



## Research article

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**DIVINE CHOICE IN AND THROUGH  
BROTHERLY/SISTERLY LOVE – *MISSIO DEI* MOTIF****Sajeev Sugu**

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**ABSTRACT**

Brotherly or sisterly love shall be seen all over the scriptures, majorly with disagreements. It is through such tensions many Biblical events were unveiled, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. The study adopted descriptive analyses method. The main sources of research materials are in relevant written materials to the study of religion. This focused on the evaluation of mission of God which commenced with humanities and the same influenced brotherly and sisterly love, which Apostle Paul encouraged its continuity. Though look like the divine choice is to favour one sibling and forgetting the other, it aims at harmony between the brothers and sisters and the inclusion of all. Missio Dei understanding of the happenings leads the seeker to a whole new understanding of the brotherly/sisterly love concept in the New Testament, having initiated and practiced by Jesus Christ and His disciples. Disagreements diminishes as the divine will of Christ-like brotherly love gets established among the siblings. Like the brothers or the members of a same family was selected for the Missio Dei, God in the present times chooses His people to do His will and to achieve the Mission of God. Thus in the choice of God (divine choice) people are called both to obey the will of God and to show brotherly love, thereby partaking in the Missio Dei.

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**Background**

Families form an integral part in the Biblical narratives, which includes marital relationships, parental relations and the role of siblings<sup>1</sup> which is very significant. Family members disagree and do quarrel sometimes, many times it get worse even. Siblings do hold a role in these quarrels and often between themselves, which is addressed as 'sibling rivalry'. The very beginning of Biblical narrative though unfortunately witnesses to the quarrel between Cain and Abel, which results in the homicide of the younger one. Rather unfortunate is, it does not end there but continues. Most of these vile and foul events have a gracious ending in 'forgiveness' initiated by God Almighty in most of the times and in rare occasions by the parties involved. Above all at the perfect discretion of God Almighty some are preferred over the other, which in this paper will be described as the 'divine choice'. Thus this paper will present the missio Dei theme 'divine choice' in relation to the families, with special reference to sibling relations and implications throughout the Bible, which is of so much importance in the 'pastoral ministry'. The first part of the paper presents a bird's eye view on some select sibling related events where God declares his choice. The second part of the paper will present a Biblical Theology of Missio Dei on 'divine choice' where families particularly brothers and sisters were used to present a model that finally leads to brotherly or sisterly love- the Missio Dei in Torah, particularly in pastoral ministry perspective.

**Missio Dei in Torah**

The Torah gives a lot of incidents related to the familial relationship problems and genesis has a lot of stories to tell but, those contribute insights to this paper will be mainly such events that demonstrates divine choice. The divine choice of preferring one over the other in most of the case have ended in forgiveness and reconciliation. Though the sibling rivalry stems up from the Cain and Abel incident (Gen 4), it did not result in reconciliation but the worst that should not have happened, happened, brutal slaying of the younger brother by the elder. In the course of the narrative concepts of violence, jealousy, and murder are deployed

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<sup>1</sup> A sibling is one of two or more individuals having one or both parents in common. A female sibling is a sister and a male sibling is a brother. In most societies throughout the world, siblings often grow up together, thereby facilitating the development of strong emotional bond



that fit the category of foulness.<sup>2</sup> The main reason behind such a horrific activity can be the choice of God of one's sacrifice over the other. Following can be the series of events happened in the Family of Abraham. An act relates to settlement though not reconciliation shall be heard in the words of Abraham to his relative lot in Genesis chapter 13: 9 (ISV) "Isn't the whole land available to you? Let's separate: If you go to the left, then I will go to the right; if you go to the right, then I will go to the left." Not so different was the case of Isaac and Ishmael, they also separate and make separate livelihood. All those who could agree upon the choice of God shall be seen being blessed abundantly.

The stories of Jacob and Esau and Rachel and Leah (Genesis 25-36) in the book of Genesis can be seen along with few stories of the same type, many of which highlight the recurring theme of the younger sibling being elevated over the older sibling—Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Rachel over Leah, Joseph over his older brothers, and Judah over Reuben.<sup>3</sup> Each of these stories in Genesis narrate sibling rivalry at some point or period of time having contained its own distinctive plot and themes. The rivalry between the twin brothers Jacob and Esau (Gen 25-33) and the rivalry between Leah and Rachel who were both sisters to one another and wives of Jacob (Gen 29-30) stand separate among these as the quarrels follow reconciliation. The LORD reveals to her (Rebekah the mother of Jacob and Esau) that these two sons are "two nations" who "shall be divided," the one stronger than the other and "the elder shall serve the younger" (Gen 25:19-23) and there it starts. Esau grew up to become a skilful hunter and preferred to stay outdoors, and Jacob was rather a civilized man in the modern terms, living in tents, thus preferring indoors. The father Isaac loved Esau, while the mother Rebekah loved Jacob (Gen 25:27-28), which added to the prevailing tension. Buying of birth rights happened followed by deceiving the father, both by the

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<sup>2</sup> Vermeulen, Karolien. 2014. "Mind the gap: ambiguity in the story of Cain and Abel." *Journal Of Biblical Literature* 133, no. 1: 36. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed June 04, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Fox, Everett. "Stalking the Younger Brother: Some Models for Understanding a Biblical Motif." *Journal For The Study Of The Old Testament* 60, (December 1993): 48. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed June 04, 2015).

