Since I am the first reviewer, I have been asked to begin with a brief overview of Professor Kaminsky’s book. Let me note first of all that the book is very clearly written and well reasoned; it is a truly readable book. (How often can we say that about academic prose?) In my highly selective summary, I will not be able to do justice to the care and finesse of Kaminsky’s argument, and if something I attribute to him leaves you scratching your head, you should assume that the problem lies in the way I have boiled it down. Pick the book up and read it yourself, and this will in all likelihood solve the problem in short order.

The first half of Yet I Loved Jacob provides a sensitive literary-theological reading of the sibling rivalry stories in Genesis, which Kaminsky identifies as a central locus for presenting the biblical concepts of election. In fact, he shows, Genesis presents a carefully worked out cycle of narratives treating this theme. The earliest stories, those of Cain and Abel and of Isaac and Ishmael, introduce the main ideas; the later stories, dealing with Jacob and Esau and then Joseph and his brothers, pick up those ideas and flesh them out in increasingly complex ways. These ideas are much more nuanced than theological critics of the idea of election tend to assume. Kaminsky demonstrates that in these stories of mysterious election “divine favoritism does not signal that the non-chosen [sibling] is
alienated from God” (27); indeed, the sibling not chosen may receive a blessing similar to the one received by the chosen sibling—or, in the case of Ishmael, a blessing essentially identical to the one the chosen sibling received. Further, “God’s choice of the elect remains shrouded in mystery and is not dependent on human action. But,” as we move further into Genesis, we see that “being chosen demands a human response and that chosenness is brought to fruition by human action, creating a synergy between divine initiative and human response” (41). Finally, Kaminsky emphasizes that being chosen involves danger for the one chosen; election results from divine will, but it is not necessarily a boon. This dark side of chosenness is often ignored by theological critics of the notion, as it was ignored by the nonchosen siblings in Genesis.

The second half of the book picks up these themes as they appear in other books of the Bible, especially in D, P, and prophetic literature. Here Kaminsky introduces what I take to be the most crucial contribution of his book: that the Hebrew Bible’s doctrine of election does not construct a binary opposition between the elect and all others but a triad, consisting of the elect, the anti-elect, and the nonelect. The elect consist of the nation Israel (or in some late books of the Hebrew Bible and in some apocalyptic works from the Second Temple period, the faithful remnant of Israel). The anti-elect are the Canaanites and the Amalekites (perhaps also the Midianites). The nonelect are everyone else—in other words, most of humanity.

Throughout the book Kaminsky examines not only the biblical doctrine of election but, perhaps even more importantly, the way biblical scholars and religious thinkers since the Enlightenment have viewed that doctrine. He focuses our attention on a series of ironies evident in the work of these scholars and critics. For example, some of these scholars reject the biblical notion of election as particularistic and ethnocentric, and they contrast it to the universal, inclusivist streams of biblical thought. But Kaminsky repeatedly shows that the universalist tendency is consistently the product of the same biblical authors who celebrate particularism. Indeed, he shows, the inclusive tendencies are the result of the doctrine of election these authors articulated. Thus the P writers begin their document by teaching us that every human being, male or female, Jew or gentile, free or slave, is created in God’s image. This is the same P document that goes on to provide a heavily worked-out notion of covenant that imposes the dignity of special responsibilities on one particular nation. Similarly, D repeatedly instructs the Israelites to treat the stranger among them with justice and compassion, but D also produces the most explicit doctrine of election in scripture, and D furthermore commands the Israelites to wipe out the Canaanites who inhabit the land God gives to the chosen ones. Kaminsky states:

There is no warrant for arguing, [as several recent critics do] … that the least exclusivist … [biblical] passages are opposed to or have transcended Israel’s
particularist theology of election.... One cannot take a shortcut through these theological problems by associating election with certain passages that treat “the other” negatively and disassociating it from those that treat “the other” positively, for these texts are two sides of the same coin. When one grasps that all of these texts are expressions of Israel’s theology of election, it soon becomes clear that many of the more exclusive passages are not as intolerant as they first appear, and many of the more inclusive passages are not as tolerant as some believe. (121–22)

