

# **The Joseph Narrative**

**Genesis 37:1–50:26**

***A Story of God's Providence  
And Faithfulness to His Covenant People***



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# Preface

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This study focuses on a particular area of biblical interpretation: the Joseph Narrative (Genesis 37--50). Many guides to understanding Scripture consider the whole Bible in general terms and neglect the unique challenges presented by Old Testament narratives and the Joseph Narrative in particular. Overriding all other concerns was the desire to integrate literary and biblical studies more carefully than has been done to date. Biblical scholars are often amateurs at literary analysis, while literary scholars run roughshod over issues that here plagued biblical scholars for years. Many of the aspects of this material have implications for all biblical interpretation, but it is the special features for interpreting the Joseph Narrative which will receive particular examination.

My target audience is motivated lay people who wish to develop their understanding of narrative literature so that they may appreciate the major literary and theological themes that constitute the *timeless* theological ideas in Scripture.

On the one hand, the material presented assumes very little knowledge of the Old Testament, theology, and methods of interpretation. This is predicated on the conviction that even the most intelligent people cannot understand procedures and concepts that are not somehow explained to them, and that there is no shame in seeking such explanations. Occasionally, it has seemed necessary to use an established technical term in order to describe exactly a particular feature of style, syntax, or grammar, but I cling to the belief that it is possible to discuss complex literary matters in a language understandable to all educated people.

On the other hand, I have tried to write with as large a spectrum of the body of Christ in mind as possible. Obviously, not everyone is going to find everything equally helpful since abilities and past achievements will markedly differ. The reader is urged to skip to those parts that he can more easily digest. At one or two points I have deliberately engaged in some rather technical discussions (i.e., source criticism considerations), for I wish to carry on a conversation not only with those whose orientation is more practical, but also with those who are acquainted with some of the more technical aspects and with some who may not share our own theological convictions but who are, nevertheless, also diligently seeking for answers to some of the same questions.

Many complexities for the sake of inexperienced readers have also been avoided. It is recognized that most lay people do not understand theological jargon. Of what advantage, therefore, is it to pretend that they can? For this reason, technicalities are relegated to the footnotes or the accompanying appendices for those who wish to pursue further study.

The overarching guide for the preparation of this study has been to address the practical use of the Joseph Narrative in the Church. Church leaders have the responsibility to teach the whole counsel of God. Unfortunately, they are seldom well equipped to analyze, explain and apply Old Testament narratives to their audience.

Often expositors have simply retold the Old Testament narratives (with or without dramatic embellishments) and then drawn a few general lessons from them. The biblical narratives, however, are far more than illustrative stories. They are highly developed and complex narratives that form theological themes. Other expositors, who have had more training in exegesis, may make a detailed study of the passage in order to clarify the meaning of everything that happened or was said but never crystallize the theological teaching of a passage in a manner that is both clear and relevant to today's audience.

In order to meet this need, this study proposes practical theological guidelines and expositional notes for preparing, investigating, and applying the Joseph Narrative to the modern Church. I have set out, therefore, to present a guide to the interpretation of the Joseph Narrative that would be nontechnical and simple without being simplistic.

It should be kept in mind that this study is only an introduction to the Joseph Narrative. To write a complete commentary of the chapters under investigation is an ambitious undertaking, and one that I have not dared.

Our focus while we study the Joseph Narrative will not be a general one, but we must look not only for *what* the text says, but also *how* it says it. If the same things are said, and said in the same way, often enough, then some general conclusions can be drawn, some theological principles discovered. These principles will then be derived from an intrinsic study of the biblical text.

Our approach will begin with a close reading of the Joseph Narrative and examine linguistic structures, patterns, and usages, recurring devices and unusual ones. The thrust here will not be on the meaning of such features (although obviously one is never totally free of semantics), but on the functions

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they serve in the literary composition. Many linguistic constructions, especially on the clause or sentence level, have poetic significance. For instance, constructions which signal openings, endings, shifts in scene, etc., are poetically relevant.

The shape and meaning of any literary text will naturally be dependent to some extent on its linguistic fashioning. Because of that fact, I refer intermittently to matters of word-choice, sound-play, and syntax perceptible in the original Hebrew, occasionally even offering alternative translations to indicate a significant pun. All of this, I think, should be fairly easy for a reader to follow without any knowledge of Hebrew; and the main topics I have chosen are features of biblical narrative that for the most part can be observed reasonably well in translation.

This study will not solve every problem in the Joseph Narrative. One reason it will not, I must say in all candor, is that there are no complete guides in this area. As far as this writer has been able to discover, no one has ever attempted to author a work encompassing in depth principles for the interpretation of biblical narrative. This discovery in itself was startling. Whatever is done here reflects my own attempts to rectify a difficult situation. I am very much aware of the fact that this volume can be regarded only as an exploratory and provisional type of first fruits.

Countless issues are left for readers to pursue on their own. The material that follows represent the result of my own wrestling with the Joseph Narrative. This struggle has been a personal pursuit for the past three years.

A few words may be helpful about the procedures I followed in the preparation of these notes. After a brief Introduction (pages 1-10), this study divides into fifteen episodes. The parameter for each episode does not necessarily follow the English chapter division (i.e., Gen. 46:31--47:27; 47:28--48:22). This has been done because each episode constitutes a well-defined unit either because of unity of place or time or theme or situation. Genesis, like ancient books, contained neither chapters nor verses nor even paragraphing. The present chapter and verse arrangement comes from Stephen Langton, who in 1226 divided Genesis into its present arrangement of chapters and verses.

Isolating each episode was not as easy as it may seem, for many complications arise in the narrative literature. It is not simply a matter of determining where an episode begins and ends; rather, it is a matter of studying the structure and themes of the literature, both in the apparent episode and in the

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surrounding context. This step was not minimized, for it would greatly change the expository treatment if only half of an episode was dealt with, or if two episodes were joined together. Of course, if they were dealt with contextually, then the expository idea should still be true. For example, to expound the account of the Sabbath Day (Gen. 2:1-3) is certainly possible if done in context, but if done properly in context the exposition will have to show how this is the climax of all the account of creation.

After a main title (which appears at the head of each page of the episode) and a subtitle, each episode is broken into the following seven parts:

- Part 1            **AN INTRODUCTION TO THE EPISODE** (untitled)  
 Preliminary observations are considered, such as the form of the literary unit, the deliberate design of the material, aspects of artistry in the selectivity of the terms and expressions, the overall structure of the episode as it pertains to the meaning of the unit, the setting of the account with the expected contrasts and comparisons, the significance of the dialogue in the narrative, and the unfolding of the plot in which the basic conflicts are resolved in the overall Narrative.
- Part 2            **SOURCE CRITICISM CONSIDERATIONS**  
 Source criticism is the theory known as the "Documentary Hypothesis." This theory postulates that the Pentateuch, and Genesis in particular, was composed by the amalgamation of sections and subsections derived from four independent source-documents, J, E, P, E. The theory posits that an editor (other than the traditional writers of the biblical texts, i.e., Moses) took some sections from this source, some portions from that source, and some extracts from the third document. He placed them in juxtaposition, or fused them together, but left each one its initial form. A close literary analysis of the episode, however, will explain the repetition, doublets, apparent inconsistencies, and awkward constructions. This section of the notes will offer a plausible solution that will be intellectually satisfying and theological constructive.
- Part 3            **THEOLOGICAL IDEAS**  
 In this section we try to determine what the passage of Scripture is saying about God, about man, and about the relationship between them; failure to do so will inevitably leave the exposition on the level of storytelling, historical inquiry, or Bible trivia. In narrative material it is important to watch for the narrator's statement of interpretation, or direct statements of the LORD in response to man's actions.

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If no such statements appear, then we must draw the conclusions by inference within the context of the Book. Then again there are passages which are completely God's word, e.g., prophetic oracles or legal decrees. How and where the material is presented in the Narrative will then help shape the formulation of the theology.

By concordance study, topical index study, and even through word studies, the student of the Scriptures can usually discover similar theological ideas in the same Book, or by the same writer, or in the same type of literature (i.e., wisdom literature). Also, through such studies the student may come upon prophetic oracles based on the material (e.g. Hosea on Jacob's wrestling).

In identifying the theological ideas of the material the reader will discover that there are frequently two strands that must be correlated: those ideas with God as the Subject-Actor, and those with man. One could say that God is the subject of the Joseph Narrative (as with all Scripture), that His activities are central to the message. But the text is usually cast in the story-line. So the subject matter is more often going to be about man's activities (past or future) in the light of what is known about God. Recognizing these connections will make the application of the theology much easier. For example, if one were to expound Genesis 1:1--2:3, obviously God is the central factor. He creates everything by His powerful word. The idea of the theology is clear--but how can it be applied apart from how it is to be seen in relation to man? When man is seen as the crowning point of the narrative, much of the relevance of the material comes clearer. Then, a consideration of later meditations on the material (cf. Pss. 8 and 33) shows how others interpreted and applied the creation account.

So the theological ideas will always be displayed in man's world. When we write the theology of a passage, then, we must be sensitive to the categories that are present in the text.

#### Part 4

#### **STRUCTURE, SYNTHESIS AND TRANSLATION**

Structure: includes the analysis of the structure and texture of the literary unit. In determining the meaning of the passage, we must consider the deliberate design of the unit, i.e., the rhetorical devices the writer used in forming the episode. In all cases a chiasmic structure is formulated, and in the cases where the parallel structure is not clear, some additional notes are given.



Synthesis: is a one-sentence summary of the entire episode, a synopsis of the unit. Limiting it to one sentence rather than a paragraph forces us to show the unity and the subordination of the parts. In short, it requires us to decide upon the central point of the unit and to determine how the other parts are related to it.

Translation: I have done my own translations of all biblical texts cited. The King James Version is the magisterial rendering in English, but even in its modern revised form it lacks a good deal in the way of clarity and philological precision, while the various contemporary translations, in striving for just those two qualities, tend to obliterate literary features of the original like expressive syntax, deliberate ambiguity, and purposeful repetition of words. A good modern translation (the best in my opinion) is the New American Standard Version (NASB). The student will do well to avoid all paraphrased Bibles when doing investigative research. My own translation of the texts at times may seem willfully awkward, but at least they have the virtue of making evident certain aspects of the original that play an important role in the artistry of biblical narrative.

## Part 5

### EXEGETICAL OUTLINE

The exegesis of a passage must demonstrate the unity and progression of the episode. The simplest way to capture the unity, and one of the most helpful, is to make a full exegetical outline of the material and then write a summary of the passage in one sentence (see Synthesis above).

An exegetical outline is developed from summaries of the individual ideas or verses of the text. These individual sections are united by common themes or constructions to form the larger divisions of the passage, for which a summary must then be written. When an outline is developed in this manner, it will include everything that is in the passage and will express the relationships between the parts, enabling the interpreter to see the narrative structure apart from all the descriptive and qualifying sections.

An exegetical outline uses full sentences to express complete thoughts about the contents of the section. Since this outline describes the contents, the sentences would be descriptive and historical.

Every outline need not be detailed; for lengthy passages the points may be more comprehensive. It is helpful to use topics to introduce the points, but this is not always possible.

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Using the past tense in the outline gives a better historical perspective. It should also be observed that summaries should not simply restate what is in the subpoints but should condense the basic ideas. In short, the student tries to capture the argument of the passage without simply restating verses.

## Part 6

**EXPOSITION OF THE PASSAGE**

The next step is the relevant and orderly presentation of the material in an expositional manner. Each section sets forth an expository idea in a boldface italic font. I tried to present a clear, positive sentence, drawn from the overall exegesis of the scene(s), stating the applicable theological point the passage is making. The wording in this expository idea is not tied to the historical and descriptive, for that removes the lesson from the present audience; neither is the wording totally contemporary, for that would leave the meaning for the original audience out of the picture. The expository idea is an attempt to express the *timeless* theological truth that the passage teaches, in a way that would be applicable to the original situation as well as to the contemporary corresponding situations.

After the expository idea, the episode is set forth in a verse-by-verse fashion, using the NASV as the standard text. The NASV is used because of its clarity and its general faithfulness to the Hebrew text.

## Part 7

**APPLICATION**

Since the Bible and therefore all that it contains is didactic, if it is truly a message from God, then it must suggest a proper course of action or proper way of thinking. I expressed this element in a specific, positive application, indicated by a single sentence in boldface capital letters. In many instances, other Scriptures are correlated with it.

When I began this study, I hoped I might be able to throw some new light on the Joseph Narrative by bringing a literary perspective to bear on it. It is an aspiration I have not relinquished. But I also discovered for myself something unanticipated in the course of minutely examining many biblical texts: that the Bible on its part has a great deal to teach anyone interested in biblical narrative because its seemingly simple, wonderfully complex art offers such splendid illustrations of the primary possibilities of narrative.

I am indebted to my many professors who over the years have prepared me to launch into such an enterprise. One professor, however, deserves special honorary mention: Dr. Allen P. Ross (former professor of Semitics and Old Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary). It is his life and scholarly influence which has impressed me the most concerning the principles of interpreting biblical narrative material.

Finally, a word of candor and caution: this volume embodies an interpretation of the Joseph story--and no interpretation can make claims to finality however much it is based on a close reading of the Hebrew text. The text itself remains a greater reality than any interpretation of it.

Abstract truth seems sterile and difficult to grasp if it stands alone--but when we see it illustrated in a life, it is amazing how clearly it emerges and how attainable it becomes. This, of course, is the genius behind Old Testament narratives.

Joseph is a classic example. He embodies some of the most significant truths in all of Scripture. Although a man just like us, Joseph blazes a new trail through a jungle of mistreatment, false accusations, undeserved punishment, and gross misunderstanding. He exemplifies forgiveness, freedom from bitterness, and an unbelievably positive attitude toward those who had done him harm. From one episode to the next, the reader will literally stand in awe and shake their head in amazement.

That is the way it is when mere humanity incarnates divine truth. My prayer is that this principle will not stop with Joseph. If this study stimulates a few to interact more vigorously with the Word of God so that they incarnate the timeless theological truths contained in the Joseph narrative, I will feel gratified in having the joy of written it.

In His service,

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δούλος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

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# Introduction

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*Open my eyes, that I may behold  
Wonderful things from Thy law (Psalm 119:18).*

"You can't see the forest for the trees." We have often used this old expression to describe the difficulty of climbing above the details to get a grasp of the bigger picture. But it can also be used to describe the problem most of us have with the Bible.

Many Christians are familiar with the doctrines woven through the fabric of the Scriptures, and others know the great Bible stories. But we often fail to grasp the fundamental theme of the Bible: *Christ throughout God's Word!*

Embedded in prophecies, hidden behind analogies, and tucked into types, Christ permeates the Old Testament. Then in the Gospels He parades in full view, only to disappear into the clouds at the end. Over in Acts and the Epistles, He reaches down from heaven into the hearts of His disciples who carry His touch to the world. Finally, in Revelation, He gallops into full view again, this time as conquering King of Kings.

In panoramic fashion, let us begin our study of Old Testament narrative by first meeting the central and unifying theme throughout Scripture: Jesus Christ. The New is in the Old concealed, and the Old is in the New revealed. What the Old Testament contains about Christ implicitly, the New Testament explains explicitly, for the truth only latent in the Old Testament is made patent in the New.

Jesus Christ's presence is clearly set forth from Genesis through The Revelation. Like a puzzle, once the overall picture (theme) is understood, it is much easier to put all the pieces together. And once we see the overall picture, all the parts of both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible will fit more easily in place.

To start our journey, let us join Jesus on the Emmaus road as He explains to two weary and disheartened disciples "the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27).

## THE EMMAUS EXPERIENCE

It had been a horrid, agonizing week. The One they had pinned all their hopes and dreams on, Jesus, had been arrested, falsely accused, beaten, and--unbelievably--crucified. They thought they had reached the end of the road when the stone was rolled into place over the opening of the tomb . . . until word came three days later that the grave was empty and Jesus was alive! How many more jolts could a disciple take? Discouraged and confused, two of them turned for home. But the road home was hardly the end; it was just the beginning.

### *Disciples in the Dark*

And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. And they were conversing with each other about all these things which had taken place. And it came about that while they were conversing and discussing, Jesus Himself approached, and began traveling with them. But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. (Luke 24:13-16)

In His post-resurrection body, Jesus is traveling incognito, so to speak. He is able to appear and vanish, move through space with no restraints at all. And He has a golden opportunity to probe two of His followers concerning the meaning of His death and resurrection. So He asks them, "What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?" (v. 17)

Shocked that someone could be so near Jerusalem and not know what has happened, they sadly relate the week's events (vv. 18-24). As they talk, Jesus perceives a mixture of disappointment, doubt, and confusion in their words. So He decides that it is time to enlighten their darkened spirits.

### *Christ Brings the Light*

"O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" *And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets*, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in *all* the Scriptures (vv. 25-27, emphasis added).

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What a great moment . . . Christ teaches the Scriptures. Please notice the word "explained" in verse 27. From its Greek root we obtain our word *hermeneutics*, which refers to the principles or study of biblical interpretation. In other words, Jesus went back to the books of Moses, Genesis through Deuteronomy, through all of the prophets, ending with Malachi, and interpreted them for these two disciples. He showed them the truth about Himself--the main theme--in all of Scripture.

How wonderful to have God Himself explaining His Word to you! Though they did not yet know who this wise Man was, when these disciples finally reach Emmaus, they understandably want Him to stay with them. And are they in for a surprise.

#### *The Savior Seen by Opened Eyes*

And they approached the village where they were going, and He acted as though He would go farther. And they urged Him saying, "Stay with us, for it is getting toward evening, and the day is now nearly over." And He went in to stay with them. And it came about that when He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight (vv. 28-31).

Imagine their astonishment as, at once, their eyes widen, "You're Je--" and blink--He disappears!

And they said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?" (v. 32).

This "explaining" has a different meaning from "explained" in verse 27. Here it means "open," the same as their eyes were "opened" in verse 31. The implication is this: Scripture is incomprehensible until we see the illuminating truth of Jesus, its major theme. It is like trying to put together a puzzle with no picture, like trying to pilot a plane with no map. Without seeing Christ in the Bible, we travel blindly through a maze of meaningless ideas and people and events. For He is the key that, when turned correctly, unlocks the truth and opens eternal mysteries for us.

The two men cannot wait until morning to share their experience with the other disciples. So they run back to Jerusalem, and, half gasping for

breath and half laughing with joy, they relate the day's startling events, saying, "The Lord has really risen" (vv. 33-35)!

But the Lord has one more dramatic surprise in store for His disciples.

And while they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst. But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have" (vv. 36-39).

Christ proves He is no ghost by letting the disciples touch Him. Then He even eats a piece of fish, showing them, once and for all, that He is really alive (vv. 40-43). Having their full attention now, He turns again to the Scriptures to explain Himself and His death and resurrection.

Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things" (vv. 44-48).

When Christ opens the minds of the disciples, they see, for the first time, what the Scriptures are all about. You can imagine their responses as lights go on all over the room. "Yes!" "Of course!" "Why didn't we see that before?" "Now I understand!"

One of the disciples in the room that night later became a courageous witness. Standing before the people who had shouted to crucify Jesus, he proclaims his new understanding of the Scripture's true meaning.

### *Opened Minds Can Open Hearts*

. . . taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea, and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give heed to my words . . . this Man, delivered up

by *the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God*, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. *For David says of Him*, 'I was always beholding the LORD in my presence . . . .' And so, because he [David] was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants upon his throne, he looked ahead *and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ*, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay . . . . For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but *he himself says*: 'The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, until I make thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet"' (Acts 2:14, 23-25, 30, 34-35, emphasis added).

Then, later, this same dauntless disciple testified again,

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered up, and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. . . . And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. But the things which God announced beforehand *by the mouth of all the prophets*, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord. (Acts 3:13, 17-19, emphasis added)

And again in another passage of Scripture,

You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power . . . . And [Jesus] ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. *Of Him all the prophets bear witness* that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins." (Acts 10:38a, 42-43, emphasis added)

Who is this man who is so strong in his faith?

Peter!

Peter? The one who, only weeks before, forsook his Lord and denied that he even knew Him? The same. What changed Peter's heart of fear into one of courage? The understanding he was given by Jesus of the Scriptures



transformed his life--and especially of the fact of Jesus' literal, physical resurrection from the dead. The Spirit of the living God, coupled with the understanding of the Word of God, turned Peter, once fearful and denying, into a rock of stability and unintimidated courage!

## OUR EXPERIENCE

In order for us to have a faith that matches Peter's, our understanding of Scripture will need to be strong and clear. We, too, will need to grasp the central theme of Christ throughout all of God's Word.

### *Christ All through Our Bibles*

Allow the following to acquaint you with Christ throughout the Bible.

Books of the Bible	Names of Christ
Genesis	Seed of the Woman
Exodus	Passover Lamb
Leviticus	Atoning Sacrifice
Numbers	Bronze Serpent
Deuteronomy	Promised Prophet
Joshua	Unseen Captain
Judges	Our Deliverer
Ruth	Our Heavenly Kinsman Redeemer
1 & 2 Samuel	
1 & 2 Kings	Promised Righteous King
1 & 2 Chronicles	
Ezra and Nehemiah	Restorer of the Nation
Esther	Our Advocate
Job	Our Redeemer
Psalms	Our All in All
Proverbs	Our Pattern
Ecclesiastes	Our Goal
Song of Solomon	Our Beloved
All the Prophets	Coming Prince of Peace
Matthew	Christ, the King
Mark	Christ, the Servant
Luke	Christ, the Son of Man
John	Christ, the Son of God
Acts	Christ Ascended, Seated, Sending
All the Epistles	Christ Indwelling, Filling
The Revelation	Christ Returning, Reigning

But there is more, much more!

In the thirty-nine Old Testament books, Christ is in the shadows, seen in analogies and in pictures. He is in types and rituals. He is prophesied and anticipated. The twenty-seven New Testament writings complete the Old, revealing Christ in person, in truth and reality, in the present and acknowledged.

Jesus Christ binds and unites everything in Scripture--beginning and end, creation and redemption, humanity, the fall, history and the future. No wonder, then, Scripture attributes to Him as "the Alpha and the Omega, Who is and Who was and Who is to come, the Almighty" (Revelation 1:8, 17; 22:13; cf. Isaiah 41:4; 43:10; 44:6).

The New Testament account of the ministry of Jesus maintains that Jesus Himself was responsible for teaching His followers that His life and ministry fulfilled the Scriptures. Jesus interpreted the Scriptures in a manner similar to contemporary Jewish exegetes, but His method and message were diametrically opposed to theirs.

This new method was a Christological reading, which means that Jesus read the Old Testament in light of Himself. During the earthly ministry of Jesus, He claimed five times that He is the theme of the entire canon of Old Testament Scripture.

Speaking of the Law and Prophets He said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished" (Matthew 5:17-18). Jesus Christ, by His own admission, came not to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill all that they had said about Him. Jesus walked with two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and "beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures (Luke 24:27). Later, to the ten disciples in the upper room Jesus said, "All things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44). In dialogue with the Jews, Jesus charged, "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me" (John 5:39). The writer of Hebrews ascribes to Christ these words of Psalm 40: "Then I said, 'Behold, I have come (in the roll of the Book it is written of Me) to do Thy will, O God'" (Hebrews 10:7).

These five times our Lord affirmed that He is the theme of the entire Old Testament. We may conclude then, on the authority of Christ, whatever may be thought to the contrary, Jesus is therefore present implicitly in the Scriptures, and this being the case it is an entirely legitimate objective to search for Him in the **only** Scriptures that existed during His lifetime.

The central theme of the Bible is indeed Jesus Christ. As one saint put it, "Cut the Scriptures anywhere and they bleed with the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world." Jesus Christ is the key to understanding the Old Testament because everything points to Himself. The New Testament writers, following the pattern of Jesus, interpreted the Old Testament as a whole and in its parts as a witness to Christ.

For example, the moral precepts of the Old Testament are brought to perfection by Christ in the New (cf. Matthew 5:17). What the Old Testament foreshadowed, the Christ of the New fulfilled (Hebrews 10:1). The ritual which prefigured Christ is done away with the reality of Christ (Colossians 2:17). Old Testament types become New Testament truths. Furthermore, the many Old Testament prophecies which foretold of Christ are fulfilled in Christ in the New (cf. Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2). God manifested Himself through laws in the Old Testament but in the life of His Son in the New Testament. The Old Testament revelation was one of symbols, but in the New Testament God spoke directly through His Son (Hebrews 1:1, 2). In short, the promises of salvation in the Old Testament are brought to fruition in the presence of Christ in the New Testament (Matthew 1:21). The thematic unity of both Testaments is Jesus Christ. What the Old Testament says by way of anticipation of Christ, the New Testament says by way of realization in Christ.

### *Christ within Our Hearts*

If you follow the trail of Christ through the Bible and through life, you will come to a clearing at the end in which all else dissolves in the blinding light of Jesus Himself. The apostle John has given us a preview of coming attractions:

And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His breast with a golden girdle. And His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire; and His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been

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caused to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. And in His right hand He held seven stars; and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man, and He laid His right hand upon me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades" (Revelation 1:12-18).

And near the conclusion of the Revelation,

And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True . . . . And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." (Revelation 19:11a,16)

Before you see Jesus as He is, in His glory and splendor, one question begs an answer at this moment. Is Jesus *your* King of Kings and Lord of Lords today?

After all is said and done, it all boils down to one question. Jesus is both Savior and Lord in Scripture--but is He yours?

If He is not Lord to the degree you would like, get to know Him better. For once you know Him, you'll discover courage and confidence you never thought possible. And the best place to find Him is in the pages of His excellent Word.

And if perhaps, you have never heard the Good News, then listen to the words as written by apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4:

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are *saved*, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

*Heavenly Father,*

*Thank You for Christ Jesus, whom You have made the author and finisher of our faith. Thank You for His finished work on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. Thank You that He will come someday as King over all who would call themselves king and Lord above all who would say they are lord. Thank You for giving Him that place of preeminence and prominence.*

*Father, we would ask that You would make Him as preeminent and prominent in our lives as You have made Him in all the words of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms--in all Your holy Word.*

*Father, we would also ask that as we begin to study the Old Testament narratives, may Your Spirit guide all of us, may our eyes be opened to Your eternal love which you have demonstrated by giving to us Your Son, Jesus Christ.*

*We pray these things for Jesus' sake. Amen.*



## **Genesis 37:1-11**

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### **Beloved Son, Hated Brother**

#### **THE SOVEREIGN CHOICE OF THE WISE LEADER**

Genesis 37 provides the introduction to the Joseph Narrative in that it lays the foundation for the crisis between Joseph and his brothers and foreshadows through his dreams the final resolution to the crisis. The report of Joseph's dreams forms the divine call of Joseph, God's sovereign choice of an individual to lead the nation. The immediate effect of this choice was hatred by his brothers. The chapter traces the growing estrangement between Joseph and his brothers, caused by the father's love and the LORD's choice of Joseph.

#### **The Narrative in the Context of Genesis**

Beginning with Genesis 37, the emphasis shifts from the personal struggles in Jacob's life to events that lead up to the formation of Israel as a nation, i.e., receiving the long awaited blessing from God which was promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. There had been no trace of this in the narratives of Abraham and Isaac. These dealt purely with personal and family matters. Now with the third patriarch, Jacob, events begin to point in the direction of Israel becoming a nation.

The promise of God has been long time coming. God is never late, but then again from our perspective, He is seldom early. A posterity without number had been promised to Abraham (Genesis 12:2; 15:5; 22:17), that it was to be through Isaac (Genesis 18:12; cf. 24:60) and the promise was affirmed to Isaac that he himself should become a multitude of people (Genesis 26:4), and finally it was affirmed to Jacob (Genesis 28:14; 35:11) that he likewise would become an innumerable people.

In the case of Abraham and Isaac, the evidence of fulfillment to them in their children was lacking, for Abraham had only Isaac, and Isaac had only Esau and Jacob. But in the case of Jacob, the number of sons indicates that God's promise was in the process of fulfillment. In respect to the delay of a son to Abraham, it was God's purpose to show that heirs to the covenant are provided by divine power alone; in regard to Isaac where more than one pos-

sibility exists, it is shown that the heir to the covenant is selected by God alone, not men. When these two principles have been enunciated, it is time to produce the nation. As these introductory verses will illustrate, in God's house God selects and calls to its administration whom He wills, in spite of the opposition of others, using the former to train the latter in the things of God.

It was God's intention, already revealed to Abraham (Gen. 15:13-16), to bring the chosen family under foreign domination until "the iniquity of the Amorites" should be full, and Canaan ripe for possession. The succession of events to lead Israel into Egypt is set in motion through the rivalries and predicaments of Joseph's brothers, under the provincial hand of God. The Narrative exhibits, as Stephen was to show, a human pattern that runs through the Old Testament to culminate at Calvary: the rejection of God's chosen deliverers, through the envy and unbelief of their friends and countrymen, yet a rejection which is finally made to play its own part in bringing about the deliverance.

A principle theme of the Narrative from Genesis 37-50 is then how Joseph's dreams come true despite and even through the affliction and humiliation brought about by the brothers who resented him, by the woman who loved him, by the master who misjudged him, and by Pharaoh's cupbearer who forgot him. The theme is expressed in the patterned sequence of the Narrative, which forms an extended narrative unparalleled in Genesis and with few equals elsewhere in the Old Testament.

### The Narrative in its Context

The term **Joseph Narrative** will be used in a very general sense to refer to the material that includes Genesis 37:2b, when Joseph is introduced at the age of seventeen, right up to Genesis 50:26, where his death and age is reported. As is the case with the "Abraham Narrative" (11:27--25:11), beginning with "Now these are *the records of the generations of Terah*," it feels somewhat whimsical to entitle the Narrative as the "Terah Narrative" as it does here to call it the "Jacob Narrative," since most of the chapters refer explicitly to the life of one of his sons rather than to Jacob himself. However, there are those who would disagree to this designation.

Strictly speaking, the caption, "History of Jacob," that is set down as a heading for the chapter, should appear after v. 1 with the subhead that we have set above v. 2. In any case, it is the author's own title and so at the same time an indication of the beginning of the last subdivision (compare remarks on 2:4). Consequently, to label this section, "The Story of Joseph," (Meek) indicates complete disregard of the author's mode of treatment of this section and labels his point of view as trivial or unimportant. One reason why critics so consistently ignore Moses' own divisions of the book seems to be, because to let the author's plan or outline emerge clearly would display what they deny—the manifest unity of the entire book.

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True, from our point of view, it may seem strange to begin Jacob's history with details about Joseph's experiences. But does not the father's life express itself in his sons? (Leupold, II.1950:953).

The problem with the "generations" of Jacob is that it is immediately derailed and the Joseph Narrative abruptly begins (37:2b) after "these are the generations of" introductory title. Joseph plays the central role through Genesis 37--50, even though other things are simultaneously going on with what happens to Joseph; Joseph's life story is the continuity which holds these chapters together--so much so that the seemingly abrupt intrusion of the episode of Judah and Tamar (Gen. 38) and Jacob's moving prophetic oracle (Gen. 49) are acutely felt.

In a strikingly similar fashion, the Joseph Narrative resembles the opening introductory scene to the Jacob Narrative. Like the opening summary verses of the Jacob Narrative, the opening summary verses of the Joseph Narrative lead in to an event which sets the keynote for the bulk of the Narrative as a whole (37:2b-4; cf. 25:19b-21). Isaac's wife receives a word from God which defines the overall parameters for the chapters that follow; Jacob's son has two dreams which reveal the parameters for the chapters that follow it (37:5-11; cf. 25:22-34). Although Jacob and his family respond to Joseph's dreams in a way which seems entirely appropriate (37:8, 10-11a), at the same time Jacob, the narrative implies, knows the Word of God when he hears it (37:11b) as does Rebekah responding to the LORD's word about Jacob (Gen. 25:22-28b).

Thus another theme of the entire Narrative emerges: the battle is between the dream and the "killers of the dream." The dream seems nullified by the end of the chapter. The father believes the dreamer is dead (v. 33). The brothers believe the threat of the dreams have been removed (v. 28). Only the single verse hints at another possibility (v. 36).

Israel's obsession for Joseph thus sets the plot in motion. Like his father, Isaac, Jacob favors one son above all. At first it is Joseph, and later his younger brother Benjamin--Jacob's two youngest, and the only sons of his beloved Rachel. Jacob's special love for Joseph produces a deep jealousy among his brothers, and they seize on the first opportunity to get rid of this favorite son. But while they can rid themselves of Joseph, they cannot dispel Jacob's love for him, and the opening episode concludes with Jacob's insistence that he will spend the rest of his days in mourning.



## Chronological Considerations

It is evident that chapter 37 narrates Joseph's dreams which chronologically occur before Isaac's death, and recorded earlier in Genesis (35:29; see Figure 1: **Chronology of the Patriarchs** on page 15). Isaac died when Joseph was 29 years old, and he had already spent some time in Egypt. Thus the whole of chapter 37 deals with events that precede Genesis 35:29.

But this raises the question whether the death of Isaac is the only event that happened after the events recorded in chapter 37. What about the death of Rachel, for instance? It is worthy of notice that in 37:10 Jacob asks, "Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?" This implies that Rachel, Joseph's mother, was still alive at this time. Some have argued that this reference to "your mother" could also refer to Leah, but this is most unlikely. This is certainly not the same situation as a second marriage where the children would accept their father's new wife or concubine as "mother." In the case of a polygamous marriage with simultaneous plural wives, each woman was called mother only by her own children (cf. Genesis 20:12 and 21:10). Thus Jacob would not have spoken of Joseph's mother bowing down before him after Rachel's death.

The fact that Joseph saw eleven stars--symbolizing his eleven brothers--need not imply that Benjamin had already been born at this time. This was a dream and the dream did not necessarily reflect the conditions of that moment. But Jacob's reply dealt with a real-life situation at that time and his inclusion of Rachel would seem to require that she was still alive.

Must we conclude from this that we must therefore chronologically place the entire chapter 37 before the death of Rachel? Certainly not. It is quite unlikely that all the events recorded in this chapter took place within a comparatively short space of time. What we are told in verses 2-4 seems to imply a considerable time sequence. There is, moreover, nothing that suggests that Joseph's two dreams were received in rapid succession. Furthermore, verse 11 tells us that Jacob "kept the saying *in mind*," which suggests that this may have been for some time. It is possible, therefore, that the death of Rachel took place sometime after the second dream. This is verified by verse 14, where we are told that Jacob sent Joseph "from the valley of Hebron," and 35:27 informs us that Jacob did not settle in the area of Hebron until after the death of Rachel. If we place the death of Rachel after the two dreams and before Joseph's visit to his brothers we can avoid any chronological difficulties.

# Chronology of the Patriarchs

2166 B.C. \_\_\_ 2066 \_\_\_ 2006 \_\_\_ 1991 \_\_\_ 1915 \_\_\_ 1898 \_\_\_ 1886 \_\_\_ 1876 \_\_\_ 1859 \_\_\_ 1805

(100 years) (60 years) (15 years) (76 years) (17 years) (12 years) (10 years) (17 years) (54 years)

Abraham  
was born  
(2166 B.C.)

Abraham  
died (at  
age 175;  
Gen. 25:7;  
1991 BC)

Isaac was  
born (when  
Abraham was  
100; Gen. 21:5;  
2066 B.C.)

Isaac died  
(at age 180;  
Gen. 35:28;  
1886 B.C.)

Jacob was  
born (when  
Isaac was 60;  
(Gen. 25:26;  
2006 B.C.)

Jacob moved  
to Egypt  
(at age 130;  
Gen. 47:9;  
1876 B.C.)  
when Joseph  
was 39

Jacob died  
(at age 147,  
17 years after  
he moved to  
Egypt; Gen.  
47:28; 1859 B.C.)

Joseph  
was born

Joseph was  
sold into Egypt  
(at age 17; Gen.  
37:2, 28; 1898 B.C.)

Joseph  
died (at  
age 110,  
therefore  
he was  
born in  
1915)

This may be calculated as follows: to the 13 years Joseph spent in slavery must be added the 7 years of plenty and the 2 years of famine that elapsed before Jacob's migration. To these 22 years must then be added the 17 Jacob spent in Egypt before he died, at age 147. If one deducts the resultant 39 years from the 147, Jacob would have been 108 when Joseph was sold by his brothers. Since Isaac was 60 when Jacob was born, and died at 180, Jacob must have been 120 at the time of Isaac's death. Hence, Isaac lived on another 12 years after the sale of Joseph.

Figure 1.

It should be understood that our narrator brings together in one coherent record the various events that led up to the sojourn in Egypt, which had already been announced to Abraham in Genesis 15:13, without concern for exact chronological progression. All emphasis is focused on Israel going into Egypt where God's promise to make of them a great nation was to be fulfilled.

### Source Criticism Considerations

Those who divide the sources generally ascribe verses 1 and 2 to "P," while the rest of the chapter, as also the further chapters that give the story of Joseph, is assigned to "J" and "E." It is claimed that verse 1 complements 36:8 and since that verse has been ascribed to "P" this one should also be given to this source. But the basis for ascribing 36:8 to "P" is questionable, so this certainly cannot be used as a basis for assigning another passage to this source.

The divisive hypothesis encounters here in full measure the same insuperable difficulty which meets it throughout the book of Genesis, and particularly in the life of Abraham, and the early history of Jacob. The unity of plan and purpose which pervades the whole, so that every constituent part has its place and its function, and nothing can be severed from it without evident mutilation, positively forbids its being rent asunder in the manner proposed by the critics. If ever a literary product bore upon its face the evidence of its oneness, this is true of the exquisite and touching story of Joseph, which is told with such admirable simplicity and a pathos that is unsurpassed, all the incidents begin grouped with the most telling effect, until in the supreme crisis the final disclosure is made. No such high work of art was ever produced by piecing together selected fragments of diverse origin.

The critics tell us that the apparent unity is due to the skill of the redactor. But the suggestion is altogether impracticable. A writer who gathers his materials from various sources may elaborate them in his own mind, and so give unity to his composition. But a redactor who limits himself to piecing together extracts culled from different works by distinct authors, varying in conceptions, method, and design, can by no possibility produce anything but patchwork, which will betray itself by evident seams, mutilated figures, and want of harmony in the pattern. No such incongruities can be detected in the section before us by the most searching examination. All that the critics affect to discover vanish upon a fair and candid inspection.

. . . The urgent motive which impels the most recent critics to split the history of Joseph asunder at all hazards is thus frankly stated by Wellhausen: "The principal source for this last section of Genesis is JE. It is to be presumed that this work is here as elsewhere compounded of J and E. Our previous results urge to this conclusion, and would be seriously shaken if this were not demonstrable. I hold, therefore, that the attempt 'to dismember the flowing narrative of Joseph into sources' is not a failure, but is as necessary as the decomposition of Genesis in general."

If distinct documents have been combined in this portion of Genesis, the critical analysis which disentangles them and restores each to its original separateness might be expected to bring forth orderly narratives, purged of interpolations and dislocations, with the true connection restored and a consequent gain to each in significance, harmony, and clearness. Instead of this there is nothing to show for P, J, or E but mutilated fragments, which yield no continuous or intelligible narrative, but require for their explanation and to fill their lacunae precisely those passages which the critical process has rent from them. We are expected to assume, with no other evidence than that the exigencies of the hypothesis require it, that these P, J, and E fragments represent what were originally three complete documents, but that the missing parts were removed by R. "We now come," as Nöldeke says, "to the most distressing gap in the whole of P." And he undertakes to account for it by the gratuitous assumption that P's account was so decidedly contradictory to that of the other documents that R was obliged to omit it altogether. In fact P is almost as absolute a blank in what follows as it was in regard to Jacob's abode in Paddanaram.

. . . Neither is the partition conducted on the basis of such literary criteria as diction and style. Only a few scattered scraps, amounting in all to about twenty-five verses, are assigned to P, such as can be severed from the main body of the narrative as entering least into its general flow and texture. The mass of the matter, as has uniformly been the case since ch. xxiii., is divided between J and E, which by confession of the critics can only be distinguished with the greatest difficulty. Whenever it is impossible to effect a partition it is claimed that R must have blended the documents inextricably together. In other places a few disconnected clauses are sundered from a J section and given to E, or from an E section and given to J; and these are claimed as evidence of two separate narratives. At other times arbitrary grounds of distinction are invented, such as assigning to E all dreams that are mentioned, or different incidents of the narrative are parcelled between them, as though they were varying accounts of the same thing, whereas they are distinct items in a complete and harmonious whole. Genealogical tables, dates, removals, deaths, and legal transactions or ritual enactments are as a rule given to P. Historical narratives are attributed to J and E, and are divided between them not by any definite criteria of style, but by the artifice of imaginary doublets or arbitrary distinctions, leaving numerous breaks and unfilled gaps in their train. And in this halting manner the attempt is made to establish the existence of what the critics would have us regard as separate and continuous documents. The method itself is sufficient to condemn the whole process and to show that the results are altogether factitious. It could be applied with equal plausibility to any composition, whatever the evidence of its unity (Green, 1979:430-31, 433-34, 435-36).

As far as the division of the rest of the chapter between "J" and "E" is concerned, it is rather amusing that the usual basis for making this division, the names of God, falls away completely here because the name of God is not mentioned in the entire chapter. It is also interesting that some of the other factors that supposedly are characteristic of "P," such as an affinity for genealogical material (v. 2a) and a certain looseness of style, are difficult to find here as well. The few evidences that do allegedly point to "P" are so inconsequential that this chapter actually calls the whole theory of divided sources into serious question.

No pretext for division is here afforded by Elohim or Jehovah, since no name of God occurs in this chapter. Astruc, Eichhorn, and Tuch regard it as a unit, and refer it without abatement to P. Ilgen partitions it between the two Elohistes with the following result: P uses the name Jacob (vs. 1, 34), represents Joseph as habitually with he flocks (vs. 2), wearing an ordinary coat (vs. 23a, 32b, 33), incurring the hatred of his brothers by bringing an evil report of them to his father (ver. 2). Reuben as the first-born takes a prominent part, counsels not to kill Joseph, and is afterward inconsolable (vs. 21, 22, 29, 30). Midianites take Joseph from the pit without the knowledge of his brothers (vs. 28), and sell him into Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh (vss. 36). E, on the contrary, uses the name Israel (vs. 3, 13), and represents Joseph as the son of his father's old age (ver. 3), unacquainted with the flocks (vs. 15, 16), wearing a coat of many colors (or rather a long garment with sleeves) (vs. 3, 23b, 32a), hated by his brothers because of his distinguished dress and his father's partiality for him (vs. 4), and hated still more for his dreams (vs. 5-11). Judah acts the part of the first-born (vs. 26); his brothers on his advice sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites (vs. 27, 28b). His father says that he will go down to Sheol mourning for his son (vs. 35). Joseph is sold to some Egyptian whose name is not given (xxxix. 1: "Potiphar, and officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard," is ejected from this verse as an interpolation).

De Wette charges Ilgen with being arbitrary and going too far, but agrees with him to a certain extent. He fancies that there are inconsistencies in the narrative, which can only be relieved by the assumption that two variant accounts have been blended. After the adoption of Reuben's proposal (ver. 23) to cast Joseph into a pit instead of killing him, Judah says (vs. 26), "What profit is it if we slay our brother?" as if they still intended to kill him. Reuben makes no objection to Judah's proposal to sell Joseph; and yet he is afterward distressed at not finding Joseph in the pit, though there had been no mention of his absence when the sale was effected. This indicates that different stories are here confused together. According to one, Joseph was cast at Reuben's suggestion into a pit, and subsequently drawn out and carried off by Midianite merchants who were passing. According to the other, Joseph's brothers had conspired to kill him, but sold him instead to Ishmaelites.

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Gramberg distributes the chapter between P and J, certain paragraphs being common to both. Both tell that Joseph was his father's favorite, and had been presented by him with a long robe, which excited his brothers' hostility. Both tell that Joseph was sent by his father from Hebron to Shechem to find his brothers, who were with the flocks. And both describe the deception practiced upon Jacob, and his inconsolable grief at the loss of Joseph. P tells of Judah and the sale to the Ishmaelites, and J of Reuben and Joseph being carried off by the Midianites; which is the reverse of Ilgen's assignment, who makes P tell of the latter and E of the former (Green, 1976:437-440).

Some have argued that the use of the names "Jacob" and "Israel" points to separate sources. But even those who advocate separate sources are a bit shaky about the use of this argument and feel compelled to point out several "exceptions." Others point to various so-called "doublets" and differences within the passage. Still others have made a point of the fact that the passing caravan is described on the one hand as Midianites and on the other as Ishmaelites. As we shall see, this usage in no way establishes two different sources for the episode. A close and careful study of chapter 37 will clearly establish the essential unity of the entire narrative, and will at the same time, afford a good illustration of the ease with which an episode embracing several incidents can be partitioned at the pleasure of a critic.

### THEOLOGICAL IDEAS

The major theological idea of this first episode is revelation through dreams. God confirmed through two dreams that Joseph would rule over his brothers. It must be noted that here in Genesis 37 the dreams of Joseph differ from other dreams in God's revelation; previously in Genesis, dreams included verbal communication, but now there were only symbols that needed interpretation. It appears that symbolic dreams were chosen because through them the wisdom of Joseph could surpass the wisdom of Egypt.

The episode also portrays human nature in response to the divine revelation. Jealousy welled up in the brothers over the choice of Joseph, a jealousy that later turned into murderous hatred. Although Joseph could not help but to know of their ill feelings toward him, he tried to get along with them, while at the same time, serving his father faithfully, bringing back an evil report about his brothers. Biblical teachings on faithfulness in the midst of envy and hatred find their beginnings here.

Other central themes run throughout the Joseph Narrative are associated with key words and motifs which are introduced in this opening chapter. Many of these had already been introduced and have become central to the larger biblical narrative of Jacob when he "struggled together" with Esau in his mother's womb (Genesis 25:22-23): rivalry between siblings, subservience of the older to the younger, hatred and jealousy, and, above all, deception.

Deceit had played an unsavory role in Jacob's youthful dealings with Isaac and with Esau, also in Laban's relationships with him. Now it reenters the family circle through the rivalry which had built up between Jacob's wives (Rachel and Leah; Genesis 30:1ff.), and transmitted to their sons. Just as Jacob had used clothing to deceive Isaac, so his sons use clothing to deceive him (Joseph's bloody coat). The suffering it left in its wake was to follow Jacob for many years, due to the cruel sale of Joseph to foreigners by his brothers.

Moreover, the motif of "recognition" which figures in the latter scene of this episode will recur in the following chapter concerning Judah and Tamar, and again much later when the brothers appear before Joseph in Pharaoh's court. In addition the motif of buying and selling runs through the Narrative, beginning with the sale of Joseph to the caravan bound for Egypt.

## STRUCTURE AND SYNTHESIS

### Structure

After the heading for the final section of Genesis ("these are the generations of Jacob"), attention immediately centers on Joseph. Our narrator accomplishes this literarily by first, using the proper name "Joseph" and a descriptive phrase immediately following the Narrative heading: "Joseph, when seventeen years of age, was pasturing the flock with his brothers." The next sentence refers to him by the means of an independent pronoun, "he" (אִי/הוּ): "while he was *still* a youth." Joseph is reintroduced by name in the next sentence (2e): "And Joseph brought their evil gossip to their father" (my own translation).

Next follow two verbs (perfects) in verse 3 which serve as background information concerning Jacob. Both of these verbs have "Israel" as subject while Joseph is named as the object of the first verb: "Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons." Following this Joseph's brothers become subjects of the storyline verbs in 37:4 and Joseph, by now introduced and integrated into the story is referred to only by pronouns and affixes.

In Genesis 37:5-11, Joseph continues to be central. He is named as the dreamer of the first dream (37:5) and consequently does not need to be so identified in reference to the second dream where "now he had still another dream" (v. 9) is sufficient. Thus, the careful introduction of Joseph with atten-

tion to his age and attendant circumstances as well as to the attitude of his father and his brothers toward him clearly marks him as central.

The entire chapter divides into three scenes, principally based on geographical location. The first (vv. 2b-11) and third scenes (vv. 31-35) transpire in the father's house between the father, the brothers and Joseph; the second (vv. 12-30) in the field (after the transition in vv. 12-17) between the brothers and Joseph. The first scene has two parts: Jacob's love for Joseph (vv. 2b-4) and Joseph's dreams (vv. 5-11). The motif that links these two parts together is the report of the brothers' hatred for Joseph (vv. 4-5, 8).

The first part includes a narrative report of Joseph's faithfulness to his father and then parenthetical information about Jacob's love for Joseph and his brothers' hatred. The second part has two dream reports that are parallel in their construction: an introduction to the dream, a dream speech, a speech in response to the dream report, and a final narration of the consequences of the report. Both dream speeches use the particle "behold" a typical form for reporting dreams.

Most biblical scholars have determined that 37:1-2a constitute a concluding statement and belong structurally to the preceding chapter. This has been reflected in English translations by several modern conventions. For example, the NASB indents and employs a paragraph marker (§) beginning at verse 2b. The RSV, NRSV and NIV simply indent verse 2b, while the NJB and KJV (KJV division is between vv. 1 & 2) indent and place a title caption at the heading (as will most study Bibles). Then why do these translations end chapter 36 where they do and not extend it to include 37:1, or even perhaps 37:2a?

Where our English translations break between chapters 36 and 37, the Massoretic Text (Hebrew Bible) indicates a similar break. Although the ancient Massoretic Text had no such modern convention as chapter numbers, the Massorites did subdivide the Torah into fifty-four hebdomadal lessons. Except for the first (Genesis 1:1), each subdivision is identified in the margin with a *Pārāšāh* (פְּרָשָׁה) at the commencement of the pericope.

Although פְּרָשָׁה does not occur in BH, it is believed that it comes from פָּרַשׁ, meaning to "be divided into parts, sections" (KB, 783; pl. פְּרָשִׁיּוֹת). In any case, it is always abbreviated in the Masora as פְּרָשׁ and only found in the Pentateuch. Each of these *Pārāšāh* has a separate name which it derives from the initial word or words. With the exception of one *Pārāšāh*, (*Wayḥi* in Genesis 47:28) all these subdivisions coincide with an open or closed section. In BHS the *Pārāšāh* always appears on the inside margin, toward the middle of the bound book. Thus on odd numbered pages, they will be found on the right side of the page, but will be on the left side of even numbered pages. These large subdivisions provide for a one year liturgical cycle (Genesis has 12 Exodus, 11; Leviticus, 10; Numbers, 10; Deuteronomy, 11). The Joseph Narrative comprises the last four of the twelve Genesis subdivisions (IX: 37-40; X: 41-42; XI: 44:18-47:27; XII:

47:28–50:26; > Ginsburg, 66-67; Scott, 2. Lowenthal mistakenly calls these פרשיות as "Sidrah" in his commentary [1973:vii].). While the Hebrew Bible verse-divisions are Masoretic, "chapters" were added to the Massoretic Text from the Vulgate Christian translation. This is why a *Pārāšāh* does not necessarily coincide with the commencement of a chapter. The *Pārāšāh* for Genesis 37-40 is ויִשְׁבֶּה.

Although the *Pārāšāh* between chapters 36 and 37 is not part of inspired Scripture, it does represent an ancient scribal major subdivision in the Hebrew text, which is perhaps too quickly discounted by modern commentators and translators. While the *Pārāšāh* supports a major break between these chapters, it does not tell us why. We must turn to literary and contextual evidence in order to determine the answer.

As will be demonstrated in this commentary, the Joseph Narrative is structured in a chiasmic manner, not in an ad hoc or haphazard manner as most critical scholars posit, but along well-conceived and deliberate lines. It is by all accounts, the most literarily unified narrative in Genesis, perhaps in the entire Pentateuch, and indeed in the entire Hebrew Bible. The macro-intrastructure of the Joseph Narrative reveals that 37:1 is inseparable to 37:2-4 for supporting and balancing the parallel descending chiasmic structure of 50:1-26 (see chapter *The Chiasmic Structure of the Joseph Narrative*). For example, the opening scene is "in Canaan" (37:1), the final scene in the Joseph Narrative is "in Egypt" where both Jacob and Joseph are embalmed (50:2-3, 26). And thus it is "in Canaan" where the introductory comments are made concerning Joseph (37:2b-4).

The opening and closing sentences of the Joseph story define the dialectic as an interaction between Jacob in Canaan and Israel in Egypt. These poles provide not only unity in the story's plot, but contact with a larger context of pentateuchal traditions. In Egypt, Jacob the patriarch becomes Israel the people, subject to the pharaoh's power administered by Joseph (cf. 45:3-13; 47:27b). It is thus significant that the exodus theme begins with an emphasis on Egyptian oppression by a pharaoh who did not know Joseph (Coats, 1983:264).

In addition, strong contextual evidence favors making 37:1 disjunctive from chapter 36. First of all, we have a change in proper names and geographical location: moving from "Esau" in "Seir" to "Jacob" in "the land of Canaan."

The NASB translates the initial conjunction (וַיְוָא) in 37:1 as "Now," signifying a mild (temporal?) disjunctive force (cf. LXX, δὲ). However, because there is an adversative intent within the context (Genesis 36:8, 43 and 37:1), a better translation would be the stronger disjunctive, "but," which is syntactically permissible, thus alerting the reader to the contrasting postures of Esau and Jacob with respect to their faith (NJB and Vulgate also renders וַיְוָא as "but"; "so" NEB; "and" KJV; NIV, RSV and NRSV omit the conjunction from their translation altogether).



Thus, in contrast to the events in chapter 36 with Esau's strong disregard to God's will, chapter 37 begins with Jacob, the future heir of the promises, dwelling in Canaan and waiting on God to unfold His plan in regard to obtaining Canaan as an "everlasting possession."

Not discounting the contrastive nature of 37:1, it should be noted, and perhaps more importantly, that it forms a bridge, i.e., a transition between what has transpired and the Joseph Narrative. This is the reason so many commentators include this verse with the preceding chapter. "Here the penchant for anticipating in one section the subject of the following section leads to a link that is created almost by tour de force" (Longacre, 1989:21; see also Ross, 1988:588). The statement of location in verse 1 has parallels in Genesis 4:16; 13:18; 19:30; 20:1; 21:20, 21; 22:19; 26:6, 17; 36:8; 50:22, each showing the statement as a part of a transition of exposition.

This transitional sentence is carefully constructed with a 3 ms Qal imperfect waw consecutive from the verb יָשַׁב/yšb, "to dwell," followed by the subject, "Jacob," and two genitives of place, the second more specific, being appositional to the first. The principal noun in both place specifications is אֶרֶץ/ereš, "land," and in both cases controlled by the inseparable preposition בְּ/b, in both cases followed in a construct bond by a definition of the land: מְגֹרֵי אָבִיו/Məgûrê 'ābîw, "in the sojournings of his father," and כְּנָעַן/knā'an, "in Canaan"; thus, "Jacob dwelt in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan."

Notice the similarity in syntactical structure between 37:1-2a and Genesis 25:11-12:

וַיֵּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מְגֹרֵי אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן (vv. 1-2a)  
אֵלֶּה תִּלְדוּת

"Now Jacob lived in the land of the sojourning of his father, in the land of Canaan." These [are] the generations . . . ."

וַיֵּשֶׁב יִצְחָק עִם בְּאֵר לַחַי רֹאִי (25:11-12)  
וְאֵלֶּה תִּלְדוּת

"Now <sup>לחיי ראי</sup> Jacob lived near Beer Lahai Roi. And these [are] the generations . . . ."

Both clauses serve as transitions between two large narrative segments. As noted above 37:1 provides a fitting transition to the next section, the Joseph Narrative, which traces the course of events by which the sons of Jacob, left the Land of Promise and entered the land of Egypt. According to Genesis 25:11 Jacob's father, Isaac, dwelt in Beer Lahai Roi, which evidently is where Jacob lived at this time.

This poetic seam is threaded into the Narrative elsewhere, and perhaps more impressively so in Genesis 47:27:

וַיֵּשֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן

"Now Israel lived in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen"

Verse 27 gives somewhat of a conclusion to what had been described in 46:1 to 47:12, regarding the resettlement of the patriarchal family. Chapter 47:13-26 related to that event very closely. The next section is then introduced with this summary statement about how Israel had come into Egypt and specifically into the land of Goshen.

### Chiastic Structure

The opening paragraph in the Hebrew text (37:1-11) after a transitional verse (37:1) and a brief biographical introduction to Joseph (37:2) all of which is needed to mirror the literary chiasmic structure of the Narrative's macro-interstructure (see notes on Gen. 50:22-26), exhibits an orderly arrangement of ideas (A, B, C, D, E). The pivot point and climax to the paragraph comes in (F) wherein both the narrator's voice and reported speech Joseph brothers exhibit embittered hatred toward him because of his dreams and words, after which events are repeated in an inverted order (E', D', C', B', A').

#### Analysis of the Chiastic Structure of Genesis 37:3-11

A Israel's outward manifestation of his love for Joseph (3)

A' Jacob's inward meditation concerning the things of Joseph (11B)

Verse 3 begins with a circumstantial clause "Now Israel loved Joseph" (וַיֵּשֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶהָב אֶת יוֹסֵף) and another circumstantial clause concludes the

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**CHIASTIC ARRANGEMENT OF GENESIS 37:2b-11**

Introduction: Joseph's background within the family in Canaan (2b-e; this mirrors literarily the closing of the Narrative; cf. Gen. 50:22-26).

- A Israel's outward manifestation of his love for Joseph (3)
- B Brothers' hatred of Joseph (4a)
- C Brothers' silence toward Joseph (4b)
- D Brothers' reaction to 1st dream (5)
- E Joseph's 1st dream report (6-7)
- F BROTHERS' EMBITTERED HATRED OF JOSEPH (8)**
- E' Joseph's 2nd dream report (9-10a)
- D' Jacob's reaction to 2nd dream (10b)
- C' Jacob's speech to Joseph (10c)
- B' Brothers' envy of Joseph (11a)
- A' Jacob's inward meditation of the things concerning Joseph (11b)

Figure 2.

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paragraph in verse 11b, "but his father kept the saying *in mind*" (אָבִיו שָׁמַר (אֵת הַדְּבָרִים)), thus forming an *inclusio* (Andersen, 1974:81) and underscoring the textual unity of verses 3-11. A circumstantial clause in Hebrew is one which breaks the ordinary Hebrew narrative prose chain of *waw*-consecutive plus prefixed verb (or, more rarely, plus suffixed verb). Commonly this is accomplished by inserting the subject, which generally follows the predicate in Hebrew prose, between the *waw*-consecutive and the verb (see Anderson, 1974:79-80,87). Circumstantial clauses which begin and end an episode often signal episodic boundaries. This point is worth making because "circumstantial clauses at episode boundaries mark major transitions in [narrative] discourse, whereas circumstantial clauses which are integral to a sentence are quite unobtrusive and often a mere aside" (Andersen, 1974:79). However, a circumstantial clause is not the only indication of episodic boundaries or subject change, since a new subject, or at least the resumption of a subject which has been already introduced, can follow a *waw*-consecutive verb, according to the ordinary Hebrew narrative sentence structure of *waw*-consecutive verb plus subject (e.g. Gen. 4:25; 11:1; 12:1,4,etc.).

As we would expect in circumstantial clauses, the Hebrew word order is normal and parallels each other in verses 3a and 11b: subject, verb and object:

verse 3: וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶהָב אֶת יוֹסֵף *Now Israel loved Joseph*  
 verse 11b: וַאֲבִיו שָׁמַר אֶת הַדָּבָר *But his father pondered the matter.*

My translation of verse 11b differs from that of the NASB because "in mind" does not occur in the Hebrew text and is not needed to carry the sense of the context. The verb "to ponder" (שָׁמַר/*šamar*) comes from the Akkadian *šamāru*, to "wait upon, attend, watch, retain" (▷KB, 993). In the case of this verb as well as the one found in verse 3, "loved" (אָהַב/*'āhab*), Jacob's attention and devotion rests upon Joseph. Thus Joseph permeates his fathers life in that he is both in the heart ("love") and mind ("pondered") of Jacob.

The literary function of the circumstantial clause in verse 3a reintroduces Jacob into the main narrative line after Joseph's preeminent staging in verse 2b-e and gives further background material concerning Jacob's relationship with his favored-son, Joseph, which spawns Joseph brothers' hatred in the subsequent narrative (Gen. 37:12-36). Verse 11b capsules the forgoing events thus far. Both circumstantial clauses give Jacob's point of view in third person.

- B Brothers' hatred of Joseph (4a)
- B' Brothers' envy of Joseph (11a)

Because of Israel's outward manifested fondness and love for him, Joseph's brothers responded with hate; and this hate was not directed toward their father, the source of the preferential treatment, but directed toward Joseph. The term for hate in verse 4a is שָׂנֵא/*šānē'* and is balanced in verse 11a with קִנְיָא/*qinnē'*, their envy of Joseph. One cannot be helped to be struck by the similarity of the Hebrew consonants. Although not etymologically related to each other, they do share two stem consonants and both convey the idea of intense emotional strife.

An additional similarity is to note the syntax: in each case, Joseph is the understood direct object of his brothers' internal emotion, and the direct object is emphasized by its proleptic placement, i.e., the subject postponed after its object: כִּי אָהַב אֶת־אָבִיהֶם, literally, "that **him** loved their-father," in verse 4a and in verse 11, יִקְנְאוּ בּוֹ אֶחָיו, literally, "they-envied **him** his-brothers".

- C Brothers' silence toward Joseph (4b)  
 C' Jacob's speech to Joseph (10c)

These two parts are in antithesis with each other. The results of Jacob's preferential love for Joseph only precipitates hatred among his brothers "so they hated him and could not speak to him in peace," whereas Joseph's second dream elicits Jacob's rebuke and speech.

- D Brothers' reaction to 1st dream (5)  
 D' Jacob's reaction to 2nd dream (10b)

It is remarkable that, generally, commentators do not mention the brothers' reaction to Joseph's announcement of his first dream actually precedes the report of the dream. And those that do comment, ascribe it as a "general introduction to the first dream" (Coats, 1974:13) or as a textual gloss (Speiser, 1964, 290; BHS). This anomaly, that both speaker and addressee are specified before the dream report begins and the brothers' resultant behavior is a key structural element in the chiasmic structure of this episode.

If we only perceive the purpose of verse 5 as "a sort of preview of what will happen" (Longacre, 1989:188), then we will overlook our narrator's desire to highlight the rising crescendo of the brothers' hatred toward Joseph (which culminates in verse 8). Our author fronts the brothers' reaction to underscore this which is an example of the literary device known as *prolepsis*, or the anticipation of an event or action before it is actually recorded. But more importantly, the prolepsis balances symmetrically with Jacob's reaction to Joseph's 2nd dream (10b).

Realizing that 5b balances 10a, helps to establish the internal integrity of the Masoretic text. Although the Septuagint omits verse 5b: יוספו עוד שנא אתו ("they hated him even more" cf. BHS). The chiasmic structure indicates that verse 5b is essential for balance and the LXX is spurious. This is an instance where textual questions may be evaluated via internal chiasmic structure.

- E Joseph's 1st dream report (6-7)  
 E' Joseph's 2nd dream report (9-10a)

The dream reports occupy the bulk of the first episode (49 words), which in itself, indicates importance. Several common elements unite these two reports and form a distinct parallel construction. This symmetry, so characteristic of the Joseph Narrative, exudes clearly to the surface.

As far as word count in the Hebrew text, the dream reports nicely balance each other: the 1st dream report, vv. 6-7, with 24 words and 2nd dream report, vv. 9-10a, with 25 words.

Before Joseph actually tells his brothers his first dream, he first requests politely for their attention with שִׁמְעוּ נָא /šim'û-nā', "Please listen." The substance of the first dream is then recounted by Joseph in verse 7. Verse 9b details his description of his second dream, being couched in a similar verbal pattern. However, the request for their attention is not as obvious as in verse 6. It has no imperative from the verb שִׁמְעוּ /šim'. But the parallel construction with verse 6 makes it clear that this briefer formula serves the same function.

Furthermore, there are linking words which are common to both parts. For example, both reports include the recurrent הִנֵּה /hinnēh, "behold," which so often marks dreams and excited speech in the Hebrew Scriptures. Vs. 9a introduces the second dream with "Now he had still another **dream**." This is picking up the key term from vv. 6-7: "And he said to them, 'Please listen to this **dream** which I have had' (literally, "which I have **dreamed**").

Both dreams are first addressed to the brothers (v. 5b, 9b), albeit, in verse 10a our narrator tells us that he also "related it to his father," after which he reemphasizes that he also "related . . . and to his brothers." Both dreams end with the image of his brothers "bowing down" ( וַתִּשְׁתַּחֲוּי /wattišw'tah-weynā, v. 7; מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים /mištah'wīm, v. 9; לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת /lehis'tah'ôti, v. 10) to him.

#### F Brothers' embittered hatred of Joseph (8)

Verse 8 marks the highly artistic climax of the episode. The report of Joseph's dreams (EE') brackets the brothers' vocal reaction (F); they immediately interpreted his "dreams" as ruling over them. Twice a cognate Qal infinitive absolute is used in conjunction with a finite verb in order to convey their outrage of the content of the dream he recites (הֲמֵלֶךְ תִּמְלֹךְ, "Are you actually going to reign over us?"; מִשׁוֹל תִּמְשַׁל, "Are you really going to rule over us?"). The structure suggests that this is almost a threatening question on the part of his brothers, with these two verbs in closely knit parallelism marking the climax.

In addition, several anomalous features distinguish verse 8 as the center of the chiasmic structure. Not only does Joseph's dreams bracket his brothers' singular vocal outrage, but notably, this is the first and only recorded speech between the brothers and Joseph until chapter 42. The word "dreams" is

arresting since the linear narrative has reported only Joseph's first dream (vv. 5-7). The ever increasing intensity of Joseph brothers' hostility in verse 8 is underscored by the final occurrence of the three-fold repetition of the phrase שָׂנְאָ אֹתוֹ, "and they hated him" (cf. vv. 4, 5; note the exact correspondence of וַיִּוְסְפוּ עוֹד שָׂנְאָ אֹתוֹ in vv. 5 & 8).

### TRANSLATION

- <sup>1</sup>But Jacob dwelt in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan.
- <sup>2</sup>These are the descendants of Jacob, Joseph at the age of seventeen years, was a shepherd with his brothers over the sheep, but as a youth, with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, the wives of his father, and Joseph brought their evil remarks to their father.
- <sup>3</sup>Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, for he was a son of his old age, and so he made for him a long-sleeved embroidered tunic.
- <sup>4</sup>And when his brothers saw that he it was whom his father loved more than all of his brothers, they hated him and were incapable [to respond to] his word for peace.
- <sup>5</sup>And Joseph dreamed a dream and he related it to his brothers, and they added yet more hatred for him.
- <sup>6</sup>But he said to them: "Please hear this dream which I have dreamt"
- <sup>7</sup>"Behold! We were gathering together our sheaves in the middle of the field -- and behold! my sheaf arose and yea, remained upright -- and, behold, your sheaves stood in a circle and bowed down to my sheaf."
- <sup>8</sup>And his brothers said to him: "Will you indeed be a king over us, or indeed rule over us?" And they added yet more hatred because of his dreams and because of his words.
- <sup>9</sup>And he dreamed yet another dream and told it to his brothers and he said: "Behold, I have dreamed another dream, and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars bowed down to me."
- <sup>10</sup>And he told it to his father and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him: "What is this dream that you have dreamt? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves down to the earth to you?"
- <sup>11</sup>And his brothers were envious of him, but his father pondered the matter.

## Synthesis

When Joseph faithfully brought back his brothers' slanderous report about the rival between the wives' sons, his father demonstrated his love for this son of his old age by giving him preferential treatment, but his brothers hated him; and when the LORD confirmed Joseph's selection for leadership through two dreams, his father was perplexed, but his brothers were envious.

## EXEGETICAL OUTLINE

Transition: Jacob in the land (1)

Heading: "These are the generations of Jacob" (2a).

- I. Joseph, while tending the family flock with his half brothers, brought back a report about their slanderous talk about him (or between the sons of Leah and the maidservant wives), for which he enjoyed preferential treatment from his father but endured hatred from all his brothers (2b-4).
  - A. While tending the family flock as a youth, Joseph had occasion to bring back a report of his brothers' slanderous talk (2b).
  - B. Israel loved Joseph and gave him preferential treatment, but his brothers hated him (3-4).
    1. Israel loved Joseph more than the others and gave him a multi-colored tunic (3).
    2. Joseph's brothers hated him because they were jealous of the favoritism shown by their father (4).
- II. Joseph reported two dreams that symbolically revealed he would rise to prominence over his family, causing his father to rebuke him and his brothers to hate him all the more (5-11).
  - A. First dream: Joseph reported having a dream that symbolically (using sheaves) foretold his rise to prominence (5-8).
    1. Introduction: Joseph dreamed a dream and told his brothers (5).
    2. Dream speech: Joseph narrated the dream to his brothers (6-7).
    3. Response: Brothers asked him if he would rule over them (8a).
  - B. Second dream: Joseph reported another dream that reiterated symbolically (using sun, moon, and stars) that he would rise to prominence over his family (9-11).
    1. Introduction: Joseph dreamed again and told his brothers (9a).
    2. Dream speech: Joseph narrated his dream to brothers (9b-10a).
    3. Response: His father rebuked him (10b).
    4. Consequences: Brothers envied him, but his father meditated upon it (11).



## SA · DEVELOPMENT OF THE PASSAGE

### I. *Waiting upon God to fulfill His promises while others prosper, develops one's trustworthiness and perseverance (1).*

In a fashion similar to the story of the occupancy of Seir by Esau, a note relative to Jacob indicates his entrance into his inheritance, as well. Our writer artfully juxtaposes the visibly prospering Esau with that of his younger and less visibly prospering brother, Jacob. Yet, it was to Jacob that God had promised that kings would arise (Genesis 35:11) since he had inherited the blessing, and not Esau. It had been foretold that Esau, the elder, would serve Jacob, the younger; that the people descended from the latter would be stronger than the people descended from the former (Genesis 25:23); and that Jacob would be lord over Esau (Genesis 27:29).

Despite all of this, Esau has become a thoroughly organized kingdom for eight successive reigns, while Jacob has recently returned from serving Laban, and thus had attained to no such organization, and most noticeably, had not yet had a single king. It is in this context that waiting upon God to fulfill His promises while others prosper, develops one's trustworthiness and perseverance. Delitzsch poignantly notes that "secular greatness in general grows up far more rapidly than spiritual greatness" (*New Commentary on Genesis*, II:238). Or, in other words: material gain comes quicker than spiritual insight.

### Commentary

As Genesis 37 opens, we find that Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father, Isaac, was a sojourner, in the land of Canaan. This initial verse is a sort of spiritual postscript to the preceding chapter and at the same time a transitional step into the Joseph Narrative. Chapter 36 tells us of the proliferation of the ungodly Edomites; here, we observe that Jacob continued to occupy his heritage in faith. He remained in the land of promise, and retained his position as a pilgrim.

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**Transition: *Jacob in the land (verse 1)***


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1 וַיֵּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִגְוֵרֵי אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן:

But-he-dwelled Jacob in-the-land of-the-sojournings of-his-father in-the-land of-Canaan

1 Now Jacob lived in the land where his father had sojourned, in the land of Canaan.

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Now Jacob lived in the land contrasts Esau who had migrated (cf. 36:6-8) and formed a separate people, the Edomites, who settled in the land of Seir. Jacob and his family, however, remained in the same area where his father had sojourned, in the land of Canaan, the Land of Promise that was to be the future inheritance of his descendants. No one probably loved Canaan more than Jacob (Gen. 30:25), who had to flee from it because of deceit and live abroad for more than twenty years (Gen. 27--32).

The patriarchs were merely to "sojourn" in Canaan and not live there (Genesis 17:8; 23:4; 26:3; 28:4), although God had promised that their future offspring would live in Canaan as their "everlasting possession" (17:8; 48:4). In contrast to this dramatic contrast with the expanding, powerful Esau (evident of the foregoing genealogical material, vv. 9-43) who had kings, a tribe and lands, Jacob was dwelling in the land of the sojournings of his father who had none of these.

Moses confirms what he had before declared, that by the departure of Esau, the land was left to holy Jacob as its sole possessor. Although in appearance he did not obtain a single clod; yet, concluded with the bare sight of the land, he exercised his faith; and Moses expressly compares him with his father, who had been a stranger in that land of all his life. Therefore, though by the removal of his brother to another abode, Jacob was no little gainer; yet it was the Lord's will that this advantage should be hidden from his eyes, in order that he might depend entirely upon the promise (Calvin, *Genesis II:258*).

This picture of contrasting destinies appears as an explicit element in Joshua's farewell speech to the tribal confederation delivered at Shechem: "And to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau, and to Esau I gave Mount Seir, to possess it; but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt" (Joshua 24:4). Both events belong to God's sovereign plan in history; from now on, however, it will be the fortunes of Israel alone that will engage the attention of our biblical narrator.

Noticeably here, **where his father had sojourned** is specified by name. That is, **the land of Canaan**, which only Isaac, of the three patriarchs, had never left. More specifically, the reference is to the Hebron region (v. 14), where Jacob had gone to visit his aged father and where eventually his father had died (cf. 35:27).

