen 32:8).

The word translated attack is *nakah* which has largely been used in the Old Testament to describe striking an animate being especially a person or group of people dead. The word is capable of describing both intentional and unintentional murder. In fact, total decimation of a city or company of people by an army are usually captured with the use of this vocabulary. It is therefore, understandable that Jacob at this point sought divine intervention through prayer in order to assuage the temper of Esau (Gen 32:9-12). While he retreated at night for reflections, he got entangled in a struggle with an angel in what Kenneth and John (1994:42) described as epitome of Jacob’s life; “he had struggled with his brother, his father and his father-in-law, and now he struggles with God.” His ability to identify the celestial being as possessing the potency to invoke blessings on him is understandable from his previous experience at Bethel while he was running away from home twenty years back (Wood, 1970:73). The text did not tell us what called for the wrestling bout; Goldingay (2003:251) says, “it is not clear what the assailant is trying to do....”

However, Jacob’s demand for blessing could be conjectured as the reason for the wrestling; Jacob needed divine assurance and protection at this crucial time of his life. Owing to stalemate in the bout, the angel went violent by touching “the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint...” (Gen 32:24). The wrestling was aborted by mutual consent as the angel pleaded to be allowed to go as the day broke. Although he already incurred injury, Jacob will not let the angel go until he received his desired blessing. He eventually got blessed but not without the scar of dislocated hip joint. It is remarkable that of all violence-charged situations in Jacob’s narrative this episode was the only instance that violence was actually unleashed on Jacob. Even his eventual meeting with Esau reveals that Esau’s rage had been pacified and a smooth reunion ensued (Gen 33:1-17). McKeown (2008:157) opines: “Esau, in spite of his capacity to harm Jacob, runs to meet him, embraces him, falls on his neck and kisses him.” The peaceful reunion has been largely linked to Jacob’s petition in prayer (Gen 32:11).

8. Some Implications

8.1. Literary Implication: The broader Patriarchal narrative that started with the call of Abraham was kept on course with the abortion of life threatening conflicts in the story of Jacob. The narrative would have terminated half-way, had the threat to kill Jacob materialized. Also, the cycle of literary pattern of conflict within the immediate family that existed in the story of Abraham and Isaac got its full expression in the story of Jacob as well. In fact, it is noted that each of the narratives of the Patriarchs have similar features.

8.2. Theological Implication: The struggle for prominence between older and younger heirs of the patriarchs is not limited to Jacob and Esau alone; Isaac and Ishmael, Joseph and brothers also had similar experience. In each of the cases, despite differences in the historical solutions to the struggles, a clear theological position is common to all. The divine will is realized without recourse to the personalities, character or intention of the participants themselves (Mathews, 2005:380). Therefore, if the intended murder (violence) of Esau against Jacob had taken place, a disruption of this consistent theology that the will or the divine purpose stands as of utmost importance would probably have resulted. By implication, abortion of the violence makes the perpetuation of the patriarchal covenant possible. Therefore, it could be interpreted as a theological plot to ensure a consistent continuity of what had been promised to Abraham. Conversely, it could be a divine intervention to eliminate the threat that rose against divine agenda. The later appears more congruent with the narrative, given the fact that God himself was the agent of the abortion in a number of instances.

8.3. Didactic Implication: Human relationship is usually characterized by misunderstanding and offences. Therefore, conflicts and animosity that are capable of degenerating to violence are part of human daily experiences. One good lesson from the story of Jacob is that, not all potential violence situations must be allowed to run its full course or to get matured. Third party intervention is highly invaluable in every human relationship. Rebekah was the third party in the first instance of Esau-Jacob brawl. God was the third party in the Laban-Jacob rancour; in the Angel-Jacob struggle, the two party resolved issues by consent; and finally, God was petitioned and invoked as the unseen but sovereign third party in the final meeting of Jacob and Esau. Therefore, since interpersonal conflict is inevitable in human society, we should be conscious enough to quickly

nip at the bud, violent situation through human third party intervention or by seeking divine intervention. In this regard the Nigerian cultural and religious settings provide a very positive avenue for the use of these measures. Firstly, the country is densely religious. Therefore, using divine intervention through homilies and prayers to checkmate violence comes very handy. Secondly, the place of elders in regulating violence and restoring peace as arbitrators, adjudicators and mediators cannot be overemphasized as it is strongly entrenched in most cultural settings in Nigeria; it should be thoroughly deployed at any sign of possible outburst of violence.

9. Conclusion

Self-realization, that is, the quest for social relevance and economic emancipation is the recurrent reason that prompted violence in Jacob Narrative. The struggles from the womb, the scheme by Jacob to outwit Esau on the birth-right as well as the matter of paternal invocation of blessing from Isaac were prompted in the bid to achieve self-realization. The same is obvious in his relationship with his uncle, Laban, as well as in the wrestling session with the celestial being. The same is true of all manner of conflict and violence today. It is innate in human to always set out to challenge anything and anyone who stands on one's way to social relevance and economic emancipation. A closer look at reasons for violence in most part of the world today cannot be separated from these noted factors. Efforts should therefore be made by individuals, social groups and tribal groups to put their self-centred quest for relevance in check and allowed third party intervention to prevail where and when necessary.

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