Kaminsky points to another, even more severe irony: Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment Christian scholars often contrast that nasty Old Testament doctrine of election the Jews love so much with the more open attitude supposedly characteristic of the New Testament and Christianity. This contrast, Kaminsky shows, is not only the old supersessionism in a sheep’s clothing; it is also just plain incorrect. As Kaminsky’s teacher Jon Levenson pointed out in The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son, the New Testament shares the Hebrew Bible’s doctrine of election, differing only in its identification of the chosen ones. Moreover, Kaminsky argues, the election theology of the New Testament and of many classical Christian thinkers is far more troubling than that of the Hebrew Bible. This is so because Christian thinkers have repeatedly collapsed the Hebrew Bible’s triad of elect, nonelect, and anti-elect into a dyad of the saved and the damned. In the Hebrew Bible, the vast majority of human beings are simply nonelect, and the nonelect are neither damned nor estranged from God. Indeed, they have their own role to play in the drama of God’s interaction with the cosmos. Kaminsky states:

Th[e] classical Christian propensity to reduce the theological landscape [of the Hebrew Bible, with its three categories] to the binary opposition of elect versus anti-elect … along with the modern Christian tendency to ignore how particularistic and exclusivistic early Christianity really was, has continuing effects. It has led many Christian and secular critics to misrepresent Israel’s treatment of “the other” and to malign the concept of election in ancient Israel and in Judaism…. Great mischief results when scholars and preachers conflate the Hebrew Bible’s understanding of election with the Christian category of salvation, implying that the non-elect are damned. Just as damaging is the equation of the election of Israel with modern racialism—a gross anachronism that cannot withstand critical scrutiny… Such attacks have failed to see that some of the most tolerant and intolerant biblical ideas flow from the same election theology. (134, 135, 136)

The irony Kaminsky exposes here is an important one to acknowledge. It is not Judaism, after all, that has argued that those outside the covenant (whether the old one or the new one) are destined to spend eternity in hell. That gruesome form of particularism belongs to the history of the church, not the history of the synagogue.
Consequently, Kaminsky argues, it is crucial that biblical scholars, theologians, and preachers should

avoid labeling Judaism as close-minded and intolerant while portraying Christianity as universalistic in its stance towards others…. The truth is that there is an inverse relationship between these two issues. Judaism is more tolerant of the non-elect in that its general propensity is to assume that one can remain non-elect and still be in right relationship to God… On the other hand, although Christianity has historically been committed to evangelize outsiders, this is not necessarily a sign of its great tolerance for “the other” as “other.” Dominant streams of Christian tradition have reduced the three biblical categories of the elect, the anti-elect..., and the non-elect … down to the two categories of the saved and those lost to God. Such binary categorization led Christians to missionize those who without conversion would have been lost to God. This is far from what a modern liberal society would consider tolerance. (172–73)

Kaminsky’s treatment of election is marked especially by its honesty. Some scholars have attempted to explain away some aspects of this doctrine or even to deny they exist in the biblical texts, saving scripture by misreading it. Others simply reject the doctrine and thus fail to attend to the Bible as scripture at all. Kaminsky does neither. He is unflinching in confronting problematic aspects of the doctrine, in particular, the grossly unethical notion that the anti-elect should be slaughtered en masse. But he refuses to dismiss the notion of election as a whole. In so doing, I would argue, Kaminsky commits himself to a type of humility rare among modern religious thinkers who confront scripture. After all, contemporary religious involvement with biblical texts easily devolves into the slavish application of norms derived from the religiously correct orthodoxy of our day: one accepts that which suits contemporary orthodoxy, one rejects what is disagreeable, and one simply ignores the many biblical texts that do not present themselves as being spiritually useful or politically relevant. In such a situation, studying the Bible contributes nothing to the formation of faith, community, or outlook; it is merely a matter of gaining a few prooftexts for what we already value. Kaminsky insists, on the contrary, that the biblical doctrine of election can teach Jews and Christians in some way. The doctrine may be unsettling, but Kaminsky insists that we examine it closely. Doing so allows him to argue plausibly that the awful sequelae are not essential to the doctrine of election at all. Just as the rival siblings of Genesis had to accept the doctrine, however difficult it was for both the chosen and nonchosen one alike, so the modern Jew or Christian has to find the humility to accept it as well. In this regard, Kaminsky is a far more faithful interpreter, a far more genuinely religious reader, than most.
It is clear that Kaminsky’s book makes an important contribution. In my remaining space, I would like to address several questions: To what, exactly, does Kaminsky make his contribution? To whom is he addressing himself? Who are his conversation partners? Conversely, what conversation is he not joining?