A short digression is necessary at this juncture, spurred by the clause **where his father had sojourned**. As noted already, Isaac alone is born, lives and dies in Canaan without ever leaving the land; furthermore, he alone lives in strict monogamy, and he alone is engaged in agriculture. These facts are essential to the Genesis record, for Isaac's function is to be the link between his father (Abraham) and his son (Jacob); he is the receptacle, repository and transmitter of the divine promises. The literary treatment which Isaac receives is to set him apart in order to juxtapose and yet connect Abraham and Jacob.

All of this is relevant to our passage, especially the clause **where his father had sojourned**. If we trace linearly the sojournings of the patriarchs, we find something very curious. We will denote "sojourning" by A, those to the north (=Aram) by N, those to the south (=Egypt) by S, and those in Canaan by C:

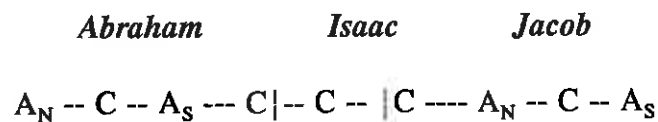


Figure 3.

As the above chart indicates, when the sojournings of the fathers are charted, it forms a neatly chiasmic format. Further, similarities between Abraham and Jacob, the two personages concentrically placed on either side of Isaac, are indeed numerous. The names of Abram (to "Abraham") and Jacob (to "Israel") are changed, whereas Isaac bears the only name of the three preordained by God. Both Abraham and Jacob left their parental homes, both suffered the threat of losing their beloved sons, both sojourned in Shechem, Bethel, Hebron and Beer-Sheba. Both, with the assent of their wives, fathered sons by their handmaidens. Both were given one commandment each for their descendants forever (Genesis 17:1ff., 32:33). Both buried their wives; both built altars. Jacob's nightly encounter with the mysterious man (Genesis 32:25-11) corresponds nicely to Abraham's experience on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22:1ff.).

The purpose of this lengthy digression is to demonstrate that chapters 12--36 are of an intricate texture and a rather homogeneous literary unit concentrically planned and symmetrically balanced; all of which is subsequently alluded to at times, such as our clause in verse 2b.

The same word (יָשַׁב/*yšb*, 1090x) describing Jacob's sojourn was also used for Abraham's (Genesis 13:12) and Isaac's (Genesis 26:3, 6), indicating a stay of an undeterminable length. But since Abraham and Isaac also migrated about in the land, the term connotes a residence of longer or shorter duration.

The characterization of a person of this nomadic character is **sojourner** (מְגוּרִי/*mġûrî* < גָּר/*gār*). Though Jacob was settling in the land, he also understood that he was only a transient, for he was finally to move--although himself at this time did not know where--to Egypt. But until that time, he had come home, be with his father before his death and dwell temporarily in the land which had been promised by God to Abraham, Isaac and himself.

יָשַׁב and גָּר are to a certain extent terms in contrast to each other. יָשַׁב is related to יָצַב. יָצַב is to stand firm and upright, and indeed, in accordance with the *š* sound, energetically overcoming obstacles. יָשַׁב in accordance with the *š* sound, a natural, quiet, unobstructed staying; to sit. גָּר, in contrast, is staying at a place where one does not belong, has no land of one's own. (Hence, also transcribed to conditions of the mind: to lose one's hold, to be dismayed, to be afraid, terrified). Jacob now hoped to be able to settle down quietly, after all his long wanderings, there where his father had only found temporary sojourning; for was it not really the land that had been promised for the quiet development of his life and family. But God did not consider the time ripe yet for that. But rather, only now do we stand at the תְּלִדוֹת יַעֲקֹב. Until now when he is settling down as an independent *pater familias*, he himself belonged to תְּלִדוֹת יִצְחָק, the development had been more passive, brought about by the family-history of Isaac. Only now does the further development of Jewish history through him and his household begin (Hirsch, 1989:539).

The purpose for this contrast between Jacob and Esau is to underscore that the promises of God had not yet been completely fulfilled and that Jacob (unlike Esau), as his fathers before him, was still awaiting the fulfillment. It is from a verse such as this that New Testament writers portray the lives of the patriarchs as "strangers and exiles on the earth" (Heb. 11:13). A promised spiritual blessing demands patience and faith. Waiting while others prosper is a test of one's trustworthiness and perseverance. Wisdom literature later develops this theme more fully: the unrighteous prosper in worldly power and wealth, while the righteous seem at times to lag behind such prosperity (see Pss. 49; 73). God will give the promised blessings to Jacob's seed, but only after long refining and proving of the faith.

**II. God sovereignly selects and calls those who are faithful and trustworthy into leadership roles, despite the opposition of others (37:2-4).**

Like Isaac and Jacob before him, Joseph is introduced as a specially chosen member of his family. This divine election is one of the themes of Genesis (cf. Rom. 9:11ff.), and God's plan and design for His chosen people is seen to be no more thwarted by the indiscretion of its allies (here Israel and Joseph) than by the malice of its opponents.

**Commentary**

*Preferential Treatment Foreshadows Divine Choice* (vv. 2-4)

In these few verses (but many for the reticent biblical narrator) a system of forces and influences is outlined which defines the characters and explains the forces at work in the interpersonal, familial relations. The seventeen year old Joseph is a shepherd along with his half-brothers and has occasion to bring an unidentified report concerning their evil behavior toward him. The reasons why his brothers feel this way is indirectly accounted for by reference to two important factors: (1) Joseph was not born of the same mother as the brothers who slandered him; and (2) he was loved by his father more than the other sons. The connection between these two factors is not made in this narrative for the reader (i.e., that Jacob favored Joseph's strangely unnamed mother, Rachel, more than his other wives). But lest the father's attitude appear arbitrary and ungrounded, it is then explained that Joseph was the "son of his old age." This accounts for Jacob's preferential treatment and thus makes his actions, as well as those of Joseph, understandable in light of the system of circumstances and consequent emotional forces operating in the family.

No mention has yet been made of the brothers' responses to this state of affairs. Perhaps they do not know, for a fact, that Joseph is reporting to their father concerning their slanderous talk about Joseph. The father, however, next makes his preferential feelings for Joseph public by bestowing upon him an unusual robe with long sleeves. Then, and only then, does the narrator reports, "and his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers" (v. 4a). With this objectification of the father's partiality, the narrator then reports that "they hated him and could not speak to him *shalom*" (v. 4b). Thus Joseph brothers' subsequent actions are explained by reference to their father's attitudes and actions.

The narrator has thus skillfully outlined a system of emotional forces in the family, over which no one has control, and its consequences. Jacob is hopelessly attached to this son of his old age, and this inevitably intrudes into his relations with his other sons. When this state of affairs is flaunted openly before the face of the brothers, their response of hatred is also to be expected. Their outburst of emotions then constitutes the motivating force behind most of the actions which follow in chapter 37, leading to the near murder and expulsion of Joseph by his brothers.

### Heading (verse 2a)

אֵלֶּה תְּלִדוֹתַי יַעֲקֹב 2a

These (the)-generations of-Jacob

<sup>1</sup>Three other occurrences of אֵלֶּה תְּלִדוֹתַי in Genesis lack the initial ך: 2:4; 6:9; 11:10. The occurrences of ך + אֵלֶּה תְּלִדוֹתַי are 5:1; 10:1; 10:32; 11:27; 25:12, 13, 19; 36:1, 9.

<sup>2</sup>It is interesting to note the orthographic peculiarities of תְּלִדוֹתַי, especially in light of Jesus' words in Matthew 5:18. Only in two instances is the word actually spelled with all six consonants (note the placement of the two vavs). The first reference is before the fall of man (Genesis 2:4), before sin had entered into the human race; the second is heading the Davidic line whereby the Messiah would come through to redeem the human race from sin (Ruth 4:18ff.). Otherwise, תְּלִדוֹתַי is spelled as תְּלִדוֹתַי (Genesis 25:12, 13; 36:1, 9; 37:2; Exodus 6:16, 19 etc.) or as תְּלִדוֹתַי (Genesis 5:1; 6:9; 10:1, 32; 11:10, 27; 25:13, 19; Exodus 28:10, etc.), or finally as תְּלִדוֹתַי, with the ך completely absent (Genesis 25:12; Exodus 6:16, 19; 1 Chronicles 26:31).

2a            These are *the records of the generations of Jacob.*

Contrary to what one may expect, no genealogical information immediately follows the clause **These are *the records of the generations of Jacob.*** Strikingly, the only name which appears is **Joseph**, even though at this time he had ten brothers. This limitation speaks eloquently of the dismal record of failure which characterized the older sons of Jacob.

In addition, are we literarily to understand that since Joseph is the only one mentioned that he is the sum and consummation of Jacob's generations? Indeed! Not only is he the focus of his father's love, but also becomes the center focus of the dreams (vv. 5-9), wherein his family is spoken in symbolic terms, i.e., never specifically named. In effect, the composite symbolic representation of the dreams places Joseph at the center of the universe.

It has been asked why this heading reads "These are *the records of the generations of Jacob*," not "These are the generations of Jacob's sons." Although we cannot give a definitive answer to this question (see a similar usage in Genesis 11:27, where only Terah is mentioned), it is clear from what follows is that the period of national history that deals with the "chosen people of God" begins with Jacob. And perhaps, also, we must remember that the *toledoth*, or "generations," deal with descendants.

The history (*tholedoth*) of Isaac commenced with the founding of his house by birth of his sons; but Jacob was abroad when his sons were born, and had not yet entered into undisputed possession of his inheritance. Hence his *tholedoth* only commence with his return to his father's tent and his entrance upon the family possessions, and merely embrace the history of his life as patriarch of the house which he founded. In this period of his life, indeed, his sons, especially Joseph and Judah, stand in the foreground, so that "Joseph might be described as the moving principle of the following history." But for all that, Jacob remains the head of the house, and the centre around whom the whole revolves (Keil & Delitzsch, 1980:1:329).

Even though the preceding chapters in Genesis relate much information about Jacob, we are now introduced to a new period that begins during the life of Jacob. Verse 2a gives a new heading for the history that is to follow: "These are *the records of the generations (tōl<sup>e</sup>dōth)* of Jacob." The problem with the *tōl<sup>e</sup>dōth* of Jacob is that, it is promptly derailed and the Joseph Narrative abruptly begins (37:2b) immediately after the *tōl<sup>e</sup>dōth* introductory title.

In every preceding instance the words '*elleh toledoth*, which open v. 2, have stood at the head of each of the preceding nine major divisions of Genesis. Consequently, v. 1 cannot be brought in as an introductory verse to this *toledōth* or "history." It does, however, remind us that as Esau (chapter 36) settled in the land of Seir, so Jacob after the separation of the brethren continued in the ancestral territory, a sojourner, where his father had sojourned. Nothing was more natural than that he, who continued the line of promise according to God's choice, should also settle in the land of promise. By this word, furthermore, it is indicated that Jacob had actually left the land east of the Jordan, where he had first stayed after his return from Mesopotamia, and had come to the land west of Jordan, which alone ranks as the land of Isaac's sojourning—and for that matter to the southern part of this land, where Isaac had been found, namely the vicinity of Hebron, Beersheba and the region toward the west, bordering on the Philistine land. Isaac, though his death was reported proleptically 35:29, continued to live for perhaps another twelve years and so shared in Jacob's grief over Joseph. But at this point Jacob supersedes Isaac and begins to carry on the history of the chosen race (Leupold, II.1950:952).

Insomuch as the Joseph Narrative is in no way confined to Jacob's genealogical history, it does not seem probable that this Narrative could be the *tōl<sup>e</sup>dōth* source of Jacob. On the other hand, a clear example of a normal *tōl<sup>e</sup>dōth* source appears in Genesis 46:8-27. This passage contains a list of Jacob's descendants and a concluding note about the family migration to Egypt (vv. 26-27), both of which are fairly common in *tōl<sup>e</sup>dōth* sources.

The solution must be that our narrator, who separated the *tōl<sup>e</sup>dōth* title line from its contents (37:2a, 46:8-27), inserted the Joseph Narrative (37:2b--46:7) between the two. Notably, the list of Jacob's offspring intro-

duced in 46:8 without the familiar *tōl°dōth* line, which had been separated from the rest of the source and left in 37:2a in the edited version of the *tōl°dōth* and narrative material, supports this proposition.

This seemingly abrupt interruption, but strategically placed Narrative, is therefore essential to explain how the sons of Israel, including the two sons of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh), came to be in Egypt and had their national beginnings there, and more specifically to explain 46:26-27 within the *tōl°dōth* of Jacob. This phenomenon has deep significance because the descent of the sons of Israel was an event fraught with divine predetermination as foretold in the solemn covenant God made with Abraham (Genesis 15:13), and "for it was the indispensable prelude to the drama of oppression and redemption which is the over-riding motif of biblical theology" (Sarna, 1966:212).

Another important reason for the suspension of the genealogical record of Jacob until Genesis 46:8-27, is because it marks another well crafted transition in the overall structure of Genesis. The chart below shows that genealogies have been artistically placed between each of the major narratives of Genesis. The primeval history serves as the prologue, the three major narratives (Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph) make up the heart of Genesis, and the story of Israel in Egypt after the arrival of Jacob is the conclusion.

#### THE STRUCTURE OF GENESIS

Prologue	Primeval History	1:1--11:26
<b>Transition</b>	<b>Genealogy</b>	<b>11:27-32</b>
Threat	Abraham Narrative	12:1--25:11
<b>Transition</b>	<b>Genealogy</b>	<b>25:12-18</b>
Threat	Jacob Narrative	25:19--35:22b
<b>Transition</b>	<b>Genealogy</b>	<b>35:22c--36:40</b>
Threat	Joseph Narrative	37:1--46:7
<b>Transition</b>	<b>Genealogy</b>	<b>46:8-27</b>
Resolution	Settlement in Egypt	46:28--50:26

Figure 4.

The Prologue, Genesis 1--11, serves as a guide and pattern to the larger narrative. It shows how God Who brought humanity through their difficult early days would do the same for the fathers of the special covenant



people. But Genesis is primarily concerned with the issue of how the nation (Israel) was threatened even before it really began, and this comes out in the three major narratives of the Book.

The three major figures of the narrative often stand alone in hostile lands with little hope of having or preserving offspring. Only the protection of the covenant God enables them to survive, prosper, and see their children. Abraham is commanded to sojourn in the strange land of the Canaanites, but it is precisely that land which God promises Abraham's offspring will fill. Jacob flees to the treacherous Laban, but it is there, because of Laban's schemes, that Jacob becomes the prosperous father of the twelve. Joseph is sold into slavery by his own brothers and ultimately, through no fault of his own, finds himself abandoned and forgotten in an Egyptian dungeon. Yet it is precisely from there that he is able to rise to a position beside Pharaoh himself and provide deliverance for his family when its survival is threatened by famine.

It will be noted that verse 2a exhibits no verb. This is in keeping with biblical narrative practice, for Hebrew commonly uses verbless clauses and sequence to describe the content of a unit of literature (cf. Genesis 5:1; 6:9, 15; 9:12; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 17:10; 20:13; 25:12, 19; 34:15; 36:1, 9, 10, 12; 40:12, 18; 41:28; 42:33; 43:11; 45:10, 17; Exodus 3:12; 6:14, 16; 7:17; 9:16; 12:43; 21:1; 29:1, 38; 35:1; etc.). This is an excellent example where a title statement is followed by a complete literary piece.

### Joseph's Age (verse 2b)

יֹסֵף בֶּן שִׁבְעֵי עָשָׂרָה שָׁנָה 2b

Joseph, a-son-of-ten-seven year

2b Joseph, when seventeen years of age

### WORD STUDY: יֹסֵף/yôsēp "Joseph"

**Meaning:** יֹסֵף/yôsēp "add, increase, do again." Rachel specifically names her son Joseph, saying, "May the LORD give me (lit. add to me) another son" (Gen. 30:24). The naming expresses a major triumph in Rachel's struggle: the birth of a son after a long period of unfruitfulness displayed divine intervention on behalf of the favorite wife. With this name there is a double word play.

Note that in v. 23 there is a play on the word, אָסַף/'āṣap "take away, remove" which is in assonance with Joseph. Rachel, earlier haughty and impatient, now gave praise to God for taking away her approach and prayed for another son from the LORD. After all, if a birth had broken the barrenness, more could follow. The name thus meant "may he [LORD] add," or "may he [LORD] increase."

**Occurrences:** The proper noun occurs over 200 times in the OT, referring primarily to the older son of Jacob and Rachel. It is used for the tribe, i.e., Ephraim and Manasseh (Deut. 33:13; Josh 14:4; 17:1ff), for the northern kingdom (Amos 5:6, 15; Zech. 10:6), and for the whole nation of Israel (Ps. 80:1 [2]; 81:5 [6]). Four other men in the OT have this name: (1) Num. 13:7, a man from Issachar; (2) 1 Chr. 25:2, 9 a son of Asaph; (3) Ezra 10:42 one who took a foreign wife; and (4) Neh. 12:14 a priest.

**Wordplays:** אָסַף ("to add, increase"); אֶפְסָד ("silver, money").

The narrator immediately launches into the Joseph Narrative. A number of pertinent background details about Joseph are given. But first, it is significant to note that the names of father and son, i.e., "Jacob" and "Joseph" are juxtaposed, that is, placed side by side in the text. Our writer incorporates an unusual striking, if not blunt, juxtaposition of proper names, "These are *the records of the generations of Jacob, Joseph . . .*," as if by this juxtaposition, the intimacy and closeness which Jacob enjoys with Joseph is first visually and literarily seen, and then the explanation for their intimacy explained in verse 3. This juxtaposition of Joseph's name to that of the title, "These are *the records of the generations of Jacob*," with no following names but Joseph's, even though he had ten brothers (at this time), speaks eloquently of the dismal record of failure which characterized Jacob's older sons and literarily equates Joseph as the sum and the consummation of these "generations," which, incidently, brings literary unity with Genesis 50:22-26 (cf. notes on Gen. 50:26).

The first biographical detail given about Joseph is his age: that he is seventeen years old. A comparison of Genesis 30:24-26 with 31:41, indicates that this was eleven years after Jacob returned from Haran. Where we would expect in English the plural "years" (and so translated in the EVV), the Hebrew regularly employs the singular "year" (שָׁנָה /*šānāh*) whenever referring to a person's age (cf. Genesis 5:3, 4, 5, 6, 7, etc.; 6:3; 7:6; 9:28, 29; 11:10, 11, 12,

14, etc.; 12:4; 16:16; 17:1, 17<sup>2</sup>, 24, 25; 21:5; 23:1; 25:7, 17, 20, 26; 26:34; 35:28; 37:2; 41:46; 47:9, 28). A corresponding phenomenon does occur, however in English. Whenever an adjectival phrase describes someone's age, we also employ the singular: "The seventeen year old boy heroically dived in and save the drowning woman from certain death."

In view of the undisputed reticent style of Genesis, our narrator's telling of Joseph's age is a surprising piece of specific information. Moreover, it is superfluous, because we are also told in the same verse that he was "a lad." As we are not informed of Isaac's age when he was to be sacrificed, why do we need to know how old Joseph was when he was sold?

To answer this question, we must turn to Genesis 47:9 where we read that Jacob's age was one hundred and thirty years when he came to Egypt and that "Jacob **lived** in the land of Egypt **seventeen** years; so the length of Jacob's life was one hundred and forty-seven years" (Genesis 47:28).

We now begin to see the significance of the twice repeated seventeen years (37:2, 47:28): Jacob "lived" only with Joseph at his side, which happened during the first seventeen years of Joseph's and during the last seventeen years of his own lifetime. The two passages refer to each other and enclose Jacob's old age within two periods of equal length--concentrically, symmetrically and, in a simple sense, chiasmatically as charted below.

---

X	Joseph and Jacob together for 17 years (37:2b)	
Y	Joseph and Jacob apart for <del>110</del> years (47:9)	<i>20-22 yrs</i>
X'	Jacob and Joseph together for 17 years (47:28)	

Figure 5.

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Enclosing large segments of narrative based upon age is not restricted to this one example. This same phenomenon is again seen when our narrator aptly concludes the grand Narrative with giving Joseph's age when he died in Egypt (110 years old; Genesis 50:22, 26), balancing and forming an *inclusio* with that of the first biographical detail in the Narrative (37:2b). One should not also overlook the fact that at the inception of verse 3, Jacob himself is 110 years old (although not explicitly stated)!!

The Abraham Narrative is also highly concentrically structured based upon his age. Abraham is first mentioned in Genesis 11:26 as a son born to Terah. His early life is glossed over in three short verses (there and 11:29, 31) and he appears on the stage when he is already seventy-five years old (12:1). In chapters 23--25, he merely completes before his death that which is left for him to do: to bury his wife (ch. 23) and to marry off his son Isaac (ch. 24), while 25:1-18 no more than lists the genealogies of his offspring. To Abraham himself, only chapters 12--22 are devoted.

Of Abraham's 175 years (25:7), the first seventy-five are skipped, as noted above. As far as the biblical narrative is concerned, his "real" life began when he entered the land of Canaan. He was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born and from this event on, like Jacob, he lived for another seventy-five years. His lifespan is thus 75 + 25 + 75 years, a numerical A-B-A' chiastic pattern.

#### CHIASTIC ARRANGEMENT OF GENESIS 17

- A Abram's age (17:1a)
  - B The LORD appears to Abram (17:1b)
  - C God's first speech (17:b-2)
  - D Abram falls on his face (3)
    - E God's second speech (name changes, kings; 17:4-8)
    - F God's third speech (the covenant; 17:9-14)
    - E' God's fourth speech (name changes, kings; 17:15-16)
  - D' Abraham falls on his face (17:17-18)
  - C' God's fifth speech (17:19-21)
  - B' God "goes up" from Abraham (17:22)
  - A' Abraham's age (17:24-25)
- Epilogue: Abraham obeyed God (17:26-27)

Figure 6.

It is also striking that a numerical inclusio, bracketing a chiastic structure in Genesis 17, underscores perhaps the most important events in all of Abraham's life (see Figure 6). The nature of Genesis 17 is almost entirely direct revelation, with its emphases on divine appearance and divine discourse,

wherein the LORD gives His pledge of the promise and the sign of the covenant, as well as changing the names of Abraham and Sarah.

This is a faultlessly regular alignment of the formal structure of this chapter. The symmetry is a substantial proof of the inner unity of the chapter and refutes source criticism that asserts that God's speeches represent superfluous repetition, as well as the seemingly breaking up of the name changes. It is indeed difficult to deny that one single mastermind produced this interwoven and aesthetically satisfying literary tapestry. That it is designed as a chiasmic matrix is furthermore forcefully impressed upon the reader by Abraham's age recurring in A and A', creating an inclusio. The epilogue falls outside of this inclusio and underscores Abraham's immediate obedience to God's will.

### Joseph's Occupation (verse 2c)

הָיָה רֹעֵה אֶת אָחָיו בְּצֹאן 2c

he-was a shepherd with-his-brothers over-the-flock

2c was pasturing the flock with his brothers

Although the EVV have smoothed over the grammatical and syntactical difficulties of this clause, the meaning in the Hebrew text is somewhat ambiguous and problematic, and perhaps intentionally so. The first difficulty encountered is the temporal aspect of הָיָה רֹעֵה */hāyāh rō'eh*, "was pasturing" (NASB; LXX = ἦν ποιμαίνων); secondly, and not unrelated to the first, whether the direct object of this verbal idea is "his brothers" (אֶת אָחָיו) or "the flock" (בְּצֹאן), or neither.

There is no doubt that the Hebrew text indicates that Joseph's participated as a shepherd. However, some grammarians believe that the verbal construction indicates that Joseph at one time was a shepherd of his father's sheep, but at some time during the events which occur in chapter 37, he no longer was. This determination is based upon the combination of רֹעֵה (understood as a Qal participle) with a form of the verb הָיָה.

For example, Joüon comments in his grammar: "The participle in the sphere of the past being atemporal, a form of the verb  $\text{היה}$  with past meaning is added in order clearly to express time past" (cf. 2 Sam. 5:2; 1 Chr. 11:2; Job 1:14). And then as an example, he cites Genesis 37:2: "Joseph, a young man of seventeen, *used to tend* . . . and he brought . . ." (Joüon, 1991:§121f).

But not all Hebrew grammarians agree. Bruce Waltke understands that the temporal nuance "seems to be more precisely 'at just that time'" (Waltke, 1990:629; cf. 2 Kgs. 6:8). In this case then, according to Waltke, the translation would yield something like "Joseph, a young man of seventeen, *was at one time tending* . . . when he brought . . ." An analogous parallel in Exodus 3:1 with that of Genesis 37:2b tends to confirm Waltke's translation  $\text{היה רעה את צאן}$ , "Now Moses **was** pasturing the flock . . . and he led the flock . . ." (NASB). This leaves little doubt that it was during the time Moses was pasturing Jethro's flock that he led the flock and came to Horeb. However, it is very possible that  $\text{רעה}$ /*r'h* is not to be understood as a verb, but as a noun and thus be translated here, as well as in Genesis 37:2c as "he was a **shepherd**" (see below).

In conclusion because there is not enough criteria to determine the exact temporal aspect of this verbal construction, it would be best to hesitate over identifying its precise nuance. Generally, it would perhaps be best to understand Joseph's shepherding taking place in the indefinite past, and the circumstances under which Joseph "brought back a bad report" (v. 2e). Thus the NASB translation of  $\text{היה}$ /*hyh* as "was" is acceptable. Perhaps the following alternate translation of Genesis 37:2b catches the spirit of the verbal thought: "Joseph, a young man of seventeen, **during the time he was a shepherd** . . . he brought . . ."

The next difficulty arises because in every instance the Hebrew particle  $\text{אֶת}$ /*et* precedes a noun following the verb  $\text{רעה}$ /*r'h* ("to tend, feed or shepherd"), it designates and identifies it as its direct object (cf. Genesis 30:36; 36:24; 37:12; 48:15; Exodus 3:1; 1 Samuel 17:15; 2 Samuel 5:2; 7:7; Ezekiel 34:8; etc.). In Genesis 37:2c the Hebrew particle  $\text{אֶת}$ /*et* is joined with  $\text{אֶתְּיָוָם}$ , "his brothers," thus if understood as the sign of the direct object, renders a problematic translation which would pose Joseph as "shepherding" his brothers, and not the flocks as all EVV have translated. In his commentary on Genesis, Bush defends this translation:

רעה, literally, *was tending, or acting the shepherd over, his brethren in the flock.* However uncouth to our ears the phraseology, this is undoubtedly the exact rendering, and the import of the words we take to be, that Joseph was charged with the superintendence of his brethren, particularly the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. Whether this was owing merely to the fond favoritism of his father, or to his superior fidelity, capacity, and diligence in the discharge of his duties, we know not; but we cannot but infer from the text that such was the fact, that in some way the management and direction of the flocks and their keepers was entrusted to him. . . . The common translation, it will be observed, renders את אחיו *eth ehav*, by *with his brethren*. But the particle את *eth* very generally follows the verb רעה *raah*, as the sign of the accusative, and not as a preposition. Thus Gen. 30.36, 'And Jacob רעה את צאן *fed the flocks* of Laban.' 2 Sam. 7.7, 'Whom I commanded את עמי *to feed my people Israel.*' Jer. 23.2, 'Thus saith the Lord God of Israel against the pastors הרעים את עמי *that feed my people.*' Indeed, in no other instance throughout the Bible, if the present be excepted, does את follow רעה as a preposition. Again, according to the established version, רעה בצאן *roeh batzizon* signifies *to feed or tend the flock*, as if רעה governed its accusative by the interposition of the particle ב *b*. But this is contrary to usage in every instance in the Heb. Scriptures except two, and those are undoubtedly cases precisely parallel to the present, in which the particle signifies *in or among*. The first occurs 1 Sam. 16.11, 'There remaineth yet the youngest, and behold, he רעה בצאן *keepeth the sheep.*' The second is found 1 Sam. 17.34, 'And David said unto Saul, Thy servant רעה בצאן *kept his father's sheep.*' In both these cases we doubt not the true rendering is that David *performed the office of a shepherd-overseer in or among the flocks*, just as we say of a military officer, *he commanded in the army* (Bush, 1976:II.220-221).

Whereas all these observations by Bush are essentially correct, there is another exegetical solution that would possibly explain the presence of את/'et before "brothers" better, rather than marking it as the direct object of רעה/r'h.

To begin, the verb "pasture/shepherd" (רעה/r'h) is used both transitively (requiring a direct object) and intransitively (not requiring a direct object, but sometimes understood from the context and thus omitted). A clear example of a transitive usage appears in the immediate context: וילכו אחיו לרעות את צאן אביהם, "Then his brothers went to pasture **their father's flock**" (v. 12; NASB). It is obvious that "flock" (את/'et-šō'n) is the direct object of לרעות/lir'ōt and is so marked with את/'et. But this is not to say that the direct object is *always* identified by the particle את/'et, for there are instances where the direct object of רעה/r'h simply follows the verb without the direct object marker את/'et (Genesis 30:36; 1 Samuel 25:16; Isaiah 61:5; Jeremiah 2:16; Ezekiel 34:2, 3 [notice that its object is proleptic], 10, 15).

As noted above, רעה may also be intransitive and therefore not need direct object to complete its meaning, as exemplified in Genesis 37:13: הלא אחיה רעים בשכם: "Are not your brothers pasturing *the flock* in Shechem?" By italicizing "*the flock*," the NASB translators indicate that these words do *not* appear in the Hebrew text, but are understood from verse 12 where את צאן /'et šō'n ("the flock") does appear. Thus, verse 13 clearly establishes רעה need not to have an object in order to complete its verbal idea (cf. 37:16). Furthermore, רעה/r'h could easily be understood as predicate nominative (since the vowels and consonants are identical; cf. Gen. 49:24) and remove any grammatical necessity for את אחיו, "his brothers" to function as the direct object of רעה/r'h (Hirsch 19 :539).

This all leads to the question whether or not *אֶת*/'*et* is really identifying "his brothers" in Genesis 37:2c as the direct object of *רָעָה*/*r'h* (as posited by Bush), or functioning in another capacity. If we understand *רָעָה*/*r'h* as intransitive/predicate nominative, then this leaves *אֶת*/'*et* free to function as in so many cases, as a preposition. As a preposition the basic sense is comitative ('with'; KJV, NASB, NIV, NJB); it may mark accompaniment (companionship, fellowship; Num. 18:2), or interest (accompaniment, literal or metaphorical, for the purpose of helping; NEB; Num. 14:9; 2 Kgs. 9:32; cf. Waltke, 1990:195f). The prepositional use of *אֶת*/'*et* is very common and used indisputably two (other) times in Gen. 37:2 alone: *אֶת בְּנֵי בִלְהָה וְאֶת בְּנֵי זִלְפָּה נְשֵׁי אֲבִיו*, literally, "with the sons of Bilhah and with the sons of Zilpah, wives of his father."

Having established the probability that *אֶת*/'*et* in Gen. 37:2c is syntactically functioning as a preposition, this raises the issue whether the EVV are correct in translating *בַּצֹּאן* /*baṣṣōn*, "flock" as a direct object, especially if *רָעָה*/*r'h* is a predicate nominative, thus not requiring an accusative complement.

The combination of the inseparable preposition with the definite article (*בַּ*/*ba*) on *בַּצֹּאן* /*baṣṣōn*, "flock," points to Joseph and his brothers' position within the household, or their place of domain, more so than a direct object (Waltke, 1991:196). Bush has pointed out that this idiom following *רָעָה*/*r'h*, which occurs here and nowhere else but in 1 Sam. 16:11 and 17:34, indicates one who "performs the office of a shepherd—overseer in or among the flocks, just as we say of a military officer, he commanded in the army" (Bush, 1976:II.221; however see Gen. 46:34; 47:3).

Whereas the foregoing has shown that neither *אֶת אָחָיו*, "with his brothers" or *בַּצֹּאן*, "over the flock" are direct objects of *רָעָה*/*r'h*, which itself is a predicate nominative, this is not to say that the composition of the clause was not meant to be intentionally ambiguous and to carry double meaning. For example, the basic concept undergirding *רָעָה*/*r'h* is that of "feeding" (Gen. 30:36; Isa. 14:30; ▶KB, 1958:899), and the immediate sense of the syntax would lead one to think that Joseph was "feeding" or shepherding his brothers. Thus, perhaps the syntax of the clause has purposely been carefully constructed to carry a subtle suggestion of what is to follow. Indeed, Joseph does in chapter 41 rise to become Grand Vizier and Minister of Agriculture in Egypt, from which position he is able to feed his family and sustain them through the terrible seven years of famine. Even after the death of Jacob, he again reassures his brothers that he will "provide" (*אֶכְלֶכֶל*) for them and for their children (50:21).



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 Joseph's Relationship with his Half Brothers (verse 2d)
 

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2d והוא נער את בני בלהה ואת בני זלפה נשי אביו

But-he a-lad with-the-sons-of Bilhah and-with-the-sons-of Zilpah the-wives-of his-father

2d while he was *still* a youth, along with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives.

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This descriptive nominal clause functions multipurposely. First, the syntax ׀ + X + QATAL suggests that this clause is describing the background of the events to follow. Secondly, it is explanatory, clarifying what was meant by אָתְּ אֶחָיו, "his brothers," in verse 2c and thus limiting the group who is included in the pronominal suffix "their report" (דִּבְבָתָם/*dibbātām*, v. 2e). Thus when Joseph brought an "evil report" to Jacob, it did not concern all his brothers, but only the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah (namely, Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher). The background for this concerns the continuation of the rivalry between Jacob's wives (Gen. 29--30) in their sons, the rivalry between the mistresses and the maidservants.

This parenthetical clause is introduced by "and" (וְ conjunction) joined with the independent pronoun "he" (הוא/*hū*), referring to Joseph. Since a nominal clause must have an explicit noun/pronoun subject, הוא is probably not emphatic here (Muraoka, 1985:14) though it stands first in the clause.

The term נער/*na'ar* is translated in the EVV as "lad/youth/young man." This term actually has a wide range of usage which is evident from a sampling of its over two hundred occurrences. Whereas in Exodus 2:6 it refers to the infant Moses, who was yet a few months old, and 2 Samuel 12:16 to Bathsheba's baby, the mature Absalom is called נער by his father in 2 Samuel 14:21 and 18:5. Thus נער/*na'ar* may refer to a youngster of ages ranging between weaning and (especially) marriageable young manhood. In this context, נער/*na'ar* would mark Joseph's extraordinary abilities, even though he was relatively young when compared with his other brothers.

If נַעַר/*na'ar* is to be joined to what follows, it may then express a position that Joseph was or did in relationship to Bilhah and Zilpah's sons. The meaning would then be that during his time as a shepherd, at his occupation, Joseph was together with all of his brothers, the sons of Leah. But his life as a "youth," his youthful activities, he spent with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah.

However, because Joseph's age has already been stated, and thus the idea of youthfulness would be extraneous, the primary meaning of youthfulness may not be the correct nuance. There is a technical use of נַעַר/*na'ar* in the Hebrew Scriptures which fits this context nicely. In Exodus 33:11 Joshua's relationship to Moses is described as an assistant/apprentice (cf. 1 Samuel 20:35). Describing Joseph in this manner fits contextually, thus making Joseph presumably learning animal husbandry from his half brothers.

Some Jewish scholars have argued that, since Joseph was favored by his father above the other sons, he must have been in a different position than his less-favored half brothers. This has led some to strain the meaning of נַעַר/*na'ar* to indicate that Joseph was placed in a position of oversight over his brothers and that this in turn caused the animosity of his brothers toward him. The term, however, does not speak of an authoritative position. Joseph simply worked as a shepherd alongside his brothers. Jacob's favoritism for Joseph came out in other ways, as is indicated in verse 3.

However, what is notable is the interesting word choice of נַעַר/*na'ar* over several other suitable synonyms, such as יָלֵד/*yeled* ("young boy/lad"). For יָלֵד/*yeled* is the term Reuben uses describing Joseph twenty-two years later when recalling the brothers' treacherous treatment of him at this time (Gen. 42:22 comp. with 37:21-22; 37:30). So why does our narrator use נַעַר here and in Reuben's speech (direct discourse) יָלֵד to describe the identical person?

Since the Joseph Narrative is filled with wordplays and reversals, it seems likely that our narrator chose נַעַר/*na'ar* for its similar consonants with נַעַר, so that a consonantal association could be seen between נַעַר/*na'ar* and נַעַר/*ra'ah* ("evil"; v. 2e), thereby linking Joseph's position of assistant with that of reporting the brothers evil (cf. v. 2e). Intrastructurally, the association between these consonants serves to further weld clauses 2d and 2e together.

A further and more developed ironic wordplay may be seen when we recall the extended meanings of the word רֹעֵה/*r'h* (as a noun: "shepherd") in the previous clause. The most notable denotation is metaphorical, "to shepherd" people (2 Sam. 5:2; 7:7; Jer. 3:15; 23:2, 4; Micah 5:3; Ps. 78:71f;

1 Chron. 11:2; 17:6), or to function as a "leader, (responsible) ruler" (Jer. 2:8; 3:15; 10:21; 12:10; 22:22; 23:1f., 4; 25:34-36; Ezek. 34:2-23; 37:24). This explanatory clause of verse 2d now tells us in what capacity Joseph accomplished this: he assisted his four half brothers. But now, Joseph--the "assistant" (נָאֵר/*na'ar*)--who is a "shepherd" (רֹעֶה/*rō'eh*) was able to detect his brothers' "evil" (רָאָה/*rā'āh*, v. 2e), which "evil" (רָאָה/*rā'āh*; cf. Gen. 37:20, 25) eventually turns against him.

Bilhah and Zilpah were the maidservants of Rachel and Leah, respectively, before Jacob's wives gave them to him as "wives" (Genesis 30:3-4, 9). Both Bilhah and Zilpah were until now referred to as "maidservants" when mentioned together with Rachel and Leah. It is significant that these concubines are now called Jacob's "wives" in concert for the first time, without any further explanation. It indicates a new status acquired by these two concubines.

The order of the "lesser" wives is reversed (cf. Genesis 29:24, 29), if we think of the order in which they were given to Jacob by Leah and Rachel, respectively. However, since Joseph would have been naturally closer to Bilhah, his mother's maidservant (since she would had been like a second mother to him), is mentioned first. Joseph grew up with her sons, Dan and Naphatali, to whom Gad and Asher, the sons of Zilpah, the other "lesser" wife, attached themselves. Or possibly, Bilhah is mentioned first because her sons were older than those of Zilpah.

Another interesting order is found in Genesis 49:16-21 where Jacob pronounces the destinies of the four sons of these two concubines. These sons are not listed in chronological order (just as the concubines are not here), but chiasmatically structured.

Significantly, in relationship to Joseph, the brothers are introduced nameless, and then only as a group, and not one by one. What will be key words throughout the Narrative, "sons/sons" (בְּנֵי־אֶחָיו) and "brother/brothers" (אֶחָיו־אֶחָיו), appear in these introductory sentences in significant juxtaposition. "Moreover, they are subordinated to Joseph by being defined simply as Joseph's brothers . . . . Even the following division of the brothers according to their mothers does not soften the subordination since the mothers are defined as the wives of Joseph's father" (Coats, 1976:11).

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 Joseph's Report (verse 2e)
 

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וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת דִּבְתָּם רָעָה אֶל אָבִיהֶם: 2e

Now-he-brought Joseph their-slander evil to-their-father

**2e**            **And Joseph brought back a bad report about them to their father.**

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It is significant that Joseph is reintroduced by name in this independent clause, which is headed by the first main verb of the narrative, "now Joseph brought" (וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף), carrying the most important concept of the Narrative thus far, subordinating all the previous clauses and phrases which are introducing the staging of the Narrative. With the introduction of Joseph as a separate character, we find the first element of tension in the family: "And Joseph brought back a bad report about them to their father."

In brief, because of the ambiguity of the syntax of this clause, there are three principle interpretations, stemming from how one understands the 3rd plural pronominal possessive suffix "them/their" (whether objective or subjective, respectively): (1) if the suffix is objective, then this makes Joseph a tale-bearer, and thus the slanderous remarks are those which he brings to his father concerning his brothers; (2) if the suffix is subjective, this would establish that the bad report originated from the brothers about Joseph, which Joseph subsequently reports; or (3) and again if the suffix is subjective, the malicious words were spoken about Bilhah and Zilpah's sons by others (Leah's sons) and Joseph tries to preserve the peace by bringing the matter to Jacob's attention.

The beginning of the Narrative portrays Joseph as a faithful son among unfaithful sons. While keeping his father's flocks with some of his brothers, Joseph had occasion to bring back an "evil report" (דִּבְתָּם רָעָה / *dibbātām rā'āh*), and interestingly enough, this "evil report" is left unqualified. The narrator does not tell us whether the report was true or false, although the words "evil report" elsewhere refers to gossip, plotting, and misinformation (Num. 14:37; Ps. 31:13; Prov. 10:18). Because there is so much misunderstanding what our narrator is communicating about the character of Joseph, the Hebrew construction will require careful examination. Lowenthal aptly comments on the Hebrew construction:

*Dibbatam*--their slander--is remarkably ambiguous. Considering the Narrative's otherwise so masterly stylistic competence, such ambiguities are deliberate and call for all the possible interpretations: "Their slander" can mean the slander *by* or *about* them. Moreover, "them" can refer to all ten brothers, to the sons of Leah and to the concubines' sons. Consequently, the verse seems to say that Joseph reported the defamations of the two "parties" about each other and by all Ten about himself (Lowenthal, 1973:16).

It seems to be taken for granted both by translators and commentators that this verse represents Joseph as the spoiled darling of a doting father, a petty tattletale who deservedly brought on himself the hatred of his brothers. The NASB and other EVV hint at this: "And Joseph brought back a bad report about them (דִּבְבֵי רָע/dibbātām) to their father." Westermann even more suggestively posits: "Joseph's action in the context of vv. 1-2 together with vv. 3ff. is to be understood as an act of tale-bearing by which he wanted to make himself important" (Westermann, 1986:36). Another writes that Joseph "commands none of our sympathies," and that the Narrative depicts "a father's favoritism, tittle-tattle, sibling jealousies, egotistic boyish dreams--all the unlovely elements of a family situation containing the infallible ingredients of explosive tragedy . . ." (Sarna, 1966:212).

These commentators are not alone in their evaluation of Joseph's early life based on the Hebrew words רָעָה דִּבְבֵי רָע/dibbātām rā'āh ("evil report," NASB). In varying degree, the general portrait of Joseph in the commentaries is that of a spoiled young brat, an unprincipled schemer who skillfully foments dissension in the family, who throws away all he has gained by blurting out slanderous remarks about his (half) brothers to his father, all presumably with the intention of gaining first-born status. His dreams are then reevaluate as visions of self grandeur, amounting to a megalomaniac.

It is true that the Hebrew word דִּבְבֵי/dibbāh is a uniformly unpleasant word. It has similar connotations to our word "insinuation," and in all other contexts means an untrue report (for references, see preceding paragraph). Notably, however, this demeans Joseph's character so intolerably that Hebrew lexicographers like Brown, Driver and Briggs listed דִּבְבֵי/dibbāh in Genesis 37:2 as an exception: "(true) report of evil doing," with no lexical justification (▷BDB, 1972:179).

These lexicographers sense the discontinuity between the usual objective genitival translation ("about them," NASB) and the utterly different portrait of Joseph which follows in the remainder of the Narrative. Joseph appears as morally virtuous who feared the LORD more than people (39:8-12), and was imprisoned and suffered for his obedience (39:19-23). Among other things, the Spirit of God was in him (41:38) so that he could give wise counsel;

diligent in his preparation when there was plenty (41:46-49); and most importantly, he did not act out of revenge against his brothers (45:1-7; 50:20).

It is very important to note that Joseph's character is never diminished in the biblical record (unless this is the only exception), so much so that inspired Scripture never records a wrongdoing by him. In fact the Torah attributes chivalry and precocity to Joseph at the early age of six when he stepped out in front of his mother, Rachel, and bowed low before Esau, manifesting boldness and initiative (Gen. 33:7). This should caution us not to attribute pettiness to this young man now. Nor is it recorded that Jacob ever consider Joseph a talebearer. Remarkably, Joseph's spiritual and moral strength does not appear to be based on or related to God's periodic and direct revelations, as was true of Abraham, Issac and Jacob.

Indeed, if Joseph is merely a tattletale, giving his father untrue reports about his brothers, then his nobility and innocence which clearly dominate later, appear without transition or explanation in the ensuing Narrative! In other words, one would not expect such maturity and purity of character as that displayed by Joseph in Egypt, from a pampered and spoiled adolescent. In this case, Joseph was not mistreated by his brothers because of his arrogance, but rather because of their own jealousy and wickedness.

However, the 3rd plural pronominal possessive suffix (םָן) on the Hebrew feminine word for "report" (דִּבְבָהּ/dibbāh) can easily carry the subjective genitival meaning instead of the generally accepted objective genitive, thus rendering: "Joseph brought their (his brothers') slanders to their father." This translation of the possessive ending would clearly establish that the idle gossip was that of the brothers and not the words of Joseph about the brothers.

Another case of דִּבְבָהּ/dibbāh with a pronominal suffix is in Proverbs 25:1, where the meaning is ambiguous: the text may threaten a disastrous chain-reaction from slanderous talk. The corresponding use of the construct with דִּבְבָהּ sometimes has subjective force (Jer. 20:10; Ezek. 36:3; Ps. 31:14), sometimes objective (Num. 13:22; 14:37). The LXX translates דִּבְבָהּ/dibbāh here by ψόγος/psogos, elsewhere only used where דִּבְבָהּ/dibbāh has a subjective genitive, so that its most natural meaning of "criticism/accusation," tends to support the subjective genitive translation.

Another possible interpretation of this clause (with **וְהוּא** as subjective, and which this author believes to be the correct interpretation) is to understand the vicious gossip was spoken about the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah by Leah's sons, who were quite capable of such an action. Because Leah's sons were sons of a principal wife, they spoke slightingly about the sons of the maidservants (and thus the reason for the inclusion of the term "his father's wives" [**נְשֵׁי אָבִיו**] in v. 2d). Is it possible that a hint of this is given some twenty years later, when Joseph sent his brothers home from Egypt with the single admonition not to quarrel along the way (Gen. 45:24)? One can imagine the word battles that probably were fought among the six sons of Leah, the two sons of Zilpah, and the two sons of Bilhah (Gen. 35:23-26). Whatever their iniquity, Joseph was compelled to report it to his father.

It is possible that Joseph resented Leah's sons conduct as an insult to his father, so he attempted to champion the cause of the lesser sons' wives before him, acting as mediator between the brothers (and thus the reason for the unexpected "for peace" [**לְשָׁלוֹם**] in v. 4b and the antecedent of "his words" [**דְּבַרְיוֹ**] in v. 8c). This may also gives us a partial understanding of these "lesser sons" becoming the central focus in the chiasitic structure of Genesis 49 (see notes on Gen. 49:16-21) wherein, although being sons of their father's concubines, they would share in the inheritance, something that the principle sons would disfavor. Joseph's actions was well-meant, but it did not change the conduct of Leah's sons.

This is not an attempt to "whitewash" the character of Joseph's early life. But to question whether in fact the common portrayal of his early character in the commentaries and latent in the EVV fits the overall movement of the Narrative, especially when there is a legitimate exegetical option which harmonizes the overall content of the Narrative.

Furthermore, Joseph's behavior in verse 2e is not to be understood in isolation from his father's attitude toward him in verse 3 ("Israel loved Joseph more than all of his sons"). True, Joseph was greatly loved by his father. Yet why not? Surely Jacob's older sons had proved disappointing to him. The evil character of Joseph's brothers is thoroughly established in Scripture. One can read concerning the cruelty and deceit of Simeon and Levi in dealing with the Shechemites (Gen. 34); or the lust and sin of Reuben (Gen. 35:22). The sins of Judah will become apparent later on, in chapter 38. The sons of Jacob did not provide the world around with an exemplary testimony. Embroiled in their sinfulness, they indeed typify Israel at the time of their Messiah (Jn. 1:11).

The report Joseph brought to his father is qualified by the adjective "evil" (הַרְאָה/ra'ah), which is one of the important themes in Genesis, and certainly is one in the Joseph Narrative (37:2, 20, 33; 38:7; 39:9; 40:7; 41:3, 4, 19, 20, 21, 27; 44:4, 29, 34; 47:9; 48:16; 50:15, 17, 20). Probably we see again an artful wordplay, for it seems likely that the reference to the "evil" (הַרְאָה/ra'ah) report" in verse 2e foreshadows the brothers' intended "evil" (הַרְאָה/ra'ah) spoken of in Gen. 50:20.

Ross' comments are insightful concerning "evil" as a major theme in the Book of Genesis, and for this reason, are quoted at length.

The motif of evil thus appears throughout the narratives of Genesis, reminding us of the sinful nature of the race and its unhappy circumstances. The basic use of this motif describes the evil acts of humans. Prior to the flood the human nature became very evil, so that evil multiplied (6:5). The judgment of the flood was the only recourse for such wickedness. But even after the judgment there was the recognition that the human heart is evil from childhood (8:21). During the early sojourn of Abram we encounter the spread of evil again in civilization (13:13), painfully reminding us of the need for God's blessing. But even in the chosen family evil surfaced (37:2) in the activities of Joseph's brothers. The bright spot was Joseph's refusal to do that which was evil before the Lord (39:9).

The words for evil also describe the painful deeds done to God's people. When Lot eventually took a stand for the Lord, the wicked sinners threatened to *deal worse* with him (19:9). Tensions of this sort were so common that treaties had to be made to keep people from doing *harm* to each other (26:29 and 31:52). But God ultimately protected his servant from evil: he did not allow Laban to say anything good or evil (24:50) or do good or evil (31:24, 29). Jacob was confident that God had not allowed Laban to harm him (v. 7), and so later praised the angel who delivered him from evil (48:16). "Evil" also describes the treachery of Joseph's brothers as they sold him into slavery (50:20) and blamed his disappearance on an evil beast (37:20, 33). In the process of time when Joseph tested his brothers, he accused them of repaying evil for good (44:4). Only at the end of the book do the brothers express how evil they had been, when they appealed to Joseph for forgiveness (50:17).

Evil actions bring evil results, and Genesis emphasizes this as well. The treachery of the brothers brought nothing but misery to Jacob (44:29, 34), so that before Pharaoh he had to admit that his days had been few and evil (47:9). But even before this, the evil in the race had brought great judgment from God, first at the flood, and then at the destruction of Sodom. But God used such calamities to advance his cause of blessing; for example, in the days of Joseph the bad cows (41:19-21, 27) signified the bad years of the famine—the occasion for the elevation of Joseph as deliverer of his people (Ross, 1988:67-68).

Since the possessive pronominal suffix is probably a subjective genitive (i.e., the brothers' slander, rather than the report was about the brothers, then Joseph brought back a report of their evil deeds to Jacob), then verse 2e provides the first glimpse of Joseph brothers' evil activity. And before the Narrative progresses very far, their evil will be turned on him.

The narrator does not allow us to eavesdrop on the brothers' "evil talk" until later when they are conspiring against Joseph. But this phrase alerts us to the alienation of the brothers' world of discourse from that of their father.

A report such as Joseph gave about his brothers' activities, whatever they were, has never been considered the popular thing to do. It opens up the one who gives it to charges of being a tattletale from those who would take evil



lightly. In fact the incident shows that Joseph was faithful to his father. Those who would be leaders must prove faithful in the smaller responsibilities. The story holds up this trait of Joseph's as exemplary.

### Israel's Outward Manifestation of His Love for Joseph (verse 3a)

וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶהֱבֵב אֶת יוֹסֵף מִכָּל בְּנָיו 3a

Now-Israel loved Joseph more-than-all-of-his-sons

### 3a Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons

Verse three begins with a circumstantial clause (וַיִּ + NOUN), giving background information to the events chronologically which precede verse 2b-e. Whereas it was during the time that Joseph was seventeen that his brothers sold him into slavery, our author desires now to give the catalyst which drove them to do it. In fact, the events recorded in verses 3-11 may possibly all occurred before he was seventeen.

Evidently, when the perfect verb is initial in a Hebrew clause, the intent is not to focus on the subject of the verb but either to present a preliminary action or to focus on an object in connection with a preliminary action. This is of course the stereotyped view of the relation of perfect and preterite, i.e., that a chain begins with a perfect and continues with preterite verbs. Thus the circumstantial perfect in 37:3 introduces a preliminary and fateful action on Israel's part, and introduces the coat that was to prove so disastrous for Joseph.

Verse 3 is considered by source critics to be an independent explanation of the brothers' hatred to Joseph. Literarily, however, it complements the previous verse by providing Jacob/Israel's viewpoint. Joseph's behavior in verse 2e is not to be considered in isolation from his father's attitudes. Though no causal link between them is explicitly made, the narrator is bringing to light something which would have obviously influenced Jacob's behavior toward Joseph and his other sons: "Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons." Such a passion leads easily to excessive and unjudicious actions.

It is striking that our narrator now changes from calling the patriarch "Jacob" to "Israel." Not Jacob, but "Israel" saw in Joseph the most excellent of

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his sons. Here we are faced with the use of two names for the same personage. Why, after the change of name in Genesis 35:10, is Jacob not consistently called "Israel"--as Abram becomes consistently Abraham after his name change? Although this interpretive problem affects Genesis 35:9-29 and 37:1, the following discussion will be confined to our narrator's choice of one name versus the other within the Joseph Narrative.

Apparently, "Jacob" emphasizes more of the patriarch's suffering, feeling human being, while "Israel" accords better with passages where his office and dignity of clan patriarch is in view. Thus, we find "Israel" in Genesis 37:3 and 13, before the sale of Joseph into Egypt, but "Jacob" in 37:34, where Jacob mourns his son. E. H. Kantorowicz in *The King's Two Bodies*, points out how medieval tombs make a artistic distinction between the king's representation on top of the tomb and the actual remains inside. According to the former, he is king in robes with no sign of death and decay, while inside the tomb is the king, naked and skeletal. Here the contrast between the public and private person of the king is graphically portrayed. In some degree also the Joseph Narrative represents "Israel" as the public person and "Jacob" as the private person. In addition, in some Russian novels, the same person can be referred to as "Boris Boturin" in one passage and "Ivanovich" (patronymic) in another--much to the confusion of the English-speaking reader!

In Genesis 42:1-4, in the brief dialogue that introduces the brothers' first trip to Egypt, we find "Jacob." In verse 5 we have a reference to "the sons of Israel." Perhaps, the name "Jacob" is fitting to describe the measures taken by a man to obtain food for himself and his family. Again, perhaps, the reference to "the sons of Israel" in verse 5 is a reminder of the dignity and historical importance of the one whose sons come to buy grain at this juncture in the nation's history.

In the dialogue that ensues on the occasion of the first return with grain (Gen. 42:29-32), Jacob is "Jacob" again; a frustrated, troubled, somewhat petulant old man! It is somewhat surprising, therefore, to find "Israel" again in the dialogue of Genesis 43:1-14. Nevertheless, this dialogue is somewhat different in that Israel, even in acceding to his sons' demands that Benjamin must go with them, comes through the passage with a certain dignity. Thus, at the end (43:11-14) he, as patriarch, finalizes the terms on which they are to go: with a present for "the man" (Joseph), with double money, and with Benjamin. In the end, he commits his case to God Almighty and resigns himself to whatever may happen (43:14). Perhaps it is not strange therefore that the nar-

rator should call him "Israel" in verses 6, 8, and 11, since he takes hold of things in his fashion.

Once again in Genesis 45:21, we find the "sons of Israel" setting out on their journey to tell the good news to "Jacob their father" (45:25, 27). Consequently, "Israel" in verse 28 makes his decision as patriarch. Thus, chapter 46:1-7 records "Israel" taking his journey and God's speaking to him. Note, however, that in verse 2 "God spoke to *Israel* in the visions of the night and said, 'Jacob, Jacob'." The narrator calls him "Israel," but God in the vision calls him by his old familiar name, "Jacob."

In the balance of chapter 46 "Jacob" and "Israel" both occur. The latter is found again in the title "the sons of Israel." It is interestingly enough that in verse 5 "the sons of Israel carried *Jacob* their father . . . "; and in the genealogy of "the children of Israel" (v. 30). Elsewhere, "Jacob" seems to suffice for the narrator's purposes.

In chapter 47, we find the name "Jacob" used for the interview with Pharaoh--where they discuss life and its brevity. Finally, in 47:27, the number of years that "Jacob" lived in Goshen and the total years of his life are given, while in 47:29 the time draws near for "Israel" (the patriarch) to die (cf. v. 31).

Again, we see the names "Jacob" and "Israel" alternated in Genesis 48:2: "When it was told to **Jacob**, 'Behold, your son Joseph has come to you,' **Israel** collected his strength and sat up in the bed'." Although the text emphasizes "Jacob's" failing health, it is in this old age that we see "Israel's" faith strong and vital. The rest of chapter 49:8-22 is concerned with Jacob's choice in blessing Joseph's younger son over the older; and thus acting as the grand patriarch, he is *always* referred to as "Israel" in the remainder of the chapter (vv. 8, 10, 11, 13<sup>2</sup>, 14, 21).

Chapter 49:2 is the first and only instance where Jacob addresses himself both as "Jacob" and "Israel." Evidently, the significance of this alternating pattern is both a father ("Jacob") who is blessing his sons, but not only as a father, but also as a prophet ("Israel") foretelling the future of Israel. With the sons as the object of Jacob-Israel's blessing, the two-fold epithet clearly sets out their natural origins as well as their spiritual heritage.

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Genesis 49:28 sets forth the individual sons as heads of their clans, and thus are called "the twelve tribes of Israel." With this inclusion, our writer wanted to emphasize the fact that these statements referred not so much to the persons of Jacob's sons as such, but to the tribes that would spring from them. However, we turn once again from "Israel" to "Jacob" in verse 33, which we would expect, since Jacob's death is in view.

The Narrative finishes with reference only to Jacob as "Israel" in chapter 50. Soon after his death, and under the direct orders of Joseph, "the physicians embalmed Israel" (v. 2). This seems to indicate that Joseph informed the physicians (and not the Egyptian priests!) after his father's death that "Israel" was his God-given name of honor, though, from now on Jacob is no longer mentioned by either name except in verse 25: "Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear . . . ."

Whereas the above explanation for the alternating pattern between "Jacob" and "Israel" has been demonstrated sound (i.e., "Jacob" emphasizes more of a suffering, feeling father, while "Israel" reflects better with passages where his office and dignity are in view), it is not posited here, however, that this is the only reason why the name shifts in the Narrative, for it would be a grave mistake to summarily categorized it with such stark simplicity. For example, whenever Jacob is brought into relationship with Joseph (near or remote), and visa-versa, the name "Israel" is employed (37:3, 13; 45:27-28!; 46:30; 47:29; 48:8, 14, 21), whereas with his other sons, it is "Jacob" (42:1, 2, 29, 36; 45:25).

There are other forces as well interwoven well beneath the surface of these same passages which make it highly evident that a skillful narrator has been at work, employing irony, satire, contrast, comparison, parallelism, chiasmus, or even paronomasia, all strongly indicating that his choice is neither random nor unmotivated.

For example, if one examines the entire chapter with chiastic antiparallelism in mind, love is bestowed upon Joseph by a person who is called by two names: "Jacob" and "Israel." By the same token, those who remove the beloved son from Jacob/Israel have two names: "Ishmaelites" (vv. 27, 28, 39:1) and "Midianites" (vv. 28, 36). Taking a clue from Judges 8:24 where Midianite invaders are described as Ishmaelites, it would be natural to understand these two names to refer to the same group of people. Note that in Genesis 37:36 we are specifically told that the Midianites sold Joseph to

Potiphar, while in the recapitulation of this information in Genesis 39:1 we are specifically told that the Ishmaelites performed the sale to the same person.

In the context of the preceding narratives about Jacob and his wives, we can see that Jacob's special love for Rachel ("and indeed he loved Rachel more than Leah," Gen. 29:30) has vicariously carried over to that of her son, Joseph. The details of Joseph's biographical background move now progressively toward what is most pertinent for the dramatic development of the Narrative. The reader is expected to know that Joseph was the son of Rachel, Jacob's favorite wife, whereas the others to which he was attached as a נָעַר/*na'ar*, "a young lad," were the children of Bilhah and Zilpah, Jacob's concubines.

In a parenthetical clause--not unrelated to Joseph's act of faithfulness--the text explains that Jacob "loved" (אָהַב/*'āhab*) Joseph more than all his children. That he was Rachel's son, and that he was faithful to Jacob as verse 2 indicated, greatly enhanced this love.

The Hebrew verb "love" (אָהַב/*'āhab*) is equivalent to the English "to love" in the sense of having a strong emotional attachment to and desire either to possess or to be in the presence of the object. Perhaps it is derived from הָבָה/*hbh* ("give"), prefixed with the individualizing א/', to give oneself completely up to another, and thus wish to have the other one in the closest proximity.

But we cannot ignore the parallel between this report in 37:3 and the one in 25:28. At the beginning of the "generations" of Isaac we learned of the father's greater love for one of his sons and of the subsequent discord between the sons that eventually led to deception and the flight of Jacob; and at the beginning of the "generations" of Jacob we discover the father's greater love for one of his sons and the subsequent envy and hatred that led to deception and the disappearance of Joseph.

### Reason for Israel's Love (verse 3b)

3a כי בן זקנים הוא לו

because a-son-of-old-age he to-him

3b because he was the son of his old age

Lest the reader understand Israel's love as arbitrary, the narrator provides a reason designed to elicit sympathetic understanding of Jacob/Israel: "because he was the son of his old age." Israel saw himself living on in Joseph, all the spiritual acquisitions he had made. It is not the man Jacob who sees the potential of Joseph, but God causing Israel to see (cf. notes on Gen. 48:10-11).

Jacob's favoritism was perhaps understandable, for Joseph was the son of his beloved wife Rachel, born after so many years of heartbreak and frustration. It is quite clear from Genesis 30:25 that the patriarch looked upon Joseph's birth as signaling the beginning of a new period in his life. In addition, Jacob had every reason to mistrust his other sons. They were treacherous, murderous and incestuous.

This expression makes better sense if we assume that Benjamin had not yet been born and that, as such, Rachel was still alive. This would then also confirm what we observed above, that the events recorded in verses 2-10 should be placed chronologically before Genesis 35:16-20. Thus, Joseph was at this time still the youngest son, and literally, the son of Jacob's old age.

It is possible that "the son of his old age" (בן זקניו) may carry a double meaning in this context. In Hebrew, "son" (בן) is not only "the son of" but can also introduce a word of quality or a characteristic (Gen. 15:2; Deut. 25:2; 1 Sam. 14:52; 2 Sam. 12:5; Isa. 5:1; 14:12; Ps. 89:23; Jonah 4:10; see BDB 121b, 8 for nine other *ben*-idioms). Also, זקן/zāqēn ("old man") can connote "sage, elder, authority" (cf. Gen. 24:2; Isa. 9:14; the ideas of *age* and *wisdom* being intimately related), and thus the combination may mean something like "a mature person, a born leader." According to this train of thought, Joseph, even in his early years, had the wisdom of a sage. This affords another reason for Israel's loving Joseph so intensely; he loved him not only because he was the firstborn son of his beloved wife, but also because he exhibited wisdom (which was later noted by Pharaoh; Gen. 41:39). It should also be pointed out that later in the Narrative when Judah is unknowingly speaking to Joseph concerning Benjamin's status with his father, Jacob, he expresses the usual idiom (different than here) for denoting a child born to a father late in life: "We have an old father and a little child of *his* old age" (בן זקניו ילדו; Gen. 44:20).

It is striking that Joseph mother's name in this narrative is entirely missing, as was also the living mother's name in Genesis 22 where the focus is also on a father's relation to his favorite son; but clearly knowledge of her and her favored status in Jacob/Israel's eyes is presupposed as a factor in his

favoritism toward Joseph. It is Joseph who undoubtedly gave his aging father poignant memories of the woman he loved with all his heart.

The personal pronoun הוּא/hû', "he" (i.e., "Israel") is delayed unnaturally after בֶּן זְקֻנִים/*ben zequnîm*, "son of old age," in order to achieve the juxtaposition with מִכְּכָל בָּנָיו/mikkāl bānāyw, "more than all of his sons." Joseph is the beloved son and all the others are called sons of their father only when contrasted with this favored son. Otherwise, they are Joseph's brothers: "And his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers."

### 8c Israel's Manifestation of Love (verse 3c)

3c וַעֲשֶׂה לּוֹ כִּתְנֶת פְּסִים:

and-so-he-made for-him a full-length coat

<sup>3</sup>Based upon the Samaritan Pentateuch, BHS suggests an emendation from וַעֲשֶׂה לּוֹ כִּתְנֶת פְּסִים to וַעֲשֶׂה לּוֹ כִּתְנֶת פְּסִים (and he will make"). This clause type, however (ו + QATAL + X) is attested elsewhere in Genesis (2:6b, 10c, 24b; 15:6a; 21:25a; 26:13b; 29:3; 30:41a, 42b; 34:5b; 37:3b; 38:5b, 9b; 47:22b), and thus need not be changed to follow the Samaritan Pentateuch.

**3c and he made him a varicolored tunic.**

The "varicolored tunic" (NIV: "richly ornamented robe") that Jacob (had) made for Joseph visually illustrates the father's preferential love for Joseph. It plays a key role in the Narrative both because of the jealousy it aroused and because it was the only means by which Jacob could have been convinced that Joseph had been killed. As such the writer continually returns to the coat throughout the remainder of this episode as a way of reminding the reader of this central issue in the Narrative (cf. 37:23, 31, 32, 33).

The expression כִּתְנֶת פְּסִים/*ketōnet passîm* has been translated three principal ways: "a coat of many colors," "an ornamented tunic," and "a long-sleeved robe." However, the precise meaning of the Hebrew remains unclear.

The traditional and well-known translation of "a coat of many colors" (KJV) absolutely finds no linguistic support from the Hebrew text. The idea of "a coat of many colors" comes from the early versions: LXX has χιτῶνα ποικίλον/*chitōna poikilon*, "variegated coat"; Palestinian Targum: פָּרְגוֹד מְצוּיָר/*pargôd m'ṣūyār*, "many colored coat"; Vulgate: *tunicam polymitam*,

"embroidered coat." It is ironic that the least probable meaning of this Hebrew phrase, "a coat of many colors," has become the accepted meaning. This misconception has carried over even into fashion, for in the seventeenth century a woman's long variegated riding cloak with a cape was marketed as a "Joseph's Coat," which was usually laced richly with gold thread.

The meaning of כְּתוֹנֶת פַּסִּים/*k'tōnet passîm* is actually "a coat of extended length," literally, a coat that extends to the hands and feet. The term פַּסִּים/*passîm* is from the verb פָּסַס/*pss*, which means "to cease, to end," probably describes a sleeved coat that reached to the wrists and ankles or perhaps alludes to the trimming of the edges of a garment, which special cloaks in the ancient Near East exhibited in order to mark the importance of the wearer. Josephus describes it as "a long-sleeved tunic reaching to the ankle" (Josephus, *Antiquities*:2.2.1 [Loeb, p. 17]).

The only other occurrence of the term <sup>outside Genesis</sup> in the Bible is 2 Samuel 13:18-19, where it describes the dress of Tamar, King David's daughter and refers to "a long-sleeved garment (כְּתוֹנֶת פַּסִּים/*k'tōnet passîm*); for in this manner the virgin daughters of the king dressed themselves in robes." Thus the robe would probably be ostentatious in appearance. It would single out the wearer as one of noble birth. This, no doubt, was Israel's object to distinguish Joseph (born of Rachel) from his half-brothers (born of Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah).

Very recently, discoveries of Mesopotamian cuneiform texts, dated not later than the thirteenth century B.C., may shed light on the garment in question (UT, 1112.5). Among various types of clothing listed in the texts, there is one called *kitû* (or *kutinnû*) *pišannu*. This was normally a ceremonial robe draped around the statue of a goddess and decorated distinctively with gold ornaments sewn to it (Oppenheim, 1949:177). Some of these ornaments would occasionally come undone and need to be sent to the proper craftsman for repairs, hence the notation in the inventories. Speiser contends that "the Hebrew phrase . . . *passim* would be an adaptation of the Akkadian *pišannu*, a technical term denoting appliqué ornaments on costly vests and bodices" (Speiser, 1964:290). If the comparison is valid, and there are several things in its favor, the second element in the Hebrew phrase, i.e., *passîm*, would be an adaption of the Akkadian *pišannu*, a technical term denoting applied ornaments on costly vests and bodies, and thus the NIV translation "richly ornamented robe" may be an accurate rendering of the term.



Ancient Near Eastern art may also shed light on the subject. An Egyptian tomb painting at Beni-hasan from about 1890 B.C. features a Semitic clan with the men and women wearing long-sleeved tunics draped over one shoulder and reaching below the knees. Another Egyptian tomb has a representation of Syrian ambassadors bringing tribute to Tutankhamen. They are dressed in elaborately designed long robes wrapped around the body and over the shoulders (ANEP, 17, nos. 52; 256).

Far more than being a nice gift, this special sleeved tunic sets Joseph apart from all of his brothers as the favored one, probably indicating that he would receive the inheritance (i.e., the leadership and the double portion). It marked Joseph out as the one to whom Jacob intended to bequeath rulership of the clan and the lion's share of his property. It set him apart from his brothers and put him on a plane of equality with his father. This presupposes the great social significance of dress; for thousands of years it has been one of the most striking and powerful indications of social rank.

The splendid tunic given to Joseph, then, spoke volumes of the special place Joseph held in his father's heart and of Israel's determination to see his beloved son lifted high. He acted with eternity's values in view, for his act was typical in significance and scope. Beyond this Narrative we catch a glimpse of God delighting in His unique and beloved Son, His firstborn. We see the Eternal Father in communion with His Son, finding all His delight in Him, determining that even though, by virtue of His coming into the world, He would have kinsmen according to the flesh, yet He would be distinct from them all and lifted up on high, above and beyond them all.

It is striking that the first element in the Hebrew phrase, i.e., *כְּתוֹנֶת*/*ketōnet*, which describes Joseph's "coat/cloak" or "tunic," occurs in Genesis only one other time (in the plural), when describing the "garments of skins" that "the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife" (3:21). The placement of this term, once at the beginning and the other at the conclusion of Genesis, is striking. Here, at the end of the Genesis narrative, the term coat would cause the hearer/reader to reflect upon the meaning and the echo of the imagery of God's provision of the clothes in the Garden. And now, perhaps Joseph at last, fulfills what was intended by God's gift in the Garden, suggesting at the very least that the "obedient" (v. 2e) Joseph is measure for measure a counterpart to the "disobedient" Adam and Eve.

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**Brothers' Hatred of Joseph (4a)**

4a וַיִּרְאוּ אֶחָיו כִּי אֶתוֹ אָהַב אָבִיהֶם מִכָּל אֶחָיו וַיִּשְׂנְאוּ אֹתוֹ

and-when-they-saw his-brothers that-him he-loved their-father more-than-all-his sons so-they-hated him

<sup>4</sup>BHS suggests an emendation from the MT reading אֶחָיו/ehyw, "his brothers" to בָּנָיו/bānāyw: "And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his sons." There is support from the Samaritan Pentateuch, LXX and several Hebrew manuscripts for this reading. The reasoning would be that the Hebrew scribe copied inadvertently from the beginning of the clause where we do have "his brothers" (cf. Speiser, 1980:290). However, this is no justification for altering the text and is pure conjecture which militates against the development and reason for the opening remarks. As already stated, this introductory paragraph undergirds Joseph's preeminent position via proper names, elaborate biographical details, independent pronouns, and most importantly for the point at hand, his brothers' subordination before him (see STRUCTURE AND SYNTHESIS, p. 19; see also pp. 25 and 48). In addition, the chiasmic structure suggests the strong literary parallel between B and B' for favoring "his brothers" instead of "his sons" (see p. 25)

**4a And his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and so they hated him**

Israel's preferential treatment of Joseph becomes the catalyst which initiated the action of the narrative, for it angered Joseph's brothers and turned them against him. Verse 4a is the result of Jacob's predelection toward Joseph. Predictably, the brothers "hated him" and could not "speak peaceably to him" (v. 4b). They resented the selection of Joseph to succeed Jacob, and eventually their anger resulted in a plan to do away with him altogether (v. 18).

The Hebrew places the object "him" (אֹתוֹ/'ōtô) in an emphatic position before the verb: "It was he whom his father loved. . . ." The pronoun is emphasized in Hebrew through inversion. Just "him" the one who did not belong to them, who was in no friendly relations with them, who drew the reproaches of the father on them, just "him" they saw their father preferred.

The reader must admire the narrator's understanding of human nature; they hated Joseph, not his father. Those who are envious often turn their hatred on the one favored, not on the one who showed favoritism. Likewise with Cain and Abel, Cain attacked Abel, not God. To capture the significance of this animosity, a study of the verbs "to love" (אָהַב/'hb) and "to hate" (שָׂנֵא/'sn') is essential. The extremes mutually produce each other. They describe active emotions, choosing and rejecting, and responding favorably to and acting in hostility against. Ironically, in this case, the father's "love" begot the brothers' "hatred."