Abraham's older son Ishmael is supplanted by the younger Isaac (Gen 17:15-22; 21:8-21). The younger Jacob is chosen by God and blessed by his father Isaac instead of his older brother Esau (Gen 25:21-28; 27:1-40; 28:10-22). The husband Jacob favours and loves the younger sister Rachel over her older sister Leah, both wives of Jacob (Gen 29:15-30). Among the twelve sons of Jacob the younger Joseph is favoured by their father and ends up as the more powerful master over all his older brothers (Gen 37:1-11; 50:15-21). In Jacob's final blessing of his twelve sons before his death, the younger Judah is raised up with a special blessing (Gen 49:8-12) while the oldest son Reuben is demoted (Gen 49:3-4; see Gen 35:22).



younger one. After Esau discovered that Jacob had stolen his blessing, Esau angrily resolved, “I will kill my brother Jacob” (27:41). Rivalry heightened and Jacob had to flee to his uncle, where he happened to marry both of his uncle’s daughters. In describing the two sisters the narrator contrasts the young Rachel who was “graceful and beautiful” with Leah whose eyes were rakkôt. In most contexts, the adjective rakkôt has a positive meaning of “tender/delicate/lovely” but in this context it may also mean “weak/feeble.” Leah’s outer beauty may be marred by “weak eyes,” her eyes may be “lovely,” or her eyes may reveal an inner disposition of delicate tenderness (Gen 29:17).<sup>4</sup> But Jacob falls for Rachel but ends up in marrying both. The envy, jealousy, and escalating competition between the two sisters did not lead to physical violence and revenge as was happening in the previous cases, instead, the narrative introduces a scene of negotiation, compromise, and fragile resolution. The fertility enchanting fruit ‘mandrake’ heightens the prevailing tension but a win-win proposal is made, which ultimately seems good for both. Though there came a temporal truce, things did not stop even after the death of Rachel!

After spending twenty years for his wives, Jacob left Haran and sojourned to his homeland. On the way he met his brother and bowed down to the ground seven times as a sign of humility as he approached Esau, hoping to save himself and his family from his vengeance (33:1-3) Esau’s reaction to seeing Jacob was not of vengeance but was full of forgiveness: “But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept” (33:4). A real and lasting forgives and thus reconciliation.<sup>5</sup> Both the brothers were blessed with enormous wealth as it says in Genesis 36: 7 “Their possessions were too great for them to remain together; the land where they were staying could not support them both because of their livestock”.

This passes on to the next generation, again problems surround the father’s nepotism. Jacob preferred and favoured his wife Rachel, so also he did to her children, even after her death. This brought tension between both the groups of children. Tension heightened when Joseph received a new robe and that finally resulted in selling Joseph to Midianites. Though

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<sup>4</sup> Olson, Dennis T. "Revenge, forgiveness, and sibling rivalry: a theological dialogue between scripture and science." *Ex Auditu* 28, (2012 2012): 114. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed June 08, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Cohen, Jeffrey M. "The Jacob-Esau Reunion." *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (July 1993): 162-163. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed June 16, 2015).



unlikely brothers selling their brother happens but rather unlikely was planned by God almighty, Joseph became the second in charge at Egypt. Genesis 45: 1-15 beautifully describes the event of Joseph's forgiveness and reconciliation with his brothers. Joseph considers this to be a mission having destined by God almighty to let Israel survive during the famine<sup>6</sup>. Joseph even takes a further step, he extends his care and protection in Egypt – “So Jacob and all his offspring went to Egypt, taking with them their livestock and the possessions they had acquired in Canaan” (Genesis 46:6). On a minor note the continuing tautness shall be seen in Jacob blessing Joseph's children, where Ephraim was preferred over Manasseh (Gen 48).

The next prevalent episode of Sibling relations shall be seen in the trio - Moses, Miriam and Aron, because of Moses' Cushite wife (marriage or divorce) – Aron and Miriam dissent (Num. 12). But God Almighty intervenes and curses them but on listening to the plea of Moses God saves them and Miriam in particular. According to Exodus 7: 7, Aaron was 83 and Moses was 80 when they requested permission from the Pharaoh to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.<sup>7</sup> After ten vicious plagues -- everything from the Nile River turning into blood and the deaths of the country's firstborn -- the brothers finally receive the Pharaoh's permission to leave Egypt and to head to the Promised Land – dynamic leadership of brothers. Though there was a bit of dissent to be seen in the beginning, ones things get better, Moses and Aron prove to be of appreciable mutual help.