A striking aspect of Kaminsky’s book is its focus on the interplay between the Hebrew Bible, on one side, and Christian scripture and tradition, on the other. He frequently refers to the New Testament, and especially to Pauline literature and the great streams of tradition that flow from it. It is rather less frequently the case that he refers to rabbinic literature, and he almost never refers to medieval Jewish philosophy and modern Jewish thought. What sort of biblical theology do we have here, then? Kaminsky’s is a biblical theology that is concerned not solely, but primarily, with scripture itself and secondarily with Christian thought. In other words, the field to which Kaminsky’s book makes a contribution is Christian (and especially Protestant) biblical theology; more generally, it makes a contribution to Christian theology writ large. But the book has precious little connection with Jewish biblical theology or constructive Jewish thought. That the book locates itself in a Christian conversation while shunning a Jewish one becomes evident in two ways.

First of all, the book is noteworthy for passing over the rich literature on the subject of election in modern Jewish scholarship, especially modern Israeli scholarship. In a footnote, Kaminsky attempts to justify this tendency by asserting that modern Israeli thinkers, unlike their Jewish counterparts in North America and Western Europe, have largely ignored the issue of election because “the more liberal Jewish movements have not had much success there” (198 n. 21). Now, the impression this note engenders is, quite simply, inaccurate. Modern Jewish thinkers writing in Hebrew and modern Israeli Bible scholars have frequently attended to the topics Kaminsky discusses.

One thinks first and foremost of the work of Moshe Greenberg. In a series of academic articles and more reflective essays he has written on the issue of particularity in the Hebrew Bible, in rabbinic interpretation of the Bible, and in classical Jewish thought. I refer especially to his 1986 work, Particularity and Power, whose title might be rendered in English as Particularity and Power. There he focuses especially on the fate of what Kaminsky calls the anti-elect. Further, Greenberg addresses the way biblical writers and later Jewish thinkers conceptualize the relationship between Jew and non-Jew in a series of essays in his 1984 collection, Ways of Israel (see, for example, the essays על הפך על יהודית, על הפך על יהודית, אמש קרים אדם… על יהודית, השלחנים של ישראל במעניות על פי כוכבי יהודה ההבנה, על יהודית, השלחנים של ישראל במעניות על פי כוכבי יהודה ההבנה, על יהודית, השלחנים של ישראל במעניות על פי כוכבי יהודה ההבנה; some, though not all, of the relevant essays are available in English versions in the anthology of Greenberg’s writings published by JPS in 1995 and in the essay, “A Problematic Heritage: The Attitude toward the Gentile in the Jewish
Tradition—An Israel Perspective,” published in the journal, Conservative Judaism in 1996). Greenberg’s body of work provides the most important treatment by any modern biblical scholar of the cluster of themes Kaminsky examines. Consequently, I was initially surprised and disappointed to find Greenberg’s work missing in Kaminsky’s book. Upon realizing, however, that Kaminsky’s book is not a contribution to a Jewish approach to biblical theology, I realized that Greenberg’s absence is not particularly surprising. (On the other hand, since Greenberg’s extraordinarily sensitive and learned work is worth reading for any biblical scholar regardless of religious affiliation, this absence does remain disappointing.)