Sometimes hatred expresses itself as an emotional attitude toward persons and things which are opposed, detested, despised and with which one wishes to have no contact or relationship (cf. סנה/snh = thorn bush). It is therefore the opposite of love (אהב/āhab) which Israel exhibited in verse 3. In this context, the hating is the opposition, ill-will and aversion that Joseph's brothers have toward him which expresses itself in verse 4b in their silence toward him. But to understand the term "hatred" as only a state or attitude would be wrong, for it is also expressed in acts toward the one who is hated. Hatred directed toward someone is like the strain in a bow; the resolution of the tension must finally issue into action.

Bush analyzed the relations as follows:

*They hated him.* This result showed that Jacob acted unwisely in distinguishing Joseph from his brethren by this mark of his regard. It seemed to be a palpable, invidious, and premature taking away of the birth-right from Reuben and giving it to the first-born of his beloved wife. The birthright was indeed to be Joseph's; and it was due to him as the eldest son of Rachel, when the first-born son of Leah had forfeited it. But, as might have been expected, Joseph was at once exposed to the envy of his brethren by this mark of his father's fondness; and the effects of that envy cost the good old man many years of pungent affliction (Bush, *Notes*, p. 223).

When Stephen recounted Israel's history in Acts 7, he tells us that Joseph's brothers were moved by jealousy (Acts 7:9). Jealousy is "the rottenness of bones" (Prov. 14:30). James tell us, "Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice" (James 3:16). In other words, jealousy is a hive from which other sins swarm. Joseph's brothers did not want him to be nor have what they could not be and have. The opposite of jealousy is contentment, and "godliness *actually* is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment" (1 Tim. 6:6).

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 10 ✓  
 Brothers' Silence Toward Joseph (4b)
 

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ולא יכלו דבְרוּ לְשָׁלֹם: 4b

so-not they-would his-word to/for-peace

 4b and could not speak to him on friendly terms.
 

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The hostility in the brothers' hatred is amplified by the notice that they could not speak peaceably to him. Here was the first outward discernible disruption of the peaceful existence the family enjoyed. Probably they could not now even greet their brother in a civil fashion. Verses 19 and 20 of this chapter record the bitterness they exuded when they merely spoke about their brother.

The Hebrew term דַּבְּרוּ/*dabb'rô*, literally, "his speaking," is unique, and is loosely paraphrased with לְשָׁלֹם/*šālôm* in the EVV: "they hated him and could not say a kind word to him" (NEB). Usually the suffix attached to this verb carries a possessive sense, meaning "his speech." The clause could then be translated, "They could not bear his speaking for peace" (for the verb יָכַל/*ykl* with a direct object, cf. Isa. 1:13; Hos. 8:5; Ps. 101:5), i.e., in a way that would lead to peace, or, it might mean he wanted to speak peacefully to them or to act in a mediating way. They took nothing from him in a friendly spirit, turned everything he said to a bad way, and most of all misunderstood any friendly advances.

Joseph brothers' inability to return Joseph's attempts of well-being, are echoed in Genesis 42:7 where Joseph speaks to them "harshly": "When Joseph saw his brothers he recognized them, but he disguised himself to them and spoke to them harshly."

Thus, the introductory paragraph immediately opens a rift between Joseph and his brothers. They were evil, and he was faithful; he was favored, and they were not. Their intense hatred soon found expression in destructive action.

### III. The LORD uses those who are faithful in little things to have authority over greater responsibilities (5-11).

The primary thrust of the previous paragraph underscored Israel's preference for Joseph which fueled the fire for Joseph's brothers' hatred. Now, this paragraph exposes the reason for their hatred: the divine purpose in Joseph confirmed by dreams reinforcing the parental preference.

#### *Dreams Foreshadow the Mode of Divine Preservation* (verses 5-10a)

Before the brothers are permitted to outwardly express their hatred toward Joseph, the narrator introduces another influential force: Joseph unexpectedly becomes the recipient of two dreams which, in thinly veiled symbolism, portray him as ruling over his brothers, and even his parents.

Throughout the Narrative, it should be noted that the dreams come in pairs. In the dreams of Joseph (Gen. 37) and Pharaoh (Gen. 41), the two dreams are synonymous and reinforce one another. The dreams of the butler and baker (Gen. 40) are antithetical; they go opposite ways. Joseph, the one dressed in the royal robe, dreamed that he really was going to rule over his family. His family, represented as sheaves of grain and astronomical bodies, bow down to him. The brothers respond to the first dream with questions, as the father does to the second dream (vv. 8, 10). The accusatory form of the questions leaves no doubt about the outrage of the family at Joseph's dreams. Lest we miss it, the narrator reemphasizes that the dreams multiplied the brothers' hatred by placing it in the center of the chiasmic structure (v. 8; see page ). His father, although rebuking Joseph for his dreams, responded not with hatred or jealousy, but with wonder: "his father pondered the matter" (v. 11).

Just as Joseph's royal coat symbolized and foreshadowed more than Jacob realized, so do these dreams. Noteworthy in this report about the dreams is that only Joseph is named, not the father, nor the brothers. They are only referred to in relationship to Joseph, "his father," or "his brothers." The Narrative literarily reinforces Joseph's dreams in such a way that he is the center of the "universe," so much so that everything revolves around him.

Within the narrative, the dreams are not directly attributed to God as their source. Indeed, if one reads this paragraph in isolation, there is little evidence to support a divine source for the dreams. Joseph does not present the

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dreams as divine when divulging them to his brothers and father, nor do the dreams themselves make any mention of God.

However, when Genesis 37:5-11 is read within a larger context, the possibility is raised that the dreams come from God. Dreams have occurred on four previous occasions in the ancestral narratives. To Abimelech, "God came to Abimelech in a dream by night . . ." (Gen. 20:3); twice to Jacob, "And he dreamed . . . and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the LORD stood above it and said . . ." (Gen. 28:12-13); "Then the Angel of God said to me in the dream . . ." (Gen. 31:11); to Laban, "But God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream by night . . ." (Gen. 31:24). All of these dreams have two features worthy of note. First, they are non-symbolic (the visual element in Gen. 28:12 is not symbolism which requires an interpretation; rather it is a setting for God's unambiguous speech in verses 13-15. Similarly, the goats of Gen. 31:10 do not require an interpretation in order for the dream to be understood; God's word explains all); they simply recount in sober form the words issued by God (i.e., God or the Angel of the LORD), and in the cases of Abimelech and Jacob (Gen. 31:11) the humans reply. Second, they all unambiguously see God as their source.

When we compare this evidence with that of Genesis 37--50 we discover that in this latter Narrative four individuals receive dreams, all of which differ from those found in chapters 12--36 in the following way. First, they are all *symbolic*: Joseph sees sheaves bowing down to his sheaf (Gen. 37:7) and the sun, moon and eleven stars bowing down to him (Gen. 37:9). The butler dreams of a vine, bunches of grapes and cups of wine (Gen. 40:9-11). The baker sees cake baskets and birds eating their contents (Gen. 40:16-17). Finally, Pharaoh is intrigued by the imagery of seven fat cows and seven thin cows coming out of the Nile, followed by seven plump and seven thin ears of grain (Gen. 41:1-7). Second, *none* of the dreams features God at all, either as an actor or as being acknowledged as the source of the dream by the dreamer. An additional element which distinguishes these dreams from those recounted earlier is that, because they are symbolic, they all require interpretation: Joseph's dreams by his brothers and father, and the Egyptians' by Joseph. The formal interpretations underline their symbolic nature even though most of the dreams are fairly transparent in meaning.

Quite clearly, therefore, the dreams in the Joseph Narrative are of a different type. However, Joseph's interpretation of the Egyptians' dreams reveals that they too come from God. Joseph offers his services as an interpreter to his fellow prisoners with the words, "Do not interpretations belong to

God?" (Gen. 40:8). It is hardly likely that the dreams could be purely human if their meaning can be derived from God alone. Joseph's rhetorical question suggests quite strongly, therefore, that the dreams are divine revelation.

With Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams we see this point made unequivocally. Joseph honors God not only as the interpreter of the dream ("God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer" [Gen. 41:16]), but also as its source, "God has revealed to Pharaoh what He is about to do" (Gen. 41:25; cf. v. 28). Joseph's successful interpretation of the dream lends credence to his judgment regarding their source. We see, therefore, that none of the Egyptian magicians mentions the divine in his dream report, yet the dream, according to Joseph, derives from God.

With this all in mind, the lack of reference to God in Genesis 37:5-11 cannot be offered as conclusive proof for denying the divine nature of Joseph's dreams. To argue this would make Joseph's dreams uniquely "human," amidst all of the other "divine" dreams in Genesis. It is surely unlikely that the dreams of one who interprets God's dreams elsewhere with divine aid should himself have dreams which merely reflect his own vaunting ambition. Also, as argued below, the crucial importance of Genesis 37:5-11 for understanding the Joseph Narrative as a whole strongly suggests God as the Author of the dreams. Joseph's dream reports in Genesis 37:5-11 may in fact be seen as an example of implicit theology of chapters 37--50: God works throughout, but is explicitly mentioned only occasionally.

Furthermore, although the dreams are not directly attributed to God as their source, they do but exert influence on events as they become speech acts. For example, it is the response to the *report* of the dreams which shapes the course of events and leads eventually to their fulfillment. This perspective the narrator makes clear in his introductory statement to the dreams (albeit needful to maintain chiasmic structure), "Then Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more" (v. 5). And after the first report the narrator tell us, "So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words" (v. 8). The reporting of the dream to his father precipitates a "rebuke" (v. 10). Thus the dreams are presented by the narrator to show that they have profound effects upon the network of Jacob's family. When now the implication that Joseph will rule over his family is added to the public symbolism of the robe, the brothers' hatred escalates to a new level of intensity (vv. 8, 11).

This paragraph poses a greater difficulty to apply because the ideas in the text must be transferred to an applicable level. Although the meaning of

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the revelation has been concentrated on rather than the method in this exposition, a few introductory remarks concerning the mode of revelation by dreams in the ancient Near East would be helpful at this juncture.

Dreams in the ancient Near Eastern cultural world were understood as divinely given, and therefore conventionally considered to contain fateful knowledge of the future, not merely individual subjective fantasy. In addition Joseph's dreams are self-explanatory in contrast to those of the Egyptians, who need an interpreter to extract meaning from their enigmatic imagery (Gen. 40:5-23; 41:1-8). The same need is present in the case of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams in the Book of Daniel (Daniel 2 and 4). There is no record of an Israelite ever requiring the skill of an interpreter of dreams.

The antiquity of revelation by dreams is seen in the ancient Mesopotamian documents. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Enkidu is told of his fate through a dream, and this places the dream as an instrument of revelation well back, for Tablet XII derives from ca. 2000 B.C., but the actual time of composition goes back probably to the Old Babylonian period (ca. 2800 B.C.). The inclusion of the dream indicates it to be a previous method of divine revelation coming down from Noah, but used without divine inspiration.

The assertion of "revelation" from the heathen gods on the part of the rulers of the Near East should be received with reserve. Consideration of the priestly system as it operated among kings and people should lead us to see that the assertions of knowing the divine will by revelation was a free assumption of common religious terminology by the king in his annals (cf. Sennacherib, Isa. 10:5ff) or an assertion based on favorable answers by the priests to the king in regard to a particular campaign. Such assertions lack the support provided in Scripture for the LORD's prophets, and are employed as a means of bolstering the king's program by dressing them in the aura of a "divine decree." It may be said that since Gudea of Lagash (ca. 2000 B. C.) fits into this pattern, he lacks actual inspiration from the LORD. The coincidence is, of course, that the providence of God makes for his rise, but this is not inspiration.

Against this background, it is not surprising to find that dreams frequently produced anxiety. To be ignorant of the true meaning is to be deprived of knowledge that might well be vital to one's wellbeing. This does not mean that the ancients did not recognize such a thing as an idle dream. They did; and that is why dreams in the Joseph Narrative always come in pairs, to prove their seriousness (Gordon, 1962:64).



Through these dreams God confirmed Jacob's choice of his faithful son to be the leader. But because of precedence, we should expect this fulfillment to come to pass outside the land of Canaan. In a dream with both symbolism and verbal communication, the LORD had informed Abraham of the sojourn in Egypt (Gen. 15:13-16); in a dream the LORD had promised Jacob protection and prosperity with Laban in Paddan-aram (Gen. 28:2,10-22); in a dream again, God spoke to Jacob to return to Canaan (Gen. 31:3; 32:9); and so here too God used dreams to predict the rule of Joseph over his family. In all these passages the recipients were Israelites about to sojourn in gentile lands.

The progression between Joseph's two dreams is to be noted. In the first, Joseph reports the dream only to his brothers, and not to his father, who as we will see, does not play in the fulfillment of Joseph's first dream. In the first dream only the brothers' sheaves bowed down to Joseph's, whereas in the second, the addition of sun and moon, connoting father and mother, indicates a supremacy over parents as well as brothers.

At the time of Joseph's dreams Rachel had not yet died, as consultation of **The Chronology of the Patriarchs** on page 15 of the relative ages of Jacob and Isaac will indicate. And, as the fulfillment of Joseph's dreams in respect to the symbolism of the sun, moon and stars which represent his father, and mother (which was not fulfilled!) are played out, just as it is impossible for the sun, moon and stars to appear simultaneously in the natural order of things, his father and brothers bow in obeisance to Joseph at different times!

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The first dream has an agricultural symbolism, anticipating the manner by which Joseph would rise to power in Egypt. The second dream involved celestial images--the sun, moon, and stars being easily recognized for their significance for rulership. These dreams symbolically represented the exaltation of Joseph over his whole family (who, incidentally, would also have positions of authority, as the symbol of stars signified--but they missed that point when they saw only the supremacy of Joseph.) The key in the dream is the explanation that their symbols bowed down to his, showing an act of obeisance (see Gen. 43:26, which says "they bowed themselves to him to the earth").

The first dream differs from the second in that in the latter Jacob's preference of Joseph as ruler is ratified. But one should ask, was Joseph really to be their ruler, for Judah later was given the ruler's staff (Gen. 49:10). The witness of God is to the administration of the covenant of Abraham and it was that position that indeed fell to Joseph. In the second dream we are to understand the manner by which the LORD would preserve His people; if it were not to be done this way, it would not be done at all. **In that this method is employed against all human disapproval, and in that the LORD makes this choice so clear by the appropriateness of Minister of Agriculture, we must believe that God had no other wish in the matter.**

Joseph's two dreams, in their respective details, may refer to two important aspects of the nation Israel's history. The sheaves of grain, which appeared in Joseph's first dream (37:7), may have reflected the Israelites' place as a primarily agricultural people in the Land of Promise. This, of course, would mean that their nomadic lifestyle would be succeeded by a settled existence in the land which would be theirs. The pilgrimage would someday end; they would no longer be strangers passing through, but possessors of Canaan. The sun, moon, and stars in Joseph's second dream may ultimately refer to Revelation 12:1-2, which indicate Israel in the time of the tribulation and then in the glory of the millennium. Because prophetic utterances have a telescoping effect, it is highly probable that Joseph's dreams would be fulfilled in his own life (through the circumstances in Egypt) and later in Israel's history.

The fact that Joseph had two dreams that foreshadowed his future ascendancy over his brothers is to be understood in light of Joseph's own words in chapter 41. There he explained to the Pharaoh, "Now as for the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice, *it means* that the matter is determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about" (41:32). So here the matter is already settled at the beginning of the Narrative. God will surely bring to pass the fulfillment

of Joseph's dreams. The narrator is careful to show throughout this narrative that Joseph's dreams do, in fact, come to pass, even in the midst of opposition.

How shall we gauge Joseph's motives in telling his family about his dreams? Some readers have criticized Joseph for telling his brothers and father his dreams; they regard this as revealing the one flaw or weakness in his character and as the needless cause of all his severe trials. Does he, to quote George W. Coats, "dream grandiose dreams and freely flaunt them and their obvious significance to all members of the family?" (Coats, 1976:82). This kind of thinking is short sighted, prejudicial and misses the literary artistry and real meaning and profound development of the Narrative. Joseph's dreams are the index to the entire Narrative. As the chorus of a Greek tragedy or the chiasmic prologue in John's Gospel, they outline and make clear the plot of the drama.

Here is a plot in which dreams are determining factors in that they are a romance of providence. Joseph's conduct throughout the Narrative is inspired and controlled by his dreams. The Joseph Narrative is a drama of dreams. While Joseph was in prison, he declared his belief: "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell *it* to me" (40:8b). And in the presence of Pharaoh he declaratively announced: "God has shown to Pharaoh what He is about to do" (41:28). The interpretation of dreams resulted in Joseph's deliverance from prison, and later elevated him next to Pharaoh's throne, respectively.

Steadfast in the belief and faith that his dreams originated from God, Joseph cherished his own dreams. Through his darkest hours he was strengthened and sustained by them. In his princely exaltation he saw them fulfilled. However naive he may now appear in this paragraph as he relates his dreams to his brothers and his father, this was not a sign of childish vanity or pride; it was an exhibition of faith. Joseph regarded his dreams not only messages but promises, yea, even the veritable voice of God.

Joseph's behavior in telling his family about his dreams is not unlike that of the youthful David who is willing to take on Goliath (1 Sam. 17:26, 31), over the protestations of his older brothers and Saul. Joseph's dreams are from God. To teenage Joseph the revelation means at least one thing: God has a plan for his life, and that plan includes some type of leadership. Here then is a teenager with a sense of destiny, divine destiny. Joseph shares what God had revealed to him out of enthusiasm, not out of brashness.

14 Joseph Brothers' Reaction to First Dream (verse 5)

5 וַיִּתְּלֵם יוֹסֵף חֲלוֹם וַיַּגִּד לְאֶחָיו וַיֹּסְפוּ עוֹד שִׂנְאָ אֹתוֹ:

And-he-had-dreamed Joseph a dream and-when-told to-his-brothers they-added continually hated him.

<sup>5</sup>Based on the LXX, BHS proposes that the last clause "they hated him even more," should be omitted because it is apparently a scribal addition. However, as already commented on page 26, the omission of the clause causes an irreparable imbalance to the chiasmic structure. Therefore, its presence is absolutely needed, not only for structure, but it highlights the rising crescendo of Joseph brothers' hatred toward him which culminates in verse 8, the apex of the chiasmic structure.

5 Then Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more.

It is significant that the narrator gives us the reaction to the dream by the brothers *before* presenting the content of the dream itself in Joseph's words. Joseph's recounting of his dream serves to provoke his brothers into speaking to him for the first time in this Narrative. The resentment that the narrator has described previously as a non-verbal emotion now erupts into speech.

It should be noted that the text makes no mention of this dream being a revelation from God to Joseph, as had been the case on previous occasions (see Gen. 20:3-7; 28:12-15). In fact, it is rather surprising that there are no definitely recorded appearances of the LORD to Joseph, as in the case of his fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yet Joseph did become a channel of revelation through the dreams that were given directly to him, and through his interpretations of the visions of others. However, it is without doubt that in the ensuing Narrative Joseph does reach a position where his brothers in fact bow down to him. Looking back from that perspective, we could conclude that this dream was indeed a revelation from God in which He revealed, in symbol, what would later take place.

The expression, "they hated him even more," involves a familiar Hebrew idiom, literally, "they added still to hate him." In most EVV the primary verb "they added" in Hebrew is actually rendered as an adverb, "they hated him even more." There is little doubt that this verb was chosen very carefully since "they added" (וַיֹּסְפוּ/*yôsîpû*) plays on Joseph's name (יֹסֵף/*yôsēp*).

An instance of hasty inference and unwarranted textual critical alteration appears in the striking out of 5b, which is supported in the Septuagint (see textual note #5 above). Many commentators claim that the clause is premature because Joseph had not as yet related his dream. But generally speaking, does not verse 5a, "he told it" cover in a summary form what Joseph said, and cannot the result of such telling be reported before the dream is told in order to underscore his brothers' reaction? And is not this proleptic detail needed in order to balance the tightly symmetrical chiasmic structure (DD'; see page 26)?!

### 20 Joseph's First Dream Report (verses 6-7)

6 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם שְׁמְעוּ נָא הַחֲלוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר חָלַמְתִּי:

And-he-said to-them "Please-listen dream this which I-have-dreamt."

7 וַהֲבֵינָה אֲנַחְנוּ מְאֻלְמִים אֲלֵמִים בְּתוֹךְ הַשָּׂדֶה וַהֲבֵינָה קָמָה אֲלֵמְתִי וְגַם נִצְבָּה וַהֲבֵינָה תִסְבֵּינָה אֲלֵמְתֵיכֶם וְתִשְׁתַּחֲוּיֶינָה לְאֵלְמְתִי:

"And-behold we binding sheaves in-midst of-the-field and-behold it-rose-up my-sheave and-also-it-stood-erect and-behold they-surround your-sheaves and-they-bowed-down to-my-sheave."

6 And he said to them, "Please listen to this dream which I have had;

7 for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect; and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf."

The Hebrew interjection "behold" (וַהֲבֵינָה/*hinnēh*), refers to the character seeing the thing that is related, and not to the narrator. The character perceives, so to speak, the thing--and we, as a consequence, perceive it too--together with the character and his eyes. The interjection here introduces a surprising happening, arresting one's attention on the following as a tacit invitation to conjure up the picture in our mind (not unlike the historical present in the New Testament), which is reinforced by the ensuing piel participle, "binding sheaves" מְאֻלְמִים /*m<sup>e</sup>'all<sup>e</sup>mîm*.

There are three discernible movements in the dream which are outlined and stressed by the repeated Hebrew interjection *hinnēh*, the second receiving the most emphasis: "and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect." When Joseph describes the dream, he does so in rhythmic, almost choreographic language, regulated by verbs and with a recurrent "behold/lo." Both the language and style are highly artistic. The first movement notably has agricultural overtones and symbolism; the second, a twofold action of rulership ("rose up"/"stood erect"); and the third, a twofold action of submission ("gathered around"/"bowed down"). This adds up to a clear assertion of authority by Joseph and of acquiescence on the part of his brothers.

The resultant action of Joseph's sheaf rising up is underscored by the subsequent verb "and also, it stood erect" The word translated as "also" is the Hebrew word *וְגַם*, and should be understood emphatic when placed between synonyms or (as here) seeming parallels. It is one of the few Hebrew visual aids to underscore a previous action. In English, perhaps the best rendering would be something like "yea." In addition, "behold" underscores the unexpected, and thus foreshadows Joseph's sudden rise to power in Egypt.

The language of Joseph's dream symbolically foreshadows his destiny and the mode of preservation for his entire people; and not only this, but also the order in which the process will occur

First of all, whereas the NASB has "in the field" (v. 7), a more exact rendering of the Hebrew would be "in the **middle** of the field" (בְּתוֹךְ הַשָּׂדֶה). *בְּתוֹךְ* is not simply "in the middle of the field," that would be *בְּשֵׂרֵי הַשָּׂדֶה*. The agricultural imagery undergirding the dream is that, harvesters would naturally begin to harvest a field from the outside, and moving in a concentric fashion, finish when they had arrived at its center. Thus, the fact that the setting of Joseph's dream is "in the **middle** of the field," i.e., that the harvest had been completed, gives us an important clue: it will only be after a harvest that the dream's fulfillment will come to pass. And thus, it is not coincidental that only after the seven years of plenty (the harvest symbolically pictured here) and two years into the famine that his brothers made the journeys to Egypt to buy grain (Gen. 41-44). ✓?

Secondly, the symbolic representation of Joseph's sheaf anticipates the manner by which he will rise to power in Egypt. But more than this, the imagery suggests that his brothers will not know that he is Joseph when they first come to Egypt to buy grain (see notes on 42:8), for they shall bow down to his sheaf. This becomes apparent when we examine Joseph's second dream:

"Lo, I have still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars **were bowing down to me**" (37:9). Thus in his second dream, Joseph is known to them and they bow down to him.

Thirdly, the picture of the brothers bowing down to Joseph foreshadows the conclusion of the dream where, because he is ruler of the land of Egypt, his brothers "bowed down" (וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ/wayyishṭah'wû, 42:2) to him. Thus on that occasion the Narrative reminds us that Joseph "remembered his dreams about them" (42:9).

Although it is highly technical, one should note that a difference should be made between אֱלוֹמִים/'*lwmym* (v. 7a) and אֱלוֹמוֹת/'*lwmwt* (v. 7b), in that the latter refers to a small bundle into which the former is bundled. Thus, it seems that fields were first completely cut, then small bundles (אֱלוֹמוֹת/'*lwmwt*) were first tied up, which were then gathered together to make big sheaves (אֱלוֹמִים/'*lwmym*) in the center of the cut field. Thus, according to what Joseph described would go something like this: "In my dream we were not at all so divided, were united in our work and wanted to make big heaps in the middle of the field out of the smaller bundles. I, too, was about to carry my small sheaf to the big common heap, but my sheaf would not come but stood itself up and remained erect, would not allow itself to be carried to the general heap in the center. And then all your sheaves came around my sheaf and bowed down to my sheaf!"

Consequently, this presented a picture of the complete impression of one isolated reigning over the others before whom they took up a submissive attitude, and indeed against the will of the one; he was quite prepared to make his small contribution to the whole, and thereby to be just a part with the others of what was accomplished.

Further it is remarkable that he should have dreamt of binding sheaves. That was something with which ordinarily they had no connection, for they were shepherds. To become an agricultural people lay for them still as their destiny in the distant future. If agriculture was so much in his mind that he even dreamt of it, the brothers could justify in their thinking that this could only be due to the teaching and information given to him by his father Israel over the expected national destiny of his house. All the more then could the brothers believe themselves justified in saying what they did in verse 8: "Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us?" Accordingly they hated him even more, both on account of the contents of his

dream and for his impudence (as they took it to be) in insisting on telling them of it.

### 3 Brothers' Embittered Hatred of Joseph (verse 8)

8 וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ אָחִיו הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּמְלֹךְ עָלֵינוּ אִם מָשׁוּל תִּמְשַׁל בָּנוּ וַיֹּסְפוּ עוֹד שֵׁנָא אֲתוּ  
עַל הַלְמָתָיו וְעַל דְּבָרָיו:

And-they-said to-him his-brothers you-indeed-a-king will-you-be-king over-us? you-a-ruler will-you-rule over-us? and-so-they-added continually hated him.

**8** Then his brothers said to him, "Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

In response to these dream reports, the brothers hated him all the more (vv. 5-8) and envied him (v. 11), questioning his audacity to suggest that he would actually rule over them. Their interpretation of the dreams was correct, and their scoffing was forcefully displayed: "Will you indeed rule over us?" (or better, "You do not mean to tell us that you will rule over us, do you?"). It is a question that has within it a statement of just what will come to pass. It is offered rhetorically here; they expect no answer, and certainly not the one that will come. Yet their first words are a question, and in time they will face puzzlement that leads to fear.

They angrily demanded to know whether Joseph intended to rule over them. The infinitive absolute in Hebrew in the brothers' question indicates their aggravated state and heightens their doubt of fulfillment. This construction is then repeated, but with a different verb: "or will you indeed have dominion over us?" (v. 8). Thus the hostility of Joseph's brothers became more bitter, first because he had the dream, and further because of "his words," a reference back to 37:2e.

Thus, the focus of the dream is in the words **reign** and **rule**. The latter term is used only twice for persons (cf. Gen. 1:16-18): in Genesis 3:16 concerning the relationship between man and woman: "Yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall **rule** over you"; and in Genesis 4:7, in the ironic promise to Cain that he might have mastery over his evil desire. By noting this



parallel (as well as the one earlier concerning Joseph's "garment," see page 62), Joseph appears to be drawn intentionally as an antitype to Adam and the "master" over evil. In effect, Joseph becomes the climactic outworking of the human problems posed in the early chapters of Genesis.

Joseph's brothers understood perfectly. A younger brother would rule over the rest. The question of who should rule, especially among brothers or equals, is a troubling matter at any time, but frequently so in ancient Israel (see, e.g., the parable in Judges 9:9-15 and then the subsequent struggles for rulership in the monarchy). This choice of Joseph marked a change from the normal societal order but did not differ from previous narratives in which the younger son was made lord over his older brother.

#### 4C Joseph's Second Dream Report (verses 9-10a)

9 וַיִּחְלֵם עוֹד חֲלוֹם אֲחֵר וַיְסַפֵּר אֵתוֹ לְאָחָיו וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה חָלַמְתִּי חֲלוֹם עוֹד וְהִנֵּה הַשָּׁמֶשׁ  
וְהַיָּרֵחַ וְאַחַד עָשָׂר כּוֹכָבִים מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים לִי:

And-he-dreamt again a-dream another and-he-related it to-his-  
brothers and-he-said behold I-have dreamed a-dream another and-  
behold the-sun and-the-moon and-one ten stars were-bowing-down  
to-me.

10a וַיְסַפֵּר אֶל אָבִיו וְאֶל אָחָיו

And-he-related to-his-father and-to-his-brothers

- 9 Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, "Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."
- 10a And he related *it* to his father and to his brothers;

The twice repeated "lo/behold" (הִנֵּה/*hinnēh*) in verse 9 indicates the unsettling nature of it from Joseph's point of view. In Joseph's second dream, it was not only his brothers, but also his mother and father, who were bowing down to him! What especially is to be noted is that, there is never a time when the sun, moon and stars can be visibly seen at the same time. This is pertinent to the fulfillment of Joseph's second dream, for it is at different times that his father (notably, not his mother) and brothers bow down to him.

This time the dream has a celestial setting and now includes his parents among those who are to be subservient to him. The symbolism of stars for the brothers is seen elsewhere, i.e., the progeny of the patriarch Abraham, i.e., Israel, is compared to the stars of the heaven (Gen. 15:5; 22:17).

Several commentators have advanced the idea that the eleven stars are a mythical designation of the signs of the zodiac (Jeremias, Skinner). This interpretation of the symbolism is really too untenable to be regarded seriously. The signs of the zodiac are twelve; and eleven is not twelve. Then, too, the signs of the zodiac are actually clusters or constellation of stars, and the dream speaks of single stars.

From Genesis 1 we learn that the sun and the moon are symbols of rule--both together ruling the day and night. In a coming day Joseph was to be given command over the rulers of the world, including his parents. That was literally fulfilled in the high position of authority Joseph attained in Egypt, an authority so great that even the pharaoh bowed to his will.

### 5C Jacob's Reaction to Joseph's Second Dream (verse 10b)

10b וַיִּגְעַר בּוֹ אָבִיו

and-he-rebuked him his-father

10b and his father rebuked him

Within a few verses (although possibly distant in time) the brothers have sarcastically questioned Joseph about the meaning of his dream(s). Now, Jacob, when faced with an open statement that not too indirectly articulates the implications of his treatment of Joseph, also cannot accept it, and thus rebukes him before his brothers. This is an important development in the plot: not only does the hatred of his brothers increase; Joseph now has strained relations with his father as well. Without the support and approval of Jacob, Joseph is made vulnerable, suspended now between his father's rebuke and his brothers' hatred.

Beforehand, God had appeared to Abraham, Issac and Jacob through visions. It was through this mode in which the LORD had demanded, commanded, warned or promised. That is why Jacob "questions" the genuineness of Joseph's dream. In reality, the three sets of dreams in the Narrative, of which Joseph's are but the first, indicate the remoteness of God. Moreover, the

somewhat secular mold, in which the Narrative is cast, is altogether new. It is in poignant contrast with the immediacy of God's communication with the patriarchs. Though throughout its course, the dream reflects the hand of Providence working His will.

### 6 Jacob's Speech to Joseph (verse 10c)

10c וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מָה הַחֲלוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר חִלְמָתָהּ הַבּוֹא נְבוֹא אֲנִי וְאִמִּי וְאֶחָיוּ לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לְךָ אֶרְצָה:

and-he-said to-him what the-dream this which you-have-dreamt?  
Shall-surely come I and-your-mother and-your-brothers to-bow-down to-you to-the-ground?

10c and said to him, "What is this dream that you have had? Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?"

The reactions of the separate objects of the dream are significant. Neither Joseph's brothers nor his father were in doubt as to the meaning of his dreams. Both understood them to speak of the dominion of Joseph over them (cf. v. 20). The hatred of the brothers was to turn into vengeful actions so as to prevent the fulfillment of the dreams. But his father reacted differently. His question seems less rhetorical than that of his sons (see page 77), less scornful of the claim of the dreams, more open to wonder. His is a more complex question, and his first actual words reflect this.

It should be noted that Joseph never stated that Jacob, his mother and brothers would actually bow down to the ground before him. In adding it, Jacob subconsciously echoes the manner in which he himself had made obeisance to his brother Esau (Gen. 33:3). Its use here is an intimation of future developments, for it appears in the narrative each time the brothers bow to Joseph in Egypt (Gen. 42:6; 43:26; 44:14).

Jacob could not reconcile the dreams' witness with the relative superior-inferior status between himself and his son. So he questioned the actuality: "What is this dream that you have had? Shall I . . . actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?" His question, which is literally "What is this dream . . ." must be translated, "What means . . ." because of

the words that follow, "Shall I and your mother . . .?" Yet one should not see here skepticism or scoffing, but honest inquiry: "Is this truly what you are saying: 'You will rule over us *all*'?" That Jacob was not scoffing is seen in the words of verse 11b: "but his father kept the saying *in mind*." Not until they were fulfilled did Jacob realize their significance. But neither did Joseph later call them to Jacob's remembrance. The history as written is sufficient commentary and answer!

Ironically, however, the manner in which the Book of Genesis was composed suggests that the picture of Joseph and his brothers foreshadows even further the relationship between Judah and his brothers as pictured in Jacob's words in Genesis 49:8: "Judah, your brothers all praise you . . . your father's sons shall bow down (יִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ/*yish'tah'wû*) to you." The picture of Joseph is transcended by that of Judah, just as the blessing that the sons of Joseph received in chapter 48 is transcended by that of Judah in chapter 49! Thus the irony of the Joseph Narrative is that in the end such royal honor does not reside in the house of Joseph but in the house of Judah ("The scepter shall not depart from Judah," Gen. 49:10).

### Brothers' Envy of Joseph (verse 11a)

וַיִּקְנְאוּ בוֹ אָחָיו 11a

And-they-were-jealous-over-him his-brothers

11a And his brothers were jealous of him

In the reaction of Joseph's brothers, we see another kind of thinking other than what was exhibited in their father. Although there was probably considerable time which lapsed between these opening paragraphs (vv. 1-4 and 5-11), our author placed them juxtaposed, wherein we see Joseph bringing a report back to their father that the sons of Jacob's concubines were making slanderous accusations against Joseph (v. 2e). To them this was but an attempt to curry favor with Jacob so as to lord it over them. They did not know what to do about it and therefore their impotence turned to hatred, expressed through angry and hateful words.

In addition, when Joseph told his brothers about his dreams, he believed, no doubt, that because they all thought them to be true, they would naturally accept their implications and no longer hate him. But just because

they could do nothing about it, and because they were envious of him, they increased their hatred toward him. To the three-fold mention of **hatred**, **envy** is now added, for now they believed Joseph's dreams. The process of divine deliverance often is not established in observance of the divine will. But Joseph actually had predicted a service so essential that later on his family would bow before him and place themselves in his hands for their very preservation.

The brothers now look upon him with passionate hatred. He had tasted their jealousy and spite already, but they had to know the truth of God, even if that truth spurred them on to violence. After Joseph told of his dreams, his brothers could no longer speak peaceably to him. Soon they seized their opportunity to rid themselves of him finally and forever, but they reckoned without God just as do people who vainly imagine they can rid themselves of God's Son.

#### 42 Jacob's Inward Meditation of the Things Concerning Joseph (verse 11b)

11b וְאָבִיו שָׁמַר אֶת הַדְּבָרִים:

but-his-father kept the-matter

11b **but his father kept the saying *in mind*.**

The repetition of the dream has established the authenticity and seriousness of the message. Joseph brothers' hate him, but Jacob muses upon it. The two attitudes juxtaposed in this verse are those that always divide people in their reactions to news from God. The brothers' skepticism was emotional and hasty; the father's was the product of some humility. Israel had learned by now, as his sons had not, to allow for God's hand in affairs, and for His right of choice among men.

Jacob's response to the dream was more tempered than his sons. At first he reacted strongly, rebuking his son, but then he pondered the significance of the dream(s). Surely Jacob must have seen the repetition of his own beginnings in the beginnings of Joseph's career. Surely he knew for a fact that God would select the younger over the older and could declare his choice in advance whether by an oracle (Gen. 25:23) or by a dream.

The narrator's concluding comment to this scene is significant. This reference to Jacob's reflective inner response (which Joseph never knew) to the

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dream report is a sign of its future significance in the plot. It is not to be merely a negative stimulus to the envy of the brothers; but it also positively foreshadows future events. It thus appears ambiguous at this point with regard to its influence upon the course of events.

The syntax of verse 11 is a good example to point out a technical feature of biblical narrative. In this case, it illustrates a clear example how the narrator uses a verb in the perfect to subordinate an action indicated by a preterite. The incident of Joseph's dreams ends with two clauses, the first is a preterite and the second involves a verb in the perfect: "And his brothers were **jealous** (preterite) of him, but his father **kept** (perfect) the saying *in mind*."

In the overall development of the Narrative thus far, the brothers' jealousy is much more intricately tied and pivotal to the plot structure than Jacob's meditating as to what Joseph's dreams might mean. The story moves along because the brothers are jealous of him and sell him into Egypt, regardless of their father's attitude. So, interestingly enough, the verb that refers to the father's attitude is reported secondarily with a perfect verb and is reported by a preposed noun (which emphasizes the father as opposed to the brothers).

The irony in the narrator's use of Joseph's dreams to stage Joseph brothers' forthcoming betrayal is working on two levels. On the one hand, they serve as genuine revelations of the future in which Joseph will ascend over them; but on the other, the brothers take action against the "dreamer" (37:19-20) and his dreams, whereby their jealous hatred is made to serve the very end of Joseph's ascendancy which it seeks to defeat! Thus in a context of far-reaching implications, the brothers are short-sighted, not seeing the larger purpose of Joseph's dreams and only interpret them in terms of sibling rivalry in the family. The brothers' benighted reaction sets in motion the plot mechanism which will eventually lead to its realization.

In conclusion, a brief note is in order regarding the progression of thought in this chapter thus far. Verses 1-4 describe the hatred of Joseph's brothers as the human force that took Joseph into Egypt. Verses 5-11 present to us the actual outworking of the two factors: hatred of his brothers and God's providence. These sections are to be considered the introduction to what follows. God is to use human hatred to effect His will and thus show His glory in the outworking of His providence.

## APPLICATION

The story of Joseph begins by unfolding the grand theme (Joseph would be elevated to rule over his brothers) and the major tension (his brother's growing hatred of him). Their reaction of envy and hatred is understandable; yet, placed in contrast to Joseph's faithfulness and honesty, demonstrates why they were not chosen. The first scene of the Joseph story, then, relates how God sovereignly selected his future leader and how that choice brought out the envy of those who would have to submit. Rather than recognize God's apparent choice through their father and through the divine revelation, the brothers went themselves on a course in which they would eventually try to destroy him. There is no place in leadership for such uncontrollable hatred and envy, but leaders often must face such opposition.

The lesson is timeless: ***GOD WILL CHOOSE A FAITHFUL, RIGHTEOUS PERSON FOR A POSITION OF LEADERSHIP IN SPITE OF THE JEALOUSY OF OTHERS.*** This statement could be turned the other way as well: *Those whom God chooses for positions of leadership may encounter jealous hatred from others.* The one who would be a leader must be faithful in discharging the duties at hand, no matter what hatred this faithfulness brings. God, and those who are spiritually mature, will honor it. And those who are called to submit to others, even though they might feel more qualified to lead, must not let their jealousy turn to cruel hatred. Even in Christianity the call to submit to others is not a popular teaching.

Joseph's dreams did not exhaust themselves in his personal life time. They reach beyond Joseph to Christ. God has given His Son a position of absolute supremacy over the universe (Ps. 2; Col. 1:13-20). In a coming day the LORD Jesus will be exalted and every knee will bow to Him "of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is LORD (YHWH), to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11; Isa. 45:23).

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Read the two paragraphs (37:2b-4 and 5-11), referring to the exegetical outline on page 29. Create your own outline. What is the tone of each paragraph?
2. How is Joseph's age emphasized in the Narrative? Why?
3. Explain the differences between the objective and subjective interpretations of "about them" in "And Joseph brought back a bad report about them to their father" (37:2e).



## Genesis 37:12-36

### Strife and Deceit

*IA. Synopsis*

#### THE SELLING OF THE CHOSEN INTO BONDAGE

While the previous episode (Genesis 37:2-11) showed how people envy the faithful chosen servant of the LORD, this series of scenes reveal the fruit of that hatred and envy if left unchecked. It is the Cain and Abel story all over again in spades. For all practical considerations, the brothers did destroy Joseph, for they believed they finally got rid of him. And they did their best to convince Jacob that his son was dead. Their action shows that they did not accept God's choice of Joseph; their envy and hatred were so strong that they thought only to put an end to his dreams in the quickest way possible. And perhaps also, the special favor and love that Jacob showed toward Joseph, if Joseph was out of the way, then Jacob would spread it around.

Two motifs run through this part of the story--the obedience of Joseph and the hatred of the brothers. The brothers' statement, "Let's see what becomes of his dreams," actually expresses the nature of Joseph's first test. What would happen to Joseph's faith in the dreams when those over whom he was to rule sold him into slavery? Would he despair over the loss of his destiny, or would he remain faithful to God Who had chosen him?

Though Joseph understood himself to be next in the godly line of administrators of the grace of God, yet he was to find that ascent to the exalted position presented in the dreams was not as instant as it appeared. The contents of this section put before us the beginning of a road of anguish, frustration and uncertainty for Joseph: his mother has now died (foreshadowing Jacob's interpretation of Joseph's dreams were not going to be fulfilled like he thought, v. 10c); anguish at the blood-thirsty hatred of his brothers, frustration that the ascent to dominion was apparently thwarted, and uncertainty as to whether the brethren would ever attain to the high character required of bearers of the kingdom of God. Their lives had to conform to the requirement of keeping God's way (Gen. 18:19). To convert his brothers to the desire to keep God's ways became the core of Joseph's labors with them, else they would forfeit any sharing in the land or the messianic heritage. Righteousness must accompany their



genealogical descent. This becomes a major concern for the remainder of the Narrative.

## **B** Chronological Considerations

After the author explains the causes for the hatred of Joseph's brothers toward him (37:3-11), he now describes how that hatred was expressed. As we have already indicated, some time must have elapsed between these stages of the narrative (see pages 14-16). Rachel most certainly has died by now since Jacob sent Joseph "from the valley of Hebron" (v. 14), and Genesis 35:27 informs us that Jacob did not settle in the area of Hebron until after the death of Rachel. However, this raises a very serious problem: Joseph's second dream as interpreted by Jacob, includes, in addition to his brothers, his father and mother prostrate before him (Gen. 37:10).

Rachel's death is implicated in that, later, having been duped by his sons, Jacob mourns for Joseph and is comforted (insincerely) by those same sons and also by his daughters, but Rachel is conspicuous by her absence from this scene of family tragedy. When Joseph meets his brothers in Egypt, he inquires concerning the welfare of Jacob, but makes no mention of his mother (Gen. 43:27), suggesting that Joseph knew of her death *before* he went to Egypt. It could be argued that Joseph gained this information from his brothers' summary of their family situation in which Rachel is omitted (Gen. 42:13): "We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more." However, if this were the first intimation Joseph had had of his mother's death we would expect some reaction, when just the sight of Benjamin is sufficient to induce weeping (Gen. 43:30).

However, even if we understand Rachel's death after Joseph's dreams and before Jacob's commission to him, this does not accord with Jacob's understanding of Joseph's dream (moon = Rachel) in which each element of the imagery has significance. In addition, all of the other dreams in the Joseph Narrative show a very close and detailed relationship between imagery and reality. The butler and baker see *three* bunches of grapes and cake baskets respectively because their fate will be decided in *three* days; in addition the imagery is peculiarly appropriate to their respective vocations. Pharaoh sees *seven* fat and thin cows emerging from the Nile followed by *seven* plump and thin ears of grain, because the agricultural prosperity of the country will go through two contrasting *seven* year cycles. As we shall see in Joseph's dreams, the imagery of his dreams have a similar significance. Thus the dreams of the

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Joseph Narrative as a whole do not allow us to treat the details of Joseph's second dream in a cavalier manner, as if they were of no importance. They must be treated seriously and the problems which arise from doing so frankly acknowledged. Perhaps the key in solving this enigma is to realize that it was Jacob who [rightfully?] interpreted Joseph's dream, and not Joseph himself.

### 2B Source Criticism Considerations

Attempts have been made by source critics that the statement in verse 14, "from the valley of Hebron," was an insertion from a secondary source and thus must be considered to be an interpolation by means of source division. The sole bases for this assertion is that this was too great a distance from Shechem to be feasible. H. Seebass proposes an emendation to "plain of Rehabon" (ZAW 90 [1978]:196-219). Others like D.B. Redford maintain that it is a gloss (Redford, 1979:28).

But it was the fact that it was at some distance that explains Jacob's method of keeping informed about the welfare of his sons and the flocks. If they had been somewhere in the immediate area, Joseph's mission would have been unnecessary and unlikely. Additionally, a charge has been made that Joseph was too young to accept such a demanding assignment by his father. In response to this charge we would point out that verse 2 informs us that he was seventeen years old and, as becomes increasingly evident in the Narrative, Joseph was a young man with exceptional abilities and talents.

There is an apparent problem in verses 28 and 36 concerning the double identification of the Midianites. The problem turns largely on the identification of the Midianites in 37:28, 36. On first reading, the phraseology of 37:28a implies to the reader who is a speaker of an Indo-European language that a new group of people is being introduced, distinct from the Ishmaelites which are referred to in 37:25. Thus the problem is why in the beginning they are called Ishmaelites (vv. 25, 27) and later Midianites (v. 28). Some writers ascribe this usage to separate traditions interwoven into one record. Others ascribe the two descriptions to separate documents. The division of verse 28 as put forth by the documentarians is as follows:

**E:** Then Midianite men, traders,  
passed by and [when] they [had]  
pulled Joseph up and lifted him out  
of the cistern.

**J:** They sold Joseph to the Ish-  
maelites for twenty shekels of sil-  
ver.

**E:** Then they brought Joseph to  
Egypt . . . ("E" then continues  
through v. 36).

The verse has been staggered in the two columns to show the points at which they connect as one record. The words in brackets must be left out in this construction to make them read properly as separate sentences under this hypothesis. But is this a correct structuring?

Hupfeld reproduces the view of De Wette by giving the entire chapter to E, except vs. 25b-27, 28c. The narrative is thus resolved into two accounts differing in three points, viz., the name of the brother who saved Joseph's life, how he came to Egypt, and the person who bought him. According to E Reuben proposed to put him in a pit, whence he was secretly drawn out by passing Midianites, who sold him to Potiphar, captain of the guard. According to J, at Judah's suggestion Joseph's brothers sell him to a caravan of Ishmaelites, of whom he was bought by an unnamed Egyptian (xxxix. 1). It is claimed that each account is complete and separable; only in ver. 28 they are so combined that the verbs are referred to wrong subjects. The clause, "and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver," is to be sundered from the rest of the verse and attached to ver. 27. Verse 28 will then read, "and there passed by Midianites, merchantmen; and they (the Midianites) drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit. And they brought Joseph into Egypt." This connects back with ver. 25a; it occurred while Joseph's brothers were sitting together taking bread. It does not appear from J that Joseph was put into a pit at all. Schrader enlarges J's portion by adding to it (vs. 23, 24, 31-35), with the effect of transferring the statement of Joseph's being put in the pit, and of his father's grief, from E to J. This still leaves the whole of the narrative prior to ver. 23 with E, and nothing in J respecting the relation of Joseph to his brothers, until suddenly without a word of explanation, they are found deliberating whether to kill him or to sell him as a slave.

Wellhausen is too acute a critic and too ingenious in discovering doublets to suffer this state of things to continue. He remarks: "Verses 12-24 are preparatory to vs. 25 sqq., and are indispensable for both E and J. To be sure, no certain conclusion can be drawn from this alone as to its composite character, but a presumption is created in its favor which is confirmed by actual traces of its being double." Acting upon this presumption he sets himself to discover the traces. It seems to him that "Here am I," is not the proper answer to what Israel says to Joseph (ver. 13); and that ver. 18 does not fit in between vs. 17 and 19. "They saw him afar off" implies that he had not yet "found them;" and "they conspired against him to slay him," is a parallel to ver. 20. Verses 21 and 22 are also doublets, only instead of "Reuben," in ver. 21 (an old suggestion of Gramberg's) we should read "Judah," whose proposal is to cast him into the pit (ver. 20), to perish, without killing him themselves, while Reuben (ver. 22) has the secret purpose of rescuing him. From these premises he concludes that while J is the principal narrator in this paragraph, as shown by Israel (ver. 13), Hebron (ver. 14), and verbal suffixes *passim*, nevertheless vs. 13c, 14a, 18, 22, and parts of vs. 23, 24, in which  $\text{יָרַד}$  repeatedly occurs instead of a suffix attached to the verb, belong to E and represent his parallel narrative, which has only been preserved in this fragmentary way.

. . . Dillmann proves in this instance to have had sharper eyes than Wellhausen, and has found the desired doublets where the latter could discover none. To be sure, he unceremoniously sets aside Wellhausen's criteria. He gives us, 19, 20, to E (not J) in spite of repeated verbal suffixes which he will not recognize here as a discriminating mark, in spite, too, of  $\text{יָרַד}$  which occurs xxiv. 65 J, and nowhere else in the Old Testament; and accordingly he does not allow the inference that J gave a parallel account of the dreams.

. . . In the first four editions of his Genesis Delitzsch could find no evidence of a duplicate narrative in ch. xxxvii. In his last edition he changed his mind, though he was still unable to accept Dillmann's keen

analysis, which seemed to go "beyond the limits of the knowable." He ventures no further than to assign vs. 28a, b, 29, 30, to E, and ver. 28c, d to J, and to claim that thenceforward the narrative of E and J are in agreement, while the text has prevailingly the coloring of J, only "the Midianites" in ver. 36 are a sure indication of E.

It will not be necessary to proceed with the recital of other proposed partitions, which are sufficiently indicated in a previous note. The critics have shown how variously the same narrative may be divided. And it must be a very intractable material indeed that can resist the persistent application of such methods as they freely employ. The fact that different versions of a story can be constructed out of a narrative by an ingenious partition of its constituent elements by no means proves its composite character. They may be purely subjective, destitute of any historical basis, and of no more value than any clever trick at cross-reading.

#### Grounds of Partition

Wellhausen admits that "the connection of the matter in ch. xxxvii. is certainly such that it would scarcely give occasion for separating it into two threads, were it not for the conclusion (vs. 25-36)." Here it is alleged that there are certain glaring inconsistencies, which cannot be otherwise accounted for than as the fusing together of discordant narratives. Four discrepancies are charged, which lie at the basis of every attempt to partition the chapter.

1. Verses 21, 22, it was Reuben, but ver. 26 it was Judah, who persuaded the brothers not to put Joseph to death.
2. Verses 25, 27, 28, xxxix. 1, Ishmaelites, but vs. 28, 36, Midianites, took Joseph and brought him to Egypt.
3. According to different clauses of ver. 28, Joseph was carried off secretly without the knowledge of his brothers, or was sold by them.
4. Verse 36, he was sold to Potiphar, but xxxix. 1 (purged of interpolations), to an unnamed Egyptian.

These imaginary difficulties are of easy solution.

As to the first, It surely is not surprising that two of the brothers should have taken an active part in the consultations respecting Joseph, nor that the same two should be prominent in the subsequent course of the transactions. Reuben, as the eldest, had special responsibilities and would naturally be forward to express his mind; while Judah's superior force of character, like that of Peter among the apostles, made him prompt to take the lead, and there is no inconsistency in what is attributed to them. Reuben persuaded them not to kill Joseph, but to cast him alive into a pit, cherishing the purpose, which he did not divulge to them, to restore him to his father. They accede to his proposal intending to let Joseph die in the pit, or to kill him at some future time. To this state of mind Judah addresses himself (ver. 26). The absence of Reuben, when Joseph was sold, is not expressly stated, but is plainly enough implied in his despair and grief at his brother's disappearance. The reply which his brothers made is not recorded; but there is no implication that they were as ignorant as he of what had become of Joseph. That they had a guilt in the matter which he did not share is distinctly intimated (xlii. 22); he must, therefore, have been fully aware that they did something more than put Joseph in the pit at his suggestion.

As to the second point. Ishmaelites in the strict and proper sense were a distinct tribe from the Midianites, and were of different though related origin. It is, however, a familiar fact, which we have had occasion to observe before, that tribal names are not always used with definite exactness (cf. xxxvi. 2; see p. 422). And there is explicit evidence that Ishmaelites was used in a wide sense to include Midianites (Judg. viii. 24; cf. vii. 1 sqq.; viii. 1 sqq.). Dillmann's objection that this belonged to a later period comes with a bad grace from one who places the earliest Pentateuchal documents centuries after Gideon. If the invading army referred to in the passages above cited could be called indifferently Midianites and Ishmaelites, why not this caravan of merchants? The British troops at the battle of Trenton in the American revolution were Hessians, and might be properly spoken of under either designation. If a historian were to use these terms interchangeably in describing the engagement, would it follow that variant accounts had been confusedly mingled? The absence of the article before Midianites (ver. 28) does not imply that they were distinct from the Ishmaelites before perceived (vs. 25, 27). They were recognized in the distance as an Ishmaelite caravan, but it was not till they actually came up to them that the Ishmaelites were perceived to be specifically or largely Midianites.

As to the third point. If the first half of ver. 28 were severed from its connection, the words might mean that Midianites drew Joseph out of the pit. But in the connection in which it stands such a sense is simply impossible. And the suggestion that R had two statements before him; one, that Midianites drew Joseph out of the pit without his brothers' knowledge and carried him off to Egypt; the other, that his brothers drew him from the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites; and that he combined them as we have them now, is to charge him with inconceivable stupidity or reckless falsification. There can be no manner of doubt how the author of the book in its present form understood the transaction. There is no possible sug-

gestion of more than one meaning in the words before us. The invention of another sense may illustrate the critic's wit, but it has no more merit than any other perversion of an author's obvious meaning. And it derives no warrant from xl. 15; Joseph was "stolen away," even though his captors bought him from those who had no right to dispose of him.

The fourth point can be best considered when we come to ch. xxxix (Green, 1979:442-450).

The Genesis record has already noted where the separate dwellings of the sons of Ishmael were (Gen. 25:12-18). A study of a map of Arabia shows them to have occupied most of the Arabian Peninsula and to have controlled effectively the Midianite territory that borders the Arabah and extends from Edom's southern border (near the 28th parallel) to the Red Sea and east to the Hijaz. Ishmael's descendants were involved in the Trans-Arabia trade, since the major east-west trade route from Egypt to India passed through this area. It may be concluded that Ishmaelite tribes had come to dominate generally the older Midianite area but that the traders in this case were actually Midianites.

But if the division stands, what are the consequences? The documentarians maintain that the Midianites drew Joseph up out of the cistern, whereas someone else sold him to the Ishmaelites and then according to the "E" version the Midianites took him down to Egypt. How did he get transferred from his purchasers, the Ishmaelites, to the Midianites, who brought him down to Egypt? Were there two caravans? But the whole purpose in the paragraph is to show how Joseph's brothers got rid of him. No sense is possibly unless "they" of "J" refers to the same persons as "they" of "E." That the record is one and not two is seen by comparing verse 36 with 39:1. In the first, Joseph is said to be sold to Potiphar by Midianites, whereas in 39:1 it is by Ishmaelites. Because the two are "contradictory," the latter is excluded by the documentarians as a gloss. Thus conveniently the disturbing factor is excised, but only to justify a theory. By this division the contradictions supposed by the documentarians have been manufactured at the expense of proper exegesis.

I suggest, however, that this is primarily a stylistic bias which reflects a difference in discourse structure between languages such as English, German, or French, and Semitic structures. I sketch this argument briefly here.

To begin with, biblical Hebrew is extremely circumspect in the identification of new participants (especially minor ones) who are brought into a narrative. Having specifically studied the device of participant introduction, I find it very difficult to believe that a new group of people (appearing startlingly and unexpectedly on the scene) would be introduced and named in v. 28a ("and there passed by Midianites, merchant men") and *not* be made subject of the next verb. We should expect, "and the Midianites drew out and lifted up Joseph out of the pit," or even, "and the Midianites sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites"--in that

the preceding context has led us to expect that the brothers were to sell him. I assume, therefore, that according to normal devices in Hebrew participant reference, the brothers remain the subject of the verbs "draw out," "lift," and "sell" in v. 28.

*see Kitchen pp. 119-20 Ancient ORient !!*

Taking a clue from Judges 8:24--where "Midianite" invaders are described as "Ishmaelites"--I consider these two names in 37:25, 28, 36 and 39:1 to refer to the same group of people. Perhaps "Ishmaelites" was sometimes used as a more generic term (= Bedouin nomad), while "Midianite" is more specific and ethnic. Note that in 37:36 we are specifically told that the Midianites sold Joseph to Potiphar, while in the recapitulation of this information in 39:1 we are told that the Ishmaelites performed the sale to the same person.

But the question still remains: Why, if the caravan is identified in 37:25, is it renamed and identified again in 37:28? Here, I believe, we must tie this matter into the fact that 37:23-28 is the climax of the episode. Suspense and elaboration are characteristic of climax. Note, moreover, two parallel developments in chapter 37: Joseph is sighted afar off (v. 18), becomes the subject of discussion (vv. 19-22), and action erupts (vv. 23, 24) when Joseph arrives on the scene. Similarly, a caravan of "Ishmaelites" is sighted afar off (v. 25), becomes the subject of discussion (vv. 26-27), and action erupts (v. 28) when the caravan arrives on the scene. And finally, the syntactical ambiguity signals a breakdown in the ability of the brothers fully to shape events.

Graphically, the text first applies the term "Ishmaelites" to the caravan seen from afar, and then on closer view calls them "Midianite merchants." Suspense of this sort is appropriate to the high point of a story. I would therefore, render v. 28a as follows: "And so they passed by, Midianite traders [as they proved to be]; and the brothers drew Joseph up out of the pit, and they sold Joseph to the 'Ishmaelites' for 20 pieces of silver."

## 2A THEOLOGICAL IDEAS

The dominant ideas in this section deal more with human nature than with theology proper. On the one hand, we have a sample of the suffering of the righteous at the hands of the wicked; on the other hand, we see the results of unchecked hatred and jealousy. Moreover, the brothers' deception of the old patriarch once again brought pain to one who was no stranger to deception. The

predominant theological idea, then, would be evil, both its employment and its effects. It is ironic that twice in the chapter the treachery was blamed on an "evil beast."

## 3A STRUCTURE AND SYNTHESIS

### 1B Structure

In Genesis 37:12-36, Joseph continues to be the central participant. In the first of three paragraphs (37:12-17), where he searches for his brothers, the proper name "Joseph" brackets the paragraph by occurring in 37:13 and 37:17, while only proper pronouns suffice in 37:18-22. On the other hand, the arrival of Joseph on the scene and the violent reception that he received from his brothers correlates with two uses of the proper name in adjacent clauses: "And it came to pass when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped Joseph of his tunic" (37:23).

Likewise, at the apex of the action the name "Joseph" occurs three times (37:28) in describing the nefarious transaction of selling the younger brother. Certainly three occurrences of the name are hardly needed for participant identification; the repetition has some further function. Here it marks an extremely important and providential event in the family of Jacob and the history of the embryonic nation.

The name Joseph occurs only three times more in chapter 37: (1) when Reuben returns to the pit and "no Joseph [was] there"; (2) at the beginning of the cover-up, "and they took the tunic of Joseph"; and (3) in Jacob's outcry, "Surely Joseph is torn!" It is plain from these observations that the central participant, once carefully introduced is referred to more often than not by personal pronouns and by affixes, but it is equally plain that at crucial transitions and climaxes the proper name is reinforced.

This part of the story of Joseph unfolds in several small scenes that work together to develop the crisis. In each step the participants and speakers differ.

## LITERARY MOVEMENT IN GENESIS 37:12-36

Participants	Action
Israel and Joseph (12-14)	Israel <i>sent</i> Joseph to inquire of his brothers' <i>welfare</i> .
Joseph and a man (15-17)	Joseph required help from a certain man in order to locate his brothers.
The brothers and Reuben (18-22)	The brothers conspired to kill Joseph, but Reuben delivered him by warning them not <i>to lay</i> a hand on him or <i>shed blood</i> .
Joseph and his brothers, Judah and the Ishmaelites (23-28)	The brothers <i>threw</i> Joseph into a pit. Judah advised them to sell him to the Ishmaelites rather than slay him and conceal <i>blood</i> .
Reuben and the brothers, the brothers and Jacob (29-35)	When Joseph was sold, Reuben became anxious and <i>tore</i> his garments; the brothers dipped the coat in <i>blood</i> and <i>sent</i> it to their father; Jacob <i>tore</i> his garments and mourned.
Midianites and Potiphar (36)	The Midianites <i>sold</i> Joseph to Potiphar.

Figure 7.

The actions of the family are framed by the verb "to send"--Jacob sent Joseph to his brothers, and they sent his bloodied coat back to him. In between are the details of the movement from one sending to the other; the critical point comes when the brothers debated which blood they should have to account for. By selling Joseph they were free from having to cover his blood and instead could simply use the blood of a goat. The first episode concludes with a transitional report of another sale, this time to Potiphar in Egypt.

## 16 Chiastic Structure

*TRANSITION*  
The climax of chapter 37:12-36 comes at 37:23-24, where "And it came to pass when Joseph arrived where his brothers were." Such an introduction of an episode in this more explicit fashion may serve here to prepare the reader for a crescendo of activity. The amount of descriptive detail--which is more appropriate to a great moment of a story than to routine narration. Note, for example, the second part of 37:24: "The pit [was] empty. No water [was] in it." The bell solemnly tolls for Joseph, Jacob's favorite son.



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**CHIASTIC ARRANGEMENT OF GENESIS 37:12-36**

Introduction: Joseph's brothers leave to pasture the flocks in Shechem (12)

- A Israel's commission to Joseph (13a-b)
- B The father sends Joseph, the faithful son (13c-14)
- C Joseph seeks his brothers and finds them (15-17)
- D The brothers' 1st plan to eradicate Joseph (18-22)
- E **THE VIOLATION OF JOSEPH (23-24)**
- D' The brothers' 2nd plan to eradicate Joseph (25-28)
- C' Reuben seeks Joseph and does not find him (29-30)
- B' The faithless sons send Joseph's tunic to their father (31-33)
- A' Jacob's lament over Joseph (34-35)

Epilogue: Joseph is sold and travels to Egypt (36)

Figure 8.

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2B ~~WA~~ TRANSLATION

- 12 One time, when his brothers had gone to pasture their father's flock at Shechem,
- 13 Israel said to Joseph, "Your brothers are pasturing at Shechem. Come, I will send you to them." He answered, "I am ready."
- 14 And he said to him, "Go and see the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flocks, and bring me back word." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron. When he reached Shechem,
- 15 a man came upon him wandering in the fields. The man asked him, "What are you looking for?" He answered, "I am looking for my brothers. Could you tell me where they are pasturing?"
- 16 He answered, "I am looking for my brothers. Could you tell me where they are pasturing?"
- 17 The man said, "They have gone from here, for I heard them say: 'Let us go to Dothan'." So Joseph followed his brothers and found them at Dothan.
- 18 They saw him from a distance, and before he came close to them they conspired to kill him.
- 19 They said to one another, "Here comes the lord of the dreams!
- 20 Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we can say, 'A savage beast devoured him.' We shall see what comes of his dreams!"

- 
- 21 But when Reuben heard it, he tried to save him from them. He said, "Let us not take his life."
- 22 And Reuben went on, "Shed no blood! Cast him into that pit out in the wilderness, but do not touch him yourselves"--intending to save him from them and restore him to his father.
- 23 When Joseph came up to his brothers, they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the ornamented tunic that he was wearing,
- 24 and took him and cast him into the pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.
- 25 Then they sat to eat a meal. Looking up, they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, their camels bearing gum, balm, and ladanum to be taken to Egypt.
- 26 Then Judah said to his brothers, "What do we gain by killing our brother and covering up his blood?"
- 27 Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, but let us not do away with him ourselves. After all, he is our brother, our own flesh." His brothers agreed.
- 28 When Midianite traders passed by, they pulled Joseph up out of the pit. They sold Joseph for twenty pieces of silver to the Ishmaelites, who brought Joseph to Egypt.
- 29 When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he rent his clothes.
- 30 Returning to his brothers, he said, "The boy is gone! Now, where shall I go?"
- 31 Then they took Joseph's tunic, slaughtered a kid, and dipped the tunic in the blood.
- 32 They had the ornamented tunic sent and they brought it to their father, and they said, "We found this. Please examine it; is it your son's tunic or not?"
- 33 He recognized it, and said, "My son's tunic! A savage beast devoured him! Joseph was torn by a beast!"
- 34 Jacob rent his clothes, put sackcloth on his loins, and observed mourning for his son many days.
- 35 All his sons and daughters sought to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, saying, "No, I will go down mourning to my son in Sheol." Thus his father bewailed him.
- 36 The Midianites, meanwhile, sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh and his chief steward.

## 3B Synthesis

When Israel sent Joseph to check on the welfare of his brothers, his brothers plotted to kill him to end his dreams but decided rather to sell him and deceive their father into thinking an evil beast devoured him; in spite of the painful success of their plan, however, Joseph was preserved and taken to Egypt alive.

### EXEGETICAL OUTLINE

- I. Joseph, in obedience to Israel's request, went to inquire of the welfare of his brothers in Shechem and, with the help of a certain man, found them in Dothan (12-17).
  - A. Israel sent Joseph to Shechem to see about the welfare of his brothers and their flocks (12-14a).
  - B. Joseph obediently traveled to Shechem and, with the help of a man, was able to trace them to Dothan (14b-17).
- II. Joseph's brothers conspired to kill him when they saw him coming but ended up selling him into slavery instead at the advice of Judah (18-28).
  - A. Joseph's brothers plotted to kill him to end his dreams (18-20).
    1. They conspired to kill him when they saw him coming (18).
    2. They planned to say an evil beast devoured him--and then would see what became of his dreams (19-20).
  - B. Reuben urged his brothers not to kill Joseph, for practical and personal reasons (21-22).
    1. Reuben urged his brothers not to lay a hand on him or shed his blood (21).
    2. Reuben urged them not to kill Joseph, because he was planning to deliver his brother (22).
  - C. Joseph's brothers stripped him and threw him into an empty cistern but then, at the advice of Judah, sold him to some Midianites who were going down to Egypt (23-28).
    1. Joseph suffered at the hands of his brothers, who stripped him and threw him into an empty cistern (23-24).
    2. Judah urged his brothers to sell Joseph for profit when Ishmaelite traders passed by their camp (25-27).
    3. Joseph again suffered at the hands of his brothers as they sold him into Egypt (28).
- IV. Epilogue: Joseph was sold to Potiphar in Egypt (37:36).

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## DEVELOPMENT OF THE PASSAGE

### I. *Obedient servants who faithfully keep their charge may suffer persecution from those who are disobedient (12-28).*

Whatever path Joseph's life is to take, the immediate track is downward, for in this act the favored son is sent from his father's love to his brothers' hatred. Opening dialogue between Jacob and Joseph (37:13-14) follows a notice that the brothers are pasturing their father's flocks near Shechem (37:12). The father charges his son to bring a report on the welfare of his brothers. The occasion will now be provided for the brothers to rid themselves of this thorn in their collective flesh. The brief interlude, in which Joseph meets the unnamed man in the fields of Shechem (37:15-17), serves, among other things, to underscore the isolation of the coming encounter between the brothers and to leave Joseph for a time suspended between father and brothers, between love and hatred. Dialogue, this time between his brothers, follows as Joseph approaches them (37:19-22).

The first scene provides the setting for the treachery. Israel naively decided to send Joseph to Shechem to see if all was well with his brothers. It should be noted that this incident parallels the beginning of the preceding act, in which Joseph brought back a report of his brothers (37:2). Perhaps the evil report of the earlier mission prompted Jacob to send Joseph on this one.

### *12* Introduction: Joseph's brothers leave to pasture the flocks in Shechem (12)

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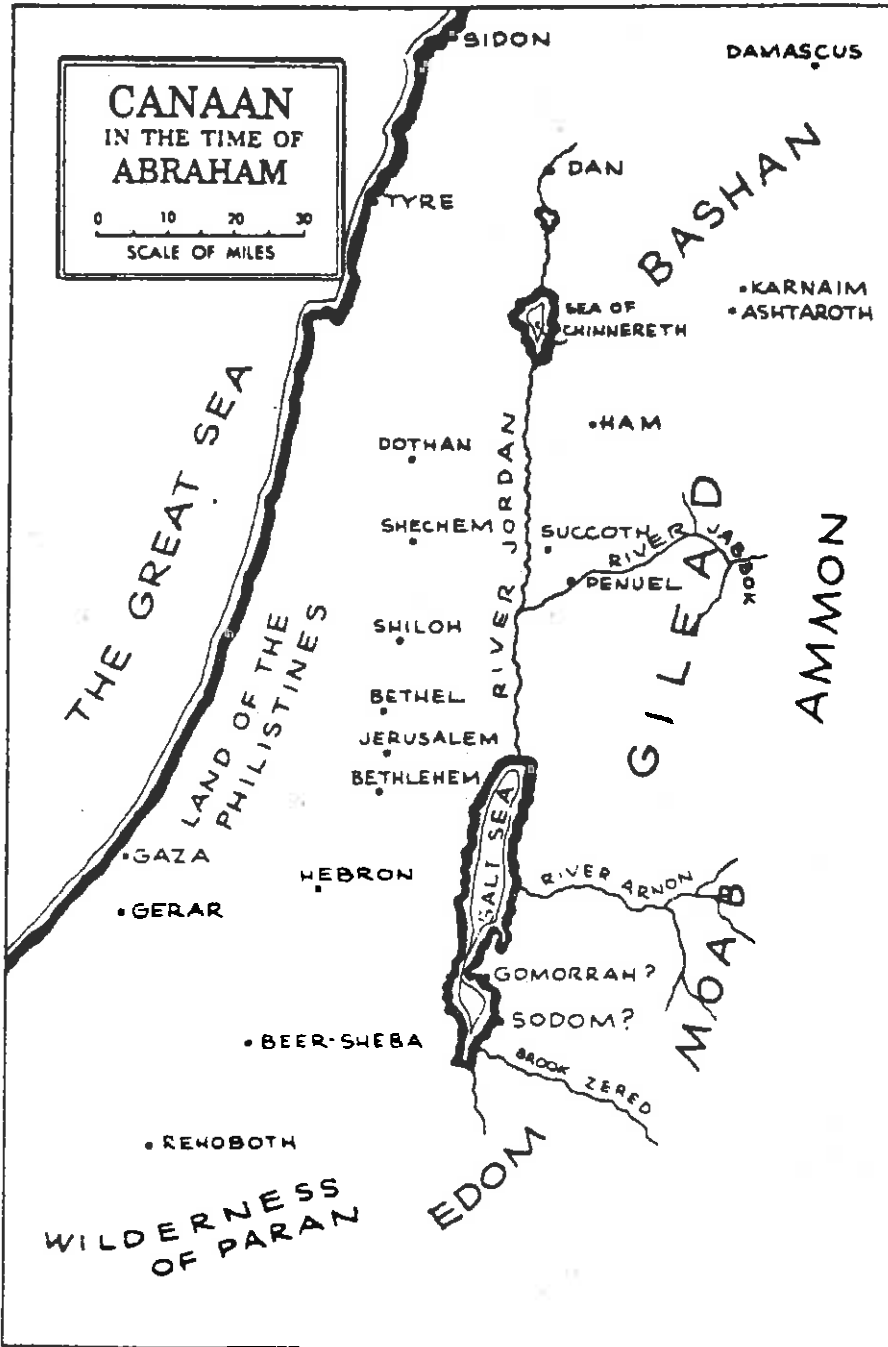
12 וַיֵּלְכוּ אָחָיו לְרֵעוֹת אֶת צֹאן אֲבִיהֶם בְּשֵׁחֶם

Then-they-left his-brothers to-pasture the-flocks of-their-father in-Shechem.

### 12 Then his brothers went to pasture their father's flock in Shechem.

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Noting the Massoretic punctuation in the Hebrew text, which cannot be reduplicated above as seen in the BH text, the following translation and punctuation affords a better sense of the overall context:



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"His brothers left: to pasture the sheep of their father in Shechem."

This translation is guided by two Massoretic markings, complementing each other, but disregarded by those who have translated this verse in the English versions.