Korah, an usurper against the leadership of Moses and Aron, though being punished by God almighty, sons of Korah grow far beyond the ways of their father (Num. 16, 26). Out of all the Psalms in the Bible about 25 are attributed to the sons of Korah.<sup>8</sup> God judged those who turned against Him in active rebellion and purified His people, but He still had a purpose and plan for even the lineage of Korah.

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<sup>6</sup> Schimmel, Sol. "Joseph and his brothers: a paradigm for repentance." *Judaism* 37, no. 1 (1988 1988): 64. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed June 11, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Sperling, S David. "Miriam, Aaron and Moses: sibling rivalry." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 70-71, (1999 1999): 46. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed June 14, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.gotquestions.org/sons-of-Korah.html> Accessed on 14/06/2021

**David and Missio Dei**

David follows next and being the youngest in Jesse's family, who was not even considered worthy to be considered when Samuel came to anoint the king of Israel. One of the tensions that can be seen is in 1 Samuel 17: 28, "Eliab's anger burned against David and he said, "Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your insolence and the wickedness of your heart; for you have come down in order to see the battle." But this soon settles down and soon after that David kills Goliath. But not that pleasant was the relationship between the children of David and worst among that happens between Amnon and Tamar. Amnon eventually ends up in raping Tamar and her brother Absalom orders his men to kill him some two years later, are the trail of happenings. Hostilities in the light of impending kingship shall also be seen among the brothers<sup>9</sup>.

Book of Prophets: The sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas were the two joined in their actions for something but was evil in the sight of God, as they did not regard the authority of God. So they were wiped out and in their place Samuel found favour in the sight of God.

Wisdom literature and Psalm 133 in particular tells about the joy and blessedness of brothers dwelling together. Proverbs 17:17 tells of brother as one who is born to help at the time of adversity, which is obviously above friends and other relatives.

Jesus Christ and John the Baptist is another example of brothers (rather cousins Luke 1: 36) who follow the pattern of Old Testament events. John begins the ministry before Jesus and paves the way for God almighty, which he admits in John 3: 30 "He must become more important, but I must become less important." An appreciable attitude, yet to be practiced properly in the Christian circle! At a point of time Jesus says (Mark 3: 35) "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." It is open to all, becoming the brother of sister of Jesus, even the mother of Jesus. Those who share the brotherhood/sisterhood with Jesus Christ do share the same between fellow believers.<sup>10</sup> This again is limited according to divine choice as is seen in John 15: 16 "You did not choose me, but I chose you and

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<sup>9</sup> Apple, Anne H K. "The rape of Tamar." *Journal For Preachers* 36, no. 2 (2013 2013): 38. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed June 14, 2021).

<sup>10</sup> Meier, John P. "The brothers and sisters of Jesus in ecumenical perspective." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (January 1992): 26. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed June 24, 2021).



appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit". Thus it can be said that those who are selected by the divine will of God are the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ.

In Gospels Two of the best-known brothers in the New Testament are the disciples Peter and Andrew. Peter was impulsive and extroverted while Andrew was the strong, silent type. Though Andrew was the first one to know and present Jesus Christ before his brother, Peter gets prominence after. The two brothers came from Bethsaida, a fishing community on the Sea of Galilee. Incidentally, the disciple Philip also came from Bethsaida (John 1:44). James and John are the other two well-known brothers in action in the New Testament. According to Matthew 4:21, their father was with them when Jesus called them to be his disciples and even after that they were very much known along with the name of their father. They anyway join for a recognition – to sit at the left and right of Jesus in His glory, which was neither denied nor agreed upon.

Mary and Martha lived in Bethany with their brother Lazarus who was raised from the dead (John 11). Mary was known for taking time to listen to Jesus while Martha was known for being busy and upset with her sister for not helping her with household chores. Jesus, however, commended Mary and suggested Martha was seeing things incorrectly (Luke 10:38-41).

Paul's Letter to Philemon: Onesimus was a slave and his master Philemon was a Christian. Onesimus had evidently run away from Colossae (Colossians 4:9) to Rome where Paul, in prison, had led him to faith in Jesus. Now he is sending Onesimus back to Philemon, not as a slave but as a brother. Paul is emphasising the brotherly love in Christ that transcends all other concerns. A note on Paul's stand against slavery shall also be made here.