As far as the issue of inroads made by modern religious movements in Israel, we might justly regard Greenberg as an exception; although he has been an Israeli since the early 1970s, he grew up in the American Conservative movement and was ordained, like his father, at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. But it is not only in the work of Greenberg that one finds attention to these themes; they play a prominent place in the work of other Israeli scholars, some of them Orthodox, some secular. Uriel Simon addresses issues relating to particularity and the place of the other in his 2002 book, מבית מבית שולח רוחמה. In fact, Simon focuses on some of the same texts that play a role in Kaminsky’s book: the story of Ishmael’s expulsion (which is the topic of ch. 2), and the rivalry between Joseph and his brothers (ch. 3). In other chapters Simon addresses related issues: ethics in warfare and political violence, especially as they involve conflict between loyalty to one’s group and loyalty to principles of justice and equity (chs. 7 and 8 as well as the appendix), and the relationship between covenant, land, and polity (ch. 12). The theme of the relationship of the particular to the universal in biblical thought plays a crucial role in the writings of the most important modern Jewish biblical scholar, Yehezkel Kaufmann. This theme comes to the fore especially in Kaufmann’s chapters on prophecy in מלוחות האמות יהושע שושלת. (Of course, this mutlivolume work is available in an English abridgement prepared by Greenberg.) Incidentally, a more extended treatment of this issue appears in Kaufmann’s other great work, the two-volume כנildo, especially in its fifth chapter (מספור האינטרוספים של האמות העברית) and in its eighth chapter, which is concerned with the role Christianity plays in working out the Hebrew Bible’s Geist. Similarly, Moshe Weinfeld has written about the issues implicated in a discussion of election, both in his Hebrew and his English writings. He discusses the relationship between universalism and particularism and the beginnings of conversion in a 1965 article in שלוחי הרכבתי whose title can be translated as “Universalism and Particularism in the Period of the Return to Zion,” a title that appears in a bibliographic footnote in Kaminsky’s book but is never directly addressed. Moreover, in The Promise of the Land: The Inheritance of the Land of Canaan by the Israelites (1993), Weinfeld explores the biblical attitudes toward what Kaminsky calls the anti-elect, especially in the chapters
“Expulsion, Dispossession, and Extermination of the Pre-Israelite Population in the Biblical Sources” and “The Conquest of the Land of Canaan: Reality and Ideology.” Weinfeld further treats one of Kaminsky’s main concerns in the chapter entitled “The Covenantal Aspect of the Promise of the Land to Israel.”

It is not only in Israeli biblical scholarship that one finds attention to the issues at hand. These issues also play a central role in the work of modern Orthodox theologians—and, contrary to Kaminsky’s suggestion, this is the case not so much in writing by Orthodox thinkers who live in North America or Western Europe but in writings by those living in the Land of Israel. Take, for example, the work of Rav Abraham Isaac Kook, the enormously influential religious Zionist thinker and mystic. Several of the issues that Kaminsky highlights are absolutely central to Rav Kook’s *ouevre*: the nature of chosenness, the place of the nonchosen in the divine economy of universal redemption, and the varying degrees to which the chosen themselves consciously accept their chosen status or unconsciously work through that status. More recently, the failure of Jews to understand the nature of their covenant and the rights and responsibilities flowing from it have been perhaps the main theme in the essays of Yeshaya Leibowitz. (As is the case with Greenberg, much of Leibowitz’s work is also available in English translation in the 1992 anthology published by Harvard University Press, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State.* ) Attention to these issues appears in the work of secular scholars as well. Of particular importance is Eliezer Schweid’s 2004 *וכשנים של השכלה: התפקיד של חידונים וה簪ות והמשטרות המחיית השפעה*. Contrary to Kaminsky’s passing assertion, it is precisely in the work of Israeli Jews that the theme of election and the question the Jewish world’s relationship to the world at large plays an important role. This is hardly surprising; in a Jewish state, these are not theoretical issues but pressing existential ones with weighty and immediate implications for questions of public policy and day-to-day life.

Similarly, Kaminsky gives relatively little attention to the treatment of election in rabbinic literature or later Jewish writing, a few references in the last chapter notwithstanding. It seems to me that a Jewish biblical theology would be one in which we create a dialogue between the ancient Jewish voices found in scripture and later voices found in Jewish tradition—that is, in rabbinic literature, in medieval Jewish philosophy, in qabalah, or in modern Jewish thought. After all, for Jews, scripture is important only alongside tradition, or as read by tradition, or as a part of the larger, overarching category of tradition. A Jewish biblical theology cannot rest, Protestant-like, on scripture; *sola Scriptura* is a doctrine that has no place in Judaism. A Jewish biblical theology must by definition attend to Torah in both its manifestations, הֶבֶלֶם תּוֹרָה and תּוֹרָה, written Torah and oral Torah, the Torah that is scripture and the Torah that is tradition. Thus one can imagine a work on election that would attend both to the biblical texts that Kaminsky so ably
describes and to some of their later reflections and transformations. It might focus, for example, on the medieval rabbinic commentator and legist, Meiri, and his notion of "nations defined by the ways of religion". Through this notion Meiri attempts to view many of the nonelect as being, Ishmael-like, phenomenologically equivalent to the elect; that is to say, for Meiri, Christians and Muslims are the moral equivalent of Jews. A Jewish biblical theological discussion of election might also invoke the rich work of the mid-nineteenth-century French rabbi Elie Benamozegh, who focuses much of this writing on the universal implications of the particular covenant. Of course, Herman Cohen, Martin Buber, and Franz Rosenzweig might play central roles in the study I am imagining. On the other hand, if such a work aspires to the intellectual honesty Kaminsky so clearly displays, it would also attend to the writings of Yehuda Halevi or to the first Lubavitch rebbe’s work המ Oilers, both of which pick up on narrowly particular ideas in biblical literature and take them to extremes.