The first Massoretic marking is an *atnah* under the one word (in Hebrew) "his-brothers" (יְהָיָו/’ehāyw), a cantillation mark to connote the end of a sentence (although not of a verse): "they left." The second Massoretic marking is two diacritical dots over the Hebrew letters ’et (אֵת), the particle which introduces a definitized noun, which in this case is "flocks." These dots are called *Puncta Extraordinaria* (special points) and is rarely found in the Masoretic text (Gen. 16:5; 18:9; 19:33; 33:4; Num. 3:39; 9:10; 21:30; 29:15; Deut. 29:28; 2 Sam. 19:20; Isa. 44:9; Ezek. 41:20; 46:22; Psa. 27:13). This marking intimates that "to pasture the flocks" was merely their claimed intention, whereas in reality, they "left for good," i.e., they seceded from the father's homestead. The significance of this is found in 37:11 where the brothers had come to know that Joseph had his dreams, because no son would otherwise dare to tell his father about it (v. 10a). That is why to their three-fold mentioned *hatred* (vv. 4,5,8), *envy* was added. They feared Joseph and decided to tolerate the situation no longer.

### Israel's Commission to Joseph (verse 13a-b)

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**13a-b** And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing *the flock* in Shechem? Come, and I will send you to them."

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While our narrator simply reports the journey of the brothers to Shechem, we hear about the trip of Joseph in more detail. The trip originates with Israel's commissioning speech to Joseph: "Come, and I will send . . ." Israel's commission to Joseph is far more weighty than appears on the surface.

Joseph is to see about the welfare (*shalom*) of the brothers and the welfare (*shalom*) of the flocks. The repetition of the word "welfare" in the wording of this commission provides an ominous link to the preceding section. Joseph was sent to see about their welfare, but they hated him so much that they were not able to speak "peaceably" (cf. v. 4) with him. The mission seemed doomed from the start.

Further, Israel directs Joseph to bring back a report. Does Israel know what he asks? While we have had narrative notice that the brothers were aware of their father's feelings for Joseph, and we are told of their own feelings (Gen. 37:4, 5, 8), we have not had any objective notice that Jacob is aware of his sons' reaction to all that he has done to manifest his love for Joseph. The brothers seem transparent; their words and what is said about them by the narrator fit. Jacob seems in some ways opaque, as his actions do not fit what should be clear to him. His treatment of Joseph would suggest a dangerous level of insensitivity, and insensitivity of one who is turned inward. But for the readers the tension rises still higher. One way to heighten suspense in a story is to send a person into what the listeners know is a dangerous situation.

A literary device concerning repetition is important to point out at this juncture. Repetition of apparent incidental bits of information, in literature in which incidental information is rare indeed, serves also to emphasize. For example, verse 12 states that "his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem." His father's first words to Joseph in the next verse are, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem?" The repetition of the narrator's words by Jacob is not verbatim, but the double "in Shechem" at first glance superfluous, serves to stress the great distance that separates the brothers to whom Joseph is being sent and the father who is sending him.

### 3B The Father Sends Joseph, the Faithful Son (verses 13c-14)

13c And he said to him, "I will go."

14 Then he said to him, "Go now and see about the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock; and bring work back to me." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem.

Joseph went in obedience to his father's commission (twice the Hebrew word for "sent" is used to stress this point, vv. 13b, 14). Obedience was the mark of Joseph, no matter what prospects lay ahead of him. In contrast to other commission speeches, Joseph offered no objections at all (cf. Exodus 3:11).

As we watch Joseph leave his father and head toward his brothers, we do it with expectation. We watch him leave his father (37:14b) and approach his brothers through lenses that reflect the eyes first of the doting

older man and then of the hate-filled older brothers. A very effective transition in this movement of Joseph from father to brothers, from love to hatred, is found in his brief encounter with the unnamed man in the fields outside of Shechem. Joseph is suspended for a moment, alone between father and brothers; but not quite alone, since we encounter him in a sort of swing of the camera angle through his meeting of an unnamed man and being directed to his brothers near Dothan (37:15-17).

As we will see elsewhere, repetition plays an important part in the Joseph narrative. One of the key terms used repeatedly is "peace" (שָׁלוֹם /šālôm), "harmony, peace, well-being." We are mindful in the last clause of the opening exposition that sets the stage for the narrative that Joseph's brothers hated him and "could not speak peaceably (*l'šālôm*) to him" (37:4b). After the opening episode in which the dreams of Joseph are recounted and elicit characteristic reactions from his brothers and father, we find that Jacob sends Joseph to his brothers and instructs him: "Go now, see if it is well with (*r'e'z 'et šālôm*) your brothers, and well with (*'et-šālôm*) the flock." Translations, like the RSV here cited, often omit all indication of the second *šālôm* before flock and use different words to capture distinct nuances of *šālôm* in 37:5 and 37:14. While offering more natural English, they deny the reader the pleasure of recognized irony: Jacob, earlier blind to or unconcerned with the wider impact of his token of special favor bestowed on his favored son, now sends him to look into the *šālôm* of those with whom this emissary has absolutely no relationship of *šālôm*, as the narrator told us at the outset. What will take place is, of course, the antithesis of *šālôm*.

#### 4B Joseph Seeks His Brothers and Finds Them (verses 15-17)

- 15 And a man found him, and behold, he was wandering in the field; and the man asked him, "What are you looking for?"
- 16 And he said, "I am looking for my brothers; please tell me where they are pasturing *the flock*."
- 17 Then the man said, "They have moved from here; for I heard *them* say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

The few verses that report the meeting of the man in Shechem who directed him to Dothan are a bit perplexing. This interlude has a brief exposition (v. 15a), an exchange of speeches (vv. 15b-17a), and then the resolution



(v. 17b). Joseph must have said more to the man than the text records. As B. Jacob notes, "The Bible has him speak with moving ambiguity, *I am seeking my brothers!* A sentence which reflects the soul of Joseph and of the whole story" (*Genesis*: 1974:253).

This incident retards the progress of the narrative and showing further diligence on the part of Joseph to find his brothers--who were not where they were supposed to be--and bring back the report to his father. Perhaps this scene was designed to show how helpless Joseph was away from his father--he was wandering in a field. And then, when he found his brothers, he was twelve miles farther away from his father.

The stranger's act in telling Joseph the whereabouts of his brothers must be understood as an act of hospitality. But ironically, in the context of the Narrative, this act of hospitality serves to direct Joseph right back into the path of danger, which makes disaster inevitable.

The man encountered in the fields outside Shechem serves to redirect the action and our perspective as he directs Joseph to Dothan and his brothers. Many commentators believe this figure unnecessary, and that no clear purpose is served in moving the brothers from Shechem to Dothan. For some this is only an elaborate device to transfer the brothers from the potentially dangerous Shechem area (given the events of Genesis 34) to the safer regions of Dothan. The encounter serves primarily to stay the action of the story at a critical point at which Israel unwisely--he seems willfully blind to the dynamics of his sons' interrelationships (as Issac was physically blind when he "mistakenly" gave the blessing to Jacob instead of Esau [Gen. 27])--thrusts the defenseless Joseph toward the group of embittered brothers in a setting far removed from any checks he might have on his sons. Not only is the reader delayed in finding out what will happen when the brothers encounter their youngest sibling, but the isolation of the coming encounter is keenly felt.

Joseph is at the center of our attention, but we are nevertheless not allowed to take in events from his perspective or to dwell on his feelings. We are not invited to empathize with Joseph by sharing his sense of isolation or fear as he approaches his brothers. As we have seen, his brothers' feelings are expressed time and again, both through their own words and actions and in the information contributed by the narrator. Although it is Joseph who knows so much, but is in essential ways the least known to the reader in that we receive fewest indications from the narrator of what motivates him.

The purpose of this small account of Joseph's seeking his brothers can be seen by comparing it with the brief and similar prelude to the second part of the story where he met his brothers in Egypt (chs. 42--44). The symmetry of the two passages and the verbal and thematic parallels serve to reinforce the sense in the narrative that every event is providentially ordered.

For example, when Joseph's brothers "saw him" (*waggir'ū 'otô*, v. 18) approaching, they "plotted" (*waggiṭnakkēlū*) "to kill him" (*lah'mîṭô*). In the same way midway through the narrative, when Joseph first "saw his brothers" (*wayyar' 'et-'ehāyw*, Genesis 42:7) in Egypt, he eluded his brothers by "disguising himself" (*wayyiṭnakkēr*, 42:7; NIV, "pretended to be a stranger") so that they did not recognize him and then planned a scheme that, at least on the surface, looked as if he intended to kill them (*w'lo' ṭāmūtū*, 42:20; NIV, "that you may not die").

#### 52 The Brothers' 1st Plan to Eradicate Joseph (verses 18-22)

The brothers are now far from their father's restraining presence. The mere sight of Joseph will ignite their hatred and murderous passions. The sight of a righteous person, whom the wicked hate, is an occasion of working mischief and evil against them.

#### 14 The conspiracy against the dreamer (vv. 18-20)

- 
- 18        When they saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted against him to put him to death.
- 19        And they said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer!
- 20        Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we will say, 'A wild beast devoured him.' Then let us see what will become of his dreams!"
- 

The text moves quickly to the plot of the brothers to prevent Joseph's dreams from being fulfilled. In the distance the brothers see Joseph coming, and in very biting language they mock by saying amongst themselves: "Here comes this dreamer!" By killing the dreamer, perhaps they can destroy the dream. The Hebrew term here for "killing," which connotes ruthless violence, is the same verb that is used when Cain slays Abel.

The crisis is somewhat similar to the plans of Isaac to give the blessing to the one who did not figure in God's plan (Gen. 27:2-4). This crisis was far more serious, however, for, rather than attempt to channel the blessing to the wrong person, the participants planned to destroy the brother to whom it apparently belonged.

The details of the brother's plans are given as well as their motivation. Behind their plans lie Joseph's two dreams. Little did they suspect that the very plans that they were then scheming were to lead to the fulfillment of those dreams. In every detail of the narrative the writer's purpose shows through, that is, to demonstrate the truthfulness of Joseph's final words to his brothers: "And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Genesis 50:20).

The words of the initial plan are worth noting in some detail (vv. 19-20). The speech begins and ends with a contemptuous and an ironic reference to Joseph's dreams: "Look, here comes this dreamer" and "we shall see what will become of his dreams." The plan was to slay him and throw him into some pit and then to lie about their crime: "An evil (*rā'āh*; NIV, "ferocious") beast has devoured him." But Reuben objects, suggesting an alternate plan (v. 22). Spilling the blood of their brother would set off an uncontrollable chain of events, according to ancient tradition. The only thing certain is that the killers would somehow have to face the consequences of their action (cf. Gen. 4:10; 9:6; Deut. 19:11-13). Instead, they cast Joseph in a dry cistern. Some brothers wanted the cistern to be a temporary stop on the way to the grave (vv. 18-20); Reuben hopes to accomplish Joseph's restoration (v. 22); and Judah suggests something in between (v. 27). The middle course proposed by Judah prevails.

*Reuben's opposition to the murderous plot (vv. 21-22)*

- 21 But Reuben heard *this* and rescued him out of their hands and said, "Let us not take his life."
- 22 Reuben further said to them, "Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but do not lay hands on him"--that he might rescue him out of their hands, to restore him to his father.

The plan was changed by Reuben, who was hoping to deliver Joseph to his father. Was Reuben hoping to regain favor after his folly with his father's concubines? On an earlier occasion he had impetuously asserted his rights as the firstborn by taking his father's concubine (Gen. 35:22); now he desperately asserts the authority that belongs to that status. His being under a cloud sharpened his sensitivity to the fact that he would surely bear the main share of blame for any misfortune. Perhaps he also hoped to regain his father's favor.

Whatever Reuben's motives were, his speech was a commendable corrective of the brothers' plan. He exhorted them "let us not take his life." Rather, "We shall not!" The statement is made with a decisiveness that tolerates no opposition. The use of the first person plural makes clear that this is to be their collective decision. Indeed, the brothers do not say another word, either of assent or dissent (contrast v. 27!).

After leaving suitable pause for his words to take effect, Reuben presses his psychological advantage: "Shed no blood!" Now he switches to the second person plural to emphasize his own loathing for the idea. Reuben's speech is made memorable by the repetition of sounds in the Hebrew text between the verbs "shed" (שָׁפַךְ), "throw" (שָׁלַךְ), and "send" (שָׁלַח).

The Hebrew word for "wilderness" in verse 22 refers to the extensive, uninhabited pasture land in the region of Dothan. The brothers believe that Joseph will die of hunger and exposure, while Reuben thinks he can rescue him somehow without their noticing.

### *bp* The Violation of Joseph (verses 23-24)

- 
- 23        So it came about, when Joseph reached his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the varicolored tunic that was on him;
- 24        and they took him and threw him into the pit. Now the pit was empty, without any water in it.
- 

The advice was accepted. The brothers stripped Joseph of the tunic his father had given him, the symbolism of favoritism and superiority, and threw him into the empty pit. In the course of the Narrative we will see that Joseph's clothing often changes at points of transition.

*Joseph is now  
NAKED - here  
link to  
Genesis 3.*

The other information called to the attention of the readers involve Joseph being thrown into a pit or cistern (an empty water cistern, perhaps similar to the rectangular, ten-foot-deep cisterns that still dot the landscape near the ancient site). They vary in depth from six to as much as twenty-four feet. Dried out cisterns were occasionally used as temporary places of detention. Murderers seem to have deliberately slaughtered their victims near such pits in order to dispose of the corpses there. One has only to bear in mind that lack of proper burial was considered to be the supreme dishonor in order to imagine something of the frenzied intensity of the brothers' hatred for Joseph. His wearing of the special tunic at the time probably was an added provocation.

By parallel repetition the narrator emphasizes that Joseph could not have drowned in the pit or cistern--but neither can he get out of the cistern by himself. Cisterns existed to catch rain so that there would be water for flocks during the dry season. The sterility of the cistern reflects the family situation. There is no life at either place. In addition, Joseph's imprisonment down in the pit stands in ironic juxtaposition with the image of elevation contained in his dreams.

It is striking that there is not a word about any reaction on Joseph's part, though Genesis 42:21 says in retrospect that Joseph begged his brothers. The narrator shows his skill in that the mention of it in Genesis 42:21 has a function, whereas here it has not, inasmuch as it is part of the crime to shut one's eyes to the suffering and pleas of the victim. The narrator trusts that his readers will understand. The pause that follows is a necessary preparation for the continuation of the action. The brothers sit down to eat.



### The Brothers' 2nd Plan to eradicate Joseph (verses 25-28)

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- 25 Then they sat down to eat a meal. And as they raised their eyes and looked, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing aromatic gum and balm and myrrh, on their way to bring *them* down to Egypt.
- 26 And Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood?
- 27 Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; for he is our brother, our *own* flesh." And his brothers listened to *him*.

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28        Then some Midianite traders passed by, so they pulled *him up* and lifted Joseph out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty *shekels* of silver. They they brought Joseph into Egypt.

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Remarkably, the brothers sat down "to eat bread." This is in callous indifference to their brother's anguished pleas, as we find out later in the Narrative (Gen. 42:21). The action allows time for further discussion of Joseph's fate in the absence of Reuben. At the same time, it provides an interlude until a fresh and final opportunity for vengeance develops.

It is ironic that they had planned to say that an evil beast had devoured Joseph (v. 20), and after they attacked him, they sat down to eat (v. 25). The two verbs in Hebrew, "devoured" and "eat" are from the same stem. The text thus signifies what evil beasts attacked Joseph--his brothers!

There is something portentous about this meal, as there is about the merchandise of the caravaneers, for later in the Narrative both reappear, and in the same language, as symbols of the reversal of fortunes between Joseph and his brothers (Gen. 43:11, 25, 31-32).

But then a new plan came to the brothers' attention, thanks to Judah. His speech, the third of the brothers' decisions, called for the sale of Joseph. He asked, "What profit is it if we slay our brother and conceal his blood?" With this first sign that they acknowledged Joseph as their brother came another, more convincing recognition of the kinship: "He is our brother and our flesh." Although this speech was designed to lessen their crime by selling their brother rather than murdering him, it ultimately underscored how wicked their deed was--they sold their brother, their own flesh and blood.

The reference to Joseph's coat, by turning our attention briefly back to the earlier events of the narrative, highlights the central point of the story, namely, that the present plan is all part of a larger divine plan foreshadowed in Joseph's dreams.

The narrative takes an important turn with the arrival of the "Ishmaelites" who were bearing spices down to Egypt (v. 25). The "Ishmaelites" become the occasion for Judah to enter the narrative with the suggestion that, rather than letting Joseph die (*nah<sup>a</sup>rög*, v. 26) in the pit, they could "sell him to the Ishmaelites" (v. 27). Only a cursory account of Joseph's fate follows in the

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text. The Ishmaelites, who are also called "Midianites" in this narrative, arrive, and Joseph is sold to them for twenty pieces of silver (v. 28). They then take him to Egypt with them.

It may seem confusing that the travelers in the caravan are identified as Ishmaelites in verses 25 and 27, and as Midianites in verses 28 and 36. Yet there is a simple explanation. It is likely that individuals from both groups of people composed the caravan. They journeyed together in the same general company. The statements in Judges 8:22-25, where the two people are mentioned together, further support this supposition. Here, though, our narrator segregates (with purposeful confusion) the two groups so that two parties are identified as having taken Joseph from Jacob, who incidentally also had two names himself, "Jacob" and "Israel."

The price received for Joseph was twenty pieces of silver, probably weighted out rather than tendered in coins. This would have been a fair price for a young lad who had not yet reached maturity (Lev. 27:5; Ex. 21:32). The amount would also have allowed for some profit in Egypt, at the other end of the slave trade.

Although war with foreign countries provided the main source of slaves in Egypt, commercial slave-trafficking was well established with both Syria and Canaan. This particular type of trade in human misery is well illustrated in Egyptian documents. One such document is the last will and testament of King Amen-em-het III (end of the 19th cent. BC), in which he provides for the disposal of four Asian slaves he had received as a gift from his brother. More interesting is a papyrus (BAP 35.1446) from 1740 BC, which contains inventory of servants on an estate. Thirty-seven of the ninety-five slaves listed are Asian. The documents derives from an age when there was no known military activity in Canaan and Syria and when there was active commerce between these two countries. There is thus evidence for a brisk trade with Egypt in Asian slaves. The sale of Joseph into Egyptian slavery accords well with what is known about the importation of slaves into that country from Canaan.

The solemn threefold repetition of the name "Joseph" in v. 28, which records the sordid transaction is very striking (smoothed out to one in some English translations, e.g., the NIV): "And they drew and lifted Joseph out of the pit. And they sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they brought Joseph to Egypt."

Joseph was thus treated harshly by his brothers but was preserved alive. The text passes over his suffering, concentrating on the brothers' wickedness. They all were involved in the crime, even Reuben and Judah. They were all in opposition to the divine plan. The narrator later introduces the motif of Joseph's pleas for mercy from this empty cistern (42:21). The brothers' cruelty in selling Joseph into slavery was matched by their equally cruel deceit in allowing their father to believe that he was dead. Their animosity was further emphasized when they asked Jacob to identify Joseph's bloodstained coat (Gen. 37:32).

Genesis 37:28 provides an ironic end to the brothers' plans. The brothers plot to kill Joseph; Judah convinces them to let Joseph live, but sell him to the Ishmaelites. Reuben wants to double-cross the brothers and rescue Joseph. None of those plans actually come to pass. The literary skill of our narrator shines: the syntax of this scene is somewhat ambiguous, that is, the syntactical ambiguity in the Hebrew text signals a breakdown in the ability of the brothers to fully shape events. Thus ironically, despite all of their schemes, the ambiguity of the text leaves the brothers having managed no murder, no profit, no dramatic rescue, and they have no idea where Joseph is.

The brothers' sale, at Judah's suggestion, of their own flesh and blood kinsman for the silver of the Ishmaelites, is another event which is typical of one in the life of the Christ. As Joseph's siblings sold him for silver, so our own LORD was betrayed by his Judas (another Judah) for thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 26:15).

II. *Those who would destroy the righteous find it necessary to deceive others about their sin but succeed only in causing grief (29-35).*

*Reuben* Reuben Seeks Joseph and Does Not Find Him (verses 29-30)

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- 29 Now Reuben returned to the pit, and behold, Joseph was not in the pit; so he tore his garments.
- 30 And he returned to his brothers and said, "The boy is not *there*; as for me, where am I to go?"



The plan of the sons to say that an evil beast devoured Joseph had to be carried out, once Reuben discovered that they had sold the lad. His initial response was anxiety--he tore his clothes and lamented his dilemma. Apparently as the oldest of the brothers a certain amount of responsibility lay with him; more important, though, his plan to deliver Joseph had been foiled. The speech of Reuben declares that those who act on hate have no place to hide from the destruction they have released: "The boy is not *there*; as for me, where am I to go?" All that was left now was to deceive the father.

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The Faithless Sons Send Joseph's Tunic to Their Father (verses 31-33)

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- 31      **So they took Joseph's tunic, and slaughtered a male goat, and dipped the tunic in the blood;**  
 32      **and they sent the varicolored tunic and brought it to their father and said, "We found this; please examine *it* to *see* whether it is your son's tunic or not."**  
 33      **Then he examined it and said, "It is my sons's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!"**
- 

The theme of deception thus appears once again in the family traditions: the deceiver (Jacob) was being deceived by his sons. Ironically his sons dipped Joseph's tunic in the blood of a "kid of the goats" to deceive the father into thinking that Joseph was dead. It was with two kids of the goats that Jacob deceived his father Isaac (Gen. 27:9). Thus Jacob, who deceived his father and brother, and who thereby won what was not by right his, is now deceived by his sons and deprived of the one he treasures most.

An unusual pair of verbs in the Hebrew text speaks about the blood-splattered robe. The brothers *sent* and *brought* the robe to Jacob (v. 32). With these two verbs fighting against each other, the narration expresses the ambivalence of the return home. Israel had sent Joseph to see to the brothers' welfare, instructing him to bring back a report. What is brought back is the brothers' report and Joseph's blood-splattered special tunic.

The brothers "sent" (answers the initial commission of Joseph, who was "sent" to them [vv. 13-14]) the garment to their father and brought it in to him with a degree of callousness that could come only from their hatred: "This have we found; recognize now whether it be your son's tunic or not." No longer do they speak of their brother or their flesh; it is now "your son."

It should be noted that the brothers are careful to let the contrived object do the lying for them: "This (*zot*) have we found. Please recognize (*hakerna*), is it your son's tunic or not?" And of course they appropriately refer to Joseph as "your son," not by name nor as their brother. Jacob now has Joseph's coat and it is the catalysis for great grief.

Once again we should note our narrator's literary artistry. He restricts himself to a narrative chain: "they took . . . slaughtered . . . dipped . . . said." There is not a word about any discussion, not a word as to whether all the brothers acted together, not a word about the brothers' reaction when Reuben makes known his intention. Everything moves from the situation; the mere sequence of events sets the unalterable in sharp relief; all that remains is to conceal the deed and deceive the father. The tunic is the means of concealment; the garment motif now recurs for the third time. The brothers show the father the blood-stained tunic, the gift from the loving father. The Narrative began with the gift. It was this that aroused the brothers' hatred and moved them to tear the cloak from Joseph, far from his father. They now bring the blood-stained tunic back to him so as to conceal what they have done.

LB  
BB  
Jacob's Lament Over Joseph (verses 34-35)

- 34 So Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned for his son many days.
- 35 Then all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, "Surely I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son." So his father wept for him.

The response of Jacob was predictable--he recognized it. His conclusion was exactly what they had conspired to promote, perhaps under their prompting. Jacob concluded that an evil beast devoured Joseph--"Joseph was undoubtedly torn in pieces." The repetition and the Hebrew construction suggest that this outburst was a form of a lament. The text affirms such a conclusion: "And Jacob tore his clothes" (v. 34). Jacob's cry of lament forms the low point of the Joseph story; from here on there could only be healing and reconciliation.

Jacob picks up the hint of his son's supposed death and declaims it metrically before his family (Jacob's speech switches into formal verse, a neat semantic parallelism that scans with three beats in each phrase [*ḥayah ra'ah*

*'akhalathu / tarof toraf Yosef*). Three short phrases: the third with the reinforcing infinitive (*tārōp tārōp*), the first in Hebrew simply binding the critical nouns "robe" and "my son."

The reader should note the unusual length of Jacob's bereavement which is described in vv. 34-35: "So Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, 'Surely I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son'. So his father wept for him."

In two brief verses half a dozen different activities of mourning are recorded, including the refusal to be consoled and direct speech in which the father expresses the wish to mourn until he joins his son in death. (Later, ironically, he will "go down" to his son not to Sheol, but to Egypt.) One can hardly dismiss all these gestures of mourning as standard Near Eastern practice, since the degree of specification and synonymity is far beyond the norms of the narrative itself. Thus, just a few verses earlier (Genesis 37:29), when Reuben imagines Joseph is dead, his sincere sense of bereavement is expressed quite simply with "He tore his clothes"--in Hebrew only two words and a particle.

Jacob's last words in this act ("Certainly, I shall go down (*'ērād*) to my son, mourning, to Sheol") are nicely balanced, first by the factual and objectively dry notice that the Midianites sold him in Egypt (Gen. 37:36) and then by the opening of chapter 39 (the next scene of the Narrative after the interlude of the episode about Judah and Tamar): "and Joseph was brought down (*hūrad*) to Egypt." There is irony in Jacob's words that the sensitive reader will not miss. Joseph has indeed "gone down," and in time Jacob will be "brought down" (Gen. 45:13, again the verb *yārad*) to him, to Egypt if not to Sheol. In the Hebraic tradition, Egypt is overwhelmingly the symbol of bondage and of death; it is in many ways Sheol.

Jacob recognizes that no **peace** exits in the family (Gen. 37:35). He goes into a grief so deep, no one can help him out. The good death in the Bible occurs when a person completes a long life and goes to Sheol "in peace" (Gen. 15:15; 1 Kgs. 2:6; 1 Chron. 34:28). Sheol is either left as a proper name (NASB, RSV) or improperly rendered as "grave" (NIV) in the EVV. In the Old Testament, Sheol designates the shadowy underworld to which all persons go. Jacob will go to Sheol in grief. The loss of his most loved son causes inconsolable grief. But in the context of this Narrative, Jacob's grief reflects

the disintegration of the family--the family through whom all other families were to receive blessing.

The paragraph which pictures Jacob's grief is chiasmic in structure. As we shall see, there are places in the Joseph narrative where such chiasmic units are used to sign off (with a flourish) a major episode.

- A Jacob **tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his loins,**  
 B and **mourned** for his son many days.  
 C All his sons and all his daughters **arose to comfort him,**  
 C' **but he refused to be comforted.**  
 B' and he said 'Surely I will go down to Sheol in **mourning** for my son.'  
 A' So his father **wept** for him.

It is interesting to observe the extent of Jacob's mourning for Joseph, how he refused to be comforted, resigning himself to go to his grave in mourning over Joseph. One recalls how, after Isaac was deceived by Jacob, Esau sought to console himself by planning to kill Jacob, the deceiver (27:42). This scene, even though sad for Jacob, is another example of reaping what was sown (Gal. 6:7-8). A family that so easily deceives to win their way cannot hope for anything but pain and grief. The brothers succeeded in their plan--they got rid of Joseph. But they also succeeded in causing inconsolable grief and bitter pain in the family.

Once again the coat that Jacob had given to Joseph provides the narrative link in the story. They symbol of the brothers' original hatred for Joseph becomes the means of the father's recognition of his loss. In the end the blood-stained coat is all that remains of Joseph, and upon seeing it Jacob tore off his own coat and exchanged it for sackcloth (v. 34).

Thus Jacob's own fate and that of his sons is briefly sketched out in this opening narrative. The chapter closes with the cover-up of the crime. Reuben, who had planned to rescue Joseph later, is frantic at the discovery of the empty pit. The cover-up is successful as far as concealing the crime from their father, Jacob, but the excessive and prolonged grief of Jacob is clearly somewhat heavier than the brothers anticipated. If they had any sense of decency at all, they would have felt miserable when offering their hypocritical words of solace to their grief stricken father. However, this evil deed would prey upon the consciences of the brothers for years to come. The awful episode would come to mind immediately when they appeared before Joseph in Egypt

much later. How dreadful to have been burdened with such a guilt-provoking secret for so long.

On the most obvious level this episode records the "crime of the century" as far as scandals within the families of the patriarchs. No attempt is made to play down the crime or its disastrous results on Jacob (and on the men themselves?). On the other hand, Joseph's destiny is foreshadowed clearly in the dreams and in the desperate attempt of his brothers to frustrate prophecy. The chapter closes with Joseph sold as a slave into Egypt--which in retrospect proves to be the first stage of his coming to power in that land.

What happens to Joseph foreshadows all that will happen to the sons of Jacob. They will be carried down into Egypt and will be put into slavery. In this sense, then, Jacob's final words set the focus of the narrative to follow: "Surely I will go down to Sheol (= "pit") in mourning for my son" (v. 35). Ironically, the Joseph narrative concludes with Jacob's going down to Egypt (46:3-4) to see his son and then with his own death (50:24-26).

### III. In spite of the persecution and the deception, God's program will continue (36).

#### Epilogue: Joseph Is Sold and Travels to Egypt (verse 36)

36 Meanwhile, the Midianites sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, Pharaoh's officer, the captain of the bodyguard.

The final verse of the chapter is short but critical. Joseph has been taken to Egypt and sold to Potiphar, an officer in the royal guard. The one who lost his royal coat now becomes the servant of royalty. Furthermore, it reports that Joseph was not an ordinary field slave but had already entered a place of higher responsibility. The verse stands in remarkable contrast to the grief in Hebron and to the brothers' attempts to destroy him and end his dreams.

We need to observe what has happened narratively in the journeys of the brothers and Joseph. The brothers travel to Shechem (v. 12); then Joseph follows with instructions to see their well-being (vv. 13-14). After the encounter at Dotham the brothers return home (v. 32); Joseph is taken as a ser-

vant to Egypt (v. 36). On the surface everything has gone wrong. However, the very regular structure of the episode, the brothers' trip, Joseph's trip, encounter, brothers' trip, Joseph's trip, may signal that all is not as hopeless as it at first seems.

If, as we are explicitly told, this is a story of divine providence, the overarching *purpose* is evident everywhere. In the providence of God, Joseph "happens" to be sent off alone and unprotected to visit his brothers. Similarly, in the providence of God, Reuben "happens" to be absent when the actual selling of Joseph takes place. And, of course, a caravan "happens" by at just the right time--and the spur-of-the-moment impulse to sell Joseph is carried out. In one devastating clap everything is changed--and, of course, the chief participant (Joseph) has no sure clue as to the end of the drama in which he is involved.

## 6A APPLICATION

This chapter in the story of Joseph is one of treachery and deception; it centers on Joseph, the faithful son, but is essentially about the brothers, who sought to rid themselves of the favored son and perhaps open the way for a better status for themselves. But the blessing does not go to such as do these things. Moreover, God's choice of a leader cannot be so easily altered.

The message could be worded either from the perspective of the righteous who suffer or from the perspective of the envious brothers. Since it is all the story of Joseph, the expositor would do well to make him the focal point. The unit teaches that God's faithful servant may suffer devastating persecution from those who hate him or her, who deceive others about their persecution, and whose evil deeds cause great grief, but will survive to fulfill his or her destiny in God's program. In short, *those who faithfully serve their master often must endure grievous persecution but cannot be prevented from fulfilling their God-given destiny.* In this chapter the destiny was revealed through the dreams; when the brothers sought to kill Joseph and see what became of his dreamed destiny, a strange set of circumstances and voices of moderation worked to deliver Joseph alive to Egypt, where he eventually fulfilled this destiny. Far from preventing Joseph's dream, the brothers actually became the agents of fulfilling it.

In the New Testament Paul catalogued the persecutions and sufferings that he had to endure in his service for God (2 Corinthians 4:7-18). In all

his trials and tribulations, he did not lose heart, because he kept his sight on the goal that was set before him--as must every believer who desires to fulfill God's will (see Romans 8:31). In spite of envy, hatred, and even persecution from others, the spiritual leader can rest assured that, if God has chosen him or her for a task, no amount of opposition can nullify that destiny. Rather, God may use the opposition in working out His will.

At his father's bidding, the obedient son, Joseph, went to his evil brothers. In similar manner was our greater Joseph, the Messiah, sent by His Father to His own. Over forty times in the Gospel of John, our LORD refers to Himself as the one sent by the Father (for example, see John 5:23, 30, 36). He came unto His people, and as John 1:11 states, "His own did not receive Him." Rather, they cast Him out of the vineyard in order to seize the inheritance for themselves (Lk. 20:13-15).

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What do you learn about Joseph and his brothers in this chapter?
2. What is the significance of this passage in the developing program of God's covenant people? See Genesis 15 for some help.
3. Why do you think that the narrator chose not to tell us anything what Joseph said while he was being stripped of his coat and thrown into the pit?
4. What ironies show up in the narrative? You may have to think ahead and back to see all the reversals.
5. From our study, what pictures of their father do you think Jacob's sons and daughter carried with them throughout their lives?
6. How is the literary device of repetition used in Genesis 37:12-36?



## Genesis 38:1-30

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### To Champion Righteousness

#### THE TRIUMPH OF RIGHTEOUSNESS IN A CORRUPT FAMILY

This bizarre and somewhat enigmatic story seems at first glance to abruptly intrude upon the Narrative of Joseph by an episode about Judah that seems to be entirely unconnected to what precedes and follows it. Suddenly Judah, not Joseph, becomes the main brother in the Narrative. Tamar, rather than Joseph, becomes the primary victim.

In the overall strategy of the Joseph Narrative, this chapter plays a crucial role. The very fact that it seems "out of place" shows that the writer has placed it here for a very special purpose—especially in light of the overall chiasmic structure of the Joseph Narrative, for it symmetrically balances the other seemingly intrusive episode of Jacob blessing his sons in chapter 49.

Judah separates himself from his brothers, marries, and has three sons. In time, he finds a wife for his first-born son. She dies childless soon after his marriage. The second son refuses to follow what was then the common procedure and marry his dead brother's wife. Then he, too, dies. When the widowed Tamar realizes that her claim for a husband is unlikely to be satisfied even through the third son of Judah, she deceives her father-in-law. Oblivious of her identity, Judah is intimate with her. Tamar gives birth to unexpected twins.

The first verse notes only that these events occurred "at the same time" (בְּצֵאת / *bā'ēthahiw*; NASB, "And it came about at that time"; NIV, "At that time"; see also Gen. 21:22), connecting in time with the sale of Joseph with the marriage of Judah. The Hebrew temporal clause does not mark an exact date, nor specify an exact time. It is used only to indicate in a loose and general way a connection with the period in which the events in the course of being narrated took place. For example in Deuteronomy 10:8, the clause introduces a narrative of a sequence of actions which transpires over thirty-eight years (cf. Num. 3:6) before the transactions which the narrator has associated it.



Several interpreters, including Augustine, assume that Judah's exploits were taking place at the same time as the events described in chapter 37. This is not likely, however. When Joseph was sold to Egypt, Judah was present with his brothers taking care of the flocks. Judah's visit to Adullam and all the resulting events could hardly have been a momentary exploit. Moreover, our chapter begins with the statement that, "Judah left his brothers." In view of this it would seem more acceptable to place this entire episode subsequent to when Joseph was taken to Egypt.

Reuben is the first-born of Jacob; yet it is not he but Judah, the fourth son, who rises to prominence in the Joseph Narrative. It was Judah who suggested the sale of Joseph (Gen. 37:26f), and it is he who will soon become the spokesman for his brothers to their father (Gen. 43:3-5, 8-10). It is Judah who assumes a position of leadership when the delegation runs into trouble in Egypt (Gen. 44:14-16) and who negotiates on behalf of the family for the release of the youngest brother (Gen. 44:18-34). Finally, it is Judah whom Jacob selects to spearhead the migration to Egypt (Gen. 46:28). Therefore, although the Joseph Narrative recounts the rise of Joseph, it also subtly registers as well the ascendancy of Judah.

As far as the Book of Genesis, this chapter plays an important part in the development of its central themes. The stage is being set for the future fulfillment of the divine promise to Abraham--"kings shall come forth from you (Gen. 17:6)--and to Jacob--"Kings shall issue from your loins" (Gen. 35:11). Two kingdoms resulted from these divine promises to the patriarchs: Judah became the name of the southern kingdom, while the northern kingdom of Israel was known as Joseph (cf. Zech. 10:6). The present chapter, then, provides a foil to the Joseph-centered episodes. It hints, ever so obliquely, at the future Joseph-Judah polarity in the history of the people of Israel, which someday according to prophetic oracle, the two shall be joined into one, under the reign of David's greater son, the Messiah (Ezek. 37:15-23; 2 Sam. 7).

As before in the Book of Genesis, the narrative begins with the mention of three sons (cf. the three sons of Adam [Abel, Cain, Seth], Noah [Shem, Ham, Japheth] and Terah [Abram, Nahor, Haran]). Two of Judah's sons died because of the evil (*ra'*; NIV, "were wicked") they did; thus the offspring of Judah was put in jeopardy. Who would prolong the seed?

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The point of this introductory information is to show that the continuation of the house of Judah lay in his hands, but Judah does nothing to further the offspring of his own household. It takes the "righteousness" of the woman Tamar (v. 26) to preserve the seed of Judah. A nearly identical theme is found in the Book of Ruth (4:18), which itself alludes to this chapter of Genesis. It is striking to note that both Tamar and Ruth share the desire to raise up heirs for their deceased husbands, which is eventually realized in both cases. Both women, moreover, together with their husbands, belong to the direct ancestry of King David.

It is apparent that this episode is a self-contained family narrative that deals with a case of family law. At issue is the distressing case of childlessness, which is common in patriarchal narratives, but in this case the young woman is a childless widow. As a piece of family history this chapter is important in settling the seniority within the tribe of Judah, and it contributes to the royal genealogy in Matthew 1:3 and Luke 3:33.

The episode about Tamar and Judah may have served another purpose apart from its purpose within the Joseph Narrative, for it does explain developments within the tribal organization of Judah. This tradition accounted for the origin of the three principal clans of Judah by the story of the struggle of Tamar to be mother in Judah and the struggle of Perez to gain the precedence over his brother.

Set in formative days of the tribe, the narrative would seek to explain Judah's isolation from the other tribes and its amalgamation with Canaanites, the extinction of the oldest branches of the tribe, and the rivalry of its youngest branches. The account thus records the beginnings of Judah's tribal history. Suggestions that the whole episode was of Canaanite origin do not hold up under close examination, for the genealogical information makes it clear that this incident was in the family of Judah.

### **Chronological Considerations**

Two alleged chronological problems have led some scholars to suggest that Genesis 38 was inserted into its present location by a later editor of Genesis (and thus Moses did not write/edit it). Despite the chronological problems this insertion would pose, the editor who wanted to include the Judah-Tamar story could find no better place to do so without causing even more difficulty.

As to the first alleged problem, it is often argued that the time between the sale of Joseph (Gen. 37:25-36) and the migration of Jacob's clan into Egypt (Gen. 46:1-7), which included Judah and his twin sons, would have been insufficient for the events of Genesis 38 to have transpired. In the space of 22 years, Judah would have had to marry, father three sons, see them grow old enough to be married, and then father the twin sons born to Tamar.

That a span of 22 years occurred between Joseph's sale and the family of Jacob's migration into Egypt can be established from references to the age of Joseph at various points in his life. Genesis 37:2 indicates that Joseph was 17 years old when he was sold by his brothers to the Midianites and subsequently taken to Egypt. In Genesis 41:46, Joseph's appointment by Pharaoh came when Joseph was 30 years of age. Thus 13 years had elapsed. Genesis 41:46-49 then describes the seven years of abundance at the end of which 20 years would have passed since Joseph was sold by his brothers. Genesis 45:6-7 indicates that Joseph's revelation of himself to his brothers and the subsequent move of Jacob's family into Egypt came two years into the famine. This brings the total to 22 years which had elapsed between Joseph's sale and Jacob's move to Egypt.

The second problem stems from Genesis 46:12, which mentions two grandsons of Judah, sons of Perez, among the sons of Israel who migrated to Egypt. If Perez and Zerah were born near the end of the 22-year period, as Genesis 38 implies, it would have been impossible for Perez to produce the offspring mentioned in Genesis 46:12 before or during the migration to Egypt.

In reference to these alleged problems of the events in Genesis 38 and 46:12 taking place in a 22-year period, Bush's comments represent the opinion of many critical scholars:

This period is evidently too short for the occurrence of all these events, and we are therefore necessitated to refer the commencement of them at least as far back as to about the time of Jacob's coming to Shechem, Gen. 33:18; but the incidents are related here because there was no more convenient place for them (Bush, *Notes on Genesis*, 2:238).

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### Chronological Solutions

On further examination, however, these two supposed chronological difficulties may be satisfactorily resolved.

In response to the first problem, it would not have been impossible for the events of Genesis 38 to have taken place during the 22-year span between the end of Genesis 37 and the commencement of Genesis 39. Judah could have married within six months or so after Joseph's sale into Egypt and could have had three sons within three years (note the quick succession of the sons in Genesis 38:3-5). Or Judah could have married before Joseph was sold into Egypt. Since young people married at early ages in comparison with today, Er, the first son, could have married Tamar when he was about 15 or 16. He may have died a short time later, at which point Onan was commanded to perform the levirate duty for Tamar. Onan's sin and death may have occurred between 16 and 18 years after Joseph's exile. This leaves a couple of years for Shelah to reach marriageable age and to be withheld from Tamar. Time is still left for Tamar's deception, her pregnancy, her delivery of twin sons, and Judah's two trips into Egypt with his brothers to buy grain. No doubt the coming of the famine forced Judah to rejoin his father's clan.

It is therefore evident for the events of Genesis 38 to have taken place in such a time frame. In fact, Cassuto has further observed that the opening words of Genesis 38:1, "And it came about at that time," reflect an awareness on the part of the author of the short time in which the events of the chapter must occur. He comments:

From the opening words of the section we immediately note that the author was not unaware that the period of time, with which he was dealing, was short and that the happenings that occurred therein were many, and that he must consequently bring them into the closest possible harmony. Hence he did not begin with the formula commonly found in . . . Genesis, "And it came to pass after these things," not does he write simply "And Judah went down from his brethren," but he uses the expression "And it came to pass at that time," as though he wished to emphasize that immediately after the selling of Joseph, at that very time, Judah went down from his brothers and married the daughter of Shua (U. Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies*, 1973:39-40).

If Cassuto is right in suggesting that Er did not marry Tamar until he was 18, the chronology becomes even tighter. Er's marriage and subsequent death would have been in the sixth year of plenty when Joseph was 36. Onan, at 17 years of age, could have then married Tamar and died in the same year. Meanwhile Shelah would have only been 16. Two years could then pass by until Shelah was 18, convincing Tamar that Judah would not give her to Shelah. This would have been Joseph's 38th year and the first year of the period of famine. Then in the second year of the famine Tamar would have given birth to the twins. Later that year, when the twins were a few months old, the family of Jacob would have migrated to Egypt.

The second chronological difficulty concerns the mention of Judah's grandsons in Genesis 46:12. Obviously Judah's sons Perez and Zerah were quite young, perhaps just a few months old, when they traveled to Egypt. Therefore it would have been impossible for Perez to have fathered Hezron and Hamul, his two sons mentioned in Genesis 46:12, before the journey into Egypt.

A closer look, however, at Genesis 46:12 reveals a variation in the mention of Hezron and Hamul. The end of the verse reads: "And the sons of Perez were (וְהַזְּרָחִים) Hezron and Hamul." Yet throughout Genesis 46, the listing of descendants was done without the use of a verbal form. For example, verse 12a reads, "And the sons of Judah: Er and Onan and Shelah and Perez and Zerah."

Cassuto comments on the "special phraseology" employed in the mention of Hezron and Hamul: "This external variation creates the impression that the Bible wished to give us here some special information that was different from what it desired to impart relative to the other descendants of Israel" (Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies*, 1973:34). Cassuto then explains the intention behind this special phraseology:

It intended to inform us thereby that the sons of Perez were not among those who went down to Egypt, but are mentioned here for some other reason. This is corroborated by the fact that Joseph's sons were also not of those who immigrated into Egypt, and they, too, are mentioned by a different formula (Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies*, 1973:35).

While the author considered it necessary to mention Hezron and Hamul in the list of Jacob's family, it was done in such a way as to distinguish them from the descendants who actually migrated to Egypt with Jacob.

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Furthermore, the omission of the genealogy of Perez at the end of chapter 38, in contrast to Genesis 46:12, strongly indicates that no grandsons had been born within the time span encompassed by the events described in the chapter.

### Source Criticism Considerations

Scholars who consider Genesis 38 as having no literary connection with the Joseph Narrative whatsoever, generally assume it to be a later intrusion. This conclusion has ensued from the story's position amidst the Joseph Narrative. Many commentators describe the positioning of Genesis 38 by terms such as "unconnected, independent, interruption" (Wright, "The Positioning of Genesis 38," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 94 [1982]:532). Von Rad asserts, "Every attentive reader can see that the story of Judah and Tamar has no connection at all with the strictly organized Joseph story at whose beginning it is now inserted" (*Genesis*, 1961:351). Similarly Brueggemann alleges, "This peculiar chapter stands alone, without connection to its context. It is isolated in every way and is most enigmatic" (*Genesis*, 1982:307).

Those who divide the sources generally ascribe chapter 38 to "J," because the name "Jahweh" appears three times in verses 7 and 10. More recent studies have ascribed the passage to the "fourth source"--an unknown redactor of the Torah. One argument that has been used to assign this material to a separate source is that Judah is presented here as living apart from his brothers, while in chapter 37 and in later chapters he is reported living with his brothers and father. Some have even argued that Genesis 38:5 suggests that Judah acquired an immediate possession in Canaan and that this excluded him from a stay in Egypt. It is possible, however, that Judah's departure from the rest of the family, which is recorded here, was of short duration and that he later rejoined them. If this was the case, the events recorded in the latter part of chapter 38 must have taken place during the first few years of the great famine. It is even conceivable that it was precisely the crisis of the famine that drove Judah back into the company of his family. To suggest that Genesis 38:5 indicates that Judah at this time established a permanent home in Canaan is reading far more into the text than is there.

This conclusion can be drawn only if we assume, as many of the critics do, that this entire chapter does not deal with individual persons but with events of a tribe. This, however, is wholly untenable. It cannot be denied that Judah and Tamar are presented here as actual persons. To present their experiences as personifications of tribal events is wholly unacceptable. Even the comments about some of the lesser figures in the narrative, such as Onan, can hardly be interpreted as referring to tribal groups. One of the strongest arguments favoring the position that this is actual history dealing with real persons is that Judah is presented here in a very unfavorable light. If this was a matter of Jewish myth or nationalistic fantasy, the later Israelites certainly would have laundered out such tales.

As far as the Joseph Narrative, chapter 38 has been inserted between chapters 37 and 39 because it forms part of the account of Jacob's family (note "these are the generations of Jacob" in Gen. 37:2). So while the "focal element" of these chapters is the Joseph story, the basic unit of narration in Genesis 37--50 is unified around Jacob and his sons. Therefore it is wrong to deny categorically any connection or relationship between Genesis 38 and the Joseph Narrative as a whole. In fact, the genealogy of Judah which is reported in Genesis 46:12 requires knowledge of 38:3-10, 29-30 in order for it to be understood.

Furthermore in response to the charge that Genesis 38 breaks a bond between Genesis 37:36 and 39:1, the language of 37:36 and 39:1 allows for a gap into which Genesis 38 nicely fits. Genesis 39:1 reiterates the information given in 37:36, explaining that Joseph had been taken into Egypt and sold to Potiphar. Though restatement is common in Hebrew narrative, such a specific rehearsal by 39:1 of the details given in 37:36 would not be expected if the former followed right on the heels of the latter.

This digression of the events of Genesis 38 heightens the reader's suspense at a critical moment in the Joseph Narrative, but the skillful blending of the chapter into the larger story shows that the digression is deliberate and the result of careful literary design by possessing a literary interconnectedness with its context. The same narrative device functioned in the Narratives of Abraham (chs. 14; 19) and Jacob (chs. 26; 34).

In addition of retarding the narrative pace and to keep the audience in suspense concerning the fate of both Joseph in Egypt and his family in Canaan, the episode in chapter 38 provides a counter pointing commentary on what we have witnessed of this family and a proleptic look at what is yet to

come. The effect for the sensitive reader is to bring to awareness certain critical dimensions and themes in the larger Narrative, thereby to shape perspectives for reading what is to come. In subtle ways this digression informs our reading of the Narrative in which it is set.

There is, one might add, genealogical irony in the insertion of chapter 38 at this point in the Joseph Narrative. For while Joseph, next to the youngest of the sons, will eventually rule over his brothers in his own lifetime as splendidly as he has dreamed, it is Judah, the fourth born, who will be the progenitor of the kings of Israel, as the end of this chapter will remind us and as prophesied in Jacob's oracle (Gen. 49:8-12).

A close reading of chapter 38 will surface a general similarity to the Joseph Narrative in which connections are forged through a whole series of explicit parallels and contrasts: sharing certain vocabulary words and phrases, common themes in that both Jacob and Judah are deceived and subsequently forced to give recognition to a piece of evidence, particular attention to like apparel, and fundamental themes like retribution, morality and the triumph of harmony and righteousness.

#### Vocabulary Similarities

The concluding statement of chapter 37, about the sale of Joseph to Potiphar, is repeated in the first verse of chapter 39, thus providing continuity after the intervening diversion. The recurring use of certain key words in the Hebrew text also forges verbal links between chapter 38 and its preceding and following chapters. Thus the Hebrew root *y-r-d* appears in Genesis 37:35 (*'ered*, "I will go down"), 38:1 (*וַיֵּרֵד/wa-yered*, lit. "he went down"), and 39:1 (*הוּרַד/hurad*, "was taken down"); the root *n-kh-r* is found in Genesis 37:32 (*הִכָּר/hakker*, lit. "recognize"), verse 33 (*וַיִּכְרָה/wa-yakkirah*, "he recognized it"), as well as in 38:25 (*הִכָּר/hakker*) and verse 26 (*וַיַּכֵּר/wa-yakker*); the root *n-h-m* is used twice in Genesis 37:35 (*לְנַחֵמוֹ/le-naḥamo*, "to comfort him"; *לְהִתְנַחֵם/le-hitnaḥem*, "to be comforted") and in 38:12 (*וַיִּנְחֵם/wa-yinnaḥem*, "was comforted"); while the root *'-r-b* is employed in Genesis 38:17, 18, and 20 (*וַיַּעֲרֹב/erabon*, "a pledge") and in Genesis 43:9 (*וְאֶעֱרַבְנִי/'e'erwennu*, lit. "I will pledge myself for him") and 44:32 (*וַיַּעֲרַב/arab* ("has pledge himself").



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### Thematic Similarities

A kid from the flock plays a role in the Joseph Narrative (Gen. 37:31) as well as in this one (vv. 17, 20). Deception plays a formative role in both chapters 37 and 38. Not only does Judah deceive once more as he leads his daughter-in-law Tamar to expect marriage in time to his youngest son, but this deceiver is now deceived in turn by Tamar. Her deceit, however, is clearly in the service of righting a wrong, as Judah himself is willing to acknowledge in the end (Gen. 38:26).

Once more the instrument of deceit is an article of apparel that especially represents its owner (Gen. 37:32-33; 38:25-26), and in each instance a father is asked to recognize/identify (נכר/*n-k-r*) the item of apparel (we will pick this theme up once more at the point at which we again take up the family's story in chapter 39).

Death is present in chapter 38 as well, the death of both of Judah's sons and then his wife. And Judah's minimal response--at best he seems to have gone through the expected motions of grief for his wife (Gen. 38:12) and hardly that for his sons--is a counterpoint to Jacob's grief when confronted with the supposed death of his favored son.

These two narratives, Judah and Tamar, and the familiar story of Joseph in Potiphar's house (Gen. 39:1-23), have been juxtaposed to develop the theme of patriarchal morality and presents a striking contrast. Joseph behaved in exemplary fashion. He served Potiphar well and resisted the seduction of Potiphar's wife. By his own words, he declared his innocence, "How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?" (v. 9). Joseph was falsely accused and was sent to prison; but God was with him, and he rose to prominence.

However, Judah fell into sin and suffered severely whereas Joseph remained pure, and God rewarded his righteousness. This topical connection is vital to understanding why these chapters appear together (see Figure 9). It puts the faith and sexual purity of Joseph, soon to be described (chapter 39), in a context which sets off their rarity; and it fills out the portrait of the effective leader among the ten brothers.

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**CONTRASTING PARALLELS BETWEEN JUDAH AND JOSEPH**

<b>Judah (Genesis 38:1-30)</b>	<b>Joseph (Genesis 39:1-23)</b>
Association with Foreign Women (38:1-3)	Separation from Foreign Women (39:6b-12)
Sexual Immorality (38:12-18)	Sexual Morality (39:6b-12)
Victimizer (38:24)	Victimized (39:13-20a)
Judgment of God (38:6-10)	Blessing of God (39:20b-23)
True Accusation from a Women (38:25)	False Accusation from a Women (39:13-20a)
Confession of Sin (38:26)	Rejection of Sin (39:10)

Figure 9.

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J. Goldin correlates the narrative with the present structure of Genesis by concentrating on the *breaking through of the younger* ("Youngest Son," 1977:43-44). Joseph, the favored heir apparent and the younger son, had apparently been removed once and for all by being sold into Egypt. But when Judah, the new leader of the brothers, refused to give his youngest son to the widow Tamar, she took matters into her own hands. As a result, twins were born to Judah (with circumstances reminiscent of Jacob and Esau [Gen. 25:24]). The second infant forced his way to the fore, signifying that the younger would rise to prominence. The repetition of this motif here stresses that God's design for Joseph's prominence could not be set aside as easily as Judah thought. Thus in his own family, and in spite of his own indifference to Tamar, Judah saw the strange outworking of the plan whereby the younger gained priority in the family.

Tamar qualifies as a heroine in the story, for she risked everything to fight for her right to be the mother in the family of Judah and to protect the family. Westermann observes that, in the patriarchal narratives, revolts against the established order are characteristically initiated by women. In each case the justice of such self-defense is recognized (*Genesis*, 1986:3:56). But the samples Westermann lists--Hagar, Rebekah, Leah, Rachel, Lot's daughters, and Tamar--may not all merit the ascription of justice to their self-defense. But they indeed

revolted against established order, especially Tamar, and the problem that they faced was in a large part caused by corruption or indifference of men.

All this shows that the story of Judah and Tamar serves a function that is more complex than a simple suspenseful pause. It cannot be an accident that all the places mentioned--Adullam, Chezib, Timnah, and Enam--are contained within the later territory of the tribe of Judah. Nor can it be coincidental that Adullam is connected with incidents in the life of David, that Bath-shua and Tamar are names similarly linked with the biography of King David, and that the episode here recounted closes with the birth of Judah's sons, of whom Perez attained preeminence among the Judahite clans and became the ancestor of King David. This chapter, then, is replete with certain historic associations that place Judah, and by inference Joseph too, in a context far wider than that of their own individual personalities.

A final word about the placement of this chapter in the history of the Israelites is now in order. Actually the biblical narrative is masterfully composed. At the close of chapter 37 Joseph disappears from the scene of Jacob's family in Canaan. It would be many years before he would rejoin his father's household. At this point the author diverts the attention of the readers away from Joseph and turns his focus to events in the life of Judah that also covered a considerable period of time. This chapter is then placed after chapter 37, not only because the events took place after Joseph's captivity in Egypt began, but also because of another factor involved.

It is significant that it was Judah who is here brought under the spotlight of revelation. There certainly were many other happenings in the family of Jacob during this time that could have been incorporated into the Narrative, but it was these events that especially bring to light the critical danger that threatened the "chosen seed" if they remained in Canaan at this time. Mixed marriages with the Canaanites could lead only to the people of Israel losing their identity among the Canaanites and eventually being absorbed by them (see Genesis 6 for a similar condition--not with the Canaanites, but with the "sons of God").

This chapter clearly indicates that Jacob's descendants had to leave Canaan if they were to develop as a separate and distinctive people. It was imperative that they be moved into a situation where they could not possibly mix with their countrymen. This, of course happened in Egypt. This chapter therefore serves as a key in the progressive narrative of Genesis. It forms a significant part of the development of the history of redemption of Israel which

began in Genesis 12, and more immediately with chapter 37, and moves on with Israel's eventual sojourn in Egypt.

## THEOLOGICAL IDEAS

This chapter has been dubbed a secular story because it does not have a great emphasis on God's acting or speaking in the events. The closest that we come to a theological point is Judah's statement that Tamar had been more righteous (הַקְדָּוָה/*śāḏ<sup>a</sup>qāh*) than he (v. 26). She had fought for her right and thereby preserved the community. We may gather from the use of this story in the present context that the underlying idea is that God was providentially protecting the community from the corruption in the family, thereby ensuring the continuation of the line. The parallel of the twins' birth with the birth of Jacob and Esau also supplies a connection with the theological points of the patriarchal stories.

The events in Genesis 38 also forms a rebuke for the wickedness of Judah and his brothers in attempting to subvert God's plan to exalt the younger. The rebuke is subtle but nonetheless is talionic justice.

Condemnation for wickedness also is present in the story, for it reports that one son was evil, and God killed him. The second son used the ancient levirate custom for self-gratification, and God killed him too. These brief reports, although not the main point of the narrative, do warn of the consequences of evil.

The sins and schemes of these individuals are of importance, and the narrative can only be appreciated in these terms. The future hangs on their choices: the plot revolves around Tamar's right to be the mother of Judah's heir, and her successive frustrations and eventual victory are its dominant concern. On a higher plane the Book of Ruth treats a variant of this theme (4:18), which itself alludes to this chapter of Genesis; and both times the Davidic, messianic lineage was involved, all unknown to all the participants involved.

The story of chapter 38, then, is much like the other "patriarchal" narratives outside the story of Joseph, which show the promised offspring in jeopardy and the patriarch showing little concern for its preservation. Just as in Genesis chapter 20 where the seed of Abraham was protected by the "righteous" (הַקְדָּוָה/*śaddiq*, 20:4; NIV, "innocent") Abimelech (cf. also 26:9-11), it is the

woman Tamar, not Judah the patriarch, who is ultimately responsible for the survival of the descendants of the house of Judah.

## STRUCTURE, SYNTHESIS AND TRANSLATION

### Structure

The center of the episode is found in the second scene, verses 12-26; it is framed by two scenes with genealogical considerations, verses 1-11 and 27-30. The entire chapter weaves together narrative reports and speeches between the participants.

The first scene (vv. 1-11) about the family introduces the complication: Tamar became a childless widow. The final scene (vv. 27-30) reports how Tamar gave birth to Judah's sons, with the judicial approval of the family. In between these scenes the narrator traces how the problem of childlessness was resolved.

This resolution is constructed around the deception of Judah by Tamar. The narrative reports Judah's change of location (vv. 12-14), allowing for Tamar's plan. The plan is worked out through a dialogue involving the business negotiation between Tamar and Judah (vv. 15-19) and concludes with the frustrated attempt of Judah to redeem his pledge (vv. 21-23). The denouement of the story occurs in a legal setting where Tamar, about to be condemned because she was pregnant, produced Judah's pledge and was acquitted (vv. 24-26). All of this illuminates the an interesting chiastic structural (see Figure 10).

### Synthesis

When Judah failed to ensure the levirate rights of his daughter-in-law, Tamar, she deceived him into having sexual intercourse with her by playing a prostitute and thereby championed her right to be the mother of Judah's children, the younger of which displaced the older in an unusual birth.

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**CHIASTIC ARRANGEMENT OF GENESIS 38**

Setting: Judah leaves his father's homestead and fathers three sons (1-5)

A The Childless Widow (6-11)

B The Business Deal (12-23)

Tamar exchanges her widow's garb for that of a prostitute (14)

Judah's proposition to Tamar (15-16b)

Exchange of pledges (16c-17)

Judah's consummation with Tamar (18c)

Tamar exchanges her prostitute's garb for that of a widow (19)

The kid is sent to receive back the pledge, Tamar is not found (20)

The Adullamite's inquiry concerning the prostitute (21a)

The response to the Adullamite's inquiry: "There has been no temple prostitute here" (21b)

The Adullamite's report to Judah (22)

The pledge is forfeited, Tamar is not found (23)

B' The Legal Action (24-26)

Judah is informed that Tamar has a child by harlotry (24a-b)

Judah's edict that Tamar should be burned (24c)

Tamar's request for the pledge to be examined and Judah's recognizes the items of the pledge to be his (25-26a)

Judah's edict that Tamar is more righteous than he (26b)

Judah does not have relations with Tamar again (26c)

A' The Birth of Twins to a Widow (27-30)

Figure 10.

**Translation**

- 1 About that time Judah went down [from] his brothers and turned aside to a certain Adullamite whose name was Hirah.
- 2 There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua, and he married her and cohabited with her.
- 3 She conceived and bore a son, and he named him Er.
- 4 She conceived again and bore a son, and named him Onan.
- 5 Once again she bore a son, and named him Shelah; he was at Chezib when she bore him.
- 6 Judah got a wife for Er his first-born; her name was Tamar.
- 7 But Er, Judah's first-born, was displeasing to the LORD, and the LORD took his life.
- 8 Then Judah said to Onan, "Join with your brother's wife and do your duty by her as a brother-in-law, and provide offspring for your brother."
- 9 But Onan, knowing that the seed would not count as his, let it go to waste whenever he joined with his brother's wife, so as not to provide offspring for his brother.
- 10 What he did was displeasing to the LORD, and He took his life also.
- 11 Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Stay as a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up"--for he thought, "He too might die like his brothers." So Tamar went to live in her father's house.
- 12 A long time afterward, Shua's daughter, the wife of Judah, died. When his period of mourning was over, Judah went up to Timnah to his sheep-shearers, together with his friend Hirah the Adullamite.
- 13 And Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is coming up to Timnah for the sheepshearing."
- 14 So she took off her widow's garb, covered her face with a veil, and, wrapping herself up, sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown up, yet she had not been given to him as wife.
- 15 When Judah saw her, he took her for a harlot; for she had covered her face.
- 16 So he turned aside to her by the road and said, "Here, let me sleep with you"--for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. "What," she asked, "will you pay for sleeping with me?"
- 17 He replied, "I will send a kid from my flock." But she said, "You must leave a pledge until you have sent it."
- 18 And he said, "What pledge shall I give you?" She replied, "Your seal and cord, and the staff which you carry." So he gave them to her and slept with her, and she conceived by him.

- 19 Then she went on her way. She took off her veil and again put on her widow's garb.
- 20 Judah sent the kid by his friend the Adullamite, to redeem the pledge from the woman; but he could not find her.
- 21 He inquired of the people of that town, "Where is the cult prostitute, the one at Enaim, by the road?" But they said, "There has been no prostitute here."
- 22 So he returned to Judah and said, "I could not find her; moreover, the townspeople said: 'There has been no prostitute here'."
- 23 Judah said, "Let her keep them, lest we become a laughingstock. I did send her this kid, but you did not find her."
- 24 About three months later, Judah was told, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the harlot; in fact, she is with child by harlotry." "Bring her out," said Judah, "and let her be burned."
- 25 As she was being brought out, she sent this message to her father-in-law, "I am with child by the man to whom these belong." And she added, "Examine these: whose seal and cord and staff are these?"
- 26 Judah recognized them, and said, "She is more in the right than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah." And he was not intimate with her again.
- 27 When the time came for her to give birth, there were twins in her womb!
- 28 While she was in labor, one of them put out his hand, and the midwife tied a crimson thread on that hand, to signify: This one came out first.
- 29 But just then he drew back his hand, and out came his brother; and she said, "What a breach you have made for yourself!" So he was named Perez.
- 30 Afterward his brother came out, on whose hand was the crimson thread; he was named Zerah.

### EXEGETICAL OUTLINE

- I. The faithfulness of Judah and his sons to God and his earthly program led to the near destruction of Judah's family (1-11).
- A. Judah left his brothers and married a Canaanite woman, who bore him three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah (1-5).
- B. Judah gave to Er and then to Onan a wife named Tamar, but both sons died without progeny because of evil done before God (6-10).
1. The LORD took the life of Er, Tamar's first husband, because he was evil (6-7).
  2. The LORD took the life of Onan, Tamar's second husband under levirate law, because he was immoral (8-10).



- C. Judah reneged on his responsibility under levirate law to give his third son to Tamar: he deceitfully withheld Shelah and place the family lineage in jeopardy (11).
- II. When Tamar realized that Judah had no intention of giving Shelah to her as a husband, she deceived him by acting like a prostitute and thereby conceived his child (12-23).
  - A. Judah's wife died, and after the time of mourning ended, he and Hirah went up to the sheepshearing festival (12).
  - B. Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute and deceived Judah so that she could conceive his child (13-19).
    - 1. Realizing that Judah did not intend to give Shelah to her, Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute to entice Judah (13-15).
    - 2. Judah promised the prostitute a kid from the goats and gave her, as pledged, his seal and his staff (16-19a).
    - 3. Tamar became pregnant (19b).
  - C. Judah's attempt to fulfill the bargain with the prostitute failed when no prostitute could be found, so he decided to let her keep his pledge (20-23).
    - 1. Judah sent Hirah to regain his pledge and fulfill the bargain he made with the prostitute, but no prostitute could be found (20-22).
    - 2. Judah abandoned the effort, deciding to let her keep the pledge (23).
- III. When Judah discovered that Tamar was pregnant, he ordered her to be burned to death; but when she proved that he was the father, he admitted that she was in the right (24-26).
  - A. Three months later, Judah learned that Tamar was pregnant (24a).
  - B. When Judah ordered her to be burned to death, she produced his pledge (24b-25).
  - C. Judah admitted the wrong done to Tamar in not ensuring her rights and recognized that she had done right (26a).
  - D. Judah allowed her to live but did not take her as a wife (26b).
- IV. Tamar gave birth to twins, and although Zerah's hand appeared first, Perez was actually born first (27-30).
  - A. Tamar gave birth to twins (27).
  - B. The midwife marked the first hand to appear with a scarlet thread (28).
  - C. Perez forged through to be born first (29).
  - D. Zerah was born (30).

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## EXPOSITION OF THE PASSAGE

### I. *God's people often complicate His program by their failure (or refusal) to fulfill their responsibilities (1-11).*

The first eleven verses present the complication that Tamar faced. Typical of such narratives, the writer had to provide the setting with genealogical information (cf. the beginning of the Book of Ruth, with its report of the family members, their move to Moab, the marriages of the sons, the deaths of the men, and the surviving widows).

The opening paragraph alerts the reader that Judah did what earlier at Shechem they would not permit to happen to Dinah (Gen. 24). It stands in contrast to Abraham's action in securing for Isaac a bride from his relatives, and what Isaac did for Jacob. In this contrast is presented the danger that the Israelites will forget the purpose in their sonship and their race. They had forgotten the experience of the world before the flood. The ease with which Judah consummated the union declares the unequivocal need of Israel to be removed from such circumstances, lest the whole race be so diluted and absorbed as to be lost to God's purposes. This episode becomes then a most integral part of the record of how the LORD preserves His people.

#### Setting (verses 1-5)

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**1**     **And it came about at that time, that Judah departed from his brothers, and visited a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah.**

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Set in the context of the Joseph Narrative, we have a second brother, Judah, separating from the family, but this one by choice. The separation of Joseph was an unnatural, forced separation. The separation of Judah happened consistent with the normal course of life: a visit to Hirah, a resident of Adullam which is southwest of Jerusalem and about 15 miles northwest of Hebron (about 9 miles northeast of modern Beit Guvrin). Thus Judah traveled in a westerly direction and moved to a lower altitude closer to the Mediterranean Sea to Adullam. This Canaanite royal city, captured by Joshua and made part of the tribal inheritance of Judah, was also associated with the life of David (see Josh. 12:7, 15; 15:20, 35; 1 Sam. 22:1-2; 2 Sam. 23:13).

In fact, this entire introduction portrays a very normal family situation: Judah separated from the family to make his own home. He married and had three sons, providing for their next generation by arranging for the marriage of the eldest son. This peaceful picture of Judah's family stands in contrast to the family of Jacob from which Judah separated himself.

Our narrator states that "Judah departed (literally, "he went down from" [יָרַד/*wyyēred*]), from his brothers," that is, from the hill country of Hebron (Gen. 37:12, 14, 32), which undoubtedly has the purpose of connecting this separation of one brother (Judah) from the rest of his brothers with the account of Joseph being separated from his brothers, the two accounts being connected with the same Hebrew verb-root, "Joseph had been taken down (יָרַד/*hurad*) to Egypt" (cf. Gen. 39:1).

One midrash (Tanḥ. B., Gen. 183) connects this event with the brothers' anger at Judah for his unfortunate advice, as given in Genesis 37:26f. The narrative reflects the isolation of Judah from the other tribes in premonarchic times caused by the presence of Canaanite enclaves. Deuteronomy 33:7 also alludes to this isolation: "Hear, O LORD, the voice of Judah, restore him to his people."

In addition, the text states that Judah "turned aside" (שָׁבַח; NASV, "and visited"). It designates the fact that Judah pitched his tent there, since it is a verb found in association with habitation (Gen. 12:8; 26:25; 35:21). The term is used only once more in this chapter when Judah "turns aside" to a prostitute (v. 16). The significance may be that Judah has changed his direction in life. He has left the confines of the covenant family to settle in another area, which proves to be disastrous for Judah. The point is that Judah has "turned" his back on the covenant family and separated himself from them.

We are not told what occupation Judah pursued in this location, but we are told that there he made the acquaintance with a "certain Adullamite whose name was Hirah." Hirah is mentioned three times in this chapter. First he is Judah's acquaintance (v. 1), then he became Judah's associate (v. 12), and he ended up by becoming Judah's accomplice (v. 20). It was while staying with this Canaanite that Judah met the woman he married. One thing leads to another.

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2     **And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua; and he took her and went in to her.**

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Judah marries a Canaanite woman. This act was out of harmony with the will of the patriarchs not to marry Canaanite women (Gen. 28:1). Both Abraham and Isaac vehemently opposed their children taking Canaanite wives (Gen. 24:1-4; 28:1, 6). Marrying Canaanite wives was understood as a violation of God's covenant of promise. The act of intermarrying with the Canaanites brought corruption to the seed and was to be avoided at all costs. However, Judah chooses to live in disregard to covenant, which will have a great impact on his entire family. B. Jacob says, "He was also the first of his brothers to lower himself by seeking intercourse with Canaanites" (*First Book of the Bible*, 257).

By marrying the daughter of a Canaanite, Judah had realized the worst fear of Abraham (Gen. 24:3) and Isaac (Gen. 28:1); so, according to the logic of the narrative, the promise regarding the descendants of Abraham and Isaac was in danger of being unfulfillable. Through Tamar's clever plan, then, the seed of Abraham was preserved by not being allowed to continue through the sons of the Canaanite, the daughter of Shua. The line was continued through Judah and Tamar. The genealogy at the close of the narrative serves to underscore this point.

It is striking that the following succession of events is introduced by an act of perception through the senses, in this case, that of sight. This underscores the haphazardness of Judah's steps toward marriage. He chooses a wife based upon externals, and not within the will of God concerning marrying Canaanite women (for a NT parallel, see 2 Cor. 6:14). Everything began with Judah seeing the woman, similar to Samson's (Judges 14:1ff.), and his Canaanite wife is left unnamed, like the latter's Philistine one: she is still known merely as Shua's daughter at the end of her story (v. 12). In 1 Chronicles 2:3 she is called "Bath-Shua the Canaanite woman." Bath-sheba, King David's wife, also appears in the variant form Bath-Shua in 1 Chronicles 3:5.

- 3** So she conceived and bore a son and he named him Er.  
**4** Then she conceived again and bore a son and named him Onan.  
**5** And she bore still another son and named him Shelah; and it was at Chezib that she bore him.
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From this marriage Judah has three sons, one after another, recorded in narrative breathless fashion. In a triad of verbs, Judah "sees," "takes," and "lies" with a woman; and she, responding appropriately, conceives, bears, and names two of the three sons. Then, with no narrative indication of any intervening events, we move ahead an entire generation to the marriage of Judah's sons to Tamar.

Apparently Judah named the first son (v. 3; see also v. 29), who expected him to continue his family name. The subject of the verb "named" in verses 4 and 5, however, is "she," i.e., the wife of Judah.

Judah did not stay at Adullam (perhaps because of his occupation), for by the time of the birth of his third son he had moved to Chezib. The birthplace is included to disclose the place of origin of the sons of Shelah (Num. 26:20).

The location of Chezib, mentioned only here in the Bible, may be associated with Aczib, as Keil and others have suggested, in which case it was located in the lowland of Judah (cf. Josh. 15:44). Later the clan of Shelanites included a Cozeba among its descendants (1 Chron. 4:22). This clearly indicates that the clan had occupied the city of Chezib, and it explains why Judah's whereabouts are noted only in connection with Shelah. Because the Hebrew roots employed here of clan and city (*k-z-v* for Chezib and *sh-l-h* for Shelah) both mean "to deceive, disappoint," it is possible that our narrator is using a word play, perhaps referring to the mother's disappointment at the absence of her husband or a suggestion of Tamar's subsequent disappointment at not being given to Shelah.