Apostle Peter describes 'the unfeigned love of the brothers' which enables to love one another with a pure heart (1 Peter 1:22). Apart from his writings in the Gospel, apostle John in his epistle also seeks to uplift brotherly love as it is written in 1 John 3:15 "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer: and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."

## **Biblical Theology – Pastoral Ministry**

The Biblical model of sibling relations are not seen with much respect as it has a lot to tell about the quarrels and murders. But at the very outset, it can be noted that God almighty was



leading the human kind to an understanding of brotherly and sisterly love. On analysis of the select Biblical events that are related to the sibling relations, frailty of the ongoing rivalry is clearly pictured. God Almighty in His perfect will has chosen certain people to lead and to continue the posterity. It doesn't mean that others are neglected or side-lined. Those who could understand and, forgive and reconcile will be blessed. The New Testament understanding given by Lord Jesus also prefers brotherly or sisterly love from those who were chosen to obey the will of God Almighty – the Missio Dei. It was practiced in the early church and also among the apostles. Following statements will give a clear understanding of the Biblical Theology of Missio Dei on 'divine choice' where families particularly brothers and sisters were used to present a model that finally leads to brotherly or sisterly love- the Missio Dei, particularly in the pastoral ministry perspective.

### **The Divine Choice is not Just Favouring One Brother and Forgetting the Other.**

Though not the covenantal blessings are the inheritance of Ismael, Esau and so on, still they are blessed (Ismael : Genesis 17:20, Esau : Genesis 36: 6-7) Lot who joins after Abraham was selected also receives God's blessings. All the children of Israel receive God's blessings though the portion of Joseph was considerably high. God Almighty might prefer and choose a particular person in the family for a particular assignment to fulfil His Missio Dei, but that does not mean that others are neglected or marginalised. God has a purpose and plan for all but not the same for all!

### **The Divine Choice Aims at Harmony between the Brothers and Sisters**

In the case of Isaac and Ismael, Jacob and Esau, Leah and Rachel, Joseph and his brothers, Moses, Aron and Miriam – the end result can be noted - peacefulness and blessedness. On all these cases, the beginning was of a little tension, either their own creation or integrated by the parents. But on realisation of the divine choice, somehow the harmony has come in. When a particular brother or sister's role is made clear in a family it may lead to some tension or disagreement, but the sooner it dies down the harmony comes in. Families are the right place and siblings are the right people to present harmony in no time. Psalms 133 shares the same theme.



**The Divine Choice Leads to Brotherly Love and Inclusion of All**

Though Jesus Christ had biological brothers and relatives, Jesus proclaims that those who do the will of God Almighty are his siblings and mother. Jesus Christ wants to bring all who are chosen to do the will of God in this fold. In totality all believers are brothers and sisters in Christ. So the brotherly love concept goes beyond biological relations in the New Testament. This should be an answer to the denominational differences and tensions that the churches face at large. There may be differences and one group may have been chosen by God Almighty for a particular work but all are brothers.

**Prevalent Tension Diminishes as the Divine Will is Established among the Siblings**

As we have noticed in the cases of Jacob and Esau, Joseph and Siblings, Moses and Aaron and, Philemon and Onesimus, when the divine will of selection is established, the prevalent tension diminishes and even those who have caused damages to the other are welcomed and the previous actions were forgiven. As in the case of all mentioned above, the previous tensions or wrong doings diminish and the brotherly love come in. Onesimus and Philemon stand above all of these incidents, even though they were not biological brothers, they share the brotherly love in Christ.

**When Christians Practice the Christ-Like Brotherly Love, Transcends All Blemishes**

Paul, Philemon and Onesimus and the Sons of Korah can be seen in this category. Onesimus a runaway slave was forgiven and will receive the brotherly love of his master. Even the sons of Korah who comes from the lineage of usurper were writing melodious Psalms for the glory of God.

**Those Who Do Not Give Value to the Brotherly or Sisterly Love Shall Not Be Blessed**

Last of all Cain and Abel; Amon, Tamar and Absalom, and Hophni and Phinehas who could not show the brotherly love shall be seen as a group who could not receive blessings or peace. Those who are chosen to obey the Will of God will surely be not falling in this group.

**Conclusion**

Divine choice of brothers and sisters in Mission of God ultimately leads to all believers receiving the title 'brothers' or 'sisters' in Christ. Divines choice in the family lines of the



Bible and especially in the Old Testament have paved the way for different heights of sibling rivalry, a Missio Dei understanding of the happenings leads the seeker to a whole new understanding of the brotherly or sisterly love concept in the New Testament, having initiated and practiced by Jesus Christ and His disciples. Like the brothers or the members of a same family was selected for the Missio Dei, God in the present times chooses His people to do His Will and to achieve the Mission of God. Thus in the choice of God (divine choice) people are called both to obey the Will of God and to show brotherly love, thereby partaking in the Missio Dei.

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