Because Kaminsky largely passes by Jewish thought in silence, some of his arguments are not as strong than they might have been. Kaminsky devotes considerable attention to the terrible laws of Deuteronomy that mandate the slaughter of the Canaanites. Without denying the ethical lapse they represent, he attempts to defang them in a number of ways, such as by noting that these laws were never carried out and were written later than the time for which they were supposed to apply. This response, Kaminsky himself points out, is not fully satisfying, since these laws, whether theoretical or not, are still part of the Bible’s value system. It would have been useful here to note how the rabbis view these laws. Almost all halakhic authorities through the ages have ruled that the laws in question applied only to the time of Joshua and not in perpetuity; that is to say, nobody living after Joshua’s era has the right, much less the obligation, to apply these laws. (Nachmanides is an exception.) In classical rabbinic literature (m. Yadaim 4:4, t. Qiddushin 5:6, b. Berahkot 28a, b. Yoma 54a) the rabbis maintain that the Pentateuch’s laws pertaining to particular nations are completely inapplicable. In the eighth century B.C.E., they claim, the Assyrian emperor Sennacherib moved vast numbers of conquered people around the Near East, removing the boundaries between nations—not only geographic boundaries, but ethnic boundaries making various peoples distinct. As a result, in the rabbis’ eyes, pre-eighth-century B.C.E. legal categories such as “Moabite,” “Canaanite,” and “Amalekite” simply no longer exist, and from Sennacherib’s time on the Pentateuch’s laws concerning specific peoples ceased to have any legal meaning or binding authority. Thus Maimonides, in his twelfth-century codification of Jewish law, the Mishneh Torah (הלכות מלכים ה ד) states that there is commandment to wipe out the Canaanites, but he goes on to note that they no longer exist משות שלח שלח שנות נשים שנות חיות [דר מים ז; הלי שלח ילדי] [דר מים ז; הלי שלח ילדי] [דר מים ז; הלי שלח ילדי] [דר מים ז; הלי שלח ילדי] [דר מים ז; הלי שלח ילדי] [דר מים ז; הלי שלח ילדי]. One of the canonical commentators on Maimonides’ code, Rabbi David ben Zimra (Radvaz), a
scholar who lived until 1492 in Spain and thereafter in North Africa and the Galilee, explains Maimonides’ claim that the Canaanites no longer exist by quoting the ancient rabbinic tradition concerning Sennacherib I alluded to a few moments ago (the one appearing in m. Yadaim, t. Qiddushin, b. Berahkot, and b. Yoma; מאמר א버 המים: לפ שמה מדברי בבל איה ויהו). That is, the Radvaz explains that it is because classical rabbinic literature claims that these legal categories no longer exist that the legal codes tell us that the commandment in question has no legal force whatsoever. This rabbinic tradition effectively nullifies the terrible laws Kaminsky discusses, at least so far as traditional Judaism is concerned.