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**The Childless Widow (verses 6-11)**

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- 6** Now Judah took a wife for Er his first-born, and her name *was* Tamar.
- 7** But Er, Judah's first-born, was evil in the sight of the LORD, so the LORD took his life.
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In accord with the custom of those times, Judah chose a wife for his first-born son Er (see Gen. 21:21; 24:4), and her name is Tamar. The word means in Hebrew "a palm tree." As a personal name, it appears in the Bible only in the Davidic family: the daughter of King David (2 Sam. 13:1) and a daughter of Absalom (2 Sam. 14:27).

The text is not clear from whose house Jacob originally took Tamar for his son's wife. The narrative is strikingly silent concerning this detail. Some interpreters believe that since we are told that Judah's own wife was a Canaanite (v. 2), had Tamar also been a Canaanite, it assumedly would have been mentioned in the narrative. However, this is intentional in contrast to Judah's wife. By not calling her "the daughter of a Canaanite" points to her as an individual of special worth. As things later developed, Tamar was indeed to be the mother of the messianic line of Judah; so we must assume that God Himself must have participated in this choice. Tamar must therefore have been the most suitable woman for this purpose in her generation. And since Tamar was a Canaanite, it likewise suggests that universal aspect of redemption which was to be preached ultimately to all peoples.

The epithet "first-born," hardly needed for identification, is asserted twice: "Now Judah took a wife for Er his first-born . . . But Er, Judah's first-born . . ." (vss. 6-7). This epithet should by now strike an ominous note to the reader of Genesis (e.g., Isaac and Ishmael; Esau and Jacob; and more closely related, that of Reuben).

The unspecified wickedness of Er, like the specific sin of Onan is recorded for its contribution to the succession crisis. At the same time, it emphasizes the steep moral decline in the chosen family, which only the outstanding piety of Joseph would arrest for a while.

Er, however, was displeasing to the LORD in some way, and the LORD slew him. Er developed so evil a life that it became a danger to Judah's family; so the LORD removed him by an early death. No details are provided, but the fact that he was "wicked" was sufficient to warrant it untimely death. An interesting wordplay occurs at this juncture: that between the proper name "Er" (עֵר/ʿēr) and the resultant action "evil" (עָרָא/raʿ). The inversion of consonants may symbolize his disordering of nature.

The fact that these are actions clearly opposed to the will of God is brought out by the phrase "in the LORD's sight" (v. 7). The idea of doing evil in the LORD's presence (or sight) carries the idea of someone who is living in opposition to His revealed will. Whenever this motif appears in Genesis, it describes something deserving of divine judgment. Notably, in Genesis 6, the whole population was evil, and God destroyed them; in Genesis 19, the wicked people of Sodom were overthrown by the LORD. So whatever Er was in the custom of doing, he was in that company, and the narrative interprets his death as divine justice (note the Hiphil of מוֹת, "the LORD caused him to die," thus underscoring the fact that Er's death was a direct result of the LORD).

#### *The Levirate Obligation (verses 8-11)*

**8** Then Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife, and perform your duty as a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother."

By an application of "levirate marriage" (from the Latin, *levir*, "husband's brother") Tamar was given to the second son, Onan. For all practical purposes, Onan had no choice in the matter; it was his legal duty to do as Judah demanded (cf. Deut. 25:5-6, a passage referred to in Matthew 22:24). This custom, presented here in a slightly different form than its definition under the law (Deuteronomy 25), had as its purpose the raising up of the name of the deceased over his inheritance so that wealth would not gradually be gathered into the hands of the few but be maintained in the family and help to build up community strength. There was no purpose for this second marriage other than to ensure that the line of the deceased Er would continue through his widow. The fact that a single Hebrew word suffices for the phrase "perform the duty of a brother-in-law" (RSV; עָרָא) would confirm that this was a standard practice. For further important information concerning Tamar's personal involvement in the levirate marriage, see pages 158-160.

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- 9     **And Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so it came about that when he went in to his brother's wife, he wasted his seed on the ground, in order not to give offspring to his brother.**
- 10    **But what he did was displeasing in the sight of the LORD; so He took his life also.**
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But Onan had no such plan. He was willing to use the custom to have Tamar but, since he was unwilling to raise up a child through it, he would regularly spill his semen on the ground (lit., "he let it spoil on the ground"). A powerful motivation for Onan to have done this is that after the death of the first-born, Onan inherits one-half of his father's estate. However, should he provide an heir to his brother, his portion would be diminished.

The standard English versions fail to make clear that this was his persistent practice. "When" (v. 9) should be translated "whenever." Here, then, was another wicked member of the family, one who would use the law to gratify the flesh and, rather than take the responsibility bound up in the custom, would destroy the seed. This attitude of gratification without responsibility has been repeated from generation to generation in immoral people. The LORD slew Onan as well, because it displeased him. B. Jacob comments with "God caused Onan to die, which indicates that Judah's request had been pleasing to God" (Jacob, 1974:258).

Just as the sinfulness of the men of Sodom (see Gen. 19:4-9) gave rise to the word "sodomy" (a synonym for "homosexuality"), so also Onan's sin gave rise to the word "onanism," a synonym for "coitus interruptus" (now widely used as a means of birth control). Yet the LORD did not judge Onan simply for practicing coitus interruptus. He did so because Onan refused to perform his levirate duty and continue Judah's line. By frustrating the purpose of the levirate institution, Onan has placed his sexual relationship with his sister-in-law in the category of incest--a capital offense!

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- 11    **Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Remain a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up"; for he thought, "I am afraid that he too may die like his brothers." So Tamar went and lived in her father's house.**



After the death of Onan, the second son, the narrator gives us Judah's direct speech to Tamar as well as his motivation, but no response is recorded on the part of Tamar. This may suggest silent submission, or at least her lack of any legal recourse as a childless young widow, and it certainly leaves wondering about what she is thinking and feeling--something which her actions will quickly tell us. She was not free to remarry but could return to live with her parents, although still subject to the authority of her father-in-law.

Tamar is called Judah's daughter-in-law, even after the death of her husbands; correspondingly Judah remained her father-in-law in verses 13 and 25. As in Hebrew both terms indicate the protection of the young wife by the house of her in-laws. It is widely interpreted that the levirate institution had its origin in the notion that the widow had initially been purchased, through marriage, by the head of the family and so became part of the dead husband's estate. As such, she remained the property of the clan after his death. At the same time, she would be assured of livelihood and protection.

Interestingly, after we have heard the wailing of Jacob and the extravagant extent of his mourning over the imagined death of one son, Judah's reaction to the actual death in quick succession of two sons is passed over in complete silence: he is only reported delivering pragmatic instructions to Tamar having to do with the next son in line. This striking contrast makes us wonder whether there is a real lack of responsiveness in Judah, and thus indicates how parallel acts or situations are used to comment on each other in biblical narrative.

Judah's insincerity would eventually come out, as postponement followed postponement (38:14b, 26), for he had clearly decided that Tamar had directly or indirectly caused the death of his first two sons, and he was afraid that Shelah also might die because of her; so he withheld his youngest son from marrying Tamar, fearing that he might lose his last remaining son-- or of facing Tamar's wrath by saying so. Tamar, who according to the law had the right to be the mother of the heir, was thus not given that privilege. She would remain a widow, and barren widow at that. She would have to take matters into her own hands if she was to be granted the rights under the law, if the family line was to continue.

Some have believed that the superstition of Tobit 3:7 concerning the fateful marriage, was operating here. But here, as there, the cause of death was removal by God. Judah had refused to connect the evil conduct of his sons with their early demise. It would appear that he had become spiritually unpercep-

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tive, further evidence of the unsuitability of the land of Canaan for the clan of Israel to develop there into the nation of God's purpose.

There is one small but tactically effective hint that Judah is in the wrong to withhold Shelah: when he addresses Tamar, she is identified as his "daughter-in-law" (38:11a), an otherwise superfluous designation that reminds us of his legal obligation to provide her a husband from among his sons, even though it would be he last, and probably now, the most beloved son (another parallel corresponding to the overall Narrative). In addition, it was ungracious of Judah still to recognize Tamar as his daughter-in-law and as the betrothed of Shelah, and nevertheless send her to her father's house.

These first verses, then, present a picture of a corrupt family. Judah continued his irresponsible course: he had earlier moved the sale of Joseph, then separated from his brothers and married a Canaanite, and now had seen the fruit of that marriage thoroughly evil and so refused to give the younger son to Tamar. The only bright spot in his family would be Tamar, but he would be too slow to recognize it. It is clear that the complications were caused by the failure and the refusal of the men in the family to live obediently to God's laws and to fulfill their responsibilities faithfully.

## II. *God's people often resort to desperate, deceptive actions to ensure the success of what they know to be right (12-23).*

The next scene continues to paint Judah as profane, but it also portrays Tamar as taking a great risk to obtain what was her right. Tamar was wholly concerned with her right as matriarch of Judah's eldest line. The last phrase of verse 24, "let her be burnt," shows the risk she accepted; Judah's admission in verse 26 recognizes the injustice which her desperate step defeated. She shows something of the indomitable spirit of an Esther, a Jael or a Rizpah; but the text, true to its practice, makes no comment on the morality of her act. Indirectly, however, its setting, within the story of Joseph, brings it into telling contrast with the faith that could be displayed, and vindicated, in far worse straits than hers.

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**The Business Deal (verses 12-23)**


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**12** Now after a considerable time Shua's daughter, the wife of Judah, died; and when the time of mourning was ended, Judah went up to his sheepshearers at Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adulamite.

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At this point in the narrative, we are given a time indication to mark the next stage of the story, in which the tempo of narration slows down drastically to attend to a crucial central action. In accordance with the chronological scheme required by the present position of the narrative, about two years would have elapsed. In 1 Samuel 7:2, the same phrase is defined as twenty years.

All the information in this verse is essential for what follows. Judah "went up" (structurally contrasting "went down," v. 1) to a city called Timnah. This is not the place as mentioned in the Samson Narrative in Judges 14:1, but another place in the hill country of Judah, mentioned in Joshua 15:10, 57). When Shelah was mature enough to fulfill his responsibility to Tamar, Judah took no action in this regard. Tamar has been allowed to linger mateless "a considerable time," so that her own perception (reported two verses later; v. 14)--that she has been deliberately neglected--is given an objective grounding.

So Tamar proceeded to force the issue, but in a form of revenge on Judah, for she moved *only* when she was informed that Judah was going up to sheep shearing. When her father-in-law went to Timnah for the shearing of the sheep, Tamar saw her opportunity and seized it with clever determination. To play on his weakness (carnality) she sat in the gate in the manner of a prostitute, on the way to Timnah.

Judah has been widowed and the official period of mourning has passed--that is the meaning of "being consoled." All of this stands in contrast to Jacob's previous refusal to be consoled (Gen. 37:35)--so Tamar can plausibly infer that Judah is in a state of sexual neediness. Here begins her bold plan. The death of Judah's wife is probably mentioned as an extenuating circumstance to account for his consorting with a harlot and that Judah was in a position to perform a father-in-law's duty to Tamar, and yet neglected to do it.

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- 13 And it was told to Tamar, "Behold, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep."
- 14 So she removed her widow's garments and covered *herself* with a veil, and wrapped herself, and sat in the gateway of Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah had grown up, and she had not been given to him as a wife.
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Tamar learns from an unidentified source that Judah, after grieving over the death of his wife (and therefore there would be no more chance of Judah having an heir through her) has headed out to join his shepherds in "harvesting" the wool. Seeing a woman dressed as a prostitute near the gate of Enaim, Judah stops. The narrative leaves us guessing why he stopped.

Although Tamar's actions in this regard may seem strange to us, there is evidence that among ancient Assyrian and Hittite peoples, part of the custom was that the levirate responsibility could pass to the father of the widow's husband if there were no brothers to fulfill it. Thus Tamar was only trying to acquire that to which she had a legal right. Judah walked right into the trap she had set for him.

When Judah spotted what he considered to be an attractive prostitute, he propositioned her and offered her a kid from his flock as payment for her services. Such was the world into which Judah had married. The prophets (e.g. Hosea 4:14) report its corrupting power over Israel for generations to come. This account of assimilation with the people of the land helps one understand why God settled His young nation in the safety of Egypt for its growth.

The apparel of a widow in mourning is not known of what it consisted or the length of time it was worn. In the case of Tamar, she may have continued to wear such clothing beyond the usual period as a symbol of the unfulfilled levirate obligation. At any rate, the presence of the widow's garb provides a tacit contrast with Judah's completion of his period of mourning. At the same time, it forges a link with the story of Joseph, in which clothing also plays a role in deception.

It is clear from verses 15 and 19 that Tamar was not normally veiled and that she simply wanted to conceal her identity (cf. Gen. 24:65). Interestingly, the Middle Assyrian laws require an unmarried cult prostitute and a

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harlot never to be veiled. The harlot who contravened this law was to be flogged fifty times, and pitch was to be poured on her head.

Until this point in the narrative, Tamar has been a passive object, acted upon--or, alas, not acted upon--by Judah and his sons. The only verbs she has been the subject are those found in verse 11 where it is reported that "Tamar *went* and *lived* in her father's house." Now, Tamar suddenly races into rapid, purposeful action, expressed in the series of verbs in which she is the doer (v. 14); she quickly *takes off*, *covers*, *wraps herself*, *sits down* at the strategic location, and after the encounter, in verse 19, there is another chain of four verbs to indicate her brisk resumption of her former role and attire.

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**15** When Judah saw her, he thought she *was* a harlot, for she had covered her face.

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Our narrator is very careful to emphasize that had Judah known the identity of the woman, he would never have had relations with her: "she had covered her face"; "he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law (v. 16): "he did not have relations with her again" (v. 26). All this is explication by the narrator, who is conscious of the contradiction between the moral standards of the Torah, later age and the fact that the offspring of Judah's venture with Tamar bore no stigma of illegitimacy.

There is an interesting interchange in vocabulary in the chapter. According to verse 15, Judah thought that she was a prostitute because she had covered her face. But when he later sent Hirah to retrieve his pledge, Hirah looked for a cult prostitute and could report back only that there was no cult prostitute there (cf. vv. 21-22). Then, when Tamar's pregnancy was discovered, it was told to Judah that she had prostituted herself and had gotten pregnant by her prostitution (cf. v. 24). This interchange raises the possibility that Judah has sought to increase the yield of his wool by engaging in a Canaanite ritual of fertility.

The cult prostitute was a higher-class woman than the prostitute, or harlot. The ploy of Tamar demanded that she cover her face. By so doing, she may have satisfied the scruples of Judah, who would turn aside to the prostitute but perhaps not to the cult prostitute, for the latter might have involved Canaanite worship. Tamar's deception worked well, for Hirah went looking for

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the cult prostitute--who would have been present at festival time--but found none.

Tamar's disguise, that of a harlot, was exactly in keeping with Judah's moral outlook, for he had no hesitation in treating her in conformity with her attire. The veil marked her assumed profession clearly. Had he known her, he would not have asked, but instead, he would have had her burned (v. 24), in keeping with his despicable double standard. This again emphasizes that the removal of the clan of Israel was imperative to its survival as God's minister.

Tamar's plan resembles that of Jacob and his mother's, Rebekah (where Rebekah prepares through another kind of deception to wrest the blessing from Isaac for her favored son Jacob; Genesis 27:14-17). Through a disguise she obtained a part in the blessing of the first-born. In so doing, just as with Jacob and Rebekah, she obtained that which the patriarch should have rightfully given. Selah, the son of Judah, was of age (v. 14), and Tamar should have been given to him for a wife (v. 11). Thus, in the end, the continuation of the line of Judah was not due to the righteous actions of the patriarch Judah but rather lay in the hands of the "righteous" Tamar. Such is a recurring theme throughout the patriarchal narratives in Genesis.

It is also interesting to compare Tamar with Leah, who participated in the deception of Jacob on his marriage night (Genesis 29:23). That deception was part of the talionic justice on Jacob the deceiver. Also through this deception, was the measure-for-measure justice beginning to unfold for Judah, the deceiver of Jacob (Genesis 37:31-32). But it is also interesting to compare Tamar with Ruth. Ruth, however, only claimed Boaz as her levirate husband at the festival time and did not actually engage in sex with him. Had she done so, there could have been no reason to offer her in marriage to the near kinsman first (Ruth 4:3-4).

It must be clearly understood that it was not just a desire to remarry that moved Tamar to remarry. Her previous experiences with Judah's sons would surely have cured her from wanting further involvement with that family. But she seems to have understood and appreciated the spiritual significance of becoming a mother in the Judaic line (see pages 158-161).

Judah takes the bait. His sexual appetite will not tolerate postponement though he has been content to let Tamar languish as a childless widow indefinitely.

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- 16 So he turned aside to her by the road, and said, "Here now, let me come in to you"; for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. And she said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?"
- 17 He said, therefore, "I will send you a kid from the flock." She said, moreover, "Will you give a pledge until you sent *it*?"
- 18 And he said, "What pledge shall I give you?" And she said, "Your seal and your cord, and your staff that is in your hand." So he gave *them* to her, and went in to her, and she conceived by him.
- 19 Then she arose and departed, and removed her veil and put on her widow's garments.
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In verses 16-18 we are given the only extended dialogue in the narrative. It is a wonderfully businesslike exchange, reinforced in the Hebrew by the constant quick shifts from the literally repeated "he said" (וַיֹּאמֶר) to "she said" (וַתֹּאמֶר). Wasting no time with preliminaries, Judah immediately tells her, "Let me lie with you" (literally, "let me come to you," or even, "let me enter you"), to which Tamar responds like a hard-headed businesswoman, finally exacting the rather serious pledge of Judah's seal and cord and staff, which as the legal surrogate of the bearer would have been a kind of ancient Near Eastern equivalent of all a person's major credit cards.

The negotiation of Judah with Tamar takes an interesting turn. The bargain was reached for a kid from the flock, a common motif in the deceptions of this family (see Gen. 27:9 and 37:31). Until Judah could send the payment, though, he had to give his pledge--his tokens of identification. These items were of significance to Tamar, for it gave her two irrefutable proofs of the identity of the father of her child. She intended to bind Judah to herself if she could not have Shelah as her husband.

The first token of identification was the "seal and cord," which makes it clear that the "pledge" was not a ring but a seal, which was part of the dress of any man of substance. The reference is to the widely used cylinder seal, a small object made of a hard material, engraved with distinctive ornamentation. The center was hollowed out and a cord passed through so that the seal could be worn around the neck. When the cylinder was rolled over soft clay, the resultant impression served as a means of identifying personal possessions and of sealing and legitimating clay documents. It was a highly personal object that performed the function of the signature in modern society, a kind of

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extension of the personality. Judah leaves part of himself with Tamar when he gives her his seal.

The second part of Judah's pledge was his staff. The Hebrew term used here can mean either "staff" or "scepter." The "staff," often carved, was equally distinctive of its owner. It is attested as the symbol of power and leadership in Isaiah 14:5 and Ezekiel 19:11-14, and also of royalty in Psalms 110:2. Numbers 17:17 states that each of the chieftains of the tribes of Israel in the wilderness had his own staff. Judah's staff must have had some personalized identifying sign. Bronze staffs topped by small lions' heads have been found in Syria dating from the time of the Assyrian Empire (8th-7th BC). Similar scepter heads, some incised with names, have been discovered over a wide area of the Near East.

Judah must have been willing to part with these valuable identifying items temporarily only because he was a man of substance; for him the payment of a kid was inexpensive and could have been accomplished with ease in a very short while.

The fact that Judah carried nothing at that moment with which to pay for the woman's services strongly indicates that he acted on impulse when "he turned aside to her by the road." This is another example of an overarching motif in Scripture that God uses human frailty for His own purposes.

The agreement completed, the narrative proceeds in three quick verbs (the end of verse 18): *He gave, he lay, she conceived*--to Tamar's single-minded purpose, which, from her first marriage, has been to become the channel of the seed of Judah. The result of the transaction was that Tamar conceived. She did what justice and the death of her husband demanded of her--but by a very dangerous scheme.

Judah was trapped by his lust, for the pledge of her price was secured from him, to be produced at the crucial moment. Tamar could leave because she did not need the kid!

The text of Scripture does not cast any moral judgment on Tamar. Delitzsch may have been too generous in calling her a saint, but she is presented in the Bible in a most favorable light (Ruth 4:12). It is not appropriate to judge her by Christian ethics, for in her culture at that time, her actions, though very dangerous for her, were within the law. She had the right to have a child by the



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nearest of kin to her deceased husband. She played on the vice of Judah to bear this child, and her deception worked.

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- 20 When Judah sent the kid by his friend the Adullamite, to receive the pledge from the woman's hand, he did not find her.
- 21 And he asked the men of her place, saying, "Where is the temple prostitute who was by the road at Enaim?" But they said, "There has been no temple prostitute here."
- 22 So he returned to Judah, and said, "I did not find her; and furthermore, the men of the place said, 'There has been no temple prostitute here'."
- 23 Then Judah said, "Let her keep them, lest we become a laughing-stock. After all, I sent this kid, but you did not find her."
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After Judah went home, he kept his promise to Tamar and obtained a kid from his flock. "His friend" Hirah, the Adullamite, took it to her in order that he may bring back the personal items Judah had left with her to secure his pledge. We are not told why Judah did not go personally; perhaps he was somewhat ashamed of what he had done, and did not want to face the woman again or to be seen talking to her.

However, search and inquire as he would, Hirah could find neither the woman nor anyone who remembered ever seeing her there. It should be noted that when the Adullamite comes looking for Tamar, he used a different word to describe her, for he asks for a "temple prostitute," though Judah had in fact thought he was dealing with an ordinary prostitute. It is possible that Hirah is expressing Canaanite tradition or that he is deliberately using the term "temple prostitute" to avoid embarrassment.

Temple prostitutes (i.e., religious or cult prostitutes) were available to the Canaanites who came to worship at shrines of the fertility goddess. In addition, in ancient Near Eastern pagan religions, there were special temple prostitutes with whom male worshipers consorted as part of a fertility cult. Harlotry was not the stigma to the Canaanites that it was to Israel. Deuteronomy 23:18 outlaws such an institution in Israel.

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The local people answer quite properly that there had been no "temple prostitute" in that place, an assertion which receives special emphasis through the episode in that it is repeated verbatim in Hirah's report to Judah. Nor, as the chiasmic structure emphasizes (see page 131), there has not been a prostitute in that place, but only a wronged woman seeking justice. The way has now been prepared for the climax of the episode.

When his friend returned and reported that the woman was nowhere to be found, Judah decided to let the matter drop there and let her keep the tokens he had left with her. He did not want to advertise what he had done any more than necessary, for to pursue this matter any farther could become very embarrassing for a man of Judah's position and would make him a laughing-stock among the people of that area; for who would have given such important items to a harlot? He had tried to fulfill his agreement to pay the woman with a kid of the flock; but since she was no longer where he could reach her, he felt that should be the end of the matter. She could keep the tokens if she wished, though it was difficult to see how they could be of any value to her. The end of it was yet to come, to his embarrassment; for Judah was not going to escape the consequences of his immoral activity that easily.

### **III. *Desperate actions, even though drawing righteous indignation, reveal the faithlessness of those who fail in their responsibilities (24-26).***

The third scene adds hypocrisy to Judah's lack of integrity. The certainty of her impregnation by Judah became evident three months afterward, and when it was reported to him, he declared the death penalty--until it was proven by the seal and the staff that he was the guilty party. Then, rather than include himself in any punishment, he simply exonerated her.

#### **The Legal Action (verses 24-26)**

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- 24 Now it was about three months later that Judah was informed, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the harlot, and behold, she is also with child by harlotry." Then Judah said, "Bring her out and let her be burned!"

After three months it was evident that Tamar was pregnant, and in order to force Judah into a public admission of his involvement in her pregnancy, she risked being charged as a prostitute. This charge was taken seriously in those days, and in her case the charge was especially serious since she supposedly was committed to become Shelah's wife.

Judah's response to what was reported to him was to "bring her out" to the city gate, where justice was administered. The order has a magisterial ring to it (cf. Lev. 24:14; Deut. 17:5; 22:21, 24). By virtue of his status as head of family, and that he, as the father of her previous husbands and her husband-to-be, Judah exercises his power of life and death (cf. Gen. 31:32), even though Tamar lives with her parents.

The naked unreflective brutality of Judah's response to the seemingly incriminating news is even stronger in the Hebrew, where the synthetic character of biblical Hebrew reduces Judah's deadly instructions to two words: הוֹצֵא וְאֵשׂרָהּ "take her out and burn her."

Yet one may ask, was he willing to let her be done away with in this manner to eliminate having to give her to Shelah? Does the apparent harshness of Judah's sentence support this view? The Code of Hammurabi does not prescribe burning for adultery, nor does it occur in the Middle Assyrian Laws or in the Hittite Laws. The only biblical reasons for burning as an adulteress is the daughter of a priest guilty of harlotry (Deut. 22:20-24 with Lev. 20:14; 21:9). The sin of the priest's daughter profaned her father in his office. The ritual was death first by stoning and then the body was to be burnt, indicating the LORD's extreme disapprobation of such sins and the total condemnation of judgment. Burning of the body tended to eliminate in effect this hope of forgiveness completely. We thus may see the attitude of Judah toward Tamar, though perhaps we should conclude that Judah was not showing vindictiveness.

Since the Mosaic Law was several hundred years afterward, it should be understood that capital punishment for adultery had a long previous history, and Judah's sentence is not disagreeable to the tone of the later written Scripture. Had Judah awakened finally to holiness? Rather, we should see here a reflection of his patriarchal predecessors or of their own ancestral culture. Here is a clear case of adultery, and the penalty is but one. There seems to be no reason to seek others. Judah's judgment was the correct one. More final conclusions probably will have to wait for further archaeological discoveries.

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Again an "unnamed source" speaks in the narrative. First "it" told Tamar about Judah's actions (v. 13). This time "it" tells Judah about Tamar's. It is unusual to have unnamed sources be as central in a Hebrew narrative as they are here (cf. Gen. 27:42). The source reports Tamar's pregnancy, accusing her of prostitution. Judah, apparently without the formalities of a trial, sentences Tamar to death (Coats, 1983:274).

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- 25 It was while she was being brought out that she sent to her father-in-law, saying, "I am with child by the man to whom these things belong." And she said, "Please examine and see, whose signet ring and cords and staff are these?"
- 26 And Judah recognized *them*, and said, "She is more righteous than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah." And he did not have relations with her again.
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Verse 25 records the fulfillment of Judah's command with not a perceptible interval between his speech and the results of the speech. But with a rare Hebrew present passive participle (מִנְצֵאתָ, literally, "And she is being taken out") marks the last instant before Tamar's triumphant revelation.

Tamar exhibits sustained and remarkable self-restraint until the very last moment, and then confronts Judah with the overwhelming and unimpeachable evidence. Her reply to Judah's condemnation was in such a way as to deny Judah's right to condemn, since he was the guilty man. She said in effect that if she was to be condemned, so should he be. In this way, she prevented her own execution. Yet her tactic of indirect accusation assures a minimum of embarrassment and so elicits a noble response. Now she had, in her own surreptitious way, forced him to fulfill that levirate responsibility himself.

What Tamar presented as exhibits were Judah's seal and staff, which were very easy to prove as his. Judah could not escape his guilt nor evade the fact that he had committed adultery. The "temple prostitute" was exposed as Tamar. Since Tamar had been promised to Shelah, her intimate relationship with Judah constituted adultery. Judah, as head of the family or subclan was properly judge. However, he could not condemn Tamar without condemning himself; so the segregation of Tamar was the only feasible solution. There was no more talk of burning. The shoe was now on Judah's foot and a very uncomfortable shoe it proved to be.

It should be noted that there is a close tie in with the larger Joseph Narrative with the exact recurrence at the climax of Tamar's episode of the words of recognition (הִכְרִיזְנָה, "Please recognize" [v. 25]; וַיִּכְרַז, "And he recognized" [v. 26]) used before with Jacob and his sons (Gen. 37:32-33). The same verb, moreover, will play a crucial thematic role in the denouncement of the Joseph Narrative when he confronts his brothers in Egypt, he recognizing them, but they failing to recognize him.

This precise recurrence of the verb in identical forms at the ends of Genesis 37 and 38 respectively is manifestly the result of a brilliant literary artist. The first use of the formula was for an act of deception on the part of Joseph's brothers; the second use is for an act of unmasking. Judah with Tamar after Judah with his brothers is an exemplary narrative instance of the deceiver deceived, and since he was the one who proposed selling Joseph into slavery instead of killing him (Gen. 37:26-27), he can easily be thought of as the leader of the brothers in the deception foisted upon their father. Now he becomes their surrogate in being subject to a bizarre but peculiarly fitting principle of retaliation, taken in by a piece of attire, as he father was, learning through his own personal experience that the divinely appointed process of selection cannot be thwarted by human will or social convention.

In this passage of Scripture, God Himself administers a moral rebuke to the twice-sinning Judah, pointing out to him the recurrence of the kid and the verb "to recognize" that links his unjust deception of his father with his justified deception by Tamar. That thematic point of retaliation, as we have seen, is intimated in the biblical text, but without the suggestion that Judah himself is conscious of the connections. That is, in the actual literary articulation of the narrative, we as the audience are privileged with a knowledge denied Judah, and so the link between kid and kid, recognize and recognize, is part of a patter of dramatic irony, in which the spectator knows something the biblical character does not, but should know. The preservation of Judah's ignorance here is important, for the final turn of his painful moral education must be withheld for the quandary in which he will find himself later when he encounters Joseph as prime minister of Egypt without realizing his brother's identity.

Tamar was exonerated by these words of Judah: "She has been more righteous than I" (v. 26). This is a critical appraisal and calls for close study. Judah is at the least saying that Tamar was more in the right than he (i.e., Tamar's cause is more just than mine; or her conduct is more justifiable than my own), for he did not fulfill his responsibilities in that he had not given her to Shelah. Tamar did nothing that the law did not entitle her to do, although her

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method was desperate. She won the right to be the mother of Judah's children and, in the final analysis, was held up as the more righteous. Brueggemann says,

The narrative contains a radical critique of morality for those who will pursue it. The text makes a judgment about relative guilts. Tamar has committed the kind of sin the "good people" prefer to condemn--engaging in deception and illicit sex and bringing damages to a good family. For a moment, until aware of his own involvement, Judah reacts on the basis of that sort of "morality" (v. 24) . . . .

In that context, a new insight about righteousness comes out of the mouth of Judah (v. 26). He draws an unexpected conclusion. In the midst of this sordid story of sexuality, there is a new understanding of righteousness. The story may give us pause about the usual bourgeois dimensions of sin. What is taken most seriously is not a violation of sexual convention, but damage to the community which includes a poor, diminished female. (*Genesis*, pp. 310-11).

This scene, then, is the turning point. Tamar's risky ploy came to light, but she was exonerated as being in the right. In the process Judah's reputation suffered another blow, for he was exposed as being immoral and hypocritical. It is often the case that a desperate act to set things right will reveal the reason for the act--someone else has been irresponsible or faithless. Since both Judah's deceased sons and he himself had relations with Tamar, it was not proper that she should become the wife of Judah, nor of Shelah, nor did she have a claim on marriage; so the phrase is added, "He was no more intimate with her."

#### ***IV. God may use such desperate actions to bring about His will when faithlessness appears to hinder it (27-30).***

This final scene reveals the outcome of the episode. As the climax to this tangled story, these verses provide the significance of the chapter. God granted twins sons to Tamar, Perez and Zerah, the line of Judah continued because of her. God had judicially taken away two of Judah's sons; now in grace He gave him two in return.

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**The Birth of Twins to a Widow (verses 27-30)**


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- 27 And it came about at the time she was giving birth, that behold, there were twins in her womb.
- 28 Moreover, it took place while she was giving birth, one put out a hand, and the midwife took and tied a scarlet *thread* on his hand, saying, "This one came out first."
- 29 But it came about as he drew back his hand, that behold, his brother came out. Then she said, "What a breach you have made for yourself!" So he was named Perez.
- 30 And afterward his brother came out who had the scarlet *thread* on his hand; and he was named Zerah.
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As the account of the struggle of the twins Jacob and Esau (Gen. 25:22), so now this episode is marked by a similar struggle of twins--except that one gave precedence to the other ("he drew back his hand"). In both cases the struggle resulted in a reversal of the right of the first-born and the right of the blessing. The result of both struggles was that the younger gained the upper hand over the elder. As Jacob struggled with Esau and overcame him, so Perez overcame Zerah, the elder, and gained the right of the first-born (cf. Num. 26:20, where Perez is regarded as the first-born). The brevity and austerity with which the episode is recounted leaves the impression that the meaning of the passage is self-evident to the reader. Indeed, coming as it does on the heels of a long series of reversals in which the younger gains the upper hand on the elder, its sense is transparent.

The births of Perez and Zerah are unusual. The narrative reports how the second child broke out first, prompting the midwife to exclaim: "What a breach you have made for yourself!" The verb "to break through," frequently occurs with the cognate accusative, "a breach." Elsewhere the expression refers to judgment breaking forth (cf. 2 Sam. 5:20; 6:8; Psa. 106:29), but here it simply describes a breaking out. This event, in turn, provided the meaningful Hebrew name *Peres*, "he who breaks through."

Thus the proper name "Perez" is a word play on the event of breaching. This is the only name in this chapter for which an explanation is given, a fact that reflects the preeminence of the Perezite clan within the tribe of Judah. David was descended from Perez, according to Ruth 4:18-22 and 1 Chronicles 2:5, 9-15. The fact that ten generations separate David from Perez

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(symbolic of a complete and significant unit of time), shows that the birth of Perez is taken to be a historic turning point.

Judah's involvement with the birth of these twins is seen in that the Hebrew literally reads, "so he called his name Perez." The naming signified the completion of Tamar's struggle and also depicted the destiny of the tribe of Perez, who later became predominant (see Gen. 46:12; Num. 26:20).

The second child was named Zerah because a scarlet thread was tied to his hand before Perez forced through to be born first. Zerah became the founder of the Zerahites (Num. 26:20) and an ancestor of Achan (Jos. 7:1). The Hebrew name *zarah* is not explained by a word play, but the emphasis on the scarlet thread implies the meaning. In western Aramaic *z'horī* is "scarlet, scarlet thread," as is Babylonian *zahuritu*. If such a word was behind the meaning of Zerah, connecting the name to the idea of the scarlet thread, it would involve a metathesis (*zhr* » *zrh*). In biblical Hebrew, however, *zeraḥ* refers not to scarlet but to the rising dawn. Perhaps the name meant something like "God has shone forth." There seems to be no connection with an idea of "shining" in Genesis 38, unless the attempt to come out first was commemorated with a name used often for the dawn. It may be that the name referred simply to the shining string.

These births, with their commemorative namings, remind us of the births of Jacob and Esau. In both cases the younger and the more aggressive one struggled to be first, reminding one that the "righteous take the kingdom by storm." In the birth of Perez, it was as if the oracle given to Rebekah had been revived in the line of Judah. In Judah's family, in spite of his own attempts to halt Tamar's opportunity to conceive, twins were born, and the younger surpassed the elder.

It is with the birth of the twins that the emphasis of this chapter shifts from the need of the clan of Israel to be transported to a consideration of the messianic line. Though Judah had not yet become by divine pronouncement the line through which the Messiah is to appear (cf. Gen. 49:8-12), yet the point of this paragraph is to establish the next link in the chain.

The significant aspect of this incident is the connection to Joseph. Judah and his brothers had sold their younger brother into slavery, thinking that they could thwart God's plan that the elder brothers should be subservient to the younger. Yet in Judah's own family, despite his attempts to hinder Tamar's marriage, God's will worked out in a poignant confirmation of the principle that



the elder would serve the younger. God worked out that principle through the births in Judah's own family, affirming that Joseph's leadership over his brothers could not be so easily set aside--as Judah would discover. The line of promise would carry on through Perez (cf. Matthew 1:3).

A very important theological point emerges here: *Before bondage begins, the redeemer is born. Joseph's coming to Egypt begins Israel's bondage. On the other hand, Perez is the ancestor of the Messianic king. The hero of Genesis 37--50 is Joseph, but salvation will come from Judah.*

### FINAL REMARKS ABOUT TAMAR

Tamar has been described as a woman who wants a child at any price, even if it means to commit adultery, and risks life and honor for her purpose. Actually, this episode, often regarded as objectionable, exhibits Tamar as one of the most admirable women in the Judaeen ancestral line.

One of the purposes of the episode can be recognized by its conclusion. It leads to Perez the ancestor of David and the Judaeen royal dynasty. The Book of Ruth which closes with the name of David expressly mentions Tamar and Perez (Ruth 4:12) and knows no higher blessing for Ruth at her wedding than her house may be like that of Tamar. One may ask why such a pronouncement--and that on Ruth's wedding day!

Directly related to this question is one point regarding the institution of the levirate is usually overlooked: Will the woman agree to it? The levirate implies that a woman who marries must under certain circumstances be ready to become the wife of one of her husband's brothers. It is not merely the one man, but the entire family and clan to which she joins herself. Neither the brother nor she can be forced to the levirate according to Talmud and Shulhan Aruh (Eben Haezer, 165). Her willingness would show loyalty not only to her deceased husband, but to the entire family which she would maintain. Should the brother refuse she is right in publicly disgracing him for his lack of piety by the ceremony described in Deuteronomy 25:5ff.

In our case Judah thinks of the levirate *only* after the death of Er. Tamar could have refused and regarded herself as a widow, no longer bound to his family. In spite of her bad experience with the first brother, she silently places herself at the disposal of the second. He dies too, after having treated her despicably, yet she does not repudiate this family, but waits for the third

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brother. When he is withheld from her, she induces her father-in-law to have sexual relations with her to produce a child.

Her motive cannot have been the wish for a child at any price; she could have had one by marrying another man. She, however, is aware of the exalted mission which became hers by marrying into Judah's family. The laconic way of Scripture must be supplemented. Without doubt Judah informed Tamar about his family, their mission, and the divine promises when he gave her to his oldest son. After Reuben (Gen. 35:22) and Simeon and Levi (Gen. 34) had been rejected, Judah as the next had reason to think that the promise "Kings shall spring from you" (Gen. 35:11; 17:16) referred to him.

Tamar has understood that she would be the mother of these kings. She wants to live solely for this mission. When, after the refusal of the last son she turns to the father, she merely acts as Judah did by the levirate. The intention is the same and the expression "incest" is out of place. The wife of my son would be more closely related to me than the wife of my brother.

The biblical prohibitions against marriages between close relatives have moral reasons, not biological or mystical ones. There are three women--mother, sister, and daughter--who must not be married because of an initially different moral relationship. This relationship must not conflict with the intimacy of marriage. In addition husband and wife are one flesh from which the prohibitions of the father's, the brother's and the son's wife are derived; their wives are in this way the same as mother, sister and daughter. All other prohibited relations can be derived from this. Horror of incest is not cause, but effect of the prohibition.

Biblical moral ethics knows considerations which under certain circumstances are of higher standing than any law, for instance the preservation of life and the duties which serve this purpose. Tamar had learned this from Judah and his levirate, but he had stopped short of fulfilling his obligations. She is unshakably steadfast in her loyalty and binds him without his knowledge by his seal and staff. The symbolism is evident. Tamar is the worthy successor to the wives of the patriarchs. All of them had lived only in the thought of the promised future (Sarah 16:2; 21:10ff.; Rebekah 25:22; 27:46; and the birthing narrative of Leah and Rachel, Gen. 30:1ff.).

Tamar stands even higher as she was originally a stranger, like that of Ruth. Her descent is not mentioned, only her name. This is intentional in contrast of Judah's wife. Undoubtedly Tamar too was the daughter of a

Canaanite, because Judah lived among Canaanites and had taken a wife for himself from them. Calling her Tamar, and not "the daughter of a Canaanite man," points to her as an individual of special worth. Her merit consists in her responsiveness to the exalted mission of ancestress of the Messiah. Nobility of mind is more than nobility of birth. Tamar represents the triumph of the spirit over "blood," and the attraction of Israel's national and religious ideas and of its faith. Another example is Jethro (Ex. 18).

We now understand that Judah's wife is called the daughter of a Canaanite (v. 2). Her father Shua was a genuine Canaanite with a Canaanite bent of mind, and his daughter and her sons were similar. They wished to have nothing to do with Israel's mission. Er does not want to beget children, and Onan will beget none for someone else. That is part of the Canaanite-Egyptian perversity (Lev. 18:2). A genuine son of Abraham begets children for his people and for eternity. Those men are killed by God who desires life and ordains events in such a way that Judah himself begets the ancestor of the kings. The woman is of foreign blood, but she is not only his equal, but even superior to him in moral purity and consistency.

Ruth is the worthy successor of Tamar for the following reasons. She too is of foreign origin, from Moab; and Moab himself had been born in incest (Gen. 19:37). Yet again a principled mind triumphs over "blood." Ruth speaks that which Tamar thought, "Where you go I will go; your people shall be my people, and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16). After joining a house in Israel, Ruth will remain loyal unto death, and even offer herself covertly to a remote relative of her deceased husband.

Chapter 38 is a vital link in the Book of Genesis, for it tells the origins of Israel. However, Israel's story culminates in kingship. The tribe from which the king would come had to be indicated, even more so his ancestors. Chapters 34, 36 and 38 refer to each other. Each one of them is concerned with mixed marriage. A daughter of Jacob marries a Canaanite woman—he is absorbed into the foreign people to such a degree that Esau and Edom become identical; a noble stranger marries into Israel and becomes the ancestress of Israel's most glorious family.

Finally, artistic considerations necessitate the insertion of this chapter into the Joseph Narrative. Following chapter 37 a delay is needed; the plot shall not be unraveled too swiftly. Chapter 38 permits a pause while Joseph's fate matures and while the father still mourns at home. This, however, as stated

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before, would not sufficiently explain the use of this particular story for the delay.

### APPLICATION

In an exposition of this narrative, the main point within the argument of the book will have to deal with the way that God was working on Judah through talionic justice. The central idea could be worded as follows: ***THOSE WHO DISREGARD GOD'S PLAN AND PURSUE A LIFE OF SELF-GRATIFICATION, GOD WILL CORRECT, OFTEN USING TALIONIC JUSTICE IN THE PROCESS.*** There are many ways to state this point, but this wording does convey what the point of the story is within the story of Joseph. The way that the whole event works out is ironic; the thing that Judah tried to prevent happened, and it was his means of correction. If it had been left up to Judah, the family would have assimilated with Canaanites. But Tamar retrieved the line and served as the corrective.

Of course, if one wishes to focus on Tamar, then the entire idea would have to be recast along these lines: In the midst of corruption and faithlessness, the faithful may have to take risks to champion righteousness (forcefully to do what is right).

One of the most common realities among God's people is that they may choose to disregard God's revealed will. The divine counterpart to this reality is the LORD's discipline. This is the truth that had become painfully clear to Judah and his two older sons. Judah and his two sons rejected the revealed will of God which led to the sons' death and his own personal immorality and humiliation. However, in spite of the indifference and immorality of God's people toward His will, the accomplishment of the God's will is not frustrated. Judah's indifference toward carrying on his descendants is climaxed by the birth of twins whose reversed order of birth brings to mind the sovereign work of God with regard to Jacob and Esau. The story of Judah and Tamar is a story of divine providence in the midst of rejection and discipline.

Tamar, perhaps a Canaanite, is the first of four women mentioned in the genealogy of our LORD as recorded in Matthew's Gospel (Matt. 1:3). Portions of the pasts of each of these women could be considered shameful by the Israelites. And yet, despite her past, Tamar was brought into the line of

promise. God's grace triumphed over her disgrace. Indeed, this is the story throughout the entire history of redemption. It is one of victory, in spite of the dark reality of the sin of man throughout that history.

Another great lesson from this account is that the dangers of dwelling among the Canaanites were shown. These pagans posed a threat to the godly Abrahamic line. This unflattering portrayal of the Canaanite influence prepared the way for the sojourn of the children of Israel in Egypt. There they would be segregated geographically and brought to the status of nationhood. Thus, God's providence would bring glory to Himself, even from the midst of seeming failure.

Indeed, the episode of Judah and Tamar stresses the need for the believer to be separated from the evil around him. We cannot go into monasteries and escape the presence of the low moral standards which surround us, but we can take steps to prevent the influence of the world from entering into our daily lives and dictating our behavior. The positive cultivation of godliness, through reading the Word and learning of Christ, as well as obeying what we know to be right, will give us power to recognize the difference between "good and evil," and resist what is not of Him (Heb. 5:11-14). Fellowship with believers who are like-minded will provide needed strength, also (cf. 1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:1-12). The shortcomings of Judah speak to us all.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the chronological sequence between Genesis 37, 38, and 39?
2. What bearing does this passage have on the Mosaic legislature about the levirate marriage?
3. What is the difference between a harlot and a prostitute in this context?
4. What is the sin of Onan?
5. What is the significance of this passage in the message of the Book of Genesis? And perhaps, more specifically, what is the significance in the line of Judah?
6. Compare Tamar's struggle for the right to be the mother of Judah's line with Ruth's claim to Boaz (see the Book of Ruth in the Old[er] Testament).



## Genesis 39:1-23

# Resisting Temptation

### HOW THE WISE RESISTS TEMPTATION

Sin is a monster of such a frightful mien,  
That to be hated, needs but to be seen.  
But seen to oft, familiar with her face,  
We first endure, then pity and then embrace.

-- Alexander Pope (1688-1744)

After the significant interlude about Judah (who separated himself from the family), the story line focuses on Joseph in Egypt (who was separated from the family), continuing from where it left off at the end of chapter 37. The digression or interlude of Genesis 38 is crucial for the Narrative. Both Joseph and Judah reenter the story line in different roles: Judah brings a family with him when he moves to Egypt and a willingness to place himself at risk in the interest and welfare of his brothers and father (Gen. 44:18-34); Joseph's situation in life undergoes several changes before the family is reunited. He rises from "sold into slavery" to become Pharaoh's prime minister, but not before once again falling into the "pit." Yet, as commentators have pointed out, wherever Joseph was allowed to exercise his God-given talents and skills, there was prosperity. Even in captivity in Egypt, the LORD's blessings upon his life were obvious.

The Narrative draws the veil over the long, hot trek across the sands of Sinai, past the Egyptian forts, and into the land. We are told nothing of Joseph's awakened wonder, despite his chains, as the ancient glories of Egypt burst upon his astonished sight. He had come to an amazing land with a history stretching back into the antiquity. When his great-grandfather Abraham had come to Egypt many years before, the Great Pyramid was already a thousand years old.

The second part of the story of Joseph concerns his advancement in Egypt and covers three episodes (chapters 39--41), which is clearly distinguished from chapter 37 before it and 42 after it. Chapters 39--41 do not mention Joseph's family, father, or brothers, but instead focus solely on Joseph's rise in the Egyptian empire.

Chapter 39 is essentially about the temptation of Joseph in Egypt. It actually formed another test of God's leader--if Joseph was to be the leader of God's people, he had to show himself faithful to God. The example of Joseph makes an excellent study on how to overcome temptation.

### **Chronological Considerations**

The integration of chapter 39 into the Narrative is detailed beginning on page 176. At this juncture it would be helpful to provide some historical data about this period, on the basis of secular historical records. One of our major difficulties is that the name of the pharaoh who was in power at the time Joseph came to Egypt is not mentioned in the biblical narrative.

When we turn to secular histories of Egypt, there is considerable evidence that we are dealing with the period of the Hyksos dynasty. Factors that point in this direction are the following:

1. In Joseph's time horses were referred to as being present in Egypt (Gen. 47:17), and horses were introduced to Egypt by the Hyksos people.
2. Mention is made of a new king "who did not know about Joseph" in Exodus 1:8. This could refer to the restoration of a pure Egyptian dynasty, after the Hyksos were driven out. This could explain why Egyptian sources make no mention of Joseph and his work since the Egyptians tried to erase all references to the hated Hyksos from their historical records.
3. There is one record from the latter part of the Hyksos period that has been preserved in the tomb of Sekenenre, one of the Thebian rulers who were Egyptians, and who continued to rule in the southern part of Egypt, the so-called 17th Dynasty, during the Hyksos period. This record refers to rules that were set up for the gathering and storing of corn during a famine that continued for many years. Since periods of famine were very rare in Egypt, it is

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highly probable that this could be a reference to the famine in the days of Joseph.

4. The pharaoh under whom Joseph was active apparently had his residence in the Nile Delta. We note, for instance, that it was convenient for Joseph to present his father and his brothers to Pharaoh. This would have been the case since the land of Goshen where Joseph's family resided was in that same area. It is known that the Hyksos kings had their residence in Avanis, which probably was located in the northeastern section of the delta.
5. The reign of the Hyksos kings would have offered an opportune time for a Semite such as Joseph to attain a high position in the government. Likewise this was a favorable time for a Semite tribe such as Jacob's family to be offered a refuge in Egypt.
6. In this chapter, verse 1, Potiphar is described as "an Egyptian." This strongly suggests that the pharaoh under whom he served was not an Egyptian, and this would also point to the Hyksos dynasty.

In spite of all these considerations, many scholars do not agree that Joseph's ascendancy in Egypt came during the rule of the Hyksos kings. They point to the strict segregation between the Egyptians and the Hebrews at the meal, mentioned in Genesis 43:32. This would have been most unlikely under a Hyksos government. Others have insisted, however, that the Hyksos rulers fully adopted the Egyptian culture. Even so, it is hard to believe that they accepted that culture so fully that they would refuse to eat with their fellow Semites, or that they would have permitted the Egyptians who were subject to them to practice this kind of segregation toward these Semite tribesmen.

Another objection that has been raised points to the argument that Joseph used to gain permission to have his family settle in Goshen (Gen. 46:34). Joseph would hardly have speculated about the ancient Egyptian disdain for shepherders in dealing with a Hyksos king.

In reply to the argument that Potiphar is designated as "an Egyptian," it has been stressed that it was common in Egypt to promote men of foreign backgrounds to high official positions. The point to be emphasized in that reference would then be, not that this high official was an Egyptian, but rather that Joseph, as a Hebrew slave, gained such a high position of trust under an Egyptian ruling official.



It is further argued that the marriage of a prominent man such as Joseph to the daughter of the high priest of On (Gen. 41:45) would be in conflict with the policies of the Hyksos kings, for the Hyksos people did everything in their power to break the domination of the Egyptian priests. This same factor would apply to the portion of land assigned to the priests according to Genesis 47:22, 36.

A strong argument raised against placing these events in the time of the Hyksos kings is that the pharaoh of Joseph's time reigned over the whole of Egypt (see Gen. 41:41, 43-44, 46; 47:20-21), whereas the realm of the Hyksos kings was limited to lower Egypt. On the other hand, it has been argued that some of the Hyksos kings also reigned over upper Egypt, as for instance, Apophis or Apepi III, who is identified with the pharaoh of Joseph's time by many scholars.

Another factor that comes into consideration, in this connection, is that among the records found of this period there are indications that Palestine also formed part of Egypt's domain under the Hyksos kings. If this were the case there would be a number of difficulties that should be faced: (1) Why did Joseph not then initiate an effort to find out about the welfare of his family? (2) Why did Joseph accuse his brothers of being spies when they came from Palestine to Egypt? (3) Why did the funeral procession that carried Jacob's body to Canaan take the long route around the Dead Sea (Gen. 50:10)? (4) Why did the Egyptian escort that accompanied the procession to Canaan not cross the river Jordan (Gen. 50:13)? (5) Why did Joseph make use of an interpreter in speaking to his brothers because during the Hyksos time it would have been altogether understandable that a high Egyptian official could understand the Semitic languages? These difficulties will be answered in the following exposition of the Joseph Narrative.

When all these arguments are put together, probably the most significant consideration involves the use of horses and chariots. It has been generally accepted that these were introduced to Egypt by the Hyksos people. Later excavations, however, indicate that horses may have been used long before the time that was formerly accepted by scholars. A skeleton of a horse was found at Gaza, which was dated at approximately 2500 B.C. This would indicate that horses were present in southern Palestine, which borders on Egypt, long before the time of the Hyksos kings. Egyptian records also cast some doubt on the thesis that horses were introduced to Egypt by the Hyksos. A papyrus has been discovered that tells of an Egyptian princess who rode a horse.

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Although the papyrus dates from approximately 1220 B.C., the narrative it records is much older than that.

One final question has been raised. If Joseph and his family stood in such close association with the Hyksos kings, why did not the pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty, who drove out the Hyksos, immediately begin his oppression of Israel? Why did he wait for many years before resorting to this method of containing these foreigners in their midst? The oppression of Israel started under the reign of Thutmose III (1478-1447 B.C.), while the Hyksos were driven out in 1580 B.C.

From all of this it is evident that there are strong arguments both in favor of and in opposition to dating the coming of Israel into Egypt during the time of the Hyksos kings. There is the added difficulty that we do not know how long the Hyksos kings actually were in power in Egypt. An ancient Egyptian historian-priest, by the name of Manetho (ca. 260 B.C.) sets the period of the Hyksos rule at five centuries. This has been strongly denied by later historians, however, and many set this period at no longer than one century. It is generally agreed that the period falls somewhere between these two figures. This period probably began after the 12th Dynasty or approximately 1790 B.C. In light of biblical data concerning the dates of the building of Solomon's Temple, the conclusion has been reached that the birth of Abraham must be set at 2169 B.C. If this is correct, the year of Joseph's arrival in Egypt would be 1899 B.C. Jacob was born 160 years after Abraham (cf. Gen. 21:5 with 25:26), and he was 130 when he arrived in Egypt (Gen. 47:9). Joseph had been in Egypt some 20 years before Jacob arrived there. Thus, there was a space of 270 years between the birth of Abraham and Joseph's arrival in Egypt. If these dates are dependable, Joseph came to Egypt a century before the reign of the Hyksos kings.

Other scholars, such as Professor Noordzij, place the beginning of the Hyksos era much earlier, at about the year 2000 B.C. In that case, Joseph's time in Egypt would fall within the Hyksos period. It should also be noted that there are some questions about setting the date of Abraham's birth at 2169 B.C. as well.

When everything is considered, we can say that there is a strong possibility that Joseph came into Egypt approximately 1900 B.C., and that the Hyksos kings probably were in power at that time, but these positions are by no means certain. It is also possible to defend the thesis that Joseph came to power long before the Hyksos period in Egyptian history.

### Source Criticism Considerations

Chapter 39 is generally ascribed to "J" by those who divide the sources. A few exceptions to this assignment are the description of Potiphar in verse 1, and the whole of verse 6. These sections are generally assigned to "E." Some scholars hold that there is evidence of two distinct traditions within this episode. They argue that according to "E" Joseph was bought as a slave by Potiphar, the captain of the guard, as soon as he arrived in Egypt. Since Potiphar also was in charge of the prison, Joseph would have served as keeper of the prison from the outset (see Gen. 40:3-4). The "J" tradition, according to these scholars, holds that Joseph was purchased by an unknown Egyptian official for whom he served as a house servant. Joseph gained a high regard and the complete confidence of this master, until he was trapped by his master's seductive wife. Thereafter he was thrown into prison.

The interpretation of this passage of Scripture given below, as well as the treatment of the material found in chapter 40, will indicate that this critical analysis of the passage is not substantiated by the text. There is no textual evidence for two distinct traditions that contradict each other.

### Tale of Two Brothers

The episode of Joseph and Potiphar's wife echoes a well-known motif in world literature: the married woman who attempts to seduce a young, handsome man who nobly rejects her out of a sense of honor and duty. She then accuses him of having attempted to dishonor her.

It has been held that the episode of the temptation of Joseph is derived from an Egyptian legend, "Tale of Two Brothers" of the *Papyrus d'Orbiney*, the oldest surviving manuscript is dated ca. 1225 BC.

The Egyptian tale tells of two brothers, Anubis and Bata, who lived together. Anubis was married, Bata was a bachelor. One day, when the former was not at home, his wife tried to seduce Bata, who virtuously rejected her advances. Knowing well her fate should her husband discover the truth, the guilty wife anticipated events by slandering Bata. The innocent brother was forced to flee from the murderous intentions of Anubis, who followed in vengeful pursuit. Bata finally succeeded in convincing his brother of his innocence. Anubis returned home, slew his wife, and threw her body into the river.

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Though there is a certain superficial resemblance, the differences outlined below are such as to preclude the derivation of the biblical from the Egyptian story:

1. Joseph was not the brother of Potiphar, but a Hebrew from Canaan, and a slave as well. Nothing of this is found in the "Tale of Two Brothers."
2. Joseph is not mutilated but thrown into prison.
3. In the Egyptian tale, there are strong mythological elements not parallel to the biblical account; for example, there are talking cows, the miraculous appearance of a river, and many others. A particularly repulsive item is the way Bata proves his innocence. He mutilates himself and casts his penis into the river, where it is swallowed by a fish.
4. The "Tale of the Two Brothers" is dated ca. 1225, and thus the Joseph episode could not have been borrowed from it, since Joseph is historically prior to it.

To be sure, the subject matter of an unfaithful wife who is jilted by her would-be lover is all too familiar everywhere in the world. One is reminded of the Greek tales about Bellerophon and Anteia, Hippolytus and Phaedra, Prius and his aunt, Peleus and Cretheis, and Tenes and Phylonome. Similar stories occur in the *Arabian Nights* and *The Decameron*.

All these aspects of the Egyptian story find no echo in the biblical narrative about Joseph and Potiphar's wife. It is not an independent story but a single episode that has been integrated into a larger account. As such, it is recorded with a striking economy of detail and with a restraint that is austere. Potiphar is faceless, lacking in individuality. His wife is nameless. Scripture is silent about her fate, which is usually a prominent feature of the "spurned wife" motif. If this was no more than a fable or a saga the outcome would certainly have been that the unfaithful wife would have been found out, and the hero, in this case Joseph, would have been exonerated and set free. The very fact that Joseph was kept imprisoned in the royal fortress argues for the historicity of this episode.

Thus again, appropriate analysis of the text presents the real cause for the inclusion in the story of the attempted seduction of Joseph, while the attempt to derive it from pagan sources reveals the desperation of the source documentarians to find sources by which effectively to discredit the Scriptures. Their effort reveals a singular distaste for determining the proper meaning in favor of preference for similarities in pagan carnality, which in themselves bear little real connection. To make the "Tale of Two Brothers" a satisfactory source, alterations need to be made in that itself.

### THEOLOGICAL IDEAS

The temptation by Potiphar's wife clearly forms the central motif of this passage, but the focus is on Joseph's resistance to it. The temptation came when Joseph was enjoying the blessing of God and was, perhaps, more vulnerable. His resistance to the temptation was due to his wholehearted trust in God's purpose for him, and that purpose was being confirmed in his present experience. In other words, the evidence of God's presence strengthened his faith. Convinced that he was chosen by God to rule, Joseph would not sin against God; sure that God was with him as he faithfully served Potiphar, he would not do wickedly against his master. He knew that he could not succeed by defying God.

Resisting temptation did not bring Joseph immediate reward. Rather, he was thrown into prison, without a hearing and without justice. His rapid advancement in prison assured him that God was pleased with him, but the immediate results of his obedience were unpleasant. This observation adds an important qualification to the theological idea that God rewards obedience.

In preceding narratives in Genesis, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob repeatedly fall short of God's expectations, though, of course, they continued to have faith in God. In the Joseph Narrative, however, we do not see him fall short. On the contrary, Joseph is a striking example of one who responds in trust and obedience to the will of God. Behind the Joseph Narrative, then, lies an emphasis that has been little felt in the earlier stories where the stress has been on God's overriding commitment and faithfulness to His promises. The Joseph Narrative, on the other hand, give expression to that part of the promise found in Genesis 18:19: "that they may do righteousness and justice so that the LORD may fulfill what He has promised to Abraham." There was a human part to be played in the fulfillment of God's plan. When God's people respond as Joseph responded, then their way and God's blessing will prosper.

The Joseph Narrative is intended then to give balance to the narratives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Together the two sections show both God's faithfulness in spite of human failure as well as the necessity of an obedient and faithful response. The theological emphasis is remarkably similar to that of the New Covenant theology of Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:22-32 where the two themes of divine sovereignty and human responsibility are woven together by means of the concept of God's Spirit giving man a "new heart"--a heart given to many by God that responds with obedience and faith. It can hardly be accidental, then, that in all the Book of Genesis only Joseph is described as one who was filled with the Spirit of God (Gen. 41:38). The same theological emphasis can be found in Deuteronomy 30:6-10, where Moses grounds his hope in the future of God's covenant promises in the divine work of giving man a new heart. Joseph was imprisoned through no fault of his own. In fact, the Narrative is explicit in its emphasis on the total uprightness of Joseph throughout the attempted seduction by the Egyptian's wife. He was in jail because of false witness leveled against him.

## STRUCTURE, SYNTHESIS AND TRANSLATION

### Structure

Once again Joseph is made the central participant of the narrative in the Hebrew text by the word order: a perfect with a prepositive noun (וַיִּהְיֶה הַיּוֹם הַהוּא / "Now Joseph was led down"), a structure which introduces or features a participant or a prop in the narrative, which in turn the action that is represented in connection with this participant or prop is a secondary or preparatory action (see 37:3: where there is temporary focus on Israel, his father, and this is achieved by means of using a clause with the verb in the perfect with the noun [Israel] prepositive). Thus in Genesis 39:1, preceding the onset of a chain of verbs (preterites), we have a sentence that begins with the words *wěyôsēp hūrad mišrāyēmâ*, "and Joseph was brought down to Egypt." Plainly, the reason for throwing Joseph to the prepositive position is to refocus on him as the central participant of the narrative, which had been interrupted by the intervening material concerning Judah and Tamar in chapter 38.

This episode falls into three acts: Joseph's success in the house of Potiphar (vv. 1-6), Joseph's resistance to the temptation by Potiphar's wife (vv. 7-20), and Joseph's success in the prison (vv. 21-23). The first and last acts are parallel and frame the account of the temptation. In the two framing acts the

emphasis is on the LORD's presence with Joseph, Joseph's prosperity, Joseph's finding grace in the eyes of his master (first Potiphar, then the jailer), and Joseph's being given greater responsibilities.

The middle act includes three scenes: (1) temptation and refusal, continued temptation and refusal (vv. 7-12); (2) notice of his garment and first false accusation, laying aside his garment and second false accusation (vv. 13-18); (3) the episode closes with the scene of the account of Potiphar's anger and Joseph's imprisonment (vv. 19-20).

The parallelism of this event with the earlier throwing of Joseph into the pit must also have been striking to Joseph. Donald Seybold shows the following comparisons in the following chart.

Head of Household	Position of Subservience	Symbol of Dominance & Transition	Symbol of Ambiguity & Paradox
Jacob	Joseph	Long-sleeved robe	The pit
Potiphar	Joseph	Cloak	The prison
Prison keeper	Joseph		

Seybold shows that under each "head," Joseph was placed in a position of dominance over a group of people:

He is a favorite of the head of the household (Jacob, Potiphar, prison keeper) over others like himself, whether brothers, slaves, or prisoners; and he is in a position of dominance over the others, whether he is checking on his brothers for his father (37:12-14), presiding over the other slaves of Potiphar (39:4-5), or overseeing the other prisoners (39:21-23) . . . . The robe and the cloak . . . indicate first his elevation and then a stripping away . . . and the pit/prison . . . is the place where Joseph is both condemned and saved. (Seybold, "Paradox and Symmetry in the Joseph Narrative," 1974:63).

Additionally, the pit was a result of Joseph's rejection by his brothers, as the prison was a result of his rejection by Potiphar. This pit-rejection motif appears later on in the psalms and the prophets. For example, Jeremiah was cast into a pit because the Word of the LORD that he delivered was rejected (Jer. 38:4-6)--just as was the LORD's revelation that Joseph delivered to his family (Gen. 37:5-11).

### Chiastic Structure

Recapitulation: Joseph is sold into Egypt by the Ishmaelites to Potiphar (1)

- A Joseph's success in Potiphar's house (2-6a)
- B Editorial remark: Joseph was handsome in appearance (6b)
- C Potiphar's wife desire (7a)
  - D Potiphar's wife request: "Lie with me!" (7b)
  - E JOSEPH'S REFUSAL TO COMMIT SIN (8-9)**
  - D' Potiphar's wife request: "Lie with me!" (10-12)
- C' Potiphar's wife spurned (13-18)
- B' Editorial remark: Joseph was confined to the king's jail (19-20a)
- A' Joseph's success in Potiphar's prison (21-23)

### Synthesis

While enjoying the LORD's abundant blessing upon him in Potiphar's house, Joseph repeatedly refused the seductive attempts of his master's wife, testifying that he could not sin against God and do wickedly against his master; and when he was imprisoned because of her false accusation, he once again enjoyed the LORD's abundant blessing.

### Translation

- <sup>1</sup> When Joseph was taken down to Egypt, a certain Egyptian, Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh and his chief steward, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him there.
- <sup>2</sup> The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he stayed in the house of his Egyptian master.
- <sup>3</sup> And when his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD lent success to everything he undertook,
- <sup>4</sup> he took a liking to Joseph. He made him his personal attendant and put him in charge of his household, placing in his hands all that he owned.



- 5 And from the time that the Egyptian put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed his house for Joseph's sake, so that the blessing of the LORD was upon everything that he owned, in the house and outside.
- 6 He left all that he had in Joseph's hands and, with him there, he paid attention to nothing except the food that he ate. Now Joseph was well built and handsome.
- 7 After a time, his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph and said, "Lie with me."
- 8 But he refused. He said to his master's wife, "Look, with me here, my master gives no thought to anything in this house, and all that he owns he has placed in my hands.
- 9 He wields no more authority in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except yourself, since you are his wife. How then could I do this most wicked thing, and sin before God?"
- 10 And much as she coaxed Joseph day after day, he did not yield to her request to lie beside her, to be with her.
- 11 One such day, he came into the house to do his work. None of the household being there inside,
- 12 she caught hold of him by his garment and said, "Lie with me!" But he left his garment in her hand and got away and fled outside.
- 13 When she saw that he had left it in her hand and had fled outside,
- 14 she called out to her servants and said to them, "Look, he had to bring us a Hebrew to dally with us! This one came to lie with me; but I screamed loud.
- 15 And when he heard me screaming at the top of my voice, he left his garment with me and got away and fled outside."
- 16 She kept his garment beside her, until his master came home.
- 17 Then she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew slave whom you brought into our house came to me to dally with me;
- 18 but when I screamed at the top of my voice, he left his garment with me and fled outside."
- 19 When his master heard the story that his wife told him, namely, "Thus and so your slave did to me," he was furious.
- 20 So Joseph's master had him put in prison, where the king's prisoners were confined. But even while he was there in prison,
- 21 the LORD was with Joseph: He extended kindness to him and disposed the chief jailer favorably toward him.
- 22 The chief jailer put in Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in that prison, and he was the one to carry out everything that was done there.

- <sup>23</sup> The chief jailer did not supervise anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the LORD was with him, and whatever he did the LORD made successful.

4A

## EXEGETICAL OUTLINE

- I. After Joseph had been brought to Egypt and purchased by Potiphar, the LORD prospered everything he did and blessed Potiphar's possessions when Joseph was put in charge of them (1-6).
  - A. After Joseph had been taken to Egypt, Potiphar purchased him from the Ishmaelites (1).
  - B. The LORD was with Joseph and caused him to prosper in everything that he did (2).
  - C. When Potiphar saw that Joseph was prospering, he put him in charge of everything he owned and thus shared in God's blessing (3-6a).
  - D. Transition: Joseph was of fine appearance and handsome (6b).
- II. In the light of God's blessing on him, Joseph repeatedly refused the seductive attempts of Potiphar's wife, only to be falsely accused by her to the servants and to her husband (7-20).
  - A. First temptation: Joseph refused the repeated advances of Potiphar's wife because he knew that to accept would be sin against God, Who had given him such great responsibility (7-10).
    1. Potiphar's wife was physically attracted to Joseph and tried to seduce him (7).
    2. Joseph refused her invitation, explaining that to accept would be to sin against God Who had caused Potiphar to entrust him with great responsibility (8-9).
    3. Joseph spurned the continual advances of the woman (10).
  - B. Continued temptation: When Potiphar's wife forcefully tried to seduce Joseph, he ran from her, leaving his garment in her hand (11-22).
  - C. Potiphar's wife falsely accused Joseph to her household servants and to her husband, so that Joseph was imprisoned (13-20).
    1. First false accusation: Using Joseph's coat as evidence, Potiphar's wife told her servants that Joseph had tried to seduce her (13-15).
    2. Second false accusation: She told her husband that Joseph had tried to seduce her (16-18).
    3. Potiphar was angry and had Joseph imprisoned (19-20).

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- III. The LORD was with Joseph in prison and dealt with him in loyal love, causing him to prosper, so that the warden put everything in his care (21-23).
- A. The LORD was with Joseph and granted him favor with the warden (21).
- B. The warden confidently put Joseph in charge of everything in the prison because the LORD was with him (22-23a).
- C. The LORD prospered everything that Joseph did (23b).

### EXPOSITION OF THE PASSAGE

- I. *The purposeful blessing of the LORD is the evidence of His presence (1-6a).*

The symmetry of this chapter, in which the scene opening (vv. 1-6) is matched, point for point, at a new level at the close (vv. 19-23) despite all that intervenes, perfectly expresses the LORD's quiet control and the man of faith's quiet victory. The seed is buried deeper, still to push upward; the servant, faithful in a little, trains for authority in much.

**Recapitulation: Joseph Is Sold Into Egypt By The Ishmaelites To Potiphar (verse 1)**

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- 1 Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and Potiphar, and Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard, bought him from the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down there.
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Fully conscious of the intervening Judah-Tamar narrative, the narrator resumes the account of Joseph by recapitulating the concluding verses of chapter 37 after the important digression in the family history of Judah in chapter 38. Verse 1, acting as an overpass spanning chapter 38 and joining directly with chapter 37, repeats much of Genesis 37:36 because of the intervening story of Judah and Tamar:

Gen. 37:36: "Meanwhile, the Midianites sold (מָכְרוּ) him in Egypt to Potiphar, Pharaoh's officer, the captain of the bodyguard."

Gen. 39:1: "Now Joseph had been taken down (הוֹרֵד) to Egypt; and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer, the captain of the bodyguard, bought him (וַיִּקְנֶהוּ) from the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down (הוֹרֵדוּהוּ) there."

The first verse, which at the same time introduces chapter 39, consists of two verbal sentences: "Joseph had been taken down . . . Potiphar bought him." This sentence resumes Genesis 37:28, "thus they [Ishmaelites] brought (וַיְבִיאוּ) Joseph into Egypt"; at the same time, it resumes the context there, namely, the fact that Joseph was sold as a slave and the reason why this could be done. Chapter 39, therefore, assumes and presupposes chapter 37. The concluding adverbial clause in 39:1d-e "the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down there," resumes Genesis 37:28b. The link is made even closer by the use of the verb "they sold him" in 37:36 (the same verb in 37:28) and the correlative "he bought him" in 39:1.

Potiphar's name, his profession, and racial origin dominate the verse. One notices immediately that the same wording is found in Genesis 37:36b. Potiphar is never mentioned by name again in chapter 39 but only as "his Egyptian master," "Joseph's master," "his master," "the Egyptian." The full name and titles are given at the beginning of the episode to draw attention to the aristocratic nature of the household into which Joseph is sold, a detail essential to the development of the story. Otherwise, the name of the master is of no significance--indeed the proper noun "Potiphar" is not used again.

The national identity of Joseph's new master being "Egyptian" is repeated three times for emphasis (vv. 1, 2, 5). Since Joseph was in Egypt, this would seem unnecessary, even superfluous, except on the supposition that Pharaoh and most of the rulers of Egypt were themselves *not* Egyptians, as would indeed be the case if this was the time of the Hyksos dynasties. Archaeology and history have revealed that an alien dynasty, not composed of native Egyptians, was ruling the land at this time. These people were known as the Hyksos, and their presence explains why our narrator especially remarks on Potiphar's nationality. Once again the accuracy of God's Word, even in such minute details, is obvious. The specifics given in chapter 39 about the structure of Egyptian households also reveal accurate knowledge of the Egypt of that time.

The three-fold repetition of "Egyptian," echoes the sale of Joseph into Egyptian slavery and may set the stage for the looming enslavement and subsequent redemption of Israel in the Book of Exodus. The prophecy given by the LORD to Abram in Genesis 15:13-16 is coming to fruition.

It is striking that the name "Potiphar" (פּוֹטִיפָר) is almost identical with that of Joseph's future father-in-law, Potiphera (פּוֹטִי פָרַע; Gen. 41:45, 50 and 46:20). This latter name has been explained as the Egyptian **Pa-di-pare**, meaning "he whom Re (the sun-god) has given." It has been conjectured that "Potiphar," a form not otherwise known in ancient Near Eastern documents, has been deliberately abbreviated in the two instances that it occurs (Gen. 37:36; 39:1) in order to avoid confusion of the two persons (Sarna, 1989:263).

As to his first title, "officer of Pharaoh" (סָרִיס פְּרַעָה), is derive from the Akkadian *ša-rēši*, "the one at the head," that is, an officer of the realm. Because of the practice of castrating court officials, the term acquired the sense of "eunuch." However, this meaning cannot be applied indiscriminately, for Akkadian texts show that not all who held the title were emasculated, especially if they did not need to come into contact with the harem. Moreover, there does not seem to be evidence of eunuchs as an institution in ancient Egypt.

It was evidently customary in ancient pagan countries, beginning with Sumeria, to require prominent officers associated closely with the king's court to be castrated, perhaps to ensure full-hearted devotion to the duties required of them and to minimize the possibility of their taking over the kingdom by military coup to establish a dynasty of their own. If the term "officer" does carry the sense of eunuch, and since Potiphar was a married man, it would seem either that Potiphar had consented to such an operation after he was married in order to acquire his high office or else that his wife had married him for political or financial reasons rather than for normal marital relations. In either case, it is perhaps understandable, though hardly justifiable, that she would be prone to adulterous episodes from time to time.

The second title attributed to Potiphar is "captain of the bodyguard," or perhaps more accurate, "commander of the executioners" (cf. 2 Kgs. 25:8ff.; Jer. 52:12ff.). The Hebrew word for "commander" (שָׂר/šar) does not indicate status or nobility. King Saul confounds the people by asking them if David would make them captains (šar; 2 Sam. 22:7), these being the common people. Nor does this title refer only to commanders of hundreds and thousands, but to those also who are over tens (Ex. 18:21, 25). Therefore, šar

simply means chief or commander; a man of authority for carrying on the king's business. The Hebrew word for "bodyguard" (חַטָּבָה/*hattabbah*) is used either for a "cook" (who prepared the meals by killing animals for food; Gen. 43:16) or "slaughterer," that is an executioner. The term is used also for judgment falling on God's enemies (Isa. 34:2; Ezek. 21:15).

### Joseph's Success In The House Of Potiphar (verses 2-6a)

**2 And the LORD was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian.**

Verses 2-6 serve as the introductory scene for Joseph's encounter with his master's wife. The reiterated verbal statements function like pulses of a musical theme at the beginning of the first movement of a classical symphony. For example, Joseph is successful (יָשָׁח + מַצְלִיחַ/*matzliah*, as an intransitive, v. 2) and God causes him to succeed (מַצְלִיחַ + יְהוָה/*matzliah*, as a causative verb, v. 3). God repeatedly "is with" Joseph (vv. 2, 3, 22, 23), a condition that clearly relates to success as cause to effect and that, spreading from the man to whatever he touches, manifests itself as *blessing*. Moreover, the word "all" (כֹּל/*kol*) is insisted upon five times (vv. 3, 4, 2x in 5, 6), clearly exceeding the norm of Hebrew biblical repetition and thus calling attention to itself as a thematic assertion: the scope of blessing or success this man realizes is virtually unlimited; everything prospers and everything is entrusted to him.

It is significant that the personal name YHWH, used only in this chapter of the Joseph Narrative (2, 3, 5, 21, 23), is confined exclusively to the narrative and never used by anyone in direct speech (cf. Exodus 6:3). The preference for this personal name of the God of Israel, as opposed to the generic ELOHIM, is determined by an underlying intent to emphasize that the unfolding events in Joseph's life are key elements in God's plan for the people of Israel. The use of YHWH gives an appropriate nuance to this wider national inflection in the Narrative.

Verse 2 declares, "The LORD was with Joseph and he was a successful (prospering) man." The reader must thoroughly understand the statements in the text in order to catch the emphasis. The seminal phrase "with Joseph" appears four times in this chapter (vv. 2, 3, 22, 23), forming a chiastically literary framework within which the narrative is encased. All of this

underscores that innate gifts of intelligence and skill cannot achieve fruition without divine support (cf. Psa. 1:3; 1 Chron. 22:11; Jn. 15:5ff.).

In addition, the repetitious use of the phrase, "the LORD was with Joseph," imparts coherence and meaning to what superficially appear to be merely random events. The phrase enables the reader to understand how the lad of seventeen, utterly alone in a foreign, hostile land and in dire adversity, matures and acquires great strength of character. He can rise again and again in situations that would surely have crushed others. This is the emphasis noted by Stephen in his review of Israel's history (see Acts 7:9).

The theological notion of the presence of the LORD, repeated so often in the Scriptures (and epitomized in the name Immanuel, "God with us), is the reason for Joseph's prosperity. The verse gives the cause (the presence of the LORD) and the effect (the prosperity). The phrase expresses the idea that innate gifts of intelligence and skill cannot achieve fruition without divine support. A study of the Hebrew verb, "to prosper," is important to the understanding of this passage; its meaning is helpfully clarified in the subsequent verses. The youth could begin to see the hand of God working in his life by means of the favor he achieved with his master. This prosperity not only began the advancement of Joseph, it also prepared Joseph for the temptation to follow.

In the first two verses, two things are conspicuous by their absence. First, there is no mention of how long Joseph had been Potiphar's slave before the events in this chapter took place. As far as the reader knows, he could have been there a few months or a few years; we are not told. Second, there is no mention of the difficult adjustments Joseph must have had to make as a slave in a foreign land and culture. Remember, he was use to a father showing favoritism and privileges that exempted him from menial tasks. Now he had to obey the commands of Pharaoh's chief executioner and do his menial tasks.

It is noteworthy that Joseph was not sent to work in the fields. It was not uncommon for slaves in Egypt to be employed in professional tasks such as household management and the administration of property. This situation is illustrated by an Egyptian papyrus (Brooklyn 35.1446) deriving from 1833-1742 B. C., which lists the names of nearly eighty slaves in an Egyptian household, together with their occupations. Strangely, the Asian slaves clearly enjoyed superior status and performed the skilled jobs while the Egyptian slaves were given the more onerous and strenuous labors in the fields. By working in the house, Joseph has the opportunity to display his administrative talents and to

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win the favor of his master. But he is also brought into close and constant contact with his master's wife!

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- 3** Now his master saw that the LORD was with him and *how* the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand.
- 4** So Joseph found favor in his sight, and became his personal servant; and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge.
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The point which our narrator wishes to underscore is that Joseph's prosperity was not any ordinary prosperity--it was phenomenal and unexpected, because even Potiphar had to admit that the LORD was with him, causing him to prosper. Joseph may have been the prototype of the righteous man described in Psalm 1:3. Notice that Joseph did not *tell* Potiphar that the LORD was with him; verse 3 says, "his master *saw*" that the LORD was with him. And verse 4 says, "Joseph found favor in his [Potiphar's] sight," not "Joseph requested favors from Potiphar."

The LORD's blessing was on Joseph's life and this, coupled with Joseph's personal integrity and hard work, led to his being promoted to a place of prominence as Potiphar's personal attendant (cf. Ex. 24:13; 2 Kgs. 6:15).

Potiphar trusted Joseph and enjoyed a share in the divine blessing on the lad. The narrator could not say that YHWH was also with Joseph's Egyptian master, because the "blessing" presupposes a mutual personal relationship. The text also indicates that Joseph served faithfully. If the interpreter had any doubts about Joseph's faithfulness from studying Genesis 37, they would be swept aside here. Everything that Potiphar owned was under the care of Joseph, and it flourished: "and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge" (v. 4c). Joseph is now overseer of the entire estate, a function that conforms to that of the title frequently encountered in Egyptian texts as *mer-per*, "comptroller." Joseph was the faithful servant par excellence; Potiphar had no need to be concerned about anything he had--even about his wife.



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- 5 And it came about that from the time he made him overseer in his house, and over all that he owned, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; thus the LORD's blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field.
- 6a So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him *there* he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate.
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Because Potiphar saw the work of the LORD and honored Joseph, the LORD blessed his household, so that the "blessing of the LORD" was upon all that he had, "in the house and in the field." This latter phrase which stands in apposition with "upon all that he owned," is a merism, a figure of speech that combines two contrasting elements to express totality (cf. Gen. 1:1, "Heavens and the earth"; Rev. 1:8, 11; 21:6; 22:13, "Alpha and Omega, the first and the last/beginning and the end"; Rev. 20:12, "the great and the small").

The text illustrates, then, the promise that whoever blessed the seed of Abraham would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3). Thus we are told that "the LORD blessed the house of the Egyptian because of Joseph" (v. 5). Such a thematic introduction alerts the reader to the underlying lessons intended throughout the Narrative. This is not a story of the success of Joseph; rather it is a story of the LORD's faithfulness to His promises.

With verse 6a Joseph has now reached the pinnacle of his career as a servant in the wealthy household, having won his master's complete and unqualified confidence in his ability and integrity. But we must not think that all this transpired quickly. If we backtrack from Joseph's age of thirty when he told Pharaoh's dreams (Gen. 41:46), deducting the two full years of Genesis 41:1 and the seventeen years of 37:2, there are eleven years for which to be accounted. Most of this time might well be allocated to the time in Potiphar's house and some two or three years additional in the prison. Thus, if we allow a few months after his seventeenth year in Canaan, and the four or five years in prison, Joseph spent perhaps seven to nine years in Potiphar's house and grew in stature and appearance until Potiphar's wife grew a liking to him.

It is notable that when the text states: "So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge [lit. "hand"]" that the Hebrew phrase **וַיַּעֲזֹב בְּיָד** ("So he left - in hand") stands in place of the usual **וַיִּתֵּן בְּיָד**, as in verses 4, 8, and 22. This is unique, for elsewhere the phrase **וַיַּעֲזֹב בְּיָד** means "to abandon to the power of" and has a negative connotation, as in Psalms 37:33 and Nehemiah

9:28. The exceptional style here is probably a deliberate literary device to hint at impending evil and to allude to a cause-and-effect connection with verses 12, 13, and 15, which employ the same phrase but in a different association.

Perhaps, I should explain why I make the differentiation and take time to note such variations. The deepest and most pervasive assumption of a close reading of the Hebrew text is the assumption that *variation in a text is not random but motivated*. In brief, where the author has a choice in regard to a lexical item or a grammatical construction, his particular choice is motivated by pragmatic concerns of discourse structure. It need not be assumed that a writer simply varied his style to avoid monotony or repetition, unless this can be clearly demonstrated to be a motivating factor. Rather, a good working hypothesis is the axiom that variation can be explained in terms of the pragmatics of author choices within discourse structure.

The exception clause in 6b, "except the food which he ate," is more enigmatic than it first appears. In view of the parallel passage in verse 9, early rabbinic exegesis understood the clause as a circumlocution for "wife." Support for this may be found in Proverbs 30:20: "Such is the way of an adulteress: She eats, wipes her mouth, and says, 'I have done no wrong'." With this interpretation, the incongruity of verses 1-6 and 7-20 is stronger, for "food" is an euphemism for Potiphar's wife, and thus a cipher for sex. The one thing forbidden is the one thing sought by Potiphar's wife (reminiscent of Eve's desire for the forbidden fruit, Gen. 3:6). An alternative interpretation sees a connection with the ritual separation said to have been practiced by Egyptians at meals, mentioned in Genesis 43:32; or perhaps it is probably to be interpreted as a fixed expression as his private affairs. In any case, the reader should note the tie between Potiphar being called *šar* ("cook," "executioner") and the object of the verb in this exception clause *lehem* ("bread"), both originally having something to do with food.

#### Editorial Remark: Joseph Was Handsome In Appearance (verse 6a)

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**6b** Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

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The first scene closes with a parenthetical transition: "Now Joseph was of fine appearance and handsome" (or as the Jewish Publication Society translation has it, "Now Joseph was well built and handsome"). Joseph possessed more than spiritual qualities and administrative abilities. He was also

handsome and well-built. No other male in Scripture is described exactly with this description. A similar statement was made much later relative to young David (1 Sam. 16:12), whom God also selected for a special service. The Hebrew phrase also is used of Rachel, Joseph's mother in Genesis 29:17.

In addition, the description reminds the reader of the appearance of Sarai and Rebekah (Gen. 12:11 and 26:7) that made them susceptible to the sexual advances of potentates, and Egyptian in the case of Sarai, and then Abimelech, a Philistine. Joseph's physical attractiveness is not mentioned as an element in Jacob's favoritism or as an additional cause of his brothers' envy. Scripture makes it clear that it is not such outward features that matter with the LORD (1 Sam. 16:7), but the attitude of the heart. Absalom, for example, was also of handsome appearance (2 Sam. 14:25), but his heart was vindictive and filled with personal ambition and rebellion, and he came to a bitter end. The mention of Joseph's appearance here serves solely to introduce and the preparation for what follows (vv. 7-20). It would explain why Potiphar's sensuous wife took a personal interest in her husband's attractive young slave.

While Potiphar is appreciating Joseph's reliable business sense and trustworthy nature, his wife is becoming increasingly preoccupied with Joseph's good build and looks. The way verse 3 picks up verse 2 and carries it a step further (from success, to success observed) is followed again in verses 4 and 5, where the servant's promotion becomes the master's blessing; and the whole progression is crowned by verse 6, its final pinnacle preparing the reader for the attack which it almost invites.

## II. *The awareness of God's presence enables His people to resist temptation (6b-20).*

This second scene reports Joseph's faithfulness in resisting temptation. God was apparently testing him through this woman to see whether he was obedient. After all, he was far away from his family, and it was his master's wife--to give in may have seemed an easy and expedient thing to do. But it should be pointed out that, if he had succumbed to her advances, he still might have ended up in prison--but as a failure with God.

The story unfolds in cycles: temptation and refusal, temptation and refusal; then false accusation to the men and false accusation to Potiphar; and finally imprisonment. By this repetition the narrative is heightening the issue:

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Joseph's determined resistance met with doubly wicked false accusation--and the latter won out.

The action of the scene is portrayed quickly, then retold twice by the woman as a 'he-tried-to-rape-me' story. Joseph's initial reply to her, "How can I do this great evil and sin against God?" (by violating Potiphar's confidence; Gen. 39:8-9), is in keeping with his all-pervading God consciousness so clearly represented in the narrative.

#### Potiphar's wife desire (verse 7a)

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**7a** And it came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph,

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The scene begins in verse 7 with a temporal note: "And it came about after these events." Sufficient time has now elapsed for Joseph's relative independence and authority to be accepted as commonplace. It is at this time that "his master's wife" longs for Joseph. Potiphar's wife remains nameless throughout the narrative. Her designation serves a dual purpose. It draws attention to Joseph's dilemma in antagonizing someone so powerful, and it emphasizes the inherent irony of the situation. She, the mistress of the house, is a slave to her own lust for her husband's slave!

We are introduced to Potiphar's wife in relationship to her desiring Joseph. The narrative tells us that Potiphar's wife had cast her eyes on him and then, when alone in the household (Potiphar seems regularly to have been away), pressured him, day after day. As von Rad has pointed out, the passage recalls the warning of Proverbs about the seductress who casts her eyes on the young man and invites him to take his fill of love with her because her husband is away (Prov. 7:6-27).

The Hebrew text literally reads, "and she, the wife of his master, lifted up her eyes to Joseph and said, 'Lie with me'." Whereas this idiom is found only in two other places in the Joseph Narrative (Gen. 37:25; 43:29), this occurrence lacks the usual accompanying Hebrew verb "saw" (i.e., וַיִּשָׂא עֵינָיו, וַיִּרְא), which would normally indicate the "exclusionary" range or content of what is seen. In our text, however, the narrator eclipses any unnecessary word(s) in order for our eyes to arrest upon her petition to Joseph.

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Joseph certainly would have behaved politely and considerately toward his master's wife, but he soon must have realized she was taking more interest in him personally than was fitting. There is no indication that he encouraged her in any way--quite the contrary in fact. Finally she impatiently decided that, since a subtle seduction was not proving effective, she would try overwhelming him with a bold invitation to her bedroom!

**Potiphar's Wife Request: "Lie with me!" (verse 7)**

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**7b** and she said, "Lie with me."

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The very first dialogue in the entire episode comes at the end of verse 7, without preliminaries or explanations, presented almost as though these two words (in the Hebrew, שִׁכְבָה עִמִּי) were all she ever spoke and commanded to Joseph: "Lie with me." The temptation was powerful by its boldness and directness. The narrator purposely uses the term "to lie" to contrast the woman's mind set with the single-minded determination of Joseph. First, there is the command, "lie with me" (v. 7). Then there is Joseph's refusal to "lie" (v. 10). The woman repeats her command (v. 12), and the word is used to accuse him (v. 14). Thus the word presents the entire interaction which moves from *command* and seduction through *refusal* to *accusation*.

Potiphar's wife attempt to seduce Joseph reverses a well-know plot in the patriarchal narratives. Whereas before it was the beautiful wife (cf. Gen. 12:11; 26:7) of the patriarch who was sought by the foreign ruler, now it was Joseph, the handsome man who was sought by the wife of the foreign ruler. Whereas in the earlier narratives it was either the LORD (cf. Gen. 12:17; 20:3) or the moral purity of the foreign ruler (Gen. 26:10) that rescued the wife rather than the patriarch, here it was Joseph's own moral courage that resisted the temptation. The purpose of this reversal perhaps lies in a change of emphasis on the part of the writer in the Joseph Narrative. Whereas in the preceding narratives, the focus of the writer had been on God's faithfulness in fulfilling His covenant promises, in the story of Joseph his attention is turned to the human faith-obedient response.

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**Joseph's Refusal (verses 8-9)**

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- 8** But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me *here*, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge.
- 9** There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?"
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Joseph immediately and simply refused. Joseph's analysis of her solicitation was keen and incisive. He had not right to presume on his privileges or trust nor might he accommodate her, for this would be sin against God, both obvious enough reasons. One thought honors the rights of the marriage partners; the other honors the rights of God.

There was no debating, no flirtations conversation. He refused to lie with her or to be with her. Joseph's moral fortitude can be appreciated all the more if one remembers that he is a slave and that sexual promiscuity was a perennial feature of all slave societies. Moreover, an ambitious person might well have considered that the importuning woman had presented him with a rare opportunity to advance his personal and selfish interests.

Now Joseph was a virile and active young man, and this invitation must have both flattered and tempted him. Her husband was gone, none of the other servants were around, and she was an attractive and eagerly available woman. Sexual dalliances were common in such circumstances and, even in his own family, Joseph had no doubt seen examples of his brothers' indifference to high moral standards. Furthermore, in view of his knowledge of the unsatisfactory nature of her marital relations with his master, he might even have justified it as an act of service to meet her own needs.

With such an array of possible rationalizations easily at hand, it would have been natural to yield to her invitation. But with Joseph there were two considerations which overshadowed all others: he knew that such actions were contrary to the LORD's revealed will. Even though the Mosaic laws were not yet written, there was enough primeval knowledge concerning God's purposes for mankind available for him to know beyond question that adultery and fornication were wrong in God's sight. He knew from the account of man's creation, for example, that God had ordained the permanence and sanctity of

marriage, and that none of man's convenient excuses for breaking this ordinance were justified in God's economy.

At the center of the narrative is Joseph's explanation of his refusal. Joseph explains his personal reasons for refusing her advances, and he presents these in an order that reflects his perception of her hierarchy of values: he tries to appeal first to her reason and second to her conscience. His analysis of her solicitation is keen and incisive.

First, Joseph points to the abuse of trust that would be involved. As the steward of the household, he had no right to presume on his privileges or trust (vv. 8, 9a). Joseph's refusal is a voluble outpouring of words (which up to this point in the episode has been rare), full of repetitions which are both dramatically appropriate (as a loyal servant, he is emphatically protesting the moral scandal of the deed proposed), and thematically pointed. The key-word "all" (*kôl*/כָּל) is picked up from the introductory verses (vv. 2-6) and employed here to stress the comprehensiveness of the responsibility that has been entrusted to Joseph.

Another thematic word associated with Joseph's trust, "house" (*bayit*), which also appears five times in the introductory verses, is used twice by Joseph here, and figures prominently through the rest of his story. When the master returns home in verse 16, he literally "returns to the house," and it is of course the usurpation of the master's role and his house which the wife implicitly encourages strategy of verbal reiteration; for this is the reason why our narrator chooses to refer to Potiphar after verse 1 only as "his Egyptian master," "Joseph's master," and "his master", and to his wife never by name, but as "his master's wife."

The third and final thematic word associated with Joseph's trust, "hand" (*yad*), which is a thematic word used thus far in the Joseph narrative [cf. 37:21, 22; 38:18, 20<sup>2</sup>, 28, 30; 39:1, 3, 4, 6]), and used in verse 8, underscores the extent of his master's trust; i.e., his household was given into the "hand" or power of Joseph. When Joseph flees from his master's wife (v. 12), however, "he left his robe in her hand," an exact echo, ironically wrenched from a context of trust to one of marital betrayal, of verse 6: "So he left everything he owned in Joseph's *charge*," literally, "in Joseph's hand" (in the Hebrew, *yad*, "hand" is singular in all its occurrences in this chapter; see comment on verses 12-13 for further thematic development of "hand").

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While it was unthinkable for Joseph that he should violate the trust of his master, he even more importantly could not yield to his wife's seduction because to do so would be a sin against God. Joseph uses ELOHIM here, not YHWH, because probably he is speaking to one of another people. An important theological point is being made here: our sin is never private. Every time we sin, we sin against God and in His presence. And in a certain sense our sin is always against Him alone (Psalm 51:4). Even though neither her husband nor the other servants should ever find out, God would know. "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Proverbs 15:3). Thus all sin, and especially sin against the integrity of God's holy institution, that of marriage, must fundamentally be a sin against God.

Joseph's reply explicitly laid bare his motives: "How then could I do this great evil (רָא'ה), and sin against God?" (v. 9). His defense was in God, as Candlish says, "in a prompt, abrupt, instant, and, as it were, instinctive appeal to God, as in his law forbidding this sin, and all sin, peremptorily and without room for evasion, or exception, or compromise" (*Studies in Genesis*, 617). Joseph's actions conform to the distinctive Israelite concept of morality as having its source and sanction in the Divine will, not in social convention or utilitarian considerations.

It is significant that the name of God comes readily to Joseph's lips at critical moments: when he is confronted by Potiphar's wife (39:9); when he interprets dreams (40:8; 41:16); and when he tests his brothers (41:18). As a servant of the LORD, Joseph would soon have made plain his connection with the Hebrews and YHWH. The means are not disclosed in this passage; only the results of the oversight of God over Joseph are made explicit.

Joseph's refusal was possible because he was convinced that (1) God had chosen him for a special task and (2) God had been prospering him to give him the responsibilities that he had. He had evidence of God's plan in his rise from the pit and enjoyment of God's presence. His refusal is thus instructive: one cannot sin against God if one is convinced of becoming a significant part of God's program. Adam and Eve missed this important aspect of leadership; rather than be satisfied with the LORD's bounty and enjoy the LORD's presence, they desired forbidden fruit. No one can fulfill his or her divine destiny by disobeying God.

But Potiphar's wife is not moved a bit by Joseph's dialogue. The woman does not reply to Joseph's arguments. She is not interested in the sanctity of her marriage or the trust between her husband and Joseph. She is



interested only in gratifying her physical lust--now. Nothing else matters. It is no wonder, then, that Joseph's spiritual concern and argument could not penetrate the darkness that shrouded her mind and will.

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**Potiphar's Wife Request: "Lie with me!" (verses 10-12)**

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**10** And it came about as she spoke to Joseph day after day, that he did not listen to her to lie beside her, *or* be with her.

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The master's wife tactic now becomes to wear down Joseph's resistance by her relentless persistence. The Hebrew text by using *כִּדְבָרָה*, "when she spoke" even without the expressive adverbial temporal phrase *יוֹם יוֹם*, "day day," indicates repeated speech (cf. Gen. 39:17, 19). But Joseph remained true to his earlier convictions (vv. 8-9) so that "he did not listen to her to lie beside her (*אַצְלָהּ*/'*etslâ*), *or* be with her." The unique usage of the Hebrew preposition '*etslâ*, "beside her," in this context may indicate that she moderated her demands on him. In that case, the second clause would mean simply "to be in her company." Another possibility is that the phrase "to be with her" is a euphemism for sexual intercourse, as in 2 Samuel 13:20, in which case the clauses express successive states of intimacy: first lie with her, then have sex with her, both of which Joseph correspondingly refused.

Perhaps it should be noted that in verse 8 Joseph's refusal is marked with the Hebrew word "but he refused" (*וַיִּמָּאן*; cf. Gen. 37:35), and now in verse 10 the text says, "he did not listen to her" (*וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֶלֶיהָ*). As the master's wife verbal persistence continued, Joseph's response is that having no further dialogue with her, in fact, "he did not listen to her." Whereas previously the woman did not respond to Joseph's arguments, now Joseph remains silent to her verbal persistence.

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**11** Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside.

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"Now it happened . . . ." How many times have we seen this thus far? That such matters are embraced in an overall Providence seems implicit in the account, but is not explicitly pointed out. If the selling of Joseph into Egypt

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was to be good-coming-out-of-intended-harm, so this action on the part of Potiphar's wife can no doubt be so interpreted.

The situation came to a climax on day when Potiphar's wife apparently determined that she would actually pull Joseph to her side by force. Her verbal assaults having failed to achieve their end, she resorts in desperation and frustration to physical aggression (for the use of the stem **שפּת** in this sense, see Deut. 22:28). The time was opportune, since everyone was gone. Possibly if she could once get him intimately close to her, his resistance would be overcome and he would be impelled by passion to continue all the way.

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**12 And she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside.**

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Joseph, however, realizing the danger of the situation, especially the spiritual implications if he should yield, pulled himself away from her arms and rushed out of the room and even out of the house. Joseph did the wisest thing: he fled, not letting the loss of a piece of clothing deter him in his haste to escape temptation. Though it caused him to be counted ignominious, yet he kept his own integrity free from sin against man and God. Most often flight is the surest way to avoid a fall into sin. One should be obedient to God at any cost and let God justify by later blessing.

Literally, the text says, "he fled (**וַיִּפְּץ**) and went out (**וַיֵּצֵא**) to the outside." The first verb describes his spontaneous and abrupt withdrawal from the room; the second suggests the assumption of a normal gait, once outside, in order not to attract attention.

#### **Potiphar's Wife Spurned (verses 13-18)**

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**13 When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and had fled outside,**

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Verse 13 literally repeats the entire last sentence of verse 12 (omitting only one reinforcing verb) for two reasons: the repetition arrests our attention at the critical evidential fact of the robe in her hand, which is followed (v. 14) by her "calling out"; and it provides a fine moment of suspended narrative

progress, while we wait to hear what move she can possibly devise to get out of this compromising situation.

It is at this point that the passionate desire of Potiphar's wife suddenly turns into the rage of a woman scorned. Knowing that her desire for Joseph was not completely impossible of fulfillment, her only thought was to humiliate him as deeply as possible for his rejection of her. Joseph's garment was still in her hand. She knew it would be interpreted as evidence incriminating her unless she quickly took the initiative by accusing Joseph.

As a note, the term used here for "garment" is the loose-fitting outer garment, apparently a sort of long cloak or robe of the well-to-do, which was removed on entering the house. The poor usually possessed only one garment (Ex. 22:26; Deut. 24:13). The use of the Hebrew word here for "garment" (בגד/*beḡed*) six times in this passage instead of the regular term for garment (מִצְעִיל/*m'ṣ'il*), evokes an association with the homonymous Hebrew stem בגד (b-g-d) employed for marital infidelity (1 Sam. 15:27; 18:4; 24:5; Jer. 3:20; 9:1; Mal. 2:14ff.). It is therefore, ironic that this special term for "garment" is employed in a context of a wife trying to seduce her husband's assistant!

Let us pause for a moment to clarify some of the facts in Joseph's situation. Joseph's problem became very complicated because of the woman's persistent, continued solicitation. Joseph faced a difficult dilemma: the very place in which he lived and worked (Joseph was not able to live somewhere else, since he was bound to Potiphar's house), brought him face-to-face with one very seductive temptation, Potiphar's wife. Second, her advances surely must have flattered Joseph's ego and aroused a powerful sensual temptation. Third, the source of temptation was persistent, she pursued him day after day (v. 10). Fourth, this woman pursued Joseph when they were alone, when there would not be any fear of detection (v. 11). And fifth, neither could Joseph go to his master and complain about the solicitations of his wife; either he would not have been believed or it would have shamed the man. He could do nothing but continue and trust that he would not be destroyed. Whether he could have altered his official routine may be debatable. He might have tried to have a male companion always with him, but there would occur times when this would have been impossible and even come to create suspicion in Potiphar's mind.

A significant point here is the nature of the sin and the timing of the temptation. It was a vulnerable time for Joseph. No doubt his own lust was working overtime trying to erode his powers of clear discrimination and decision (cf. James 1:13-15). Little sins gnaw away at a person's effectiveness in

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service, and at times God tolerates a person for some time until he must deal with that individual, although God can forgive and restore the sinner.

In this passage, however, we have a paradigm for leaders (and therefore all who follow them): people cannot defiantly sin against what they know to be God's righteous will when they are on the verge of becoming what God wants them to be. One cannot willfully sin against God and continue to enjoy His presence and His blessing.

Joseph did the right thing by fleeing. In almost every instance where the issue of sexual lust is dealt with in the New Testament, we are told to flee, to get up and run (cf. 1 Cor. 6:18). Some temptations we are to stand and resist. When it comes to sensual lust, however, we are commanded to do exactly as Joseph did--get out of there. If we stay, we are likely to acquiesce.

Once Joseph fled and ran outside, he did not hear any angelic choirs singing his praises for saying no. What he heard instead was the scream of a woman--a scream that would hurl him from the heights as Potiphar's overseer to the depths of an obscure jail cell.

Equally important is the lesson that resistance to temptation does not always find immediate reward. Joseph suffered for his spiritual victory--all because of a false accusation. Potiphar's wife, humiliated by Joseph's refusal of her, accused Joseph of assaulting her. We can discern more of her nature through the discrepancy between her speeches.

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**14** she called to the men of her household, and said to them, "See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport of us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I screamed."

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Potiphar's wife told the men of her household, "See he has brought in a Hebrew to us to mock us," which is meant to stir them against the husband who has introduced this dangerous alien presence in their midst. Her words to the men of her household betray her disloyalty and bitterness toward her husband. Because she uses precisely the same series of phrases in her speech (vv. 14-15) that had been used twice just before by the narrator (vv. 12-13) but *reverses* their order, so that her calling out *precedes* Joseph's flight, the blatancy of her lie is forcefully conveyed without commentary.

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The Hebrew verb "to mock" in verse 14 recalls the story of Lot, who, when trying to rebuke the wicked people of Sodom, was called a mocker (Gen. 19:14); it also reflects the mocking of Isaac by Ishmael (Gen. 21:9). The verb in this stem seems to describe an activity that cannot be taken seriously or that does not take something seriously. It refers to holding something up to ridicule, toying with it. Potiphar's wife accused Joseph of such an offense to her husband, as if Joseph had attempted to rape her, holding her in contempt and not taking her seriously. What Joseph said to Potiphar, she contended, was a totally different side of him. And Potiphar, perhaps out of necessity, believed her and imprisoned Joseph.

In the latter part of verse 14, the woman gives evidence for her own innocence to her servants in the ordeal: "he came in to me to lie with me, and so I screamed." The scream was regarded as evidence of resistance to attempted rape and, hence, was a sign of innocence, as is formulated in Deuteronomy 22:24, 27. She well knows that none of those to whom she speaks had been close enough to hear her (cf. v. 11). Nothing is said, however, about whether the servants believed her story. The chances are that they knew her, as well as Joseph, too well for that. In their position, however, they could hardly challenge her story.

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15 "And it came about when he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, that he left his garment beside me and fled, and went outside."

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This blatancy is even more sharply focused through the change of a single word in one phrase which she repeats from the preceding narration. As noted above, the act of leaving something in someone's hand is given particular emphasis because it echoes verbatim the leaving, giving, entrusting in Joseph's hands stressed in the introductory verses.

In the version of Potiphar's wife, the incriminating "in her hand," of verses 12 and 13 is quietly transformed in verse 15 into "by me" (עָלַי / 'esli, v. 10) so that Joseph will appear to have disrobed voluntarily as a preliminary to rape. Joseph, of course, is again linked with the misleading evidence of a garment, as he was when his brothers brought the blood-soaked robe to his father. The wife carefully places the robe "by her" (v. 16) as an arranged prop for the story she will now repeat to her husband when he returns.

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Nothing is noted by our narrator about whether the servants believed Potiphar's wife tale. The chances are that they knew her, as well as Joseph, too well for that. In their position, however, they could hardly challenge her story. Joseph probably went to his own quarters to await the outcome.

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- 16    **So she left his garment beside her until his master came home.**  
 17    **Then she spoke to him with these words, "The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport of me;**  
 18    **and it happened as I raised my voice and screamed, that he left his garment beside me and fled outside."**
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When "his [Joseph's] master" (not "her husband," since it was in the capacity of slave master that she would confront him) returned home, his wife repeated her story to him, however, embellishing and deleting certain aspects as needed.

In addressing the servants, she had begun with the contemptuous reference to her husband's bringing a Hebrew man to dally with them. Now, she starts (v. 17) with the shock of "The Hebrew servant, which you have brought to us, came in to me to mock me," which, by itself, could easily be taken to mean in good Hebrew idiom, "has had sexual intercourse with me." Then she qualifies, "the one you brought us, to dally with me." This woman who before had spoke to Joseph "lie with me," now shows herself a subtle mistress of syntactic equivocation. In her words to the servants, the husband had unambiguously brought the Hebrew "to dally with us." When she repeats the whole short clause in direct address to her husband, she places it so that it could be understood in two ways: "the slave came to me--the one you brought us--to dally with me"; or, "the slave came to me, the one you brought us to dally with me." (The Hebrew text, of course, offers no clarifying punctuation.) In addition, she cunningly uses the singular when she says, "[he] came in to me to make sport of me" (v. 17c). This is a fine psychological touch designed to arouse her husband's jealous instincts and sense of outrage.

The second reading obviously would be a sharp rebuke to the husband. In effect, she seemed to place the blame on Potiphar himself for giving a foreign slave such authority and freedom around the house that he would try to take advantage of his own faithful and long-suffering wife! But the wife is cunning enough to word the accusation in such a way that he will be left the choice of taking it as a direct rebuke or as only an implicit and mild one. One should

also note that in her words to the other servants Joseph was called a "fellow" (or simply, "man"), while in restating this to her husband, she is careful to identify the Hebrew as "slave," thus provoking the wrath of a master who should feel that a trust has been violated and that the most lowly has presumed to assault the most high.

Otherwise, in her version to the husband she once more repeats the lying rearrangement of the sequence of phrases, the crucial substitution of "by me" for "in my hand," and the lady-doth-protest-too-much insistence of her own raising of the voice and screaming. Amusingly, in Hebrew, the screaming now no longer appears as an independent clause--"I screamed in a loud voice"--but becomes an assumed action reduced to a subordinate clause--"When I raised my voice and screamed (as of course I would do, being a virtuous woman)." The definition of character and relationship through repetition in dialogue is dazzlingly effective. The husband witlessly responds just as she has coolly calculated, Joseph is thrown into prison.

It is ironic that twice Joseph's garments were used to deceive. We have read of the scene in front of Potiphar. Earlier, Joseph's brothers had produced his blood-splattered tunic to convince Jacob of his death. These events should lead us to be suspicious of evidence that is solely circumstantial.

#### **Editorial Remark: Joseph Was Confined To The King's Jail (verses 19-20a)**

**19** Now it came about when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, "This is what your slave did to me," that his anger burned.

On hearing his wife recount the story, Potiphar's "anger burned." The text does not say at whom, an omission that may hint at an underlying ambivalence in his reaction. It may be significant, however, that Scripture does not say that his "anger burned" against Joseph. Furthermore, rather than having Joseph slain, he merely put him in that part of the prison reserved for political, rather than criminal, prisoners.

It is possible that Potiphar was not entirely taken in by the accusations of his wife, because he did not have Joseph put to death immediately. He may well have been aware of his wife's desires, since such attitudes could not be kept secret very long from the servants of the household circle, or from

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others. The records of Egypt and its history disclose that the women of that time were quite free in these sorts of matters. They were not secluded or cloistered. It almost seems that Potiphar also knew both his wife and Joseph too well to really believe he had heard the whole story.

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**20 So Joseph's master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; and he was there in the jail.**

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The result was perhaps not what Potiphar's wife may have desired--Joseph's death. The entire episode demonstrates the moral depth of him whom the LORD had chosen to lead the affairs of the clan of Israel in its next step to nationhood, indicating, as has been said, that one may be in the world without succumbing to its evils.

The wrath of Potiphar appears not to be so deadly as one might suppose, though the king's prison may have been the place where those who faced the death sentence were kept (cf. Gen. 40:1-3, 19). Yet Joseph was not in this category. Rather, he seems to have been put in a place from which he could not go out ("the place where the king's prisoners were **confined**" or "bound.")

The very prison in which Joseph may have been placed is believed to have been uncovered in the city of Memphis, the ancient capital of Egypt. It was a place where important prisoners were confined, as we see from Genesis 39:20 and 40:1-3.

There is no indication that Joseph made any effort to defend himself from these charges (cf. Isa. 53:7; 1 Pet. 2:19-23). Though they were utterly untrue, and he was being punished unjustly, the text is silent if he said anything. Possibly he realized that the political realities of the situation would not permit Potiphar to take a servant's word against that of his wife, even if Potiphar had good reason to doubt his wife.

Among other things occasioning Potiphar's anger, no doubt, was his realization that he would now have to lose the services of one who had proved extremely profitable to him. Nevertheless, for appearance' sake, he did have Joseph put into the prison, where he apparently remained for a long while.



The term "prison" (בֵּית סֹהָר), perhaps deriving from a stem s-h-r, "to be round" (cf. Song of Sol. 7:3) has been held by a number of scholars that this prison was known as the "Prison of Tar, or Saru," based on the Egyptian term used here. According to Egyptian records, this prison was used not only for political prisoners but also for those who were guilty of other serious crimes. The king's political prisoners were not normally favored, but, if anything, were treated more severely than others. In light of this it would appear that Joseph was placed in this particular prison because his offense was considered to be very serious. It would be comparable to placing a prisoner in "maximum security" in our day. Psalm 105:18 states that during this time "they afflicted his [Joseph's] feet with fetters, He himself was laid in irons."

The term for "prison" used here is employed only eight other times in this Narrative (only in chaps. 39 and 40), and nowhere else in the Old Testament. It is believed by some, therefore, to be a word taken from Egyptian language. Thus it was reflective of the actual historical setting of the events in that land. The prison detail is characteristically Egyptian, for the punishment of imprisonment was unknown in ancient Near Eastern law but is well attested in Egyptian documents.

Now for the second time Joseph was imprisoned for being faithful to his master. The first experience at the hands of his brothers must now have been of some comfort to him--he knew he had been here before. If God could raise him then, he could also do so now.

### **III. *The renewed blessing of the LORD (in spite of the adverse consequences of obedience) confirms God's approval of the believer (21-23).***

Once again, God begins to bless Joseph. He had allowed him to be unjustly accused and punished, no doubt for purposes of developing his character for the great work He had for him to do in the future, but He would still acknowledge His approval of Joseph by prospering and sustaining him in those difficult circumstances.

#### **Joseph's Success In Potiphar's Prison (verses 21-23)**

21 **But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer.**

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- 22    **And the chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible *for it*.**
- 23    **The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper.**
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The final section mirrors the motifs of the first section (vv. 1-6), showing once again phenomenal and unexpected prosperity. Joseph, while in prison, begins to rise in favor because the LORD was with him and prospered him. This, of course, casts a special light on the whole event. Further, we are told that the LORD showed kindness to Joseph by granting him favor with the keeper of the prison. This probably was a gradual process, with Joseph first finding favor with some of the lesser officials in the prison, who in turn brought a good report about this prisoner to the warden or commander of the royal guard house. The latter was probably under the direct command of Potiphar who was captain of the guard.

The chapter even repeats the motif of the master's turning over all his affairs to Joseph because the LORD was with him, and everything he did prospered. Thus, once again, "all" is entrusted to him, placed "in his hand" (a final corrective reversal of the garment left "in the hand" of Potiphar's wife).

In verse 6, Potiphar "gave no thought to anything" because of the confidence he placed in Joseph; here, the chief jailer "gave no heed to anything" for exactly the same reason. This essential pattern of total trust will receive its ultimate confirmation when Pharaoh places the administration of the entire country "in the hand" of Joseph. The fact that YHWH was with Joseph which introduced the entire episode of his activities in Egypt (v. 2) now recurs near the end of the concluding verse of the episode, and the very last words of the episode are, most appropriately, "the LORD causes to succeed" (יְהוָה מַצְלִיחַ / *YHWH matzliah*).

Joseph might have been considered a failure with Potiphar, but he was a success with God, and even in prison that achievement meant more than a momentary pleasure with Potiphar's wife. It is far better to lose one's reputation than one's character.

The point of this unit is to confirm that Joseph did the right thing, even though he suffered for it. Joseph's phenomenal success in prison was clearly evidence of God's approval.

This event confirmed that Joseph remained faithful to his God. With the dreams in the back of his mind and being aware of God's presence, he refused to yield to temptation at his first enjoyment of power. The wise young man recognized that allegiance to God was the first requirement of the ideal ruler.

Did the Apostle Peter have this episode in mind when he wrote 1 Peter 2:18-23? Let us consider the apostle's exhortation:

Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this *finds* favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously.

Certainly, Joseph presents us with an outstanding example of one who suffered unjustly, typifying our LORD in His suffering. Scripture does not record that Joseph complained about his situation. He was as obedient as Peter exhorts his readers to be in the passage above. While we may sometimes accept justly-deserved punishment without complaint, it often proves too much for most of us to suffer unjustly without expressing resentment and seeking retaliation. Yet we would do well to remember that our LORD's torment was borne without complaint (Isa. 53:7).

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### APPLICATION

Israel would learn that she too must remain faithful in spite of the consequences. The people of God would be faced with many temptations, especially while serving in Egypt; but if they wished to fulfill the destiny that God had planned for them, they would have to prove faithful. Joseph did not sin, because he was convinced beforehand that God had something marvelous for him to accomplish. We may reflect this lesson in an expositional manner: ***DEDICATION TO THE CALLING OF GOD WILL ENABLE THE SERVANT OF GOD TO RESIST TEMPTATION.*** This dedication idea means that one is convinced of God's plan and committed to carrying it out--that is, shows obedience and faithfulness. Such dedication must be developed over a period of faithful service to God and enjoyment of His presence. In the moment of temptation there is no time to fortify oneself with commitment to God's plan.

Here are five important insights to help you say "NO" when your lust says "Yes!"

*Do not be weakened by your situation.* Several aspects of Joseph's position could easily have undercut his resolve to say no to lust. He was handsome and alone. He enjoyed a secure and trusted position. His integrity and accomplishments made him the object of much praise. And, perhaps, most dangerously, he had complete autonomy. He was accountable to no one. No one, that is, except God. Joseph did not allow his eyes to wander from his holy God to the sinful seductions of his situation.

*Do not be deceived by persuasion.* Potiphar's wife was bold, calculating, and her proposition was tantalizing. No doubt her verbal enticements were as loosely clad and suggestive as she probably was. Day after day she tried to lure Joseph with just the right combination of tempting words, such as, "My husband doesn't meet my needs." Or "Who will ever find out? We're completely safe!" Or perhaps "Just this once. Never, never again." But her words were in vain. Joseph's commitment to God completely shut her out.

*Do not be gentle with your emotions.* F. B. Meyer said, "Resist the first tiny thrill of temptation, lest it widen a breach big enough to admit the ocean. Remember that no temptation can master you unless you admit it within." Our emotions will beg and plead for us to open the door to that first tiny thrill of temptation, but we have to learn to keep the door closed like Joseph did. In verse 8 "he refused." In verse 9 he calls her words "this great

evil, and a sin against God." In verse 10 he did not even listen to her or be with her. And in verse 12 he fled from her!

*Do not be confused by the immediate results.* Do not be confused when your "Mrs. Potiphars" keep coming back to tempt you after you have said no. Saying no to temptation, whatever kind it may be, does not banish it forever. Lust does not give up that easily. Be prepared to say no again the next day--or even the next minute.

*Memorize 1 Corinthians 10:13 and apply it daily to your Christian walk.* "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it."

In one of his best writings, a small booklet fewer than fifty pages long titled *Temptation*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer gave perhaps the single most descriptive explanation of temptation anywhere outside the Scriptures:

In our members there is a slumbering inclination towards desire which is both sudden and fierce. With irresistible power, desire seizes mastery over the flesh. All at once a secret, smoldering fire is kindled. The flesh burns and is in flames. It makes no difference whether it is sexual desire, or ambition, or vanity, or desire for revenge, or love of fame and power, or greed for money or, finally, that strange desire for the beauty of the world, of nature. Joy in God is in course of being extinguished in us and we seek all our joy in the creature. At this moment God is quite unreal to us, he loses all reality, and only desire for the creature is real; the only reality is the devil. Satan does not here fill us with hatred with God, but with forgetfulness of God . . . . The lust thus aroused envelops the mind and will of man in deepest darkness. The powers of clear discrimination and of decision are taken from us . . . . It is here that everything within me rises up against the Word of God.

From the position as a favored son, Joseph became a slave in the house of Potiphar. His plight reminds us of our LORD's own. As Philippians 2:7 says, Christ also "took upon Him the form of a servant" (cf. Jn. 13:4-5).

So often adverse circumstances find us bemoaning our fate instead of looking for ways to glorify the LORD Jesus in them and through them. We have to learn life's adversities before we can be trusted with life's advancements.

Who would have thought that any good thing could have come out of the notorious Ravensbruck death camp of the Nazis? Surely when she was incarcerated there as prisoner 66730, Corrie ten Boom must have wondered at her fate. Yet, in that place of torment and horror, that devoted and courageous servant of the LORD Jesus decided if she had to live in that suburb of hell, where the only means of exit for a Jew or a Jew-sympathizer was up the smokestack of the crematorium, if death was to stare her in the face every day, if she must live daily with spine-chilling atrocities, if she must be subjected to indignity and intimidation, if she must be foul with vermin, whipped, forever hungry, terrorized day and night—why then, she would be the very best inmate Ravensbruck horror camp had ever known. She would be a Christian. So there, in barracks number 28, she held clandestine Bible classes and taught her wretched fellow inmates how to face life and death with Jesus Christ.

As a result of her agony, God was able to open up for her in later years a worldwide ministry. Her story has been told in print and on the platform. It has been made into a major film and shown in movie theaters around the world. It has both encouraged and challenged countless millions of people. Often she must have wondered why, after she had risked her life so often to rescue persecuted Jews, God should have allowed her to be piled into a boxcar with eighty other frightened human beings, packed in so tight that they could hardly breathe; why she should be forced to endure such thirst, such unspeakable filth, such naked horror, such sorrow over the death of her weaker (and Christian) sister. But now she knows! Through her life and ministry thousands upon thousands have been led to the salvation which comes from the LORD. God meant it unto good.

**STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. Note the repeated thought, "had been taken" in Genesis 39:1. Note similar statements in Genesis 37:28 and 36. What does this emphasize?
2. Observe the repeated terms of ultimate degree (e.g., the repeated word "all"). How do you account for such emphasis?
3. What was the key to Joseph's successes?
4. Contrast the character of Joseph in this chapter with that of Judah in the last.
5. Point out the faith of Joseph in the chapter, when under temptation, and also note the dealings of YHWH with Joseph mentioned in the chapter.
6. What lessons do you think might be here concerning the nature of temptation and the response of faith to it? What would Israel learn about Egypt's effect on their faith?
7. Do you see any connection between Joseph's imprisonment and the later bondage of Israel? What encouragement might Israel gain from hearing that YHWH was with him in prison?



## Genesis 40:1-23

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### An Unwavering Faith

#### IMPRISONED AND FORGOTTEN BY MAN

Chapter 40 represents an intermediary stage in the development of the Joseph Narrative. A second test of Joseph's faith came while he was in prison. He had kept himself pure from the temptress but suffered imprisonment for it. The question to be answered now was whether or not he had abandoned his dreams.

Joseph has been cast in jail and has risen to a position of prominence there. We are apparently to assume that Joseph's position was responsible for his being assigned to wait on the two incarcerated royal officials (vv. 1-4). They each had a dream, which Joseph then correctly interpreted, but ultimately to no avail, since the surviving official soon forgot the matter.

What could have been the writer's purpose in including at such great length the events which transpire at this time in the Narrative? It can first be said that later in the story, when the Pharaoh himself had a dream, the cupbearer then remembered the events of this chapter and told the king about Joseph. From that perspective the events recorded here prove decisive. But is there more to it than that? Why so much detail regarding each dream? Why such an elevated style in the telling of the story?

The writer clearly wants to impress on the reader the picture of Joseph that comes through these events. It is Joseph who, like Daniel, is an interpreter of dreams and mysteries. He discerns the course of future events that to others lies in total darkness. Even when we, the readers, hear the dreams recounted, we are at a loss to find their meaning.

The sense of the cupbearer's dream may seem self-evident, but as the sense of the baker's dream shows, such apparently self-evident meanings are by no means certain. Who could, on the face of it, discern between the meanings of the two dreams? One is favorable and the other not so. There is clearly more to the dreams than a plain reading of each would suggest.



The picture of Joseph that emerges from this narrative is precisely that which the Pharaoh himself later expresses. Joseph is "one in whom is the Spirit of God" (Gen. 41:38). He knows the interpretations of dreams, which, in his own words, "belong to God" (Gen. 40:8). The narrative serves then to set Joseph apart from all those who have preceded him in the Book of Genesis. He is "discerning and wise" (Gen. 41:39), and "things turned out exactly as he interpreted them" (Gen. 41:13). Whereas Abraham was a "prophet" (Gen. 20:7), Joseph is a "wiseman" (cf. Gen. 41:39). Whereas Abraham sees the course of future events "in a vision" (Gen. 15:1), Joseph discerns (Gen. 41:39) the course of the future in the mysterious dreams of others.

What lies behind the writer's portrayal of Joseph in these terms? Why the contrast with Abraham? The answer may lie in the perspective of the Pentateuch in general. As the last chapters of Deuteronomy indicate, the Pentateuch addresses itself to an audience that has seen the passing of Moses, the great prophet (Deut. 34:10), and yet has not seen the fulfillment of all his great prophecies. Much lay ahead yet to be fulfilled. It is to this audience that the leadership of Joshua is presented, not as a prophet, but as one "filled with the spirit of wisdom" (Deut. 34:9), a "wiseman" like Joseph.

Joseph, then, represents the kind of leadership that the readers of the Pentateuch would be called on to follow. He is a leader like Daniel, who needed to "discern" (cf. Dan. 9:2) the visions of the prophets to find the course of God's future dealings with His people, rather than to wait on new prophecies to come. Joseph, like Solomon, is a picture of a truly wise leader who understands and sees the will of God in the affairs of those around him. In this sense Joseph stands as a prototype of all the later wisemen of Israel. All future leaders must stand the test of measurement against him. It is hardly surprising then that one sees foreshadowed in the picture of Joseph elements that later resemble David, Solomon, and, ultimately, the Messiah Himself.

The pain and anguish of suffering unjustly is one of the severest trials into which we can enter. It is a sanctuary of flames from which some emerge with a tempered, unshakable faith; while others, only ashes. We cannot control whether today or tomorrow we will be treated fairly. But we can choose how we will respond. Our attitude is something we can control. Resentment, hostility, bitterness, revenge--these are the common attitudes people choose when they are mistreated. God, however, has a different choice in mind for His children:

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Joseph did what was right and he suffered for it. He refused Potiphar's wife advances, so she concocted a lie that sent him to prison. From free man-to slave-to prisoner, Joseph's freedom was progressively stripped away. Everything about his circumstances seemed to indicate that he had been forgotten by both the LORD and man. Now Joseph faced the most difficult part of being mistreated unfairly. Now he had to exercise the only freedom left to him--his faith in the LORD.

That Joseph did not lose faith is proven by his willingness to interpret the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker. After all that had happened, he was still convinced of his ability to understand dreams and therefore of the meaning of his own. This passage makes it clear that God put His servant in this adverse situation to test his perseverance in the promised hope. Joseph seized the opportunity to demonstrate his faith, and when the dreams were fulfilled exactly as he had predicted, he must have been greatly encouraged in his faith.

### Chronological Considerations

This chapter provides the second act in Joseph's rise to power in Egypt. Its structure shows that it is a self-contained unit, but its substance inter-relates with the surrounding context.

Genesis 40 is clearly dependent on the general context of the Joseph narrative by virtue of the repeated motifs, which means that the surrounding chapters must be used in interpreting this chapter. The sets of two dreams, first Joseph's (chapter 37), then the cupbearer's and the baker's (chapter 40), and then Pharaoh's (chapter 41), link the passages together. Joseph's dreams predicted his destiny; the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker formed a test for Joseph's perseverance; and the dreams of Pharaoh provided the opportunity for Joseph's ascendancy.

The dreams of the cupbearer and the baker spoke of life and death, respectively. In this way their dreams anticipated the dreams of Pharaoh, which spoke of plenty before the famine, or the prospects of life before the prospects of death. The polarity of ideas in these dreams corresponded to Joseph's experiences of moving from favor to slavery (chapter 37), from bounty to bondage (chapter 39), and finally from prison to dominion (chapter 41). In all the experiences of Joseph and the dreams that he interpreted, the LORD God was demonstrating his sovereign authority over success and failure, bounty and famine, and life and death.

## Source Criticism Considerations

This chapter is generally assigned to "E" by those who divide the sources. A few small sections in verses 1, 5 and 15, it is claimed, include a mixture of material from more than one source. Some of the arguments used in this connection are based on conclusions that these same scholars had already drawn with respect to chapter 37 (cf. pp. 16-18 and 87-91) and 39 (cf. pp. 168-170), since those chapters relate to the material recorded here. One example would be the theory that there are two different accounts of how Joseph came to Egypt. Another idea was that Joseph was actually not a prisoner but that his duty in the prison was part of his responsibility as Potiphar's slave. These critical theories were discussed when we treated the chapters mentioned and we need not repeat that discussion here.

There are a few other references in this chapter that allegedly point to more than one source for this material. There is the use of the expression, "after these things" (וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה) (v. 1), which our EVV have generally rendered "some time later," and is never ascribed to the source "E" by the source critics, although it appears in passages which is ascribed to "E" (cf. Gen. 15:1; 22:1; however, the expression is not literally the same in both passages and thus it offers little support for ascribing the entire passage to a separate source).

In verse 4 of this chapter it appears as though Joseph was serving the cupbearer and the baker while in Genesis 39:22 it is obvious that he was in charge of all the prisoners. Mention is also made, by the critics, of the fact that in verses 3, 4 and 7 another word is used for imprisonment (בְּמִשְׁמָר/*b<sup>m</sup>mišmar*) than was used in Genesis 39:20-23 (בֵּית הַסֹּהַר/*bêt hassōhar*). Our translators have used the term "custody" in this case. Also, here we find the term "king of Egypt," while in the rest of the Narrative the ruler is referred to as the "pharaoh."

In reply to these allegations, let it be said that there certainly is no conflict between a prison guard, such as Joseph was, on the one hand being "in charge" of the prisoners, and on the other hand "serving" them with their food and other needs. Further, the terms used to describe the state of being imprisoned are different, and different for very important reasons which will be discussed in the exposition of the passage. The use of different words for the place of detention certainly does not, in itself, argue for multiple sources for the material at hand. It should be noted that in verse 15 Joseph used still another word for the prison, the word the NASB translators have rendered "dungeon."

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Also, to change from the use of the term "pharaoh" to "king" certainly is not unusual. We find the same variety of expression in Egyptian literature, as well as in many other places in the Old Testament Scripture. Thus the arguments of the critics remain wholly unconvincing.

### THEOLOGICAL IDEAS

In its context, this chapter illustrates the endurance of faith in adversity. God prompted the demonstration of Joseph's faith by giving him dreams to interpret. Had he given up on his own dreams, he would never have offered to interpret the two in this chapter. Joseph did not waver in his faith. Moreover, his triumph here must have built up his confidence for interpreting the dreams of Pharaoh, when that call came.

Along with this major point is the clear statement of the passage that the interpretation of dreams comes from God, not Joseph. This confession should silence all ancient and modern mystics who would claim to possess such power. Joseph was asserting that the Egyptian magicians could not interpret the dreams because God had not revealed the answer to them. Without that insight they were in the dark.

A minor theological point can be drawn from Joseph's protestation of innocence, which appears here for the first time in the Joseph's speeches. It opens the study to comparisons with other passages in which the innocent protest that they suffer unjustly (e.g., Psa. 44).

### STRUCTURE, SYNTHESIS AND TRANSLATION

#### Structure

Chapter 40 narrates the second act of Joseph's stay in Egypt. Joseph has suffered a serious fall; Verses 1-4 introduce the act, which prepares the way for his new rise, bringing Joseph into contact with the two court officials. This takes place in three brief scenes.

The Hebraic transition formula in verse 1a is followed by the first verbal sentence, ". . . offended their master . . ." (v. 1b), and the reaction of the master is followed by two further verbs: he was angry and put them into

custody (v. 3). In the third scene the chief of the guard put the two royal officials under Joseph's care (v. 4a). This gives rise to the situation (v. 4b), in which the action beginning in verse 5a takes place. This is a clear and coherent sequence in which there is nothing missing and nothing superfluous. This meeting of the two officials offered Joseph some hope for deliverance, but after it was all over he was forgotten in prison (v. 23). Thus, these ideas are chiastically paralleled together (A and A').

The encounter between Joseph and the court officials (vv. 5-8) arises out of the introduction (vv. 1-4). The two officials each have a dream (v. 5); Joseph asks why they are downcast (vv. 6-7); they tell him the reason (v. 8a) and Joseph presses them to tell him what the dreams are, stating that interpretations [solely] belong to God (v. 8b). The chiasmic parallel of verses 5-8 (B) is found in verses 20-22 (B') wherein it states how everything turned out just as Joseph had said in interpreting their dreams, and thus clearly indicating that God had sent these dreams and had enabled Joseph to correctly interpret them.

The bulk of the passage concerns the cupbearer's and baker's dreams (vv. 9-11 and 16-17) and Joseph's interpretation (vv. 12-13 and 18-19), forming the symmetrical parallel items of C and C'.

But between the two explanations is Joseph's appeal to be remembered because he had been imprisoned unjustly (vv. 14-15), the chiasmic heart of the passage (D). The central position of this request shows that it is the predominant idea in the episode and that this event is indeed the preparation for Joseph's being remembered. The structure with its symmetry is a classical example of the author's narrative art.

There is a further context in which chapter 40 is set: the three pairs of dreams that encompasses the Narrative. The dreams of the officials in chapter 40 point back to Joseph's dreams in chapter 37; the explanation points forward to that in chapter 41. It is easy to understand how these three sets of dreams are distributed across the whole, and to sense the function of the motif and the tension rising to the third.

## Synthesis

When Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker had disturbing dreams in prison, Joseph accurately foretold the cupbearer's restoration and the baker's execution, but his request to be remembered was quickly forgotten.

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**CHIASTIC ARRANGEMENT OF GENESIS 40**

- A Joseph's meeting of the cupbearer and baker (1-4)
- B The cupbearer and baker have dreams in the same night (5-8)
  - C The chief cupbearer's dream narrated and explained (9-13)
  - D JOSEPH'S REQUEST FOR INTERCESSION (14-15)**
  - C' The chief baker's dream narrated and explained (16-19)
- B' The cupbearer and baker's dreams fulfilled in the same day (20-22)
- A' The cupbearer forgets Joseph [the baker is dead] (23)

Figure 12.

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**Translation**

- 1 Some time later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt gave offense to their lord, the king of Egypt.
- 2 Pharaoh was angry with his two courtier, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker,
- 3 and put them in custody, in the house of the chief steward, in the same prison house where Joseph was confined.
- 4 The chief steward assigned Joseph to them, and he attended them. When they had been in custody for some time,
- 5 both of them--the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison--dreamed in the same night, each his own dream and each dream with its own meaning.
- 6 When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were distraught.
- 7 He asked Pharaoh's courtiers, who were with him in custody in his master's house, saying, "Why do you appear downcast today?"
- 8 And they said to him, "We had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them." So Joseph said to them, "Surely God can interpret! Tell me [your dreams]."
- 9 Then the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph. He said to him, "In my dream, there was a vine in front of me.
- 10 On the vine were three branches. It had barely budded, when out came its blossoms and its clusters ripened into grapes.
- 11 Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand."
- 12 Joseph said to him, "This is its interpretation: The three branches are three days.

- 13 In three days Pharaoh will pardon you and restore you to your post; you will place Pharaoh's cup in his hand, as was your custom formerly when you were his cupbearer.
- 14 But think of me when all is well with you again, and do me the kindness of mentioning me to Pharaoh, so as to free me from this place.
- 15 For in truth, I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews; nor have I done anything here that they should have put me in the dungeon."
- 16 When the chief baker saw how favorably he had interpreted, he said to Joseph, "In my dream, similarly, there were three openwork baskets on my head.
- 17 In the uppermost basket were all kinds of food for Pharaoh that a baker prepares; and the birds were eating it out of the basket above my head."
- 18 Joseph answered, "This is its interpretation: The three baskets are three days.
- 19 In three days Pharaoh will lift off your head and impale you upon a pole; and the birds will pick off your flesh."
- 20 On the third day--his birthday--Pharaoh made a banquet for all his officials, and he singled out his chief cupbearer and his chief baker from among his officials.
- 21 He restored the chief cupbearer to his cupbearing, and he place the cup in Pharaoh's hand;
- 22 but the chief baker he impaled--just as Joseph had interpreted to them.
- 23 Yet the chief cupbearer did not think of Joseph; he forgot him.

### EXEGETICAL OUTLINE

- I. Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker were sent to Joseph's prison for gravely offending their king (1-4).
- II. When the cupbearer and the baker had disturbing dreams, Joseph interpreted their dreams, foretelling the cupbearer's restoration to his post and the baker's execution (5-19).
  - A. The cupbearer and the baker had disturbing dreams and became dejected because no one could interpret them (5-8a).
  - B. Joseph implored them to tell him their dreams, asserting that the interpretation came from God (8b).
  - C. Joseph interpreted their dreams (9-19).
    1. The dream of the cupbearer (9-15).
      - a. The cupbearer related his dream, in which he gave a cup of wine to Pharaoh that he had squeezed from grapes from a three-branched vine (9-11).

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- b. Joseph explained that within three days he would be restored to his post (12-13).
      - c. Joseph requested that the cupbearer help obtain his release from prison (14-15).
    2. The dream of the baker (16-19).
      - a. Expecting a positive interpretation too, the baker related his dream, in which birds devoured baked delicacies for Pharaoh that he was carrying in three wicker baskets atop his head (16-17).
      - b. Joseph explained that within three days the baker would be executed and hung on a stake from which the birds would devour his flesh (18-19).
  - III. The dreams were fulfilled three days later, when Pharaoh granted amnesty to the cupbearer but executed the baker, just as Joseph had foretold; but the cupbearer forgot to mention Joseph to Pharaoh (20-23).

## EXPOSITION OF THE PASSAGE

### I. *God's servants often find themselves in situations that can discourage their faith (1-4).*

The first part of the chapter records the setting for the events, namely, the imprisonment of the cupbearer and the baker in the ward in which Joseph was imprisoned. While in prison, the Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and chief baker wronged or offended the Pharaoh in some way. So the men were arrested and turned over to Potiphar, who put them in the same prison where Joseph was confined. Joseph was assigned to be their servant.

Joseph probably spent at least several years in Potiphar's prison, but only one event during that time is recorded, and that because it later led directly to Joseph's being summoned to appear before Pharaoh. In addition, Joseph demonstrates that he is not only a dreamer, but also master of the dreams of others as well (cf. Gen. 37:19).

Joseph, as we encounter him in chapter 40, is a young Hebrew man who finds himself in a foreign country, Egypt, in as lowly a position as possible: he is a slave in prison under the authority of the captain of the guard. It is better to be the favored son than the favored slave, better to be the favored slave than the favored prisoner. Joseph has had a threefold descent: into the pit



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(Gen. 37:24), down into Egypt (Gen. 39:1) and into prison (Gen. 39:20; 40:15). Joseph has hit the bottom. Could things become any worse?

**1B Joseph's Meeting Of The Cupbearer And the Baker (verses 1-4)**

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**1 Then it came about after these things the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt.**

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The Hebrew introductory clause, "Now it happened after these things . . .," implies a sequence that is not necessarily immediate (cf. Gen. 15:1; 22:1, 20; 39:7; 48:1). For example in Genesis 22:1, Isaac was about three years old when Ishmael was expelled; "now it happened after these things" refers to events that Isaac is now old enough to carry a load of firewood and to ask an intelligent question based on experience and observation. This transition is necessary and makes good sense when referred to the goal of verses 1-4. It took place after these events, namely, those narrated in chapter 39, because Joseph came in contact with two of Pharaoh's officials.

"Now it happened." Again, and again the narrator embraces all that which befalls Joseph simply "happens." As we have seen in the previous chapters, nothing simply "happens" apart from God's master plan. Because of Potiphar's wife allegations and Joseph's subsequent imprisonment, God is able to use him strategically in the lives of two men--in a place where most would ask themselves, "Where is God in all this?"

We may calculate that Joseph is now twenty-eight years old, for we know that in another two years, when he appears before Pharaoh, he is then thirty (cf. Gen. 41:1, 46). Thus, eleven years have elapsed since his sale into slavery; but we have no way of determining how many of those years he spent in the service of Potiphar and how many in prison.

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**2 And Pharaoh was furious with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker.**

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While imprisoned, Joseph came in contact with two important people who had fallen into disfavor with Pharaoh: the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. Verse 2 identifies them as the respective chief officials of their

professions in the royal household. Since the cupbearer is crucial to the narrative, he is always mentioned first.

These two officials held prestigious positions in Pharaoh's court. The translation "butler" in some translations (KJV) for "cupbearer" is unfortunate. The term literally means "one who gives drink" (מַשְׁקֵה/mašqēh). He was the overseer of Pharaoh's vineyards and wine cellar, as well as his personal cupbearer, and responsible to see that all drinks served the Pharaoh were both safe and of best quality. Thus, because of the sensitivity of his position, his loyalty in what was a perpetually intrigue-ridden household had to be beyond reproach. Ready access to the monarch could make a savvy cupbearer a trusted adviser and place him in a position of great influence. Egyptian documents testify to the wealth and power of such officials.

The second official is called the "baker" (הַאֲפֵה/hā'ōpēh). It might seem strange for a baker to hold such a high position in the royal court, but his responsibility to prepare food not only for the living Pharaoh, but for his mortuary temple and priesthood perhaps was what exalted him. The baker's chore apparently was not an easy one. In an humorous exhortation and warning to schoolboys, dating from the Nineteenth Dynasty, the occupation of a scribe is compared favorably to any other--including that of a baker.

Both the cupbearer and the baker were officials of the "king of Egypt" (מֶלֶךְ-מִצְרַיִם/melek mišrayim). It is obviously deliberate that the narrator uses twice "king of Egypt" instead of "Pharaoh" in verse 1. This title occurs only here and in Genesis 41:46 in the Joseph Narrative. It is no coincidence that in both passages interpretation of dreams are in focus and that Pharaoh is designated "king." It is probable that the LORD wishes to reveal Himself superior to the Egyptian god "Pharaoh" by controlling both the content of the dreams as well as the agent through whom (a Hebrew) the dream(s) shall be interpreted. The battle is between the king of Egypt and the King of kings, as well as it will be in the Book of Exodus (chs. 1--14).

Two other words in verse 1 fortify the above conclusion. The text says that both the cupbearer and the baker "offended" (חָטְאוּ/hāt'ū) their "lord" (לְאֲדֹנֵיהֶם/la'ādōnēhem). The second occurrence of "king of Egypt" stands in apposition to "lord," describing their relationship to the Pharaoh. Whereas their "lord" was Pharaoh, Joseph's LORD was God (אֱלֹהִים/'lōhîm)--even YHWH Who was with him (Gen. 39:2, 3, 5, 21, 23), and against Whom he could not "sin" (חָטְאוּ/ya'hātā'ū) in Genesis 39:9. The same Hebrew verb for "sin" is rendered in our EVV differently--and thus breaks the thematic continuity. This

contrast between the occasion for the king's officials to be in jail and that of Joseph's is striking: They went to prison because they had "sinned" against Pharaoh, but Joseph because he did not want to "sin" against God. The antithesis is striking and help to fuse the parts of the Narrative into one continuous whole--much like a reoccurring musical theme (the three notes in Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, for example).

To observe these themes and narrator's choice of words is of paramount importance. While the lexical choice of a word(s) of any literary narrative can never be entirely transparent or indifferent, the choice or the mere presence of particular single words and phrases in biblical narratives has special weight precisely because biblical narrative is so laconic (i.e., "reticent, succinct, compressed or concise"), especially compared to the kinds of Western literature which have shaped our reading habits. The repetition of single words or brief phrases in biblical narrative often exhibits a frequency, a saliency, and a thematic significance quite unlike what we may be accustomed to from our normal reading of novels, periodicals, or the newspaper.

The most prominent device involving the repetition of single words is the use of thematic key-word(s), as a way of enunciating and developing the moral, historical, or theological meanings of the text. What befalls Joseph is emphatically punctuated by significance, and the usage of thematic key-word(s) is a principal means of punctuation.

Where the narration so abundantly encourages us to expect this sort of repetition, on occasion the avoidance of repetition, whether through substitution of a synonym or of an entirely different word or phrase for the anticipated recurrence, may also be particularly revealing. Repeated words may be relatively abstract, like "blessing" in Genesis, and so point toward a thematic idea, or they may be entirely concrete, like "stone" in the Jacob Narrative (Gen. 28:11-22), and so serve to carry forward narrative themes from one narrative into another.

When a biblical narrative, moreover, is told so laconic, the fact of inclusion or exclusion of any particular lexical item may itself be quite important in the development of a particular theological theme. There is not a great deal of narrative specification in the Bible, and so when a particular descriptive detail is mentioned (i.e., the age of Joseph, that Israel loved Joseph more than his other sons, that Judah married a Canaanite woman, that Er was his firstborn, that Joseph was exceptionally handsome, etc.) we should be alert for consequences, immediate or eventual, either in plot or theme. Similarly,

when a relational epithet is attached to a character (i.e., that Tamar was Judah's daughter-in-law, that the cupbearer and baker's lord was the king of Egypt), or conversely, when a relational identity is stated without the character's proper name (i.e., "a daughter of a certain Canaanite," Potiphar's wife), the narrator is generally telling us something substantive without resorting to explicit commentary (i.e., the narrator oscillates between calling Jacob "Jacob" or "Israel" in the Joseph narrative according to his personal relationship with God).

Thus our narrator in Genesis 40:1 is subtly and in a very artistic literary fashion setting the stage for a confrontation, between the king of Egypt who is lord of the cupbearer and the baker, and between the King of kings, the LORD of Joseph, the servant who can correctly interpret not only Pharaoh's servants dreams correctly, but Pharaoh's dreams also (chapter 41).

Likewise, it is not without reason that in verse 2 both the cupbearer and baker are now called "chief cupbearer" and "chief baker," respectively, whereas before they were simply called "cupbearer" and "baker" (this peculiarity occurs again in v. 5a). In addition, the specific mention of the two men, following the general statement regarding the officials ("with" [לְ] is repeated before "chief cupbearer" and "chief baker"), may indicate that the offense of each, as in fact it will, be judged differently. This explains why they eventually received different treatment at the hands of Pharaoh.

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**3**     **So he put them in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, in the jail, the *same* place where Joseph was imprisoned.**

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In some way, these two men had "offended" (lit. "sinned against") Pharaoh, and so were thrown into the same prison where Joseph was. The details concerning their specific offense(s) are omitted, being irrelevant to the narrative.

This verse states they were "put into custody" (בְּמִשְׁמָר/*b'mišmar*; cf. Gen. 42:17, 19; Lev. 24:12; Num. 15:34). This term does not describe a place, namely, the prison, but a situation, detention. This means that they were under investigation, not serving a prison term. The Pharaoh has not yet come to a decision about punishment. The place of detention is "the house of the captain of the guard" (more precise by אֶל-בֵּית הַסֵּהָר, "in the prison building"). This was Potiphar's title (cf. Gen. 39:1), from which it is known that this was the prison over which Potiphar had jurisdiction. It is indicative of the high

esteem in which Joseph was held by both Potiphar and the governor of the prison that he was even placed in charge of these two high officials of Pharaoh's court.

The text is silent for what offense the cupbearer and the baker had been imprisoned. What follows in the chapter would seem to indicate that they were both suspected of a possible capital offense, but that it was unclear whether one or both of them were guilty. In view of their responsibilities for the king's food and drink, and since no others apparently had been put in the ward for the same offense, the presumption would be that the crime had something to do with Pharaoh's table. Possibly a cache of poison had been discovered, under such circumstances that it appeared destined to reach Pharaoh by way of either his food or drink. When questioned about it, no doubt both the cupbearer and the baker had denied any responsibility for it; so Pharaoh, to be safe, threw them both into jail. However, since their guilt or innocence was not yet established, they were apparently treated fairly well for the time being.