Not only do the rabbis effectively abrogate Deuteronomy’s laws regarding the Canaanites as far as the future goes; they also attempt to diminish the extent to which we think that the book of Joshua describes them as having been applied in the past. Moshe Greenberg discusses this tendency in his essay משנת ממדרשי יהודה ימיスーフא יוהו בצלאו ימיスーフא ספרא יהושע. Greenberg describes how the rabbis attempted, with varying degrees of success, to temper the violence and injustice evident in a contextual, nonmidrashic reading of the book of Joshua. In several midrashic sources the rabbis read the narratives of Joshua in light of the laws of warfare in Deut 20 and in light of the halakhic principal that punishment must always be preceded by warning and by a chance for repentance. Having recontextualized the narratives in this way, the rabbis create a hermeneutic that allows them to insist that Joshua fought the Canaanites only after offering them the opportunity to leave Canaan peacefully or to renounce the pagan practices that provided the rationale for the laws of extermination in the first place. Some Canaanites, the rabbis claim, availed themselves of these opportunities to avoid the fate Deuteronomy prescribed for them; the book of Joshua describes the fate of those who did not. This move in rabbinic exegesis is also evident from a halakhic commentary to Deut 20:17, which Kaminsky does cite (211 n. 15). According to the passage, one cannot leave any Canaanites alive. In the halakhic commentary in Sifre Devarim 202, the rabbis assert that the law in question does not apply if the Canaanites repent; thus a law that commands slaughter is modified to one that does not allow slaughter in the event of penitence.

Whether one agrees with the hermeneutical methods behind the rabbis’ rereading of these passages or whether one regards them as sufficient responses to the ethical challenge that scripture presents would be questions for other papers. My point in regard to the topic of our session is simply that these halakhic and haggadic data would be of primary import for any Jewish biblical theological discussion of the anti-elect. Since Kaminsky’s book does not engage the field of Jewish biblical theology, however, the absence of these data is to be expected. Still, one cannot help feeling that the book is somewhat the poorer for its failure to engage seriously the Jewish interpretive traditions concerning the issues at hand.
That this book places itself specifically in the field of Christian biblical theology and not Jewish biblical theology can be seen in a second way. Just as the book largely ignores Jewish biblical scholarship (especially when that scholarship is most relevant to the issues under discussion), so too it attends frequently to issues pertaining to Christian religious formation. Indeed, the book is replete with methodological advice—it seems to me, very sound methodological advice—for Christian biblical scholars, theologians, and preachers. How should Christians view the relationship of their two Testaments? See page 85. What is the real Old Testament source of the universalism in which Christians take such pride? See page 99. How should Christians regard their mission to the Jews? See page 175. All these are important questions, and I am not criticizing Kaminsky for providing answers to them; I just want to note that they are questions belonging to the field of Christian thought, not Jewish thought. Since this book contributes to the former and not the latter, it is appropriate that chapter 5 (“Promise and Covenant”) ends with a section entitled “Reflections on the Later Christian Appropriation of Israel’s Covenantal Theology” (91–93). The chapter does not reflect on later Jewish appropriations of that theology.

In short, the questions Kaminsky addresses are driven by an agenda deriving from Christian theology. This book is for the most part reactive in nature—and quite successfully so. One of Kaminsky’s main achievements (in addition to his very subtle and convincing reading of the sibling rivalry cycle in Genesis) is to deconstruct the anti-election rhetoric so common in modern Christian theology and in secular critiques of the Bible—that is, to show how that rhetoric contradicts itself, how those critiques are, in the end, incoherent. Kaminsky demonstrates that classical Christian thought is at least as committed to particularism as the Hebrew Bible is, and in some sinister ways rather more so. He further demonstrates that secular critics misread the Hebrew Bible’s doctrine of election because they accept a tendentious and supersessionist representation of the biblical doctrine, a representation ultimately deriving from Paul and his interpreters. Reacting to these misreadings and exposing their ironies is an eminently worthy project, and I congratulate Joel for the success he achieves in undertaking it. At the same time, I want to make sure his readers understand what this book’s project is and what it is not. Kaminsky’s project is about Christian thought; if I may be a bit reductionist, this is really a book about Paul. It is not about Judaism, except insofar as it addresses how Judaism is misrepresented by non-Jews.

Yet I Loved Jacob is an important a contribution to Christian biblical theology. Not (as one prominent Jewish thinker of recent vintage was wont to say) that there’s anything wrong with that! But I imagine that some readers might have turned to this book hoping to find a Jewish biblical theology, and they should know that that is not what they are going to find. A flourishing field of Jewish biblical theology does exist, and the question of election plays an important part in it. There are many riches one will gain from reading
this book, but discovering how Jewish biblical theology discusses election will not be among them.