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**4 And the captain of the bodyguard put Joseph in charge of them, and he took care of them; and they were in confinement for some time.**

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Joseph had the responsibility of seeing their needs were met. At the same time he was accountable for their security. Naturally, Joseph was freed from his fetters when he was to serve in the jail, especially when the jailer appointed him to take charge of the cupbearer and baker and to serve them. But there is evidence here and in Psalm 105:18-19 that Joseph was kept in bonds. Joseph could hardly have suspected what lay before him when these men were put in his care. For the moment, they were two more people he had to serve in his duties in prison. Apparently an investigation into the problem which led to their imprisonment was proceeding in Pharaoh's court, quite possibly under the direction of Potiphar himself (whose position would roughly correspond to that of the chief of the security police); so the two men spent quite some time imprisoned.

Several observations can be made from these verses. First, Joseph continued to serve faithfully and receive appointments to tasks, even though he was in a most unfavorable and discouraging place. Second, the narrative reveals that the prison was a most disagreeable place, for Joseph later appealed for help to gain release. Third, God was beginning to move to bring about Joseph's release and ascendancy, even though it was not known to Joseph. In

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fact, the introduction of the cupbearer marks the turning point of Joseph's career--he had fallen as far as he would.

In spite of the disagreeable conditions in which Joseph found himself he continued to serve faithfully in whatever responsibilities he was given. The reader can certainly learn from Joseph's example of patience and obedience; but when the events of the chapter unfold, the reader can learn the reason for such patience and faithfulness--God was beginning to work.

## II. *God's servants must take every opportunity to demonstrate their faith, in spite of their circumstances (5-19).*

After the cupbearer and the baker were confined "in confinement for some time" (a Hebrew term which indicates an indefinite time, Gen. 4:3), they both had dreams in the same night. It was to become evident later that these dreams were of great significance in the unfolding Narrative. The cupbearer and the baker were convinced that their dreams had some special significance for them. In ancient Egypt, as in other ancient countries, there were strong beliefs and superstitions regarding the importance of dreams with respect to future events. So when these two Egyptian officials had dreams in the same night, which were strikingly similar, they felt sure that these dreams related somehow to their own destiny.

In addition, it was recognized in the Ancient Near East that the deity communicated with men by means of the dream; cf. Abimelech (Gen. 20:3) and Laban (Gen. 31:24). As to the dreams of others (Pharaoh, Gen. 41:1ff.; the cupbearer and the baker in our passage), the messages of the dreams are not so clear to them, being as it were in riddle form, actually symbolic and needing an interpreter. This but serves to emphasize what has been said elsewhere, that "the biblical Hebrews never need interpreters to explain their dreams, although individual Hebrews (like Joseph or Daniel) may interpret dreams for foreigners" (Gordon, 1953:67). This is true so far as the examples in the Bible are concerned. It is true because the gift of understanding dreams comes also from God (Gen. 41:8). Those who interpret dreams, as Joseph or Daniel did, appear to enjoy the status of prophet in conformity with Numbers 12:6:

He said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream."

Such is the regular view of the Scriptures. The Magi were told directly what to do, there being no prophet present. The conclusion to be drawn is that God's chosen people are a people of prophecy, i.e., of revelation and are given the gift of understanding of one mode of revelation--the dream. Other people stand in a lesser relation to them, so as to emphasize the prophets as God's media of revelation. The butler, the baker, and Pharaoh all exemplify this lesser status. The lack of the gift of interpretation, of ability to comprehend, is the frequent concomitant frustration of the dreams of Gentiles, as in the cases of Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar (cf. Dan. 2). But at any rate, the indication of the divine will is recognized as obvious.

Since the cupbearer and baker were in detention, they did not have access to one of the interpreters of dreams who undoubtedly formed part of the royal court of Egypt. Because of this situation, there was sufficient opportunity for Joseph to make personal gain out of their dreams or to use the occasion as a stepping-stone to his own release. But he did neither of these. His services to both these men were given freely and unconditionally. He asked the cupbearer that he would speak up for him on behalf of justice only *after* he had interpreted his dream.

#### **The Cupbearer and Baker Have Dreams In The Same Night (verses 5-8)**

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- 5     **Then the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt, who were confined in jail, both had a dream the same night, each man with his *own* dream *and* each dream with its *own* interpretation.**
- 6     **When Joseph came to them in the morning and observed them, behold, they were dejected.**
- 7     **And he asked Pharaoh's officials who were with him in confinement in his master's house, "Why are your faces so sad today?"**
- 8     **Then they said to him, "We have had a dream and there is no one to interpret it." Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell *it* to me, please."**
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An opportunity for Joseph came when the cupbearer and the baker had dreams in one night. The reader knows, of course, that this occurrence was more than a striking coincidence, and that it was ordered by the LORD. As it has been shown in the previous episode (chapter 39) that the LORD was the source of Joseph's morality, He now becomes the source for his knowledge.

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The "coincidence" of these two officials having simultaneous dreams doubtless also heightened their tension. The anxiety normally brought on by the accepted seriousness of dreams is here intensified for the prisoners by the uncertainty as to their fate and by their being denied access to a professional dream interpreter. The cupbearer and baker probably described their respective dreams to each other, and noted their somewhat similar details, perhaps even considering this resemblance significant.

What is peculiar to the context is that the two officials had a dream on the same night and that each dream had particular significance. The literal Hebrew rendering of "each man . . . own interpretation" is "each according to the interpretation of his dream" (the same phrase is used later by the cupbearer in Gen. 41:11). The Hebrew can be variously taken to mean that the interpretation turned out to be appropriate to the content or that each dreamed as if his dream were a prediction.

It is interesting that Joseph's dreams, although symbolic, were immediately comprehensible to himself and his brothers. This was not the case with the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker. Nahum M. Sarna makes the significant observation that, although

Israel shared with its pagan neighbors a belief in the reality of dreams as a medium of divine communication, it never developed, as in Egypt and Mesopotamia, a class of professional interpreters or a dream litiger. In the entire Bible, only two Israelites engage in the interpretation of dreams--Joseph and Daniel--and significantly enough, each serves a pagan monarch, the one in Egypt, the other in Mesopotamia, precisely the lands in which oneiromancy flourished. Moreover, in each case, the Israelite is careful to disclaim any innate ability, attributing all to God" (*Understanding Genesis*, 1966:218-219).

It should be noted that humanly speaking, Joseph's own dreams caused his misfortunes, while the dreams of others will lead to his prosperity. In this case, the two dreams are needed to establish Joseph's reputation as an interpreter of dreams; they serve as a double witness, so that no one can say that the first was mere "luck" or a good "guess" by Joseph. One should also note the symmetry of the occurrences of dreams in the Joseph narrative: three sets of dreams occur in pairs--by Joseph (37:5,9), by these two court officials (40:5), and by Pharaoh (41:1, 5).



The dreams made such an impression on the men that Joseph noticed their preoccupation the next morning (v. 6). Joseph's perception of their troubled minds is further indication of the kind of mind necessary to discern needs of people. Here again the character of Joseph is shown in beautiful light. How easy it would have been for him to have gone about his duties with scant concern for the difficulties of others, since he had so many troubles of his own. Why should he have bothered with the problems of others, since he himself was an unjustly-imprisoned slave? It is natural for us to adopt self-centered perspectives, and thus escape involvement in the sorrows of those in the world around us. 1 Corinthians 10:24 contains some excellent advice on such matters: "Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor."

The coming severe famine required an individual with a mind able to see needs apart from his own personal difficulties and address his energies to the solution of the needs of others. This same faculty was required in Joseph respecting the needs of "pagans." His offer to interpret reveals a concern for others no matter what his own state. It required the time both in Potiphar's house and in prison to reveal the full depth of Joseph's character.

At first the men simply looked sad (once again the narrative begins a dialogue section with a verb "to see" רָאָה, followed by an interjection, "behold" וַיַּבְהִי: "And Joseph looked upon them, and behold they were sad"). In his questioning, Joseph asked, "Why do you look so sad today" (lit. "Why are your faces bad/evil [רַעִים/רָא'ִים] today?").

They were dejected because there was no interpreter for the dreams they had. The verb and the noun for interpreting a dream occur only in the Joseph Narrative in the Old Testament: the verb (פָּתַר) in Genesis 40:8, 16, 22; 41:8, 12, 13, 15, and the noun (פַּתְרוּן) in 40:5, 8, 12, 18; 41:11). It is far more common in Aramaic and later Hebrew, as well as the cognate languages. The word signifies the interpretation of dreams with their symbolic meanings; it eventually came to be used for secret interpretations of a special class of people. Dreams and their interpretation played a very important role in ancient Egypt. Interpretations of dreams became a specialized skill. And this is just what the courtiers say: there is no expert to interpret their dreams.

Joseph's response to their reason asserts that interpretations come from God: "Do not interpretations belong to God?" The implication of this statement seems to be that God will tell their dreams through him; for if interpretation belongs to God, then He can confer this gift on whomever He pleases. In this context the meaning is that interpretation is not limited to specialists.

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God is free in His action; He is thus immediately accessible and can work on any person through another. Joseph speaks here out of his own experience. God can be with him in a foreign land, in the territory which is the preserve of foreign gods; He can affect the people of this land through him. The God of Joseph's forefathers is not confined to an isolated area: He acts and speaks directly and immediately within the whole realm of reality.

Joseph had not lost his confidence in God or in his being one to whom God revealed interpretations. It should be remembered that Joseph had some experience with dreams before (Gen. 37:5-11), and all it did was create problems for him. Yet when he hears that these men are upset because no one can interpret their dreams, he still offers to help.

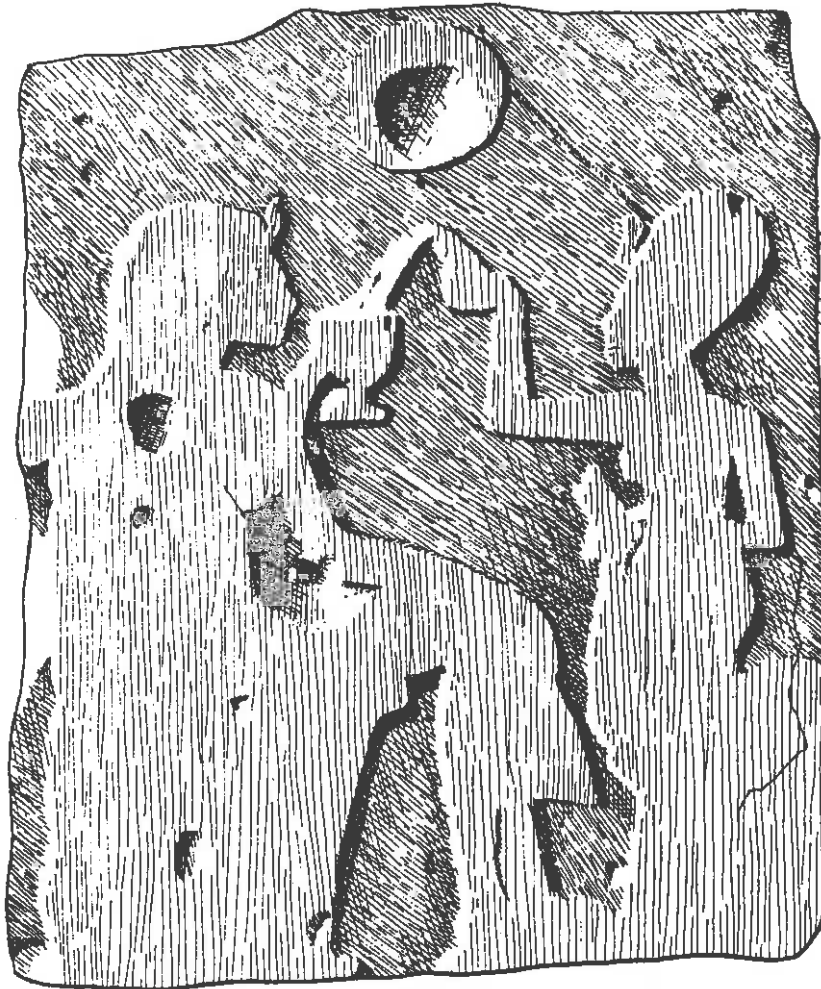
Joseph thus invited them to tell him their dreams (v. 8b). Even though the bottom had dropped out of his life, Joseph's attitude of patient endurance enabled him to be sensitive to the needs of others. And it was this concern for others that started a chain of events that would eventually lead to his release, beginning with the interpretation of the king's servants' dreams.

#### The Chief Cupbearer's Dream Narrated And Explained (verses 9-13)

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- 9     So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph, and said to him,  
"In my dream, behold *there was* a wine in front of me;  
10    and on the vine *were* three branches. And as it was budding, its  
blossoms came out, *and* its clusters produced ripe grapes.  
11    Now Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; so I took the grapes and  
squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I put the cup into Pharaoh's  
hand."  
12    Then Joseph said to him, "This is the interpretation of it: the three  
branches are three days;  
13    within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore  
you to your office; and you will put Pharaoh's cup into his hand  
according to your former custom when you were his cupbearer."
- 

The chief cupbearer seems to find Joseph's response persuasive, while the baker remains skeptical and hesitant. Perhaps the chief cupbearer spoke first because, even though he was curious about the meaning of his dream, he was confident of his own innocence and therefore was not hesitant to hear its significance.



Smenkhkare performs the duties of a butler for Akhenaton in a relief dated in the fourteenth century B.C.

Figure 13.

The dream's blend of reality and symbolism is recounted in a series of staccato scenes, often uncharacteristically without a conjunction in the Hebrew between the short clauses. The effect is a telescoping of time in which the grape-growing season, the production process, and the serving of the finished wine each takes place instantaneously, and follow one another in swift succession--reminding one of modern time-lapse films (vv. 9-11). Perhaps this quick succession of events denote there had been no opportunity, either through his negligence or his direct guilt, for anything alien to be introduced into the Pharaoh's cup. The cupbearer knew in his heart that he was blameless of Pharaoh's charges, and this fact seemed evident in his dream.

The cupbearer's dream consists of an image and an event; the subject is the vine, and the cupbearer is himself. The cupbearer sees a vine with three branches (v. 10a; שריג occurs only two other times in the Hebrew text, v. 12 and in Joel 1:7); then he sees movement; the vine begins to bud (פרח) and blossom (עלתה נצה), and the clusters ripen into grapes (הבשילו = bring to ripeness). As a result of this extraordinary, instantaneous process the fruit of the vine is at hand to him. Thus, the cupbearer can exercise his office (v. 11). He now appears in the dream, holding Pharaoh's cup himself. He takes the grapes, squeezes them (the verb שחט only here) and hands the cup full of wine to the Pharaoh. Again there are three actions and "Pharaoh" and his "cup" is named in each. This threefold mention of the Pharaoh expresses how firmly the servant is bound to his master despite his detention.

The specifics of the cupbearer's dream are unmistakably Egyptian in character. The old critical objection that the vine, mentioned in verse 10, was unknown in that land at that time, has been discredited by archaeology. The placing of the cup in, or on, the hand of pharaoh was, no doubt, the most important single responsibility in the cupbearer's daily service. It is no wonder that this action was the focal point of his dream.

In verses 12-13 Joseph interprets the cupbearer's dream by a scheme of equivalences. The rapidity of the action suggests imminent fulfillment. The recurrence of the number three indicates specifically three days, three branches, three stages of growth, three actions performed; and both "Pharaoh" and his "cup" are mentioned three times. Moreover, Joseph cannot help noting that in the dream the cupbearer is actually performing his duties in the presence of Pharaoh.

As a result Pharaoh would "lift up his head" and restore him to his position. To "lift up the head" signified a restoration of favor (Psa. 3:3; see also 2 Kgs. 24:27-30). The inability to "raise the head" is synonymous with indignity, shame, and a state of subjection (2 Kgs. 25:27; for the opposite, Job 10:15; Judg. 8:28; Zech. 2:4). In Akkadian, the equivalent idiom *našû rêša* may mean "to summon a delinquent, to call someone into the presence of the king." This meaning admirably fits the context here and in verses 19 and 20.

#### Joseph's Request For Intercession (verses 14-15)

- 14 "Only keep me in mind when it goes well with you, and please do me a kindness by mentioning me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house.
- 15 For I was in fact kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon."

No doubt this was exciting news for the cupbearer. And Joseph saw the possibility of something good in it for himself too. So to this favorable interpretation Joseph added his personal request (v. 14): "Only keep me in mind when it goes well with you. . . ." The combination of *אֶפְרָיִם* ("only") appears nowhere else to introduce a sentence in the entire Hebrew Scriptures. One should, therefore, assume that what preceded it, is left out and that it refers to a reward which Joseph declines to accept; instead he asked, ". . . show kindness to me, and make mention of me to Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house." This is strengthened by the fact that the professional diviner and dream interpreter expected to be paid for his services, as is illustrated by the case of Balaam in Numbers 22:17f.

Joseph anticipated that things would go well with this man (in contrast in v. 7). He thus appealed to the faithfulness of the cupbearer to assist him in getting out of the prison, twice using the verb "remember" (*זָכַר*) in the hope of release.

In support of his appeal, Joseph explained his plight in a rare moment of self-defense (v. 15). Here for the first time Joseph declares his innocence, using in his passionate statement the word "pit" (*בֹּרַי*/*bōr*) to describe the prison. It is a hole, a dungeon, a place of confinement.

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The construction is emphatic in the Hebrew text: "I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews," and is a back-reference to the narrative of Genesis 37:28, 36 and refers to his being sold into Egypt, in which case it would have been the Midianites, not Joseph's brothers, who drew Joseph up from the pit. It is also possible that Joseph may simply have used this term because he was ashamed to tell his fellow prisoner that his own brothers had sold him into slavery.

Joseph reports that he was kidnapped from "the land of the Hebrews." This is a reference to the land in which the Hebrews sojourn, either Canaan or the Hebron area in which they were concentrated and were buried. The term is not likely to be an anachronism since the designation was not used in later times. It recalls the description in the Mari documents of the Middle Euphrates region as the "land of Hana," after the Haneans who wandered and resided there.

Then he added that he had done nothing to deserve prison now, for he was falsely accused. What he wants to express is merely that his being a slave is not a consequence of birth and/or war, but of crime. Thus, Joseph assures the cupbearer that he would be intervening on behalf of an innocent man. It is worth noting that the term translated "dungeon" is in fact the same Hebrew word in Genesis 37:20-29 translated "pit." Just as Joseph was innocent of any wrongdoing in Genesis 37, he is innocent also here. His protesting of his innocence adds to the idea that God was testing him, for he was suffering without a cause.

#### The Chief Baker's Dream Narrated And Explained (verses 16-19)

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- 16 When the chief baker saw that he had interpreted favorably, he said to Joseph, "I also *saw* in my dream, and behold, *there were* three baskets of white bread on my head;
- 17 and in the top basket *there were* some of all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, and the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head."
- 18 Then Joseph answered and said, "This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days;
- 19 within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head from you and will hand you on a tree; and the birds will eat your flesh off you."

The chief baker's skepticism has vanished. He is now eager to talk because he recognizes the points of similarity between his dream and that of the cupbearer. But, all too humanly, he disregards the crucial differences: had this dream been "the same," it would have shown grain growing, ripening, harvested, made into pastry . . . all before the baker placed it before his king.

In his dream, however, he does not appear before Pharaoh who is only casually mentioned one time. Besides, he carries the king's pastry in the "uppermost," i.e., unprotected, basket, and is unable to drive away the birds. Thus, his is a prevented (neglectful) action.

It is interesting to note the contrast between the baker's dream and that of the cupbearer. Unlike the cupbearer, the baker does not prepare the delicacies himself and does not personally serve Pharaoh in his dream. In fact, the food does not even reach Pharaoh, for it is eaten by the birds. This symbolizes the devouring of the baker's own flesh by the vultures.

In his dream, the baker was carrying baskets of baked goods on his head to Pharaoh, which reflected his profession as well. Again there was a distinctive "threeness" about the dream; for there were three baskets, in obvious parallel with verse 10. In the uppermost, exposed, basket, there were all sorts of baked goods (there was a highly developed industry of fine baking in ancient Egypt: the Egyptian dictionary of Erman-Gradow lists 38 sorts of cakes and 57 sorts of bread), such as he hoped he would be able again to prepare for Pharaoh--all of which he carried on top of his head (which again is repeated in v. 17 and of special significance for the interpretation). This practice of carrying baskets on the head can still be seen in the Middle East today.

Unlike the chief cupbearer, however, he never had opportunity actually to present them to Pharaoh. There was a time lapse between the baking and the serving in his case, affording opportunity for birds to eat the baked goods. He had failed to provide protection against this, as the duties of his office required.

That the dream forebodes ill-fortune needs no explanation (for the second time now in Genesis, birds of prey are used to signify oppression, the first being in chapter 15). In Egypt, birds were sacred and so were protected; therefore they were often a nuisance. Such experiences as the one the baker dreamed about were not uncommon in Egypt, for this reason. Nevertheless, the possibility that such could happen in the case of food intended for the Pharaoh himself would surely indicate a serious lapse of proper care--whether intentional

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or accidental--on the part of the chief baker. The details suggest that the baker had neither the strength nor the presence of mind to drive the birds away--an ominous detail (contrast Abraham's action, Gen. 15:11).

Joseph informs the baker that the interpretation of his dream was entirely different from that of the cupbearer. The three baskets again represented three days. The first part of the announcement in v. 19a is word for word the same as that to the cupbearer, but with an ironic twist: "Pharaoh will lift up your head *from you*." This additional expression probably does not mean a beheading; rather, Pharaoh would hang the baker. The Hebrew phrase, "from you," may signify that the favor would be removed from him, for "to lift up the head" signifies a restoration to favor.

The baker, Joseph predicted, would be beheaded and then his body would be impaled on a stake as a warning to others who might be plotting crimes against Pharaoh (ancient drawings and inscriptions indicate that "impale on a stake" is the most likely meaning of the phrase "hang on a tree" in the Old Testament). Impaling was a widely used mode of execution in the ancient Near East (cf. Deut. 21:22f.; Josh. 10:26; 1 Sam. 31:10).

Moreover, instead of the birds eating Pharaoh's bread, they would eat the baker's flesh. The theological beliefs of the Egyptians motivated them to pay special attention to the preservation of the body after death. Hence, the punishment foretold here is particularly loathsome.

### III. *God's servants often find encouragement through the results of their faithful actions (20-23).*

This portion of Scripture reports the fulfillment of the dreams--just as Joseph had interpreted them. This development must have been a tremendous encouragement to the faith of this young man; it would increase his confidence that he was right, that he had not misunderstood God's revelation to him in dreams. He was sure that God would yet use him, even though he had waited eleven years.



**The Cupbearer And Baker's Dreams Fulfilled In The Same Day (vv. 20-22)**

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- 20    **Thus it came about on the third day, *which was* Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants.**
- 21    **And he restored the chief cupbearer to his office, and he put the cup into Pharaoh's hand;**
- 22    **but he hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had interpreted to them.**
- 

The interpretation of the dreams came to pass exactly as Joseph had said three days later. The narration employs the exact words of Joseph to indicate the precision with which his predictions were fulfilled.

Apparently Pharaoh had delayed announcing the findings of his investigation and his resultant verdict until the date of his own birthday, which was, as it turned out, the third day after the two dreams. It was customary for the Pharaoh to give a banquet for his servants on his birthday, and this would be the ideal occasion to announce to all concerned the fate of these two most prominent of the servants. The culmination of these events suggest that whatever plot had been laid against Pharaoh might have been intended to be consummated on this occasion; if so, this would lend peculiar significance to its exposure and punishment at this time.

While the festivities were in progress, Pharaoh called for the chief cupbearer and chief baker to be brought to him out of detention (v. 20). In the sight and hearing of all the other servants, Pharaoh then pronounced the chief cupbearer innocent of all charges, and restored him back to his high office. In great joy, the chief cupbearer immediately, as a symbol of his gratitude and faithfulness, took the cup himself, filled it with wine, and offered it to Pharaoh (v. 21).

The Bible does not mention many birthdays, but another famous one resulted in the same tragic consequences. The birthday of Herod the tetrarch was the occasion of the beheading of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:6-11).

But then when Pharaoh turned to his former chief baker, he had his head "lifted up" by hanging. Here was the culprit, guilty as charged, and the penalty was immediate execution.

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**The Cupbearer Forgets Joseph [the baker is dead] (verse 23)**


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**23 Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.**


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This verse stresses that the chief cupbearer did not remember him but forgot Joseph. In fact, the narrator stresses the chief cupbearer's neglect of Joseph through a double statement cast in both negative and positive terms. Such is often the outcome when we place our hopes on people. Even those whom we have befriended may ignore us in our times of need. But such experiences, too, are part of our education in the wider school of God. We must learn not to put our confidences in men or in circumstances, but only in Him (Psa. 118:8-9).

The Hebrew text usually translated as "he did not remember" (וְלֹא־זָכַר), makes the final verb (וַיִּשְׁכַּח) with its pronominal suffix redundant. Yet, as in Genesis 8:1; 30:22 and Exodus 2:24 indicates, the verb "to remember" (זָכַר/*zākar*) means "planning to do something at a given time." The "given time" would have been Pharaoh's birthday.

Because the chief cupbearer failed to make this resolution, he forgot about Joseph. The joy and excitement of his restoration and the subsequent press of duties, catching up on everything that had been delayed while he was in detention, the chief cupbearer gradually let Joseph and his promise to him slip his mind. Actually two full years (Gen. 41:1) were to lapse before he would remember and bring Joseph to Pharaoh's attention. This ingratitude of the Egyptian cupbearer perhaps prefigures the latter national experience of the Israelites in Egypt (cf. Ex. 1:8).

Though Joseph's (and the reader's) hope is, therefore, dashed, it will be recognized that man's failure can serve the design of Providence. Had the courtier remembered, Joseph might have been freed and returned to his father; but the Divine plan to have Jacob and his clan come to Egypt because of Pharaoh's gratitude to Joseph would not have come to pass. As will be seen in the next chapter, by God's design the cupbearer will have to recall Joseph.

While Joseph must have hated to see such a dire interpretation come true concerning the chief baker, all of this must also have raised some hopeful expectations in Joseph. In his daydreams he could probably see the cupbearer convincing Pharaoh to free him. Mentally, Joseph had his bags packed and was

ready to go--but soon he must have realized that he had been forgotten. The knowledge that he was correct might have seemed little consolation while he was in prison. But it was consolation: others may have forgotten him, but God would not. He had a future.

Joseph's imprisonment was to continue for two whole years (Gen. 41:1). This period must have been the most difficult time in his experience up till then. As Proverbs 13:12 puts it, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick." Possibly such heartsickness enveloped Joseph at this time.

### APPLICATION

Joseph's faith could not be destroyed by the circumstances, which was exactly what God was looking for in a leader. Joseph had been stolen from his land and then wrongly imprisoned, but when the opportunity arose for him to exercise his faith in God, he did. He was able to discern the interpretation of dreams correctly. His faith was confirmed. Now he was ready for greatness in public.

God tests His people's faith in the promises before He entrusts them to positions of greater responsibilities. ***THOSE WHO ARE CONVINCED THAT GOD DESIRES TO USE THEM IN GREATER CAPACITIES WILL DEMONSTRATE THEIR UNWAVERING FAITH IN THE MIDST OF DISCOURAGING SITUATIONS.***

Though destined to have his youthful dreams come true, Joseph's path to their fulfillment was nothing less than nightmarish. He endured every type of mistreatment we could list--undeserved treatment from family members, unexpected restrictions through his circumstances, untrue accusations from people, and finally, unfair abandonment from one he had helped.

How could Pharaoh's cupbearer have so quickly forgotten Joseph? Joseph had interpreted his dream and shown him compassion when the cupbearer was in a painful and frightening situation. Perhaps the painfulness of the cupbearer's situation is the key. To remember Joseph would have meant recalling his time in the dungeon and experiencing all that pain again. So he turned away from it--a tendency we all have--and put the memory out of his mind. Unfortunately, with that memory, Joseph and his request were also forgotten.

Because of the cupbearer's forgetfulness, Joseph spent two more long years in prison. How did he survive? How did he endure the anguished times of despair and depression that must have come? And how did he come through that excruciating time of injustice with his faith still intact--more than intact, mature and strong?

Perhaps it has something to do with where Joseph ultimately placed his trust.

*Do not trust in princes,  
In mortal man, in whom there is no salvation.  
His spirit departs, he returns to the earth;  
In that very day his thoughts perish.  
How blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,  
Whose hope is in the LORD his God; . . .  
Who executes justice for the oppressed;  
Who gives food to the hungry.  
The LORD sets the prisoners free. Psalm 146:3-5, 7*

The next time you are feeling forgotten, forsaken, abandoned, and disillusioned, remember that there is One Who is unfailingly trustworthy. Here are some Scriptures that will help bring this to mind.

#### The Trustworthiness of God

Deuteronomy 31:6  
Psalm 25  
Psalm 27:10  
Psalm 37:3-6, 28  
Psalm 94:14  
Psalm 98:3

Psalm 118:5-9  
Psalm 146  
Proverbs 3:5-6  
Isaiah 42:16  
Matthew 28:20b  
Hebrews 13:5

**STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. Explain the continuing motif of dreams as a means of revelation.
2. How does Joseph's interpretation of the cupbearer and baker's dreams demonstrate his faith?
3. Trace the symbolism in the elements of the cupbearer and baker's dreams?
4. Comment on the grisly pun at the end of the chapter and its significance to the narrative.
5. Explain the significance of the royal officials having their dreams on the same night whereas Joseph has his on separate occasions.



## **Genesis 41:1-57**

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### **God's Will For The Nations**

#### **REMEMBERED AND PROMOTED BY GOD**

When God elevates Joseph to power in fulfillment of his dreams (cf. Gen. 37:5-10), He again uses dreams to confirm the work He was about to accomplish. If the ruler of Egypt had dreams and obtained their interpretation through God's servant, then he would know for sure that God was sovereignly controlling his land and that Joseph was God's intermediate agent. Had the cupbearer mentioned Joseph earlier, the ruler might have ignored him; at this time, however, the ruler was dependent upon Joseph.

Joseph's descent from Potiphar's household to prison as an attendant to the courtiers held in detention, and then his remarkable rise to the position of vizier in Egypt, are recounted in a manner that keeps Joseph at the center of attention; at the same time the reader's attention continues to be defined by the point of view of someone else. Joseph's abilities are first introduced as they are perceived by the captain of the guard and prison keeper in chapter 39, and then by the chief cupbearer and baker as he interprets their dreams in chapter 40. Thereafter he drops from narrative view, just as he is forgotten by the chief cupbearer (Gen. 40:23), only now to reappear as he is recalled by this official when there is a need for a skilled interpreter of dreams (Gen. 41:9-13).

Chapter 41 completes the larger unit of chapters 39--41 and forms the turning point in the Joseph Narrative, for it tells how Joseph comes to power--a meteoric rise from prisoner to grand vizier of Egypt. The story of Joseph began with the brothers' disbelief that Joseph should rule over them (Gen. 37), and in the end the fulfillment of the dream was disclosed to them (Gen. 45). At the center of this development is the account of Joseph's coming to power in Egypt. When Joseph stood before Pharaoh God's favor was on him and the destiny of God for him came into sharpest focus. At the center of this dramatic moment the dialogue confirms the work of God: Joseph explained that it was all for the good of Egypt, and Pharaoh acknowledged God's power at work in Joseph.

This chapter has several similarities to the account of Daniel. Four points of contact may be identified: (1) the Hebrew slave (in the biblical texts) is summoned before the king to resolve the problem of the interpretation of the dream, (2) the king explains the problem that has eluded the wise men of the court, (3) by the help of God the Hebrew slave interprets the dream, and (4) the king elevates the Hebrew in reward for the resolution of the problem. For both Joseph and Daniel the events took place while they were in bondage in a foreign land. In both cases the dreams that the rulers received demonstrated that God was controlling the destiny of those lands and that they and their wise men were unable to do anything other than submit to the counsel of the Hebrew interpreter, in whom the wisdom of the Spirit of God resided.

The central theme of chapter 41 is expressed clearly and forthrightly by Joseph in verse 32: "the matter is determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about." As the events of this chapter show, the assurance that God will surely bring future events to pass comes from the fact that the dreams relating those events are repeated twice. "Two" dreams with the same meaning show that God will certainly bring about that which was foreseen in the dreams.

Throughout the Narrative this theme is kept alive by a continuous return to the pattern of "twos." In the previous chapter the "two" officials of the king each had a dream (cf. Gen. 40:2). One dream was good, the other bad. The dreams and their interpretations are repeated twice, once by the writer in the narrative of chapter 40 and then again by the cupbearer before the Pharaoh in Genesis 41:9-13.

After "two years" (Gen. 41:1), the king himself had "two" dreams (Gen. 41:5), one part of each dream was good ("seven years of great abundance," v. 29) and the other bad ("years of famine" vv. 27, 30). Within the narrative, each of the two dreams is repeated twice, once by the writer (vv. 1-7) and again by Pharaoh (vv. 17-24). When the dream is "repeated" (v. 32), it is to show that the matter "has been firmly decided" and that "God will do it soon." The point of the narrative is that such symmetry in human events is evidence of a divine work. The narrator, along with Joseph, is able to discern the handiwork of God in the events that he recounts, and he passes them along to the readers in these subtle interplays within the text itself.

## 1B Source Criticism Considerations

Even those who divide the sources recognize that this chapter presents a unified narrative. This, then, is generally ascribed to one source, "E." Some scholars, however, still manage to point out certain traces of more than one source, especially in the latter part of the chapter, after verse 30, but there is little agreement among these scholars as to which references should be assigned to other sources. Some insist that the specific data about Joseph's age, etc., in verse 46, points to "P." Others have argued that verse 33 presents Pharaoh as restricting his order to one man, while verse 34 presents this as including a group of people. It has also been alleged that Joseph's special discernment is acknowledged twice, in verse 38 and again in verse 39. Moreover it is claimed that Joseph's promotion is mentioned twice, in verse 40 and again in verse 44. Further, there are supposedly two different presentations regarding the famine. The one suggests that the whole world suffered from hunger except for Egypt (v. 54), and the other suggests that Egypt also suffered from the famine.

It is not necessary to deal with each of these arguments individually. Each one of them will be discussed in the course of the expositional notes. It will become evident that there are no true irregularities or contradictions in the text and, therefore, no substantial reasons for searching for more than one source.

## 2A THEOLOGICAL IDEAS

The sovereignty of God is the underlying theme of this chapter, for the economy of Egypt--in fact, Egypt's whole future--was subject to the LORD God of Israel. The Scriptures affirm that God raises up kings and sets them down; and He controls the destinies of empires in accord with His plans for His people. In this instance, He controlled Egypt's life source, for God had determined that His wise servant would be the means of delivering Egypt.

A major part of this theological theme is the dreams of Pharaoh and Joseph's interpretation of them. They provide God's revelation of things to come. But they also signify something more. As Brueggemann observes, the dreams took the initiative away from Pharaoh; he was not the subject, but the object, receiving messages and not generating them (*Genesis*, 1982:326). The setting of Pharaoh's dreams is the Nile River, the foundation of Egyptian life. When it flows, the land produces, but when it does not, crops fail and famine



occurs. In this way, the LORD God was to use the forces of nature to bring His people into the land of Goshen.

Behind Joseph's rise to power was the loss of power and initiative by Pharaoh and the helplessness of his courtiers. This emphasis on the loss of power under God's sovereign plan also appears with the Pharaoh of the exodus period, who lost control and initiative to Moses. It also occurs in the New Testament with Herod, who could not stop the birth of Jesus, and with Pilate, who had only power that was given to him from above. To his credit, the Pharaoh before whom Joseph stood did not resist the revelation from the living God but recognized that God was the source of wisdom. Because this ruler wisely submitted to the more powerful Sovereign, his lands were spared.

In addition to this grand theme, we have a short note at the end of the chapter about the births of Manasseh and Ephraim. Westermann states the point succinctly: "The two names, expressing the praise of God, are a witness that the great statesman in Egypt remains bound to the God of his fathers" (*Genesis*, III:99). This example would be instructive for Israel in bondage or captivity: because God was sovereign over the nations, Israel can and must remain true to her heritage.

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## STRUCTURE, SYNTHESIS, TRANSLATION

### 13 Structure

The structure of this chapter has been thought through in every single detail, and is evident in its literary unity. Our writer makes subtle and varied use of the device of repetition in the details of the structure.

The narrator effectively employs repetition of motifs found in the surrounding contexts as well as in this chapter itself. It records that Pharaoh had two dreams (vv. 1-7) and that the courtiers failed to interpret them (v. 8). Then, in verses 9-13, it reports how the royal cupbearer recalled the events of chapter 40, thereby forming a literary connection to the preceding chapter. It then includes Pharaoh's telling of the dreams for the second time in the chapter (vv. 17-24). It breaks the pattern by telling that this time he received the proper interpretation (vv. 25-32), along with the wise counsel (vv. 33-36).

With literary artistry our narrator sandwiches Pharaoh's dreams by several literary structural devices. First, he inverts the expected word order in

v. 1a, lit. "now Pharaoh dreams" (וּפְרָעָה הַלָּמַם) and concludes the dreams in v. 7b with "then awoke Pharaoh" (וַיִּקָּץ פְּרָעָה); thus the literary structure begins with Pharaoh dreaming and concludes with him waking up: a neat inclusio which is striking and suggests the whole of the first section (vv. 1-7) is background for the narrative that follows.

Next, the entire dream cycle is introduced and concludes by the interjection "and behold" (וַהֲבִינָה): "and behold, he was standing by the Nile" (v. 1b) . . . "and behold, it was a dream" (v. 7c). Moreover, a two-fold repetition of "behold" begins each sub-section of Pharaoh's dreams which points to the "cast" or the physical entities seen in the dreams. All these occurrences of "behold," with its inherent deictic force plus the succession of participles in the dreams (עֹמֵד, "standing" v. 1; עֹלֵת, "ascending" v. 2; עֹלֹת, "ascending" v. 3; עֹלֹת "ascending" v. 5; וְשֹׁדֵפֶת "being blight" v. 6; צֹמְחֹת "sprouting up" v. 6) all produce vivid images: "Look, there standing over the Nile! . . . Oh, seven cows ascending up from the Nile! . . . And now, seven ugly cows ascending up . . .", etc. All of these participles have a nuance of the durative present, having the effect of sweeping away the distance-in-time characteristic of narrative verbs and unties the narrator, Pharaoh, and reader with the ongoing experience (compare the historical present in the Gospels in the NT).

The narrator has thus succeeded in setting the heart of the narrative, a dream and its interpretation (E; vv. 25-36), and Pharaoh's recognition of Joseph's abilities (E'; v. 39), with Joseph's divine endowment squarely set in the center of the narrative structure (F; vv. 37-38). Joseph's answer to the Pharaoh is in two parts; he joins interpretation (vv. 25-32) with wisdom (vv. 33-36). Both win the Pharaoh's approval (vv. 37-38). His reply forms the link between the first part and the second--Joseph's elevation (vv. 37-57). The ceremonial acts of installation in office follow in vv. 41-47. Then comes the conclusion, the realization of what had been announced--the seven years of plenty (vv. 47-49) and the seven years of famine (vv. 53-57). The wisdom that Joseph applied to the dreams and had given to the Pharaoh is followed (vv. 33-36), and the land is saved in face of the famine. There follows an additional note about Joseph's age (v. 46a), and the birth and naming of his sons (vv. 50-52). Thus the chapter closes with Joseph's elevation to power and his blessing from God.

The main action of 41 takes place in the middle section (vv. 8-45). Before this, there has been the futility of Egypt and imperial death (vv. 1-8). After this, there is life and well-being even in the midst of famine (vv. 46-57). Between the futility and the well-being, there is Joseph. Thus the turning point

of the narrative is Joseph's interpretation and advice, followed by Pharaoh's acknowledgment of God. The reader is immediately impressed that God was sovereignly controlling both the interpretation of the revelatory dream and the response to it.

The structure of Genesis 41, thought through in every detail, reveals an overall plan for the entire chapter and is proof of its literary unity. The following chiasmic structure by our narrator is evident.

### CHIASMIC ARRANGEMENT OF GENESIS 41

- A Pharaoh's dreams (1-8)
- B The chief cupbearer remembers Joseph (9-13)
- C Joseph comes to Pharaoh (14)
- D Pharaoh recounts his dreams to Joseph (15-24)
- E Joseph's interpretation and advice (25-36)
- F JOSEPH'S DIVINE ENDOWMENT (37-38)**
- E' Pharaoh's recognition of Joseph's abilities (39)
- D' Pharaoh makes Joseph lord over his land (40-45)
- C' Joseph in Pharaoh's presence (46-49)
- B' Joseph forgets his trouble because of God's blessing (50-52)
- A' Pharaoh's dreams come to pass (53-57)

Figure 14.

### Synthesis

After Joseph faithfully interpreted the two dreams of Pharaoh, God elevated Joseph to power and demonstrated His sovereignty in controlling the economic life of Egypt as He worked to accomplish His will for Israel through Joseph's preparation for the years of famine.

### Translation

- 1 After two years' time, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile,
- 2 when out of the Nile came up seven cows, handsome and sturdy, and they grazed in the reed grass.

- 
- 3 But presently, seven other cows came up from the Nile close behind them,  
ugly and gaunt, and stood beside the cows on the bank of the Nile;
- 4 and the ugly gaunt cows ate up the seven handsome sturdy cows. And  
Pharaoh awoke.
- 5 He fell asleep and dreamed a second time: Seven ears of grain, solid and  
healthy, grew on a single stalk.
- 6 But close behind them sprouted seven ears, thin and scorched by the east  
wind.
- 7 And the thin ears swallowed up the seven solid and full ears. Then Pharaoh  
awoke: it was a dream!
- 8 Next morning, his spirit was agitated, and he sent for all the magicians of  
Egypt, and all its wise men; and Pharaoh told them his dream but none  
could interpret them for Pharaoh.
- 9 The chief cupbearer then spoke up and said to Pharaoh, "I must make men-  
tion today of my offenses.
- 10 Once Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and placed me in custody in the  
house of the chief steward, together with the chief baker.
- 11 We had dreams the same night, he and I, each of us a dream with a mean-  
ing of its own.
- 12 A Hebrew youth was there with us, a servant of the chief steward; and  
when we told him our dreams, he interpreted them for us, telling each of  
the meaning of his dream.
- 13 And as he interpreted for us, so it came to pass: I was restored to my post,  
and the other was impaled."
- 14 Thereupon Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was rushed from the dungeon.  
He had his hair cut and changed his clothes, and he appeared before  
Pharaoh.
- 15 And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, but no one can interpret  
it. Now I have heard it said of you that for you to hear a dream is to tell its  
meaning."
- 16 Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, "Not I! God will see to Pharaoh's wel-  
fare."
- 17 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "In my dream, I was standing on the bank of  
the Nile,
- 18 when out of the Nile came up seven sturdy and well-formed cows and  
grazed in the reed grass.
- 19 Presently there followed them seven other cows, scrawny, ill-formed, and  
emaciated--never had I seen their likes for ugliness in all the land of Egypt!
- 20 And the seven lean and ugly cows ate up the first seven cows, the sturdy  
ones;

- 21 but when they had consumed them, one could not tell that they had consumed them, for they looked just as bad as before. And I awoke.
- 22 In my other dream, I saw seven ears of grain, full and healthy, growing on a single stalk;
- 23 but right behind them sprouted seven ears, shriveled, thin, and scorched by the east wind.
- 24 And the thin ears swallowed the seven healthy ears. I have told my magicians, but none has an explanation for me."
- 25 And Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Pharaoh's dream is one and the same: God has told Pharaoh what He is about to do.
- 26 The seven healthy cows are seven years, and the seven healthy ears are seven years; it is the same dream.
- 27 The seven lean and ugly cows that followed are seven years, as are also the seven empty ears scorched by the east wind; they are seven years of famine.
- 28 It is just as I have told Pharaoh: God has revealed to Pharaoh what He is about to do.
- 29 Immediately ahead are seven years of great abundance in all the land of Egypt.
- 30 After them will come seven years of famine, and all the abundance in the land of Egypt will be forgotten. As the land is ravaged by famine,
- 31 no trace of the abundance will be left in the land because of the famine thereafter, for it will be very severe.
- 32 As for Pharaoh having had the same dream twice, it means that the matter has been determined by God, and that God will soon carry it out.
- 33 Accordingly, let Pharaoh find a man of discernment and wisdom, and set him over the land of Egypt.
- 34 And let Pharaoh take steps to appoint overseers over the land, and organize the land of Egypt in the seven years of plenty.
- 35 Let all the food of these good years that are coming be gathered, and let the grain be collected under Pharaoh's authority as food to be stored in the cities.
- 36 Let that food be a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which will come upon the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish in the famine."
- 37 The plan pleased Pharaoh and all his courtiers.
- 38 And Pharaoh said to his courtiers, "Could we find another like him, a man in whom is the spirit of God?"
- 39 So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is none so discerning and wise as you.

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- 40 You shall be in charge of my court, and by your command shall all my people be directed; only with respect to the throne shall I be superior to you."
- 41 Pharaoh further said to Joseph, "See, I put you in charge of all the land of Egypt."
- 42 And removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph's hand; and he had him dressed in robes of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck.
- 43 He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command, and they cried before him, "Abrek!" Thus he placed him over all the land of Egypt.
- 44 Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh; yet without you, no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt."
- 45 Pharaoh then gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him for a wife Asenath daughter of Poti-phaera, priest of On. Thus Joseph emerged in charge of the land of Egypt.--
- 46 Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.--Leaving Pharaoh's presence, Joseph traveled through all the land of Egypt.
- 47 During the seven years of plenty, the land produced in abundance.
- 48 And he gathered all the grain of the seven years that the land of Egypt was enjoying, and stored the grain in the cities; he put in each city the grain of the fields around it.
- 49 So Joseph collected produce in very large quantity, like the sands of the sea, until he ceased to measure it, for it could not be measured.
- 50 Before the years of famine came, Joseph became the father of two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Poti-phaera, priest of On, bore to him.
- 51 Joseph named the first-born Manasseh, meaning, "God has made me forget completely my hardship and my parental home."
- 52 And the second he named Ephraim, meaning, "God has made me fertile in the land of my affliction."
- 53 The seven years of abundance that the land of Egypt enjoyed came to an end,
- 54 and the seven years of famine set in, just as Joseph had foretold. There was famine in all lands, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread.
- 55 And when all the land of Egypt felt the hunger, the people cried out to Pharaoh for bread; and Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; whatever he tells you, you shall do."--
- 56 Accordingly, when the famine became severe in the land of Egypt, Joseph laid open all that was within, and rationed out grain to the Egyptians. The famine, however, spread over the whole world.

- <sup>57</sup> So all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to procure rations, for the famine had become severe throughout the world.



## EXEGETICAL OUTLINE

- I. Pharaoh had two dreams that greatly troubled him and could find no wise man to interpret them (1-8).
  - A. Pharaoh dreamed two consecutive dreams (1-7).
    1. His first dream was of seven thin cows eating seven healthy ones (1-4).
    2. His second dream was of seven scorched ears of grain swallowing seven good ears (5-7).
  - B. Pharaoh was greatly troubled and could not find a wise man to interpret for him (8).
- II. After the cupbearer remembered Joseph's abilities and told Pharaoh about them, Joseph interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh, explaining that interpretations came from God, and then advised Pharaoh regarding what he should do (9-36).
  - A. The cupbearer remembered Joseph and related to Pharaoh what had happened in the prison (9-13).
  - B. Pharaoh sent for Joseph from the dungeon in order to have him interpret his dreams (14-24).
    1. Pharaoh summoned Joseph to the court (14).
    2. Pharaoh explained that he had heard Joseph could interpret dreams, but Joseph explained that it was God who did it (15-16).
    3. Pharaoh told his dreams to Joseph (25-32).
  - C. Joseph interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh (25-32).
    1. The two dreams were one message concerning God's future actions in Egypt (25, 28).
    2. The seven good cows and ears represented seven years of abundance in Egypt (26, 29).
    3. The seven thin cows and ears represented seven years of severe famine in Egypt (27, 30-31).
    4. The fulfillment was certain and immanent (32).
  - D. Joseph advised Pharaoh regarding how to plan for the famine (33-36).
    1. Pharaoh should appoint one wise man as an overseer to store up the grain (33-34).
    2. The grain should be reserved for the famine (35-36).

- III. Recognizing that God's hand was on Joseph, Pharaoh appointed Joseph to the office of vizier over Egypt, provided him with a wife, who bore Ephraim and Manasseh, and gave him authority over the economy of the land (37-57).
- A. Joseph became the administrator over Pharaoh's house (37-45).
    - 1. Pharaoh chose Joseph and gave him great authority over all the land of Egypt (37-44).
    - 2. Pharaoh gave Joseph a new name and a new wife (45).
  - B. Joseph served as minister of agriculture over Egypt (46-49).
  - C. Asenath bore Joseph two sons (50-52).
    - 1. Joseph named the first son Manasseh, because God had made him forget (50-51).
    - 2. Joseph named the second son Ephraim, because God had made him fruitful (52).
  - D. Seven years of famine came upon Egypt (53-57).
    - 1. Despite the severe famine, Egypt had food (53-54).
    - 2. People were sent to Joseph for food (55).
    - 3. The famine was severe throughout the world (56-57).

### EXPOSITION OF THE PASSAGE

#### I. *The nations cannot understand the purposes of God over the affairs of people (1-8).*

Pharaoh's two dreams are more transparent than those of the two officials. The sense of the two dreams can be seen in the elements of the dream. Seven good cows and seven good heads of grain are seven good years. Seven ugly cows and seven blighted heads of grain are seven bad years to follow. To show that the dreams' simplicity conceals rather than reveals their meaning, the narrator tells us that all the king's magicians and wisemen were unable to give their meaning (v. 8).

The inability of the court officials to interpret the dreams prefigures the officials in the court of Nebuchadnezzar who also proved powerless in the face of the king's mysterious dreams (Dan. 2:4-12). In their case, however, to insure against fraud, they had not only to interpret the dream but to recount it as well. Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams differed from Daniel's in that not only did he have to forecast from the dreams what was to happen, but, more importantly, he advised Pharaoh how to prepare for what was to come. Thus



Joseph's wisdom in dealing with the situation forecast in the dreams is portrayed as of equal importance to the interpretation of the dreams. His was a wisdom that consisted more in planning and administration than in a knowledge of secret mysteries.

In chapter 40, we saw that Joseph interpreted the cupbearer's dream, revealing to him that in three days he would be restored to his former duties. Joseph asked that he remember to put in a good word for him to Pharaoh. But the cupbearer promptly forgot about him for the next two years (Gen. 41:1).

What happened during those two years? Nothing . . . on the outside. Joseph lived out monotonous, unexciting hours that stacked up into days, months, and finally years. Humanly speaking, waiting is one of the most difficult tasks we can be assigned. From our perspective it feels like we are stagnating and getting nowhere. But, from God's perspective, it is the ideal crucible for strengthening and establishing His character in us.

The Joseph Narrative began with Joseph's brothers hating him because of his dreams. Yet, ironically, the dramatic turning point in Joseph's life came as a result of dreams. The irony is forceful, for the "master dreamer" who only angered his brothers becomes, by the unfolding power of YHWH, the influence by which, not only they and all of Israel, but the whole land, are rescued from the famine. What Joseph's brothers rejected, becomes their salvation.

### **1B Pharaoh's Dreams (verses 1-8)**

**1 Now it happened at the end of two full years that Pharaoh had a dream, and behold, he was standing by the Nile.**

The occasion for Joseph's rise to power came after two years, when Pharaoh had two dreams in one night. Because of their critical role in the subsequent history of Joseph and Israel, Pharaoh's dreams are first narrated (vv. 1-7), then immediately repeated by Pharaoh himself (v. 8).

Pharaoh's dreams are first reported in 3rd person (vv. 1-7); later the same report occurs in the 1st person (vv. 17-24). The first dream about the cows (vv. 1b-4) is divided into an exposition (v. 1b, he was standing on the Nile) and three verbs: seven cows ascending . . . grazed; seven others ascending

stood by them . . . devoured them. The second dream is shorter, with no exposition and contains only two verbs: grew up . . . swallowed. Apart from this they are exactly parallel, differing only in their subject: seven cows/seven ears of grain.

The precise time stated in 41:1, "Now it happened at the end of two full years," is somewhat striking; for all other time references thus far (except for Joseph's age, Gen. 37:2b) are only stated in general terms: "And it came about at that time" (Gen. 38:1), "Now after a considerable time" (Gen. 38:12), etc. Perhaps our narrator records this exact measurement of time to serve as a sensory echo of Joseph's two dreams, which are just now beginning to come to fruition--in the LORD's timing. At any rate, the effect of this is to present us with moments of intense illumination of character and situation rather than allow us to take in the steady flow of life.

In any case, the time indicated, "at the end (מִקְּצֵה/miqqēs Gen. 8:6; Deut. 15:1; Jer. 34:14) of two full years" (שְׁנַיִם יָמִים, lit. "two years of days," 2 Sam. 13:23; 14:28; Jer. 28:3, 11), means that two complete years have elapsed since the release of the royal cupbearer. Possibly the dreams and the events connected with them also took place on Pharaoh's birthday.

- 
- 2     **And lo, from the Nile there came up seven cows, sleek and fat; and they grazed in the marsh grass.**
- 3     **Then behold, seven other cows came up after them from the Nile, ugly and gaunt, and they stood by the *other* cows on the bank of the Nile.**
- 4     **And the ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. Then Pharaoh awoke.**
- 

There is clear Egyptian coloring in the two dreams. First, the Nile as the setting for Pharaoh's dream is fateful, for the river was literally the lifeline of Egypt, the source of its entire economy. The text states literally that Pharaoh was standing "on the Nile," not "by the Nile." "On the Nile" is to be understood perspectively from ancient Near Eastern thought: Pharaoh sees himself "above" the Nile, standing on its other side and watching the scene taking place in the foreground.

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Another touch of Egyptian coloring is the cows (vv. 2-4), for cows were abundant in Egypt and important to the economy. The motif of seven cows is a familiar one from Egyptian paintings and texts. The cows must have impressed Pharaoh especially in a religious sense, because the cow was the emblem of Isis, the revered Egyptian goddess of fertility. In the Egyptian "Book of the Dead," the chief scripture of ancient Egypt, the god of vegetation and the nether world, Osiris, is represented as a great bull accompanied by seven cows.

It is worth noting at this juncture that Pharaoh's dream of the Nile river, cattle, papyrus reeds, the East wind, and heads of grain is typically Egyptian in flavor and is one more piece of evidence that the writer of this narrative knew ancient Egyptian life intimately.

There is further witness to the historicity of these events. In the previous chapter we are told that the third day after the royal cupbearer and baker dreamed their dreams was Pharaoh's birthday. Several generations ago there were skeptics who attacked this portion of Genesis because, so they said, birthdays were not celebrated in Egypt. There is no record of birthdays ever being celebrated there, they said. As far as we know, birthdays are a Persian, not an Egyptian custom. How easy to attack the Bible in this fashion! There are always things mentioned in the Bible for which we do not have independent corroboration, and if one is inclined to put every other source of information above the Bible, it is easy to conclude that the Bible is in error at that point. How dangerous! In this case archaeologists discovered the Rosetta Stone, by which scholars learned to read Egyptian hieroglyphics, and one of the sections of the Rosetta Stone was a decree on the occasion of the celebration of the birthday of a Pharaoh. So that argument against the reliability of Genesis died.

In Pharaoh's dream the cows stood half-submerged in the Nile in refuge from the heat and the flies and then came up out of the river, and then grazing among the reeds along the flood plain. The Hebrew text has literally, "in the reed grass" יִבְרֹשֶׁת (NASB, "the marsh grass", v. 2). The Hebrew term is from an Egyptian loan word that originally meant the land flooded by the Nile and then came to be used for pasture land in general. From Egyptian it passed into Hebrew and other Semitic languages.

The troubling part of the first dream came when seven other cows that were gaunt ("bad of appearance"), and lean ("thin of flesh") came up after them ("close behind them," e.g., in time) and devoured them. Such a thing could happen only in a dream, and it was so startling that Pharaoh woke up.

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After wondering what it might have meant, he soon became drowsy and fell asleep again. Here was the beginning of the symbolic revelation of God's control over the life-and-death cycle of Egypt.

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- 5** And he fell asleep and dreamed a second time; and behold, seven ears of grain came up on a single stalk, plump and good.
- 6** Then behold, seven ears, thin and scorched by the east wind, sprouted up after them.
- 7a** And the thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears.
- 

The second dream carried a similarly disturbing theme. Seven ears on a single stalk (a clear symbol of abundance), plump and good ("good," balancing "bad" in the vision of the cows), were swallowed up by seven thin ears that were shriveled by the East wind. Again, Pharaoh must have been impressed with the richness of Egypt. The wealth of Egypt's grain fields and granaries (cf. Gen. 41:49) was proverbial throughout antiquity and was often illustrated on the walls of tombs of the great dignitaries of the Middle and New Kingdoms. But when the annual Nile flood failed, then the threat of famine stalked the land. Several famines are mentioned in Egyptian texts of all periods. Just before or after Joseph's time, in an oft-quoted inscription, a certain Bebi remarks, "When a famine came (lasting) many years, I gave grain to my town during each (year of) famine."

But the same fate that had overtaken the fat cattle in his earlier dream befell the plump ears of grain (not "corn," in the modern American sense of "maize," but a form of wheat). Seven thin ears of grain, blasted and withered with Egypt's bitter East wind, came up. The violent winds from the eastern wilderness would wither almost any growing plant, and these ears of grain were hardened and thin, utterly inedible. A sight even stranger than that of cattle turning carnivorous and cannibalistic then passed before Pharaoh's startled gaze, as the thin ears swallowed up the plump ears. The word used in the case of the cattle (וּתְאֵכְלֵנָהּ) indicates the lean cattle actually chewed up the fat cattle. In the case of the grain the Hebrew word (וּתְבַלְעֵנָהּ) indicates a process of swallowing, or engulfing.

What must have been very troubling to Pharaoh was the depiction of the Nile in the first dream. We cannot grasp the trouble fully until we recall that the Nile River is not only a geographical referent. It is also an expression of the imperial power of fertility. Because of the Nile, the land of Egypt

weathered famines rather well—there was usually grain in Egypt. And if there was grain, the livestock would flourish, and all life as well. The Nile was also an expression of the imperial power of fertility. The failure of the Nile and its life system means that the empire does not have in itself the power of life (cf. Ezek. 29:3). It is for that reason that the plague of the Nile is so crucial during the exodus (Ex. 7:7-22). An assault on the Nile strikes at the heart of Pharaoh's claim to authority. Conversely, "famine" refers to the failure of self-generative powers and the helplessness of the empire in the face of death. The dream's juxtaposition of *Nile* and *famine* is an exposé of the futility of Egyptian ways of existence. The river is now characterized by death.

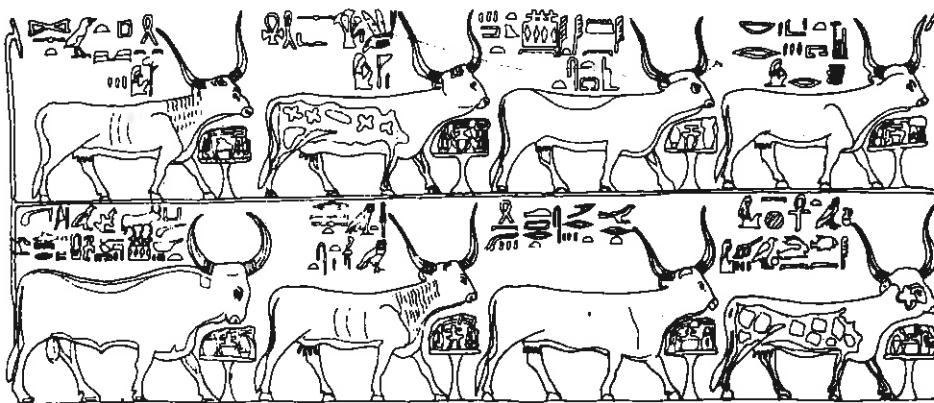
Pharaoh's dream repeats the basic message that poverty will destroy plenty, and thus strikes at the source of Egypt's economy. Because of the Nile itself, the prosperity of the field and the herd would cease.

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**7b Then Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream.**

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The repetition of the same theme with different figures greatly impressed Pharaoh. The dreams had been so vivid and real that, in spite of the physical impossibility of the events he had observed, he had actually been surprised to find on awakening that he was only dreaming (v. 7). Thus, this phrase



A painting from the tomb of Queen Nefertari (thirteenth century B.C.) shows Egyptian cattle

6000

Figure 15.

is not to be understood as meaning, "This is idle," but "This is a revelation" (cf. v. 25). Furthermore it should be noted that the phrase "it was a dream" is not found in verse 4 after the first dream and that the singular "dream" (חֵלֶם/hālôm) is used in verses 8, 15, and 25, although the reference is to both dreams. The text hints at the underlying identical nature of the interpretations (see further comment, v. 22).

*Mankind's frustrated understanding (v. 8).*

**8** Now it came about in the morning that his spirit was trouble, so he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh.

As soon as it was morning and because Pharaoh was disturbed, he sent for all his magicians and wise men to explain his dream. He sensed that there was something ominous about the dreams, for had not the very symbols of the gods and the prosperity of the land of Egypt been destroyed before his eyes?

Again, our narrator uses a somewhat unique lexical term to describe Pharaoh's spirit, that it was "troubled" (the only other occurrences are located in Psa. 77:5; Dan.2:1, 3). The Hebrew verb for "troubled" is פָּאַם/pā'am in the niphal, which anticipates and serves as a verbal link to פְּאַיִם/pa'āmāyim, "twice," v. 32; thus, Pharaoh was "troubled" (פָּאַם/pā'am) because the dream occurred "twice" (פְּאַיִם/pa'āmāyim). The mode, therefore, is as startling as the substance of the dream.

The Hebrew term for "magicians" (חַרְטֹם/hartôm, better translated "soothsayer-priest") is an Egyptian loan word (*hry-hbt*). It appears in the Hebrew Scriptures only in connection with Egypt (Gen. 41:8, 24; Ex. 8:3, 14, 15; 9:11) and Babylon (Dan. 1:20; 2:2). Magicians, diviners, astrologers and those possessed of occult knowledge were thoroughly entrenched in Egyptian life. It should be noted that although Israel shared with its pagan neighbors a belief in the reality of dreams as a medium of divine communication, it never developed, as did Egypt and Mesopotamia, a class of magicians; quite the contrary, the religion of Israel banished magic and sorcery from its midst (cf. Lev. 9:26; Deut. 18:10ff.).

In Egypt and Assyria special textbooks existed for the interpretation of dreams; an Egyptian one (Papyrus Chester Beatty III, written in the 13th century B.C., but probably originally composed about five centuries earlier) follows the pattern, "If a man sees himself in a dream doing (such and such), it is good or bad and means that (so and so will befall him)."

The second group of sages that Pharaoh called were all the "wise men." This is the first usage of the Hebrew stem **חכמ**/*h-k-m* in the Scriptures, and it occurs two other times in this chapter (41:33, 39). In this context it refers to those who possess a specialized, utilitarian knowledge and skill in the magic arts (for further comments on "wisdom," see verses 33 and 39).

One should not read too quickly and miss the little word "all" which is repeated twice before "magicians" and "wise men" in verse 8. Later, when Joseph correctly interprets Pharaoh's dream, the contrast between "all" and the one (Joseph) makes Joseph's triumph even greater. Where all the magicians and sages of Pharaoh fail, Joseph succeeds. The best wisdom which the Egyptian empire has to offer is dysfunctional. The empire is helpless before the inscrutable power and purpose of God.

Because of the symbolic nature of these dream revelations, Pharaoh and his magicians were unable to derive a proper interpretation. (Probably few of the covenant community could have done any better; it took one in whom the gift of interpretation resided.) This possibly could mean that the sages of Egypt, although they were skilled in handling the ritual books of magic and priestcraft, could not interpret. However, is it inconceivable that this professional dream staff was unable to provide any kind of "interpretation"?

Perhaps the answer lies in two key phrases. The first phrase which needs to be examined is "for Pharaoh" (**לְפָרֹעֹה**), properly signifying that their solutions did not satisfy him. The fact is that there is nothing in the dreams that relates *in a personal way* to Pharaoh himself. This, incidentally, is in contrast to all previous dreams in Genesis in which the dreamer plays a central role. The second key phrase in helping us to understand properly why Pharaoh knew that his sages were not interpreting correctly, is a comparison between "his dream" (v. 8c) and "none could interpret them" (v. 8d). The singular in "his dream" indicates that Pharaoh himself realized that his second dream merely reiterated his first dream in different terms. "None could interpret them," however, shows that Pharaoh's experts saw in the two dreams two different visions, thus falling short Pharaoh's own understanding of his dream.

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But this limitation too was part of God's plan for using symbolic dreams rather than direct verbal communication. (See also the reasoning behind the parables in Matt. 13:10-17). God used an Israelite slave to confound the wisdom of Egypt, just as He later used another captive from Zion, Daniel, to explain the dreams to Nebuchadnezzar. God employed such communication to show that, no matter how powerful and prosperous these nations were on the face of the earth, they were still subject to His sovereign control.

The failure of the Egyptian "interpretation council" has a significance that reaches far beyond the immediate narrative. This incident--the first clash recorded in the Bible between pagan magic and the will of God--constitutes a polemic against paganism. The same motif recurs in the contest between Moses and Aaron and the court magicians of Egypt in Exodus, chapters 7--9, in the rivalry between Daniel and the magicians of Babylon in Daniel 2 and 4, and in the narrative of Balaam in Numbers, chapters 22--23.

Certain fortunetellers and necromancers have, throughout history, professed to be able to understand dreams and foretell future events. On occasion, they have made profound impressions on their contemporaries through seeming success in such endeavors. To whatever extent they have really been able to do this, it is likely that ability to communicate with demons has contributed to such successes. Demonic spirits, who as fallen angels almost certainly are associated with Satan in his rebellion against God, have some limited ability to control future events--and, therefore, to predict those events they can control. Furthermore, they utilize this power on behalf of their human intermediaries, whose occult abilities can in turn be used to turn the hearts of men away from the only true God toward Satan. In this case, Pharaoh's dreams had not been generated by evil spirits, and therefore those spirits were not able to understand their implications.

## **II. *God uses His people to explain to the nations the revelation of the divine plan for the world (9-36).***

In the words of the cupbearer, the reader's attention is redirected to the first occasion of Joseph's interpretation of the dreams. Though he had forgotten, he now recalled that Joseph's interpretation had stood the test of time: "And it came about that just as he interpreted for us, so it happened" (v. 13).

As it turns out, even the cupbearer's forgetfulness worked in Joseph's favor since, just at the opportune moment, he remembered Joseph and



recounted his wisdom before the king. By drawing the reader's attention to the events of the previous passage, both the wisdom of Joseph and the sovereign workings of God are emphasized. Joseph's wisdom is highlighted by the fact that in contrast to the wisemen of Egypt, the interpretation of Joseph, "now a Hebrew youth" (v. 12), proved true. God's sovereign power is highlighted in the fact that though he did forget Joseph at the time, the cupbearer remembered just at the right moment and thus served as the means for Joseph's ultimate rise to power.

In the sovereign plan of God, Joseph had been compelled to wait for his deliverance. The delay he suffered teaches us that all events are under the providence of God, that this providence meshes indisputably human affairs in its outworking. Though God may appear callous in permitting the delay, yet patience is a virtue which Joseph needed to develop and comprehend, so that he could perform well his labors both for the heads of the tribes of Israel and for Egypt, and he could learn this only where he was. Neither purpose could be accomplished overnight, and Joseph learned to endure and to wait on the LORD for His time of accomplishment.

Bringing Joseph to his hour took two steps in the narrative: the remembrance by the cupbearer and Pharaoh's decision to summon Joseph. In Pharaoh's disturbance over the symbolic revelation, only one avenue was open to him for the meaning--the servant of the LORD. The experience of his dreams caused the cupbearer to recall his faults that brought him into Joseph's care in the prison.

### The Chief Cupbearer Remembers Joseph (verses 9-13)

- 9 Then the chief cupbearer spoke to Pharaoh, saying, "I would make mention today of my *own* offenses.
- 10 Pharaoh was furious with his servants, and he put me in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, *both* me and the chief baker.
- 11 And we had a dream on the same night, he and I; each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his *own* dream.
- 12 Now a Hebrew youth *was* with us there, a servant of the captain of the bodyguard, and we related *them* to him, and he interpreted our dreams for us. To each one he interpreted according to his *own* dream.

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13     **And it came about that just as he interpreted for us, so it happened; he restored me in my office, but he hanged him."**

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Verses 9-13 records the cupbearer's report of what happened in chapter 40. The similarity of language in verse 9 conveys a direct relationship between what the royal cupbearer is about to relate to Pharaoh and what he promised he would do--two years earlier. The verbal link is made by the verb *מִזְכֵּיר* (*mazkîr*, "I would make mention," NASB; "I am reminded," NIV), which is the same verbal stem as used by Joseph in his plea to the cupbearer "to remember" him in Genesis 40:14, and our narrator's comment that "the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph" in 40:23!. Hence, he speaks of his "offenses" (the same word used in 40:1, literally "sins") in the plural, against Pharaoh and against Joseph.

It is to be noted regarding verse 9, that the construction of the personal pronoun "I" is significant. When the pronoun is coupled with a predicate noun, it emphasizes the *pronominal subject*, whereas the other form of the personal pronoun (*אֲנִי*/*'ny* as used here) is used to emphasize the *predicate nominative*, the name, the person. Thus, in this context it is not the cupbearer but his forgetfulness that is emphasized.

Central to the report to Pharaoh is the cupbearer's statement: ". . . and he interpreted our dreams for us. To each one he interpreted according to his own dream" (vv. 12b-13a). Knowing how remarkably Joseph had been able to interpret his own dream and that of the baker, with results which had been precisely fulfilled, he should long ago have called Pharaoh's attention to such an unusual and potentially valuable man. The young man of the Hebrews--a slave at that--had been the only one able to give them an interpretation of their dreams. Furthermore, his interpretations had been meticulously correct. Three days later, exactly as he had predicted, the royal cupbearer had been restored and the baker hanged. Here was a man who had greater insight into the future than all the sages and interpreters of the land of Egypt. Here was the missing element in the understanding of the dreams by Pharaoh; he now apparently could find an interpreter. It should be noted that the cupbearer actually stops short of recommending that Joseph be brought to Pharaoh.

As customary in ancient Near East decorum, Pharaoh is never addressed in the second person or by his own name. He is always addressed in the "indirect" third person.

2B *Joseph Interprets Pharaoh's Dream (verses 14-32)*

Though Pharaoh might have normally scorned to seek help from a Hebrew, and especially from a Hebrew slave in jail, he now had nowhere else to turn, and he simply had to know what his dream meant. The Pharaoh thus has no choice but to take the opportunity offered him, an indication of how much he was troubled by his dream.

1C *Joseph Comes to Pharaoh (verse 14)*

**14 Then Pharaoh sent and called for Joseph, and they hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon; and when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came to Pharaoh.**

The rhythms of narrative pace in this extended segment reflect the rhythms of Joseph's rise--all of which should not be overlooked. We linger over Pharaoh's dreams as the narrator recounts them in full, both of them! Their startling quality understandably triggers Pharaoh's concerns, and the concerns heighten when "all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men" (Gen. 41:8) prove unable to provide an interpretation. The royal cupbearer now recalls his lapse of memory, and Joseph is called (v. 14). It takes but one verse and a burst of verbs--send, call, bring, shave, clothe, come--to bring Joseph to his audience with Pharaoh. Joseph may linger in prison as we linger over Pharaoh's dreams; but once recalled, Joseph moves from his cell to the palace with breathless haste to stand before Pharaoh.

Joseph's call to stand before Pharaoh contains an inclusio: containing six verbs bracketed by the occurrence of the name Pharaoh:

**Then Pharaoh sent**  
 and called for Joseph,  
 and they hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon;  
 and he shaved  
 and he changed his clothing  
 and he came to Pharaoh

This inclusio with its six verbs indicate a series of actions performed in swift succession in the atmosphere of urgency and stress that is created when Pharaoh's wishes are to be satisfied. However, even within this quick succes-

sion, the verbal action of "hurriedly brought him [Joseph]" is contrasted with "he had shaved himself and changed his clothes." It is only after this well-spaced pause, which says much more than any description of Joseph's thoughts or feelings, that in his own good time, Joseph "comes" to Pharaoh.

This is markedly the turning point in the Joseph Narrative. God brings forth His obedient servant, who, though was rejected, misunderstood, falsely accused, and forgotten, God now in His timing lifts him up from the lowest level of humanity--slavery--to the pinnacle of respect.

Several things need to be pointed out which is implicitly contained in verse 14. First, the word for "dungeon" (בֹּר/bôr) forges a connection with Genesis 37:20-29, for Joseph's misery began in a "pit" (בֹּר/bôr) and ends when he is brought out of a dungeon/pit (בֹּר/bôr). Twice, Joseph was put into a "pit" (Gen. 37:24 and 40:15). Now he leaves "the pit" and appears before Pharaoh and the splendor of the court. Secondly, the Egyptians, according to the historian Herodotus, had extreme care for cleanliness, and thus the Egyptian men would let their hair and beard grown only during periods of mourning. The term for "shave" (גָּלַח/gālah) applies both to the head, as in Numbers 6:9, and to the face, as in Jeremiah 41:5. For hygienic reasons, Egyptian men generally shaved both areas. Beards shown on the Egyptian monuments are ceremonial and even Queen Hatshepsut wore an imitation one, as is to be seen on the representations left to her after Thutmose III had her images defaced or removed. A. S. Yahuda writes:

In the eyes of Semitic people the beard was a mark of dignity, long hair an ornament of warriors and heroes, and only prisoners and slaves were 'shaved as sign of humiliation and dishonor. The Egyptians had an exactly opposite view, and the first thing every Egyptian of better upbringing was anxious to do, as soon as he came of age, was to deliver his head and face to the razor of the barber. He only grew beard and hair when mourning for a near relative (*The Accuracy of the Bible*, 8).

Thirdly, Joseph dressed suitable for an appearance at court before Pharaoh. Change of clothing was necessary to suit Joseph's status as a wise counselor. Clothing has been an important motif in marking a key transition in the Joseph Narrative (cf. Gen. 37:31-33; 39:12, 15-16, 18). Thus here, Joseph's sudden rise from cell to court is marked by a change of clothing: the process of Joseph's liberation and rise to world power now begins.

Joseph was thus summoned to stand before Pharaoh--a slave for thirteen years, now in the presence of the most powerful monarch in the world! But we must keep in mind that Joseph, however, was there because of God's providence and timing; and his God was the very Creator of the world, before whom Pharaoh himself was but dust (cf. Psa. 119:46). God's help comes in an unexpected way. Suddenly the despised Hebrew slave stands in the splendor of the court before Pharaoh's throne--someone who was just a few hours ago a nobody!

24 **Pharaoh Recounts His Dreams to Joseph (verses 15-24)**

**15** And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it; and I have heard it said about you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it."

After Joseph arrives and comes before Pharaoh, in summary fashion, Pharaoh relates to Joseph what has recently transpired: "I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it." What follows is Pharaoh's expectation of a solution from Joseph in accordance with what he has heard of him: "I (emphatic) have heard concerning you, when you hear a dream (you) interpret it." The verb with its emphatic personal pronoun (וְאֲנִי שָׁמַעְתִּי, "I have heard") is a literary echo of the cupbearer's testimony concerning to Pharaoh about Joseph's ability (vv. 9-13), thus underscoring verse 14 as the literary pivotal point.

Joseph might well have felt very flattered, to be so addressed by none other than Pharaoh himself. Furthermore, he might have been tempted to bargain with Pharaoh. He was possessed of a unique ability, and this ability was in very high demand right at that moment. He could at least have extracted a promise for his freedom, and perhaps a considerable fee, in return for granting Pharaoh's request.

**16** Joseph then answered Pharaoh, saying, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer."

Instead, however, when Joseph was confronted with the evidence about his abilities: "I have heard it said about you, that when you hear a dream

you can interpret it," Joseph immediately asserted that he himself had no prophetic ability at all and related to Pharaoh as to the true source of the interpretation of the dream. Joseph disclaimed any innate ability, saying that God would answer Pharaoh with peace. This conviction was reiterated after Pharaoh recounted the dreams to him (v. 25), because it was obvious to Joseph that God was declaring what He was going to do.

This emphasis on "God" would have been remarkable in the courts of Pharaoh, for in Egypt Pharaoh was a god himself--but not like this God of the Hebrews. Benno Jacob writes:

The decisive element is the form which Joseph gives his interpretation and to which the commentators have given no attention. He uses the word *God*; Joseph began, "God may give Pharaoh a favorable answer," not I. He goes from the prison to the throne of the king, and this is his first word. This speech is as pious as it is frank. He who is aware of God, is humble and fearless at the same time. Even a king is nothing compared to God. We are not told of Pharaoh's reaction to this; then after reporting his dreams, Joseph begins his interpretation with God (verse 25) and ends with God (verse 28); he emphasizes this once more by twice using "God" in verse 32 (*First Book of the Bible*, 280-81).

With the courage of faith, yet with courtly deference, Joseph answers the Pharaoh respectfully but firmly. He rejects a commendation that he does not deserve while at the same time expressing the certainty that the Pharaoh will receive his answer. Joseph stresses that the answer will not be a demonstration of his skill in interpreting (יָלַעְרָי = "no, not I" or "that is not for me to do"); the interpretation, like the dream, will come from God. Joseph points out to the Pharaoh that his dream does indeed come from God (the position of אֱלֹהִים/’ēlōhîm, "God," in the sentence makes it emphatic); God wants to tell him something (v. 25); hence the interpretation must also come from God; otherwise it is worthless. Thus, Joseph dares to proclaim his God as the Lord of Egypt and of its king, revered as a deity: it is God Who sends the dreams and whomever He deigns He inspires to interpret them.

Lest Pharaoh be too quickly dismayed, however, Joseph assured him that God Himself would indeed grant Pharaoh the meaning of the dream: "God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer". The precise meaning of the Hebrew text יַעֲנֶה אֶת־שְׁלוֹם (ya’āneh ’t-šlôm = "will give the peace") is unclear. It probably implies that "God will respond (to me and grant) Pharaoh's welfare." Thus, the answer which, in spite of the great troubles that were surely coming

on the land of Egypt, would enable him to be prepared for them and to endure them in peace.

Furthermore, it is not that Joseph knows the interpretation of the dream in advance; rather, he is convinced that the sudden turn of events that has brought him from the dungeon into the presence of Pharaoh is providential for him. Indeed, God had sent him the dream for the very purpose of preparing him for the future. And he believes that he will receive a dream interpretation from God that will entirely satisfy Pharaoh.

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- 17    **So Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, "In my dream, behold, I was standing on the bank of the Nile;**  
 18    **and behold, seven cows, fat and sleek came up out of the Nile; and they grazed in the marsh grass.**  
 19    **And lo, seven other cows came up after them, poor and very ugly and gaunt, such as I had never seen for ugliness in all the land of Egypt;**  
 20    **and the lean and ugly cows ate up the first seven fat cows.**  
 21    **Yet when they had devoured the, it could not be detected that they had devoured them; for they were just as ugly as before. Then I awoke.**  
 22    **I saw also in my dream, and behold, seven ears, full and good, came up on a single stalk;**  
 23    **and lo, seven ears, withered, then, *and* scorched by the east wind, sprouted up after them;**  
 24    **and the thin ears swallowed the seven good ears. Then I told it to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me."**
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Pharaoh proceeded to tell Joseph the details of both his dreams (vv. 17-24a). The recitation of the dreams to Joseph contains several expansions of and verbal variations from the original narration. Pharaoh's recitation is more personal and subjective, colored by his "troubled spirit" (cf. v. 8), his feelings of fright, horror and helplessness. And no wonder! He received the messages which he did not generate or authorize. The dreams have robbed Pharaoh of his confidence, his control, and finally, of his expected future.

Pharaoh repeated his two dreams to Joseph in virtually the same terms as our narrator originally cast them. Why then does the writer allow the dreams to be told twice? It is not unusual for him to include such repetitions,

but in each case the reader should look for the reason behind it. As was suggested above, the writer has gone out of his way to present the whole of the Narrative in a series of "pairs," all fitting within the notion of the emphasis given by means of the repetition: "the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon" (v. 32). Recent scholarship has seen in this verse a clue to the repetitions that appear so often in the first five books of the Old Testament: they are there for emphasis, and they describe events in which the hand of God is clearly demonstrated. The repetition of the dreams, then, fits this pattern. But there may be still more to it.

When the Pharaoh repeated the dreams, he added only two major parts, the comment in v. 19b--"such as I had never seen for ugliness (לָרָע/lārō') in all the land of Egypt"--and the whole of v. 21, stating that these cows looked just as "ugly" (רָע/ra') as before they ate the good cows. In both cases the repetition seems to stress the "evil" (רָע/ra') of the appearance of the cows in contrast with the "good" (הַטֹּב/hattōbt, v. 26) cows of the first group.

The writer's emphasis on the "good" and "evil" represents Joseph's wisdom and discernment as an ability to distinguish between the "good" (טוֹב/tōb) and the "evil" (רָע/ra'). Such a picture suggests that in the Narrative of Joseph the writer is returning to one of the central themes of the beginning of the Book of Genesis, the knowledge of "good" (טוֹב/tōb) and "evil" (רָע/ra'). While Joseph is able to discern between "good and evil," it is clear from this story that ultimately such knowledge comes only from God (v. 39). Joseph is the embodiment of the ideal that true wisdom, the ability to discern between "good and evil," comes only from God.

Thus the lesson of the early chapters of Genesis is artfully repeated in these last chapters! Consistent with such an intention is the fact that at the very end of the Book (Genesis 50:20) the writer returns to the picture of God so clearly portrayed at the beginning (Genesis 1:1-31), namely, the covenant God Who alone brings about all things for the "good" of His own. In light of such considerations, it can hardly be accidental that the following narrative picks up just on this point by recounting that Joseph's plan seemed "good" (טוֹב/way-yîtab, v. 37) to the Pharaoh and all his servants.

Several other elements should be pointed out before moving on to Joseph's interpretation of the dream. First, in verse 21, only now do we learn the startling lack of change in the thin cows, which will be interpreted in verse 31. Secondly, significantly in verse 22, the phrase "a second time" (v. 5) is omitted, as though Pharaoh himself realizes that the two dreams are really one



(see comments on verses 7-8). Next, the final clause in verse 24, "\*but there was no one who telling [it] to me," employs the Hebrew verb  $\text{מָגַד}$ /*maggîd*, instead of "interpret" (as in vv. 8, 15). This verb is often used in connection with elucidation of what had been obscure (Judges 14:21; 1 Kings 10:3). This clause looks back once more and refers to what was related in verses 8 and 15. And once again,  $\text{לֹא־יָדָע}$ , "but there was no one who could 'tell' [it] for me" occurs in this clause, as it does in v. 8--none of Pharaoh's sages were able to give an appropriate interpretation that corresponded to his suspicions.

The humility and faith of Joseph thus come through in the chapter. Because God had given Joseph the special gift and because God had singled out Joseph for this special interpreting ministry, it was Joseph's duty to give glory to God for the revelation and the meaning and to take none of the glory for himself. Those whom God calls to special service must make it a point to inform the unbelieving world that any success or ability that they have comes from God. When they explain God's revelation to the world, they must confront the world with God. The servants are not greater than the master.

### 34 Joseph's Interpretation and Advice (verses 25-36) 38

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- 25 Now Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Pharaoh's dreams are one *and the same*; God has told to Pharaoh what He is about to do.
- 26 The seven good cows are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one *and the same*.
- 27 And the seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven thin ears scorched by the east win shall be seven years of famine."
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Without any hesitation, Joseph immediately gave Pharaoh the interpretation he so urgently sought. Despite its length, the chapter is very tightly knit; the interpretation too is very densely concentrated; there is not one unnecessary word. Joseph's interpretation does not follow Pharaoh's dream point by point; for Joseph is able to discern what is important and what is not. For example, all self-explanatory details are omitted--the cows rising out of the Nile River is obviously due to the fact that all fertility comes from the Nile; the gaunt cows do not feed on grass, as none remains; cows refer to plowing, ears to harvesting.

Now the focus turns away from Pharaoh and toward God, the One with Whom Pharaoh finally must deal. Joseph's interpretation is not an occasion for excitement, persuasion, or argumentation. It is already done! It is established and decided without any particular reference to Pharaoh. The future in Egypt does not depend upon Pharaoh. Pharaoh is no longer the subject, but the object. In fact, Pharaoh is irrelevant and marginal to the future of the kingdom. This much is implicit in the dream. In its mode and in its substance, the dream presents the coming reality that is not conjured or willed by Pharaoh. It is settled and it will happen--no matter what! The Pharaoh is helpless in the face of God's coming future. This would be a bold and risky message to deliver--especially to one who thought himself as a god.

Note Joseph's confidence in his speech, which incidently, is the second longest in the entire Joseph Narrative(!). He makes flat and unembarrassed statements in interpreting his dream. The power of God is contrasted with the feeble power of Pharaoh. The criterion of the true God (cf. Isaiah 41:21-29) is that God is the One Who can cause a future. In Genesis 41, it is clear that Pharaoh cannot cause the future. Nor can he resist the future that God will bring. This is the reason for the theocentric interpretation:

"God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer" (v. 16).

"God has told to Pharaoh what He is about to do" (v. 25).

"God has shown to Pharaoh what He is about to do" (v. 28).

"the matter is determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about" (v. 32).

This theocentric casting of the narrative is very striking. Thus, all of this has come from God. God had sent the dream, God had given the interpretation, and He would bring it all to pass.

The interpretation section begins with a reiteration of the source of the dream and its meaning--God. The dreams were a communication to this god Pharaoh from the true God, concerning what he was about to do in the earth. The "God" is not named or identified as YHWH. Joseph clearly refers, however, to the God of his family.

As an interesting and significant aside in this account, it is observed that the two names for God are selectively employed contextual. Whenever Joseph was speaking to Egyptians about God, he used the name  $\text{אֱלֹהִים}$ /'*ēlohîm*, Elohîm ("God"), as is befitting for those to whom God could be known only as mighty Creator and Sovereign (cf. Gen. 39:9; 40:8; 41:16, 25, 28, 32). Also

because the God of providence was working in the world, the name Elohim is proper. Whenever our narrator made comment about God's dealing with Joseph, however, he used the personal covenant name, יהוה, YHWH ("LORD"), as this was the redemptive, covenant making name by which He had made Himself specially known to the people of His peculiar promises (cf. Gen. 39:2, 3, 5, 21, 23). There is thus always a clear spiritual reason for the various uses of the two divine names. They are not, as the higher critics have alleged, indications of separate documentary sources.

Three elements determine the interpretation:

- (1) The two dreams are only one dream (v. 25). Both dreams, although separate and successive, form part of a single whole and give expression to the identical phenomenon. This observation must be put at the beginning; otherwise, everything would be spoiled. Pharaoh had already prepared for this by not telling that he went back to sleep (cf. v. 22). That the dream is one was one of the major obstacles that the Egyptian sages were unable to determine.
- (2) The numbers are periods of time, namely years (vv. 26-27, 29-30). The "seven-ness" of the dreams, however, only God could have given Joseph infallible knowledge concerning its correct interpretation. This number represented a period of time, just as the "three-ness" of the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker had represented three days in chapter 40. In this case, however, there were seven years represented by the respective groups of seven. The seven cows and seven ears represented seven years; seven years of plenty would thus be followed by seven years of famine that would eat up the plenty.
- (3) The disappearance of the full in the empty without a trace means famine after abundance.

Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream concludes with v. 28, which can be seen by the narrative device of *inclusio*; vv. 25-28 are framed by the same sentence with a minor difference:

V. 25b: "God has told (הִגִּיד/higgid) to Pharaoh what He is about to do." As mentioned before, this verb often is used in connection with elucidation of what had been obscure (cf. v. 24).

- V. 28: "God has shown (הִרְאָה/*her'â*) to Pharaoh what He is about to do." The Hebrew verb expresses the language of vision--that is, of visual imagery--as distinct from verbal articulation.

Such things as famine (2 Chron. 20:9; cf. Deut. 28:23, 24) are sometimes to be understood as judgments on people for their turning to wickedness. It would be difficult, and surely it is not necessary, to single out some particular sin or sins of Egypt; the idolatry of Egypt was a continuing thing and such judgment could have come any time. However, this is not suggested in any of the remarks of Joseph, nor in the remarks of Stephen in Acts 7:9-15. If this was a threat of judgment against Egypt, then the response expected would have been repentance. Joseph did not declare that the famine was God's judgment on the land. Besides, because there was the revelation *first* of the years of plenty *before* the years of famine, preparation could and should be made for it. We are then left with the simple fact that God brought it about to secure the removal of Jacob and his clan to Egypt.

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- 28 "It is as I have spoken to Pharaoh: God has shown to Pharaoh what He is about to do.  
 29 Behold, seven years of great abundance are coming in all the land of Egypt;  
 30 and after them seven years of famine will come, and all the abundance will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine will ravage the land.  
 31 So the abundance will be unknown in the land because of that subsequent famine; for it *will be* very severe."
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The significance of what God is going to do follows in vv. 28-31. These verse have the form, not of an interpretation or an explanation, but of an announcement (הִנֵּה/*hinnēh*, "behold"--or better yet, "take heed") which throws the entire weight on the announcement of a misfortune. Pharaoh elaborated upon the negative aspects of his dreams (vv. 19, 21) emphasizing the elements that had deeply disturbed him. Joseph, therefore, mentions the famine first, inverting the order of the dream. In this way, the narrative indicates that it is the famine that causes Joseph's emancipation and elevation to high office and which ultimately brings his brothers down to Egypt.

Only a few further technical notes are needed for vv. 29-31. Our narrator uses only one sentence to describe the years of plenty (v. 29), whereas five are given to the famine (vv. 30-31), thus accenting the famine. Thus, the seven years of famine would alter in startling respects the economy of Egypt with regard to agriculture and animal husbandry.

Another technical note is that when describing the great "abundance," our writer uses a relatively obscure word (עֲבָרָה/*sābā'*) in verses 29, 30 and 31 (occurs elsewhere only in Proverbs 3:10 and Ecclesiastes 5:11). In verse 29, both the words "seven" (שֶׁבַע/*šeba'*) and "abundance (עֲבָרָה/*sābā'*) share the same consonants (since in ancient Hebrew there was not a differentiation between the consonants ש and שׁ). In fact, this entire sentence is made to read easily, thus to remind us literarily that when things are going great, time passes easily, as does reading the Hebrew text.

These seven years will be marked by tremendous ("great," גָּדוֹל/*gādōl*) satiation, after which the good years will be quickly and completely forgotten (v. 30). This explains why the lean cows and ears did not look any different after they had swallowed the fat ones. This is what disturbed Pharaoh. Surely a meal as hearty as the one they had eaten would have had some effect on the consumers! When it happened twice, he could not overlook the strangeness of it, nor escape the foreboding it injected into his mind (cf. v. 8).

Because of the severity of the ensuing famine (v. 31), the Hebrew text literally reads, "this satiation will not be known (עֲבָרָה לֹא יִדָּעָה/*yiūāda'*) in the land . . . ." "It shall not be known" is a verbal echo and interprets verse 21 (עֲבָרָה לֹא יִדָּעָה/*nōda'*). Thus, this verse is not superfluous; if a person is tormented by hunger he completely forgets that he ever was satisfied earlier.

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32 "Now as for the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice, *it means* that the matter is determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about."

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In verse 32 we have another *inclusio*, echoing thematic words, thus neatly rounding off Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream which began in verse 25:

v. 25 "Pharaoh's dream is one; God has told to Pharaoh what He is about to do."

- v. 32 "Now as for the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice, it means that the matter is determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about.

Joseph concludes his interpretation on a climactic point. Its decisive element is "God," Who will be the cause behind all that which is to transpire. Joseph spoke of God at the beginning of his interpretation (v. 25), again in verse 28, and now twice at its conclusion proper (v. 32). Even to the end of the interpretation, Joseph keeps Pharaoh's focus on God and off himself.

Verse 32 is of great importance, because the statement made by Joseph assures Pharaoh (as well as the reader) that the dream-duplication indicates the irrevocability of the events to come and their imminence. This comment perhaps applies generally to the many things in the life of Joseph which occurred in pairs, including his earlier dream which had been repeated to him twice, with different figures (cf. Genesis 37:5-10).

There was no doubt that the future had been accurately told. The term used for "determined" (נִכְוֵן/nākôn - niphil participle of כָּוַן) is used elsewhere in Hebrew as a legal term, meaning that something is established beyond the shadow a doubt (Deut. 13:15). This verse is skillfully placed at the end, making Joseph's subsequent advice more urgent. Pharaoh was powerful, but even the world's greatest army was defenseless against the onslaught of a famine.

Verse 32 provides a death-blow answer to the error of creating documents (i.e., JEPD theory) through what some documentarians call "doublets"--the repetition of an event: when events are similar, their variants are considered by the documentarians to be variants of a single original. It was believed that such repetitions as passing a wife off as a sister (Abraham two times and Isaac once) could not be separate occurrences. This became the basis for the denial of the authority of other similar happenings; thus, here also, it is held that the two dreams could not both have occurred. But this is expressly denied by the text (v. 32!) where the duplication is said to be a method of biblical teaching. The documentarians have *deliberately misconstrued* the biblical data (cf. 2 Pet. 3:16-17).

Joseph finishes the dream interpretation in v. 32 and the narrative shifts in v. 33 where Joseph is prepared with a concrete follow-up program. But note that after his interpretation, there is no (narrative) response from Pharaoh. We are not told that he accepted the interpretation or agreed to it.

The narrative proceeds as though there were no question of this. At this point, the initiative is completely in God's hands.

4B  
*Joseph's Advice (v. 33-36)*

33 "And now let Pharaoh look for a man discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt.

34 Let Pharaoh take action to appoint overseers in charge of the land, and let him exact a fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven years of abundance.

35 Then let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and store up the grain for food in the cities under Pharaoh's authority, and let them guard it.

36 And let the food become as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which will occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish during the famine."

Because God revealed these things for a purpose, Joseph immediately added wise counsel to the interpretation. The advice that Joseph gives the Pharaoh is as clear and precise as the interpretation of the dream. He advises the Pharaoh to take measures (v. 33) which he spells out in detail under three headings (vv. 34-35). The conclusion (v. 36) explains the purpose of the measures.

Joseph has presented the danger facing Egypt with clarity and forcefulness, but now, immediately follows with sound advice on how to meet the danger, beginning with these words: "And now" (וְעַתָּה/*w'attâ*, v. 33a). This Hebrew adverb frequently introduces a new development within an episode (cf. Gen. 3:22; 4:11), which in this context stresses that there is no sharp division between the interpretation of Pharaoh's dream and Joseph's ensuing advice given on the basis of it. Joseph is not being presumptuous in offering his advice, but simply carrying out his dual task of giving the dream's interpretation and drawing the consequences from it. The interpreter and the counselor are one and the same person. Therefore, not only did God give Joseph the true interpretation of Pharaoh's dream, but also an effective plan of action for Pharaoh.

Joseph is extremely tactful and uses proper courtier protocol when he advises Pharaoh. Joseph does not wish to raise any suspicion that he is sug-

gesting the creation of a new, and possibly threatening, focus of ruling power. Thus, when dispensing his advice, the repeated emphasis is on "let Pharaoh" do such and such (vv. 33, 34) "under Pharaoh's authority" (v. 35).

Joseph's first recommendation was for Pharaoh to find a man discerning (נָבוֹן/*nābôn*) and wise (חָכָם/*hākām*, occurring in Genesis only in 41:8, 33), and set him over the land of Egypt" (v. 33). The "discerning and wise" man described here is the one who is capable of planning and carrying through important economic measures. The "wisdom" of Pharaoh's sages is not enough. Though it may provide the knowledge how to store all produce without spoilage, "discernment" and "wisdom" is required for the collection and the husbanding (cf. v. 35).

"Discernment" in the Torah is the perceptive sensibility to carry out the duty given by God's command. The term comes from a Hebrew root that means "between" and thus has the idea of distinguishing between good and evil, right and wrong. The bounty of the earth--God's blessing--in this chapter is called "good"; if it is cared for well, it will see them through the bad years of the severe famine.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, "wisdom" covers the whole gamut of human experience. Wisdom is seen in the skill of technical work in making garments for the high priest (Ex. 28:3), craftsmanship in metal work (Ex. 31:3, 6), as well as the execution of battle tactics (Isa. 10:13). Wisdom is required from government leaders and heads of state for administration (Deut. 34:9; 2 Sam. 14:20). Workmen who made idols (Isa. 40:20; Jer. 10:9) were also said to be wise because of their skilled craftsmanship. Sailors of Phoenicia were "skilled men" (Ezek. 27:8). Seamen in a storm at sea "were at their wits' end" (Psa. 107:27, literally, "all their wisdom was swallowed up"). Their usual skill in piloting ships was useless in the distress of the disastrous storm. Women skillful in mourning were hired to wail in times of desolation (Jer. 9:17).

"Wisdom" referred not only to ability or skill in craftsmanship but also to skill in advising and/or administering. Elders of the tribes (Deut. 1:13, 15), Joseph and Daniel in their high administrative posts (here in Gen. 41:33-39 and Dan. 5:11, 29), Joshua (Deut. 34:9), and King Solomon (1 Kgs. 3:12, 28; 5:7, 12; 10:23-24) were all men of wisdom, with the responsibility to exercise justice, make correct decisions, and provide leadership. Also the king of Tyre possessed wisdom (Ezek. 28:4-5, 17; the NIV unfortunately translates *hokmôt* "wisdom" in v. 5) and "skill" in v. 5).



Wisdom sometimes suggested shrewdness or craftiness, as in the counsel given by Jonadab (2 Sam. 13:3), a woman of Tekoa (2 Sam. 14:2), and a woman of Abel Beth Maacah (2 Sam. 20:14-16).

The essential idea of wisdom represents a manner of thinking and attitude concerning life's experiences--how to correctly fuse God's revelation with that of life experiences; including matters of general interest and basic morality. These concerns relate to prudence in secular affairs, skills in the arts, moral sensitivity, and experience in the ways of the LORD. Therefore, godly wisdom was not theoretical and speculative. It was practical, based on revealed principles of right and wrong, to be lived out in daily life.

An individual is "successful" as they direct their life in accord with God's divine design, His plans for the world. Seeing God's moral order, sensing from divine revelation what God desires and has planned for mankind, one is then challenged by the divine wisdom to conduct their life in line with those principles established by the Creator. To the extent an individual follows these principles or rules of God's order or pattern for life, to that extent they are able to cope with realities, and to enjoy inner order and harmony. Neglecting God's order leads to disorder and chaos; heeding God's design results in satisfaction and peace.

These two terms, "discerning" and "wise" in verse 33 presents the hinge that is both thematic and structurally important. The purposes of God demand a human counterpart. The transcendent purpose of God (vv. 25-32) is tied to concrete historical action (vv. 33-36). There could not have been the saving historical action (vv. 33-36) if there had not been the dream. But if there had been only the dream (vv. 17-24) and its interpretation (vv. 25-32) without historical response (vv. 33-36), there would have been no saving. This point is pivotal not only for this narrative but for the entire narrative faith of Israel.

There is a striking parallel between "discerning" and "wise" which Joseph urged and those of the expected Messiah (Isa. 11:2-3):

And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him,  
 the spirit of wisdom (הַקְּדוּשָׁה/*hākmāh*) and understanding  
 (רוּחַ הַיְבוּנָה/*ûbînāh*),  
 the spirit of counsel and strength,  
 the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD  
 And He will delight in the fear of the LORD . . . .

While the words **wisdom** (חָכְמָה/*hākāmāh*) and **discernment** (בִּינָה/*bînāh*) are applied to many people in diverse types and kinds of literature, they are especially at home in wisdom literature in the Hebrew Scriptures. Of particular interest is the introduction to the Book of Proverbs (1:2-6), in which these terms and their cognates recur:

To know **wisdom** (חָכְמָה/*hākāmāh*) and instruction,  
 to **discern** (לְהַבִּין/*l'habîn*) the sayings of understanding (בִּינָה/*bînāh*).  
 A **wise man** (חָכָם/*hākām*) will hear and increase knowledge,  
 and a man of **understanding** (נָבוֹן/*nābôn*) will acquire wise counsel.  
 To **understand** (לְהַבִּין/*l'habîn*) a proverb and a figure,  
 the words of the wise (חֲכָמִים/*hakāmîm*) and their riddles.

Joseph's advice is sound. Instead of living every year on that year's abundance, as the Egyptians had grown accustomed to doing, they would need to implement a sound program of savings--not of money but of grain.

Unfortunately, the people themselves could not be relied on to store up for the coming years of famine. Human nature being what it is, most people will spend all they earn, and more, for their immediate needs, both real and imagined. The few individuals who would indeed save for the future would be tempted to profiteer when opportunity came. Besides, the need was going to be so great that nothing less than a centrally administered plan could really be effective on a national basis.

On the other hand, a central bureaucracy could easily lead to despotism and cruelty, especially if all available food supplies were in the hands of a self-seeking dictator. The key to the success of such a plan, and the survival of the nation, would be the chief administrator. The right man would be a deliverer; the wrong man could become a tyrant.

Therefore, Joseph's first recommendation was for Pharaoh to find a discerning and wise individual, a person who was possessed of shrewd insight into a situation and its needs, a man who could with confidence be placed over the whole land of Egypt to plan its future food production and distribution systems. Joseph deliberately uses the same verbal stem he has used three times before in connection with the impending divine action when he advises Pharaoh to "take action" (עָשָׂה/*'sh*, cf. vv. 25, 28, 32), implying that his advice is the human counterpart of God.

Then, this chief administrator should be provided with a staff of capable and trustworthy deputies to administer his plan. The word rendered "overseers" is **קִדְמֵי**/*p<sup>o</sup>qidim*, a general term for any person deputized to do a job, whether it was looking after soldiers (2 Kgs. 25:19), performing priestly functions (2 Chron. 24:11, 31; Neh. 11:14; 12:42), or carrying out royal commands (Judg. 9:28; Esther 2:3). They carried more authority than troop commanders and, interestingly enough, were occasionally delegated to collect produce from an estate.

Joseph suggests that a double tax--that is, one-fifth in place of the usual one-tenth--be collected in the seven years of plenty to provide a surplus for the following seven-year cycle of famine when no tax could be collected. It has been shown by historians that tithing was practiced in ancient Egypt and other nations, as a form of taxes or tribute to the king; but a twenty percent levy would be very unusual, and might well be resisted, especially if enacted by an unpopular sovereign. Thus, the chief administrator of this plan would have to be skilled in diplomacy and persuasion, as well as be of unquestioned integrity himself to overcome the natural reluctance of the people to such a tax.

When verse 34 speaks of commissioners who would oversee this food conservation program, this does not conflict with verse 33, which suggests that one man would be put in charge of this operation. Obviously one person could not do all the work involved in such a huge project. He would need a staff of subordinates who would take care of gathering and storing all this food. The fact that Joseph recommended that only one fifth of the harvest be gathered during the years of plenty should not be construed as a weakness in his proposal--as if he should have collected fifty percent.

We should not conceive of this as meaning that Egypt would have no crops at all during the years of famine. It should probably be seen as a period when the Nile would not overflow as extensively as it normally did (see notes on vv. 53-57). As a consequence the crops that depended on this annual overflow would be more limited than in normal years. At that time the stored reserves could supplement the diminished harvests. It should also be remembered that in a normal year Egypt produced far more grain than was needed for the country's use. Vast amounts of Egyptian grain were exported. In view of these facts, even one fifth of the grain produced in years of great abundance would provide an enormous supply for the storage plan that Joseph advocated.

Some interpreters understand the word **חָמַם**/*hāmmēš* as "organize," and thus translate, "And let Pharaoh take steps to appoint overseers over the

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land, and **organize** the land of Egypt in the seven years of plenty." While it is true that this stem is used elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures to "organize" for war in companies of 50 (Ex. 13:18; Josh. 1:14--note only in the Qal), in our context, our writer uses the Piel stem and finds in the analogous *shillesh*, "to divide into three"; *shishsheh*, "to set aside a sixth part." It should also be noted that Joseph later institutes a permanent tax of one-fifth on all produce (Gen. 47:24, 26) and that the number "five" recurs many times in the Joseph Narrative (Gen. 43:34; 45:6, 11, 22; 47:2, 24, 26).

The statement in verse 34 regarding "one fifth" of the harvest also is not in conflict with the reference in verse 35 to "all the food." This simply refers to all of the one fifth that would be stored.

Joseph sensibly suggests the stockpiling of grain in the plentiful years against the forthcoming years of famine (v. 35). The food which was gathered in this manner should, Joseph advised, then be preserved in large storehouses constructed for this purpose. The eighty percent that the people would have left would be more than adequate to meet all their needs, as well as the need for exports, during the seven plenteous years. Furthermore, he advised that the food should be kept stored and guarded in depositories in key cities throughout the land, in order to have food available in the years of famine which would eventually come.

God's revelation was not only the means to get Joseph to power; it was also the means by which God would save Egypt and the world in the time of crisis, causing everyone to know that deliverance comes from God--if people would believe the Word from God and prepare accordingly. Wisdom literature advises that people should store up in times of plenty for times of need, which is just practical living (Prov. 6:6-11; 20:4). But here the entire event was part of God's way of making Himself known to the world.

There is no indication in Joseph's words that he was trying to suggest himself as the administrator. Probably, such a thought could hardly have even crossed his mind; for he was not only a foreigner but a prisoner, and had never held a political office. Though God had prepared Joseph for this moment, he himself had no inkling of it. So in a stunning reversal, Joseph is given a promotion that will take him in one day from the pit to the pinnacle of Egypt.

**III. *Believers who recognize that the success of their service is part of God's sovereign plan will not abandon their faith when they find success (37-57).***

The last part of the chapter builds to a climax, starting with Joseph's meteoric rise to power in Egypt and concluding with a reminder of God's blessing and a report of Joseph's preserving his faith. It would have been easy for a young man to be taken with his success and forget his spiritual heritage. But Joseph was the faithful servant of the LORD.

The installation of Joseph as Grand Vizier is summarized in this quickly moving passage, culminating in the words: "And Joseph went forth [as lord] over the land of Egypt." This is followed by three scenes that deal with: (1) Joseph's grain collection and storage during the years of plenty (Gen. 41:46-49); (2) the birth of Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim (Gen. 41:50-54a); and (3) the first year or so of the famine (Gen. 41:54b-57).

In verses 37-57 of this chapter, the account of the king's appointment of Joseph over all his kingdom continues to present a picture of Joseph that recalls the portrait of Adam in Genesis 1. Just as Adam is seen in the Creation account as dependent on God for his knowledge of "good and evil," so Joseph also is portrayed here in the same terms. Just as Adam is made God's "vice regent" to rule over all the land; so similarly Joseph is portrayed here as the Pharaoh's "vice regent" over all his land (vv. 40-33). As Adam was made in God's image to rule over all the land, so the king here gave Joseph is "signet ring" and dressed him in royal garments (v. 42); moreover he gave him a new name.

The picture of Joseph resembles the psalmist's understanding of Genesis 1 when, regarding that passage, he writes,

Yet Thou hast made him a little lower than God,  
 And dost crown him with glory and majesty!  
 Thou dost make him to rule over the works of Thy hands;  
 Thou hast put all things under his feet,  
 All sheep and oxen,  
 And also the beasts of the field,  
 The birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,  
 Whatever passes through the paths of the seas. Psalm 8:5-8

Just as God provided a wife for Adam in the garden and gave man all the land for his enjoyment, so the king gave a wife to Joseph and put him over all the land (v. 45).

What is to be made of such correspondences between Adam and Joseph? Are they intentional or coincidental? While they may be merely accidental similarities, such theological patterns in the description of key characters are found often in biblical texts and would not be thematically out of place here. At many points in the Narrative, Joseph appears to be represented as an "ideal" of what a truly wise and faithful man is like. He is a model of the ideal man or the ideal king. He accomplishes all that Adam failed to do. It seems likely then that a conscious purpose lies behind these similarities with Genesis 1 in the portrayal of Joseph.

The story of Joseph is a reflection of what might have been had Adam remained obedient to God and trusted him for the "good." At the same time the picture of Joseph is an anticipation of what might yet still be, if only God's people would, like Joseph, living a life of obedience and trust in God. For what does it profit a person to know "good" or "evil" if one cannot do the good, nor avoid the evil? By the wisdom that God imparts to the believer who is empowered by the Holy Spirit, we can! (cf. Eph. 5:15-21).

The picture of Joseph, then, looks back to Adam; but more, it looks forward to One Who was yet to come. It anticipates the coming of the one from the house of Judah to whom the kingdom belongs (cf. Gen. 49:10). Thus, the tension between the house of Joseph and the house of Judah, which lies within many of these texts, is resolved by making the life of Joseph into a picture of the One Who is to reign from the house of Judah.

9B

### Joseph's Divine Endowment (verses 37-38)

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- 37** Now the proposal seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his servants.  
**38** Then Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find a man like this, in whom is a divine spirit?"
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Pharaoh and his advisers were amazed and impressed, not only with Joseph's ability to interpret the dreams, but also with his wise counsel and, no doubt, also with his whole aspect and character. They are impressed by his perception that the two dreams are actually one, by his relating them to national

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affairs rather than to the Pharaoh's personal interests, and by the social concern that he displays in his advice.

Even though Joseph had been completely unknown to them only a few hours earlier, it was transparently clear that here was a man of unique qualities, ideally suited to administer the plan he had formulated and proposed.

With no hesitation, therefore, Pharaoh acknowledge that none other than Joseph was truly qualified to fill the post he had described. The elevation to power began with Pharaoh's response: "Now the proposal seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his servants" (v. 37). Pharaoh perceived that Joseph had what was required for the task and nominated him before all the court: "Can we find a man like this, in whom is a divine spirit?" (v. 38). Pharaoh's question to his courtiers is rhetorical. Agreement was obviously unanimous. The court agrees either because it has no alternative or simply because it does not want to oppose the Pharaoh's conviction.

Pharaoh knows at once what he must do. Although they had shown their pleasure at Joseph's interpretation and advice, the courtiers now make no comment. The text seems to imply that the "magicians" and "sages" had left before Pharaoh assembled his courtiers for consultations. What pleased them was, perhaps, not only the self-evident truth of the interpretation of the young Hebrew slave, whom Pharaoh had been so wise to interview, but also Joseph's solving--through the produce-tax to be levied upon the wealthy lords--the problem of supporting the entire population without expense to the crown. Still, some officials may have cautioned Pharaoh to wait and see whether the next crop would, indeed, turn out to be as abundant as Joseph predicted. But others, expecting they would be the new appointee, obviously recommended that Pharaoh proceed at once.

Pharaoh recognized immediately that this was the man to use, for a "divine spirit" was in him (v. 38). When Pharaoh declared Joseph to be a "man like this, in whom is a divine spirit," he recognized that the task for saving the land and people was beyond mere human abilities and that God had appointed Joseph to the work.

Scholars have variously translated the reference to the LORD's spirit in pharaoh's question: "Can we find a man like this, in whom is a divine spirit?" The word used for God, *Elohim*, is a plural noun, and may technically be used with a plural verb. Even so, it is always used with a singular verb in Scripture, indicating the unity of God. From the fact that pharaoh used the

word *Elohim* in the next verse with a singular verb, it is probable that it was the "spirit of God" which pharaoh saw in Joseph, not "a spirit of the gods" (NIV). Pharaoh was not the last man in Scripture to speak more wisely than he knew (cf. Jn. 11:49-52). His words in verses 38-39 indicate that Joseph's opening protest (v. 16) had made an impact. Joseph and the Pharaoh, despite the difference in their religions, are at one in their conviction that "God" acts in history.

The empowerment of the Spirit of God in this verse is the first biblical mention of one so endowed. In Exodus 31:3 and 35:31, Bezalel is described as another who is endowed with God's Spirit and therefore has "skill, ability and knowledge." Belshazzar similarly describes Daniel: "I have heard about you that you have the spirit of the gods in you, and that illumination, knowledge, and extraordinary wisdom are to be found in you" (Dan. 5:14). Generally, possession of the "Spirit of God" impels one to undertake a mission (Num. 27:18), imparts extraordinary energy and drive (Judg. 3:10; 11:29), and produces uncommon intelligence and practical wisdom.

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#### Pharaoh's Recognition of Joseph's Abilities (verse 39)

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**39** So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are."

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When Pharaoh declares Joseph as "no one so discerning and wise," he recognized that the task of saving the land and people was beyond mere human abilities and that God surely had appointed Joseph to the work.

Pharaoh refers to Joseph's own words and implies his disillusionment with the proverbial "wisdom of Egypt": "Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are." Joseph's interpretation seems so evident to Pharaoh that it is unnecessary to wait till it transpires.



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 7B Pharaoh Makes Joseph Lord Over His Kingdom (verses 40-45)
 

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- 40 "You shall be over my house, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; only in the throne I will be greater than you."
- 41 And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See I have set you over all the land of Egypt."
- 42 Then Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand, and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen, and put the gold necklace around his neck.
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Pharaoh immediately decreed that Joseph would be over all the affairs of Egypt; only Pharaoh himself would be over him. Joseph had been faithful over what had been given him to do, whether Potiphar's house or the house of prison, and so God made him ruler over greater things, the house of Pharaoh. Joseph would have all the authority needed to carry out his plan, and to enact and implement all necessary policies and regulations. The Hebrew phrase *וְעַל-פִּיךָ יִשָּׁק כָּל-עַמִּי*, rendered in the NASB as "all my people shall do homage" is more literally, "on your mouth shall all my people kiss"--a figurative expression for paying homage (cf. Psa. 2:12). This agrees well with the metaphor either of a homage-kiss, which was a common enthronement custom, or of kissing the dust (prostrating oneself), which corresponds to an Egyptian idiom (Vergote, 97). The term "on your mouth" figuratively means "on your command," as in Genesis 45:21.

In contrast to his previous loquacious discourse, Joseph does not utter a word in response to Pharaoh's announcement, "See I have set you over all the land of Egypt" (v. 41). The threefold repetition of the phrase "Pharaoh said to Joseph," in verses 39, 41, and 44, probably indicates that the Pharaoh pauses after each statement to ascertain the young man's reaction and then reiterates his decision in order to reassure the dumb-struck Joseph that he really means what he says.

This was a truly amazing development. An unknown alien prisoner suddenly elevated over the entire land of Egypt! The necessity for Joseph's long period of suffering and humiliation, learning patience and trust, is now clearly seen. Any other person so suddenly exalted would almost certainly have quickly been filled with heady pride, and would sooner or later have been ruined by success.

Does a new identity accompany the new name? Is Joseph now the "favorite son" of Egypt? So it would seem. Not only does Joseph have the same position with Pharaoh and for the whole kingdom as originally in the house of his first master (Gen. 39:9), but what follows, Joseph is given "favorite sonship" status, echoing Genesis 37:3!

There is some question as to the exact position that Joseph held in the royal court. He appears to have been vizier (prime minister). There are several indications of this in our text. First, Pharaoh said that "only in the throne I will be greater than you" (v. 40) and made Joseph ride "in his second chariot" (v. 43), which clearly proclaims him the next after Pharaoh: first citizen, or vizier, of the whole land. Next, Pharaoh gave Joseph jurisdiction over "all the land of Egypt" (v. 41), a fact which is repeated many times (cf. 41:43, 44, 46, 55; 42:6; 45:8), which indicates that he was given military control of Egypt besides having authority over Pharaoh's personal estates (cf. v. 40a) and heading the ministry of agriculture (cf. v. 40b). Thutmose III gave his newly-appointed vizier the same when he charged him:

Look thou to this office of vizier. Be vigilant over everything that is done in it. Behold, it is the support of the entire land. Behold, as to the vizierate, behold, it is not sweet at all, behold, it is bitter as gall ("The Vizier of Egypt," translated by Wilson, in Pritchard, *ANET*, 213).

Finally, Pharaoh gave Joseph the royal seal (v. 42), with which Joseph could transact affairs of state in the name and with the authority of the crown. Joseph's clothing and jewelry (v. 43) accord well with numerous Egyptian paintings. His "garments of fine linen" (v. 42) must have been similar to the clothes worn by Rekh-mi-Re when he was appointed vizier:

I was a noble, the second of the king and the fourth of him who judged the Pair . . . . It was the first occasion of my being summoned. All my brothers were in the outer office. I went forth . . . clad in fine linen" (Pritchard; *ANET*, 213).

W. A. Ward has suggested that Joseph was not vizier but merely an important official with considerable power. He contends that of the six titles attributed to Joseph, only half were working titles; the other half were strictly honorific (Ward, "The Egyptian Office of Joseph," 145-50). The combination of titles and powers given Joseph, however, seems to put him above a mere elevated noble with honorific titles.

After Pharaoh had appointed Joseph to his high position, he immediately proceeded to carry out the procedure for elevating this new official to the proper elegance and honor of his position (vv. 41-45). He does this by performing a series of ceremonial acts that, in effect, constitute Joseph's investiture as "Grand Vizier of Egypt."

Three things are bestowed upon Joseph as symbols of the authority he is receiving: a signet ring, a fine linen garment, and a gold chain. Joseph was undoubtedly showered with other gifts by Pharaoh, including such things as houses, lands, servants, and treasures. But these did not have the symbolic significance of the three items named here, and so play no part in the ceremony. The three items mentioned here in the investiture ceremony, as well as the one in verse 43, all appear in the report of the seventh-century B.C. Assyrian conqueror Ashurbanipal concerning his campaign against Egypt. Describing his installation of Necho as pharaoh, which was performed according to Egyptian custom, Ashurbanipal says that he clad Necho in a garment with multicolored trimmings, placed a golden chain around his neck, put golden rings on his hands, and presented him with chariots.

Before all, Pharaoh takes his signet ring from his hand and puts it on Joseph's, possession of which enabled its owner to place his seal and signature on official documents of state. The transfer of the ring bearing the royal seal from the finger of Pharaoh to that of Joseph signifies the delegation of authority. The signet ring plays a similar role in Esther 3:12; 8:8; it is very often there on the occasion of the clothing of priests (Ex. 28).

Next, Joseph was also dressed in the finest linen clothes (v. 42b). The Hebrew word *šššš* is an Egyptian loan word which only occurs here, used for cloth of exceptional quality. The same material was used later in Israel for the Tabernacle furnishings and the priestly vestments.

And finally, Pharaoh puts a golden chain around Joseph's neck. This, too, is a well-known Egyptian symbol; the giving of a gold chain was one of the highest distinctions the king could bestow upon his favorites.

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43 **And he had him ride in his second chariot; and they proclaimed before him, "Bow the knee!" And he set him over all the land of Egypt.**

A royal procession of state was organized, with Joseph riding immediately behind Pharaoh in a chariot only slightly less ornate than that of Pharaoh himself, thus indicating to the entire populace that Joseph was now second in command in the kingdom. This is the first reference to a chariot in the Bible. The horse is not mentioned here, but there is little doubt that the horse-drawn chariot is intended. The Hyksos invasion of Egypt in the eighteenth century B.C. first introduced the chariot to that country as an instrument of warfare. The narrative here implies the use of the chariot as a status symbol, as in 2 Samuel 15:1.

A brief note on the era of the Hyksos is in order. Manetho, as reported in Josephus, compares the Hyksos advent to "a blast of God" which smote the Egyptians from the east (*Contra Apionem*, 1:14). Actually, evidence from Egyptian slave lists indicates a large influx of Asiatic slaves into Egypt in the Twelfth Dynasty (1991-1786 B.C.) and more in the Thirteenth (1785 B.C. and following), probably through war. They are designated as 'Aamu, and a considerable number of them settled in the Eastern Delta, precisely in the area where the clan of Israel was settled (cf. Gen. 47:6ff.). Amenemhet I (1991-1962 B.C.) set up strong points in the area, strengthening the frontier near Wadi Tumilat. Amenemhet III (1842-1797 B.C.) appears to have employed one Khebdad, a "brother of the prince of Retjenu" (south Syria-Palestine) in some of his Sinai expeditions, along with some of his forces. Nehesy erected a stele at Tanis. He was a devotee of the god Seth commemorated on the 400 year stele. Nehesy represents a break, as king in the Delta, between earlier Egyptian kings and the Hyksos, and depended on the Asiatics of the Delta for support against the former. The *Admonitions of Ipuwer* gives a picture of unsettled times in Egypt, much like what Manetho wrote. This writing favored the eventual takeover of Egypt by Asiatic rulers in the Delta, who followed Nehesy, with the support of military Asiatics of the Delta. This was done from Avaris. Later they seized the palace, the residence of Pharaoh. It is in this context that the era of Joseph should be viewed and thus it is understood why a fellow Asiatic could be elevated to so great a station.

There are other cases where Semitic people arose to high offices in the Egyptian government. The case of the Semitic nomad Yanhamu, who became Egyptian commissioner for Canaan and Syria in the days of Akhnaton (ca. 1370-1353 B.C.), and of Ben Ozen, who came from a place situated east of Lake Tiberias and rose to become the royal herald, or marshal, at the court of Merneptah (ca. 1224-1214 B.C.) indicate that such elevation of foreigners was indeed possible. In fact, a brother of the same Merneptah was given in marriage by his father Ramses II (ca. 1290-1224 B.C.) to the daughter of a Syrian

sea captain named Ben-Anath. Thus it was not at all extraordinary for foreigners, and Semites in particular, to be welcomed by the court and to rise to positions of responsibility and power in the government of Egypt.

Joseph was now second in command in the kingdom. The NASB obscures the meaning of this verse 43 by translating: "And he had him ride in his second chariot . . ." A better translation of the Hebrew would be, "he had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command . . ." (see NASB margin reading; NIV, NEB and others support this reading). The meaning of the Hebrew, מִשְׁנֵה/misneh "second-in-command," is well established by such texts as 1 Samuel 23:17, 2 Kings 23:4 and 2 Chronicles 28:7. It would thus be a title corresponding to the Akkadian *terdennu* (= *tartan*, Isa. 20:1) and equivalent to vizier. The ancient versions, such as the Septuagint, Vulgate, and Targums, applied the term to the chariot and took it to mean "his second one," in accordance with the use of מִשְׁנֵה/misneh as "double" in Genesis 43:12 and Exodus 16:22 and "copy" in Deuteronomy 17:18 and Joshua 8:32.

With the decree of Pharaoh the dreams of Joseph began to be realized. As Joseph rode in his chariot, men accompanying his chariot cried out to the people along the way אַבְרֵק/’abrēk! This exclamation is found nowhere else in this exact form. The most likely understanding of this exclamation means "bow the knee," thus ’abrēk would be equivalent to the Hebrew בָּרַךְ/bārak, "kneel." The prosthetic *a* in this case is held to be an invasion from earlier times from two-radical roots of the imperative over into 3-radical roots in the imperative, indicated by surviving Coptic imperatives. It would have meant, "bow down." It is very interesting that "bow the knee" (בָּרַךְ/brk) in Hebrew is a homonym of the verb "bless" (בָּרַךְ/brk), although unrelated in meaning, does provide an allusion by the sounds of the words. Furthermore, it is worthy of note that even today in some Arab countries the word *balak*, which is an Arabic form of the same word, can be heard by camel drivers commanding the beasts to kneel down so that they can get on and off them.

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44 Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Though I am Pharaoh, yet without your permission no one shall raise his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt."

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Verse 44 is the final assurance that Joseph indeed had been placed at the administrative center of the Egyptian government. The supreme authority that Joseph receives in verse 41b means an unlimited power of command (v.

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44); the consequence is that Joseph is immune in his office. His authority is restricted by the Pharaoh's sovereignty, expressed by the formula "I am Pharaoh." The formula conveys that it is as Pharaoh, that is, with his authority and guarantee of sanctions, that he is about to speak (this is analogous to "I am YHWH"; Ex. 6:2, 6, 8, etc.). This was expressed by the very colorful figure of speech, "without your permission no one shall raise his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." This figure of speech indicates Joseph's absolute authority. This is language of an absolute ruler.

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**45** Then Pharaoh named Joseph Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On, as his wife. And Joseph went forth over the land of Egypt.

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As far as the Egyptians were concerned, in spite of the high esteem in which he was now held, there was still one problem. Joseph was not an Egyptian, and this would inevitably be a hindering factor in the effectiveness with which he could carry out his duties. And so because of Joseph's alien background, Pharaoh decided to confer, insofar as possible, Egyptian citizenship and social status on Joseph, making it easier for him to be accepted as second-in-charge by the Egyptian people.

To signify his new status, Pharaoh gave Joseph a new name, Zaphenath-paneah. All scholars are agreed that this was a pure Egyptian name, but there is little agreement about the meaning of that name. The last part of the term apparently means "life," but the meaning of the rest is somewhat obscure. Some have interpreted it as "God speaks that he may live." Another reading, accepted especially by the scholar Yahuda, is "the food of the land is life." An older reading is, "sustainer of life" (Septuagint transcription).

At the present time, I favor the transcription of *dd-p',-ntr-'iw.f-'nh*, "God speaks; he lives." However, if this is applied only to Joseph, it does not make sense. Of course, Joseph would live, by Pharaoh's desire. But this is not the context; it is that the land and people of Egypt would live! The use of the third person "he" could very well be a reference to Pharaoh and his people and their salvation in recognition of the service of preservation Joseph was to perform. The use of the third person for first or second person is permissible, since the cupbearer used the third person in speaking directly to Pharaoh (Gen. 41:10). By this name, Pharaoh memorialized the gift of interpretation as being the one thing above all others that qualified Joseph for his weighty task.

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Pharaoh could not always have been sure that his dreams had been rightly interpreted, but on this one occasion he could not be deceived. Hence the extraordinary name.

The changing of Joseph's name is also connected with the key role that his elevation plays within the larger Narrative. For the prophecy of Genesis 15:13ff. to be fulfilled and the Exodus accomplished, the Israelites must settle in Egypt. The descent of Joseph's brother is the indispensable means to this end, and the external Egyptianization of Joseph is pivotal, for his brothers must not recognize him, and indeed, they will not hear the name "Joseph" mentioned when they come to Egypt years later.

Pharaoh next obtained a suitable wife for Joseph--suitable in the eyes of the Egyptians. The woman chosen was the daughter of an Egyptian priest. Nothing is said about her except her name and parentage. We can only assume that Joseph, dedicated as he was to the LORD, would not have consented to marry her unless he was satisfied that she would leave her own pagan beliefs to follow YHWH. She was to be the mother of Joseph's children, and the problems encountered in his own home background would have caused him to understand fully how essential it would be for he and his wife to have one mind in the training of their children to follow the LORD. A novel was written in Philo's time, entitled *Joseph and Asenath*, which included the account of the conversion of Joseph's wife to Yahwism. Whether factual or not, all that can be determined from this passage is that their children were given Hebrew names.

The woman's name was Asenath, which apparently indicates something like "she who belongs to (the goddess) Neith," Neith being the Egyptian equivalent of the goddess Minerva. Thus there is little doubt that she had been brought up in the polytheistic Egyptian religion. So far as Scripture is concerned, Joseph never married any wife other than Asenath.

Asenath's father, Poti-phera (meaning essentially the same thing as Potiphar, "given by Ra, the sun-god"; cf. page 178 of the notes), was actually a prominent priest in this religious system, located at the temple at On. This city, situated seven miles northeast of modern Cairo, on the eastern bank of the Nile, was the great cultic center of the sun-god Re, called Bet Shemesh in Hebrew (Jer. 43:13) and Heliopolis in Greek. "On" is derived from Egyptian *iwnw*, which means "a column." The name reflects the city's most outstanding architectural features, which were columns and colonnades. The high priest at On held the exalted title "Greatest of Seers." It is worthy of note that the

pharaohs also chose their wives out of this family and this is indicative of the high rank that Joseph was accorded, even in the selection of a wife. Joseph thus marries into the elite of Egyptian nobility.

The scene closes with the statement "And Joseph went forth over the land of Egypt" (v. 45). The Hebrew for "went forth over" is literally "went out over the land of Egypt" (וַיֵּצֵא יוֹסֵף עַל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם). The precise meaning of the Hebrew is unclear. The present rendering is supported by the force of the preposition *על*/*'al*, "over," in verses 40, 41, and 43. In all likelihood it indicates that Joseph began his work in his new position of authority by conducting a survey of the entire agricultural situation in Egypt. He gathered firsthand information that he would need for setting up his plan for storing all the surplus food that would be produced in the years of abundance. He had to determine what storage facilities were available and make provision for added storage space as needed for the gigantic program that was his responsibility.

### 8B Joseph In Pharaoh's Presence (verses 46-49)

The faithfulness of Joseph is reiterated in the closing verses (epilogue) of this account. He was now ruler over *all* the land of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. The narrative reflects the firm authority of Joseph. He is clearly in charge. None may resist or question (v. 55). The Joseph of verses 46-55 is strongly legitimated in sharp contrast to the Pharaoh (vv. 1-8). Whereas Pharaoh is destined to death, Joseph represents the new power of life for the empire and for the world.

Joseph's sovereignty is evidenced in its effectiveness by the multiple use of "all": **all** the land of Egypt (v. 46); . . . **all** the food (v. 48); . . . **all** my trouble and **all** my father's household (v. 51); . . . **all** the lands; but in **all** the land of Egypt (v. 54); . . . **all** the land of Egypt . . . **all** the Egyptians (v. 55); . . . **all** the face of the earth . . . **all** that was in them (storehouses; NASB has "storehouses," which the Hebrew text lacks, v. 56); . . . **all** the earth . . . **all** the earth. The repeated emphasis on "all" is not accidental and reminds us of Genesis 39:3-5, 22-23, where our narrator explicitly states that YHWH was with Joseph. Thus, Joseph is the intermediary source through whom YHWH carries out His plan of life and well-being.

Now, in order to bring into focus the subsequent events, the question needs to be asked: Did Joseph give any thought as to the purpose of the famine?; for not only was Egypt affected, but also were adjacent lands (v. 54). Joseph soon learned this (v. 57) and perhaps felt that soon some of his family



from Canaan would appear. He may have had reason to believe, even before this, that they would come, perhaps even when he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams. But again Joseph was not the type to be frustrated by being prevented from seeking to fulfill his desires. He had work to do and, not seeing clearly how the LORD's providence would work out but believing in God's announced purposes, he could work while he trusted the LORD to bring His will to fruition. The potential of the dreams was accomplished. Hence, the record in these few summary sentences shows the justification of Pharaoh in selecting Joseph to administer the realm. In his capacity as deliverer of Egypt, Joseph is pictured as qualified also to deliver his brethren; the two are bound together inextricably. The gathering in of food is the reason for which his brothers later came to Egypt. Thus, the famine story is an essential part in all its stages.

*The Seven Years of Plenty (vv. 46-49)*

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- 46 Now Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh, king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went through all the land of Egypt.
- 47 And during the seven years of plenty the land brought forth abundantly.
- 48 So he gathered all the food of *these* seven years which occurred in the land of Egypt, and placed the food in the cities; he placed in every city the food from its own surrounding fields.
- 49 Thus Joseph stored up grain in great abundance like the sand of the sea, until he stopped measuring *it*, for it was beyond measure.
- 

This section begins with a parenthetical note, giving Joseph's age as thirty at the time his sufferings finally ended when he stood before Pharaoh (v. 46), which corresponds to the recording of his age as seventeen when they began (37:2b)--ultimately informing us that he has been gone from his home for thirteen years, of those years in Egypt eleven years, of which at least three years had been spent in prison--almost half of his life. This is the age also that the Levites were to begin their service in the tabernacle (Num. 4:3ff.).

The adverbial clause, "when he stood before Pharaoh" should be more aptly translated "entered the service of Pharaoh," which indeed is the force of the Hebrew expression *בְּעִמְדוֹ לְפָנָי פָּרְעֹה* (1 Sam. 16:22 and 1 Kgs. 1:2). The appositional phrase "king of Egypt" is added, for now Joseph is the king's minister and no longer Potiphar's slave.

After his initial survey, the text again mentions that Joseph "went through all the land of Egypt" (v. 46c), probably indicating a much more detailed, unit-by-unit survey of the agriculture and other productive occupations of the Egyptians. He was then able to organize, with his assistants, a comprehensive program of conservation during the good years ahead. He did this after he "went out from the presence of Pharaoh," literally, "went out from before Pharaoh" (וַיֵּצֵא מִלְפָּנָי פַּרְעֹה), v. 46b). This refers to Joseph, following his investiture, walking backward, facing the king (cf. 47:10). A disrespectful parting from a king is expressed by omitting the word "before" (מִלְפָּנָי/*millipnā*, cf. Ex. 8:8, 26; 9:33; 10:6, 18; 11:8).

This leads directly into a description of the years of abundance that had been predicted in Pharaoh's dream as interpreted by Joseph (vv. 47-49). As foretold, the land produced abundance of grain in the first seven years, literally "heap and heaps" (לִיקְמָשִׁים/*liqmāšim*, v. 47). The singular means "a handful" (Lev. 2:2). It is assumed that "by handfuls" means "bumper crops." The figure of speech probably personifies the earth as bestowing her bounty "with full hands."

Joseph gave his personal supervision to the gathering of food in preparation for the severe famine ahead and stored it away in the various cities (vv. 46, 48). Joseph was able to see that his advice was carried out and the grain collected and stored. The process of storing, which had only been mentioned in verse 35, is described in detail in verse 48b. Verse 49 underscores yet again the abundance of grain stored.

The overflow of these abundant harvests was stored in the cities for the cities were obviously made collection points for the grain from the fields lying around them (see also v. 34). The volume of grain that was gathered was so great that it is recorded by the descriptive figure that it was "like the sand of the sea." In Egyptian fashion, at first careful records were kept of the amount of grain put into storage, but as the volume increased, keeping careful records became impossible and finally was abandoned. All of this reveals the eminent success of Joseph's plan and his effectiveness in his position as vizier.

9B

### Joseph Forgets His Trouble Because of God's Blessing (verses 50-52)

50 Now before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On, bore to him.

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- 51 And Joseph named the first-born Manasseh, "For" *he said*, "God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household."  
 52 And he named the second Ephraim, "For," *he said*, "God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction."
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The land produced abundant crops for seven years, just as Joseph had predicted. In spite of his success and status, he did not forsake his heritage. He gave his sons Hebrew names.

Before proceeding to a description of the years of famine, the narrator informs us that Joseph bore two sons by his Egyptian wife. Obviously these children were born during the years of plenty, and Joseph named his sons Manasseh and Ephraim. Regarding these names we take note of the same phenomenon in connection with the naming of Jacob's sons in chapters 29 and 30. The names were given in connection with certain expressions, based on similarities in sound between the name and one or more of the words in the expression used to describe the event of the birth of the child.

The first child born to Joseph was named Manasseh; he explained this name by saying, "God has made me forget my toil and my father's house." The name forms a description of divine activity on behalf of Joseph, explaining in general his change of fortune.

The name itself is in the form of the Hebrew Piel participle, suggesting the meaning "he who brings into forgetfulness." Noth says the name is the kind that would suggest compensation for misfortune or bereavement at the time of birth which overcame the blow (*PN*, 211, note 1). The Piel form of the verb may have been used instead of the normal form to provide a closer paronomasia with the name. The meaning of the name is an integral part of this section of the Joseph story; it presents the brighter outlook of Joseph in view of the change of fortune. The memory of toil and sorrow were replaced by the birth of this son and what he signified.

The name of the second son was Ephraim (*'eprāyim*). This name was explained by Joseph as follows: "God has caused me to be fruitful (*hipranî*) in the land of my affliction." The house of Joseph first represented a change of fortune (Manasseh) and then a new prosperity (Ephraim).

The explanation of the name Ephraim uses the verb *pārâ*, "to bear fruit," the letters *p* and *r* making the sound play. This idea of fruitfulness is

also connected with Joseph tradition in Genesis 30:2, which says that God had withheld the *fruit* of Rachel's womb--the fruit that eventually was Joseph. Genesis 49:22 announces that Joseph is a "fruitful bough" (although there are different interpretations offered for the text of this verse). Deuteronomy 33:13-17 further develops the idea. Finally, Hosea writes about Ephraim: "Though he be *fruitful* . . . his spring shall become dry" (Hos. 13:15). The biblical traditions thus link *pārâ* with *'eprāyim* in the household of Joseph.

There is a slight difficulty in that the name is spelled with the dual ending (in Hebrew), which usually indicates a place name. Delitzsch simply stated that the name meant "double fruitfulness," the dual being used in the superlative sense as in Egyptian (*New Commentary on Genesis*, II:305), a proposal I do not find very convincing. G. J. Spurrell argues that it may be a diphthongal pronunciation of a name ending in *-an* or *-am*, often thought to be dual suffices (see Diblaim in Hos. 1:3; *Notes*, 334). Many, however, associate the name with the territory of Ephraim and interpret it to mean "fertile land" (see C. Fontinoy, "Les noms de lieux en *-ayim* dans la Bible," *UF* 3 [1971]:33-40). The dual would then be an old locative suffix. Various other views have been offered for the name, relating it to such things as "pastureland" or "embankment of earth," all with the idea that the tribal name was taken from the name of the territory in which the tribe settled.

If the name Ephraim is related to the verb *pārâ*, then its basic meaning is "fruitfulness." This idea would also be possible as a description of the territory of Ephraim, and the form of the name--now a dual--would lead us to understand it as a place name. But since it forms part of the Joseph Narrative, it has another significance in Genesis. The name signifies that Joseph's fruitfulness (i.e., his prosperity and posterity) came by divine intervention. Because of this story, *pārâ* came to mind when one heard the name. The fact that such fruitfulness was part of the promise to be passed on to Ephraim underscores this thought. An Egyptian setting with its affliction provided a suitable contrast for the significance of the name. The name would also remind the later Israelites to hold to their heritage, for it signifies the action of God, who prospered His people under affliction (cf. Ex. 1:7, 12).

The narrator thus recorded the birth report about the ancestor of the Ephraimites and, with a precise choice of expression, perhaps changing the name to a dual, incorporated it into the Joseph story to explain the fruitfulness of Joseph--and the fruitfulness of the tribe--as a work of God. In the tradition Joseph used Hebrew names for his children that signified his faith in the LORD was as strong as ever, in spite of his suffering and in spite of his success.

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 103 Pharaoh's Dreams Come To Pass (verses 53-57)
 

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- 53 When the seven years of plenty which had been in the land of Egypt came to an end,
- 54 and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said, then there was famine in all the lands; but in all the land of Egypt there was bread.
- 55 So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried out to Pharaoh for bread; and Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, you shall do."
- 56 When the famine was *spread* over all the face of the earth, then Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold to the Egyptians; and the famine was severe in the land of Egypt.
- 57 And the *people of* all the earth came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the earth.
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Joseph's wisdom also bore fruit in the land of Egypt, for the seven years of plenty in the land came to an end, and the famine began, just as Joseph had predicted. The effectiveness of the program that Joseph had enacted soon became apparent. When other countries began to feel the agony of famine there was sufficient food in Egypt. It is evident that the severe drought was not limited to Egypt. Verses 56 and 57 speak of the famine as covering "all the word." Naturally, the reference is first of all to the lands that bordered on Egypt.

Had not Joseph prepared against the day of adversity, not only for himself but for the whole land, no doubt most of the people would soon have been reduced to abject poverty and even starvation. The years of famine came, and the meager supplies of most people quickly were exhausted. As a matter of fact, the famine came on all the nations in that part of the world; but none of them had made provision for it, as had been done in Egypt. Eventually the famine was due to affect even the land of Canaan and the family of Jacob.

The scarcity of food among all the nations could not have been caused in the same way in every place. Egypt's harvests were dependent, to a great extent, on the annual overflow of the Nile. When, for one reason or another, this overflow did not follow its normal course there was bound to be a poor harvest in Egypt. Egyptian records mention periods of scarcity that sometimes lasted for a number of years. But in some of the neighboring countries

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times of famine were much more common due to a lack of rainfall. Because of Egypt's unique situation, other nations frequently turned to Egypt for relief in time of famine. This, in turn, would contribute to the depletion of Egypt's food supply even in times when Egypt itself had enough food to provide for its own needs.

There is no conflict between verses 54 and 55 in their accounts of the famine. Verse 55 informs us that there was no immediate need in Egypt at this time because the people could appeal to Pharaoh for help and he, in turn, referred them to Joseph who was able to supply them with food. While the rest of the world was agonizing because of the famine, Joseph opened the storehouses for the Egyptians and sold them grain from the vast resources that had been stored.

Further, when verse 56 says that "the famine was severe throughout Egypt" this is not in conflict with what was said in verse 54. The intent is to point out that the harvest in Egypt was inadequate to meet the needs of the people, but even though they felt the famine they had a recourse, since they could purchase food from the royal storehouses. Since neighboring countries were accustomed to coming to Egypt for food in time of famine, it could be expected that they would do so again in this instance. In this connection we can think of Abraham, in Genesis 12:10. The food supplies that Joseph had stored were obviously adequate to meet the needs of the Egyptians and still allow enough to sell to people from other countries who were in need.

Joseph did not simply give the food to the people, instead he made them buy it (v. 56). Joseph maintained strict control over the supplies, in order to prevent looting and waste, knowing that even the vast supplies that had been accumulated would have to be carefully husbanded to last through seven long years of famine. He then sold them for a reasonable price and on an equitable basis to all who were in need of grain.

By the time the famine came, Joseph had been in Egypt twenty years. He had never received any word from his family during all that time. For all he knew, his father might well be dead. Joseph must often have longed to see him, and even his brothers. Probably, since coming to power in Egypt, he must have considered taking a trip (well protected by soldiers) back into Canaan to look up the family again; but if so, he had presumably been hindered from it by the pressure of the business activities for which he was responsible.

But perhaps still, the answer may be that although originally Joseph had seen in his dreams merely a prediction of his future rise, a prediction which enabled him to maintain his faith in YHWH in all adversities, his realization that Pharaoh's dream had a hortatory as well as predictive meaning was reflected back on his own dreams: Though his "sheaf was rising" had been fulfilled with his elevation, he should do nothing about communicating with his father and family until the bowing of his brothers' sheaves before him should be fulfilled by the Ten brothers bowing before him after the famine had also engulfed Canaan.

Verses 54b-57 is markedly chiasmic in structure. Thus, again with a chiasmic flourish, ends an exciting and crucial episode of Joseph (see page 504 of the notes):

- A then there was famine in **all the lands**;  
 but in all the land of Egypt there was bread.
- B So when all the land of Egypt was **famished**
- C the **people** cried out to Pharaoh for **bread**
- D and Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph,  
 whatever he says to you, you shall do."
- E **When the famine was spread over all the face of the  
 earth,**
- D' then Joseph opened all the storehouses,
- C' and sold **grain** to the **Egyptians**;
- B' and the **famine** was severe in the **land of Egypt**.
- A' And **all the earth** came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the  
 famine was severe in **all the earth**.

## APPLICATION

In the exposition of this passage three persons must be in view: God is the prime mover of the events, Joseph is the faithful servant and the center of the narrative, and Pharaoh is the potential antagonist who becomes the quiescent agent of God's sovereignty. The unit as a whole teaches that **GOD SOVEREIGNLY CONTROLS THE DESTINIES OF NATIONS TO PROTECT AND PROVIDE FOR HIS COVENANT PEOPLE**. The working of the expository idea would have to be modified to fit the particular emphases of the expositions. In developing it, what should be stressed is that God controlled the economy of Egypt to bring Joseph to power and thereby prepare for the migration of Israel to Egypt.

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In conjunction with this theologically worded idea, the faithfulness of Joseph should be stressed, who serves as the model for the believer. Joseph knew God's revelation, boldly declared it to Pharaoh, and advised him to conform to what God was about to do. Here, then, is the directive for applying this story to believers in other times. It must also be added that, once Joseph was elevated to his position of responsibility, he continued to live in faith.

Sudden reversals as Joseph experienced are difficult for most of us, for our eyes are not constantly on God as his were. When we experience a sudden reversal for the worse, we are despondent. We think God has abandoned us, and we become bitter. When we experience a sudden reversal for the better, we are arrogant. Instead of thinking that God has abandoned us, we sometimes abandon God in our thinking and become quite secular--we become ungodly. It is a rare person who can enjoy sudden prosperity and keep his or her spiritual life on course.

Joseph was one of those rare persons. When he was in prison he did not forget God. When the chief cupbearer and baker told him why they were troubled, Joseph replied, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams" (Gen. 40:8). Here, before the mightiest monarch of his day, it is the same thing. Joseph could have been tempted to answer Pharaoh differently. He could have reasoned that Pharaoh knew nothing about the true God and might even be offended by mention of a God other than the various deities of Egypt. Besides, this was Joseph's great opportunity. Assuming that God would give him the interpretation of Pharaoh's dream, would it not be better for him to take credit for the interpretation himself? This would advance his standing in Pharaoh's eyes, facilitate his deliverance from the prison, and gain him opportunity to witness later. Was this a temptation for Joseph? The text gives no indication that it was. For a lesser man perhaps. Not for Joseph! Joseph lived with his eyes on God and lived his life with full expectation of his dreams coming to fruition.

In order to correlate these ideas with what the later Scriptures teach on this topic, we must make the wording a bit more general. Dreams as a form of revelation may not be given now--they were part of the diverse means that God used in the Old Testament. We now possess God's full revelation, which makes it clear that God controls the destinies of nations for His purposes, and His purposes include the protection and provision of His people. How should the believer live in the light of this great truth? In great comfort, in bold faith to



declare God's plans, and in responsible obedience to what he or she knows God's plan is.

### **Responses We Can Learn from Joseph**

Joseph's meteoric promotion was incredible. But let us not end our study focusing on the gold necklace he wore and forgetting the gold character underneath it. That gold character was made possible by two important responses--responses that are not exclusive to Joseph.

First: *During the waiting period, trust God without panic.* We must learn to count on Him to handle the cupbearers of our lives who may forget and abandon us. Second: *During the time of reward, thank God without pride.* Oftentimes the night of our suffering seems as if it will never pass. We feel as if we cannot even remember what the dawn was like. In our hearts, we pray for endurance and promise to thank God and give Him the glory when the dawn comes. But that thankfulness, that humility, often vanishes like morning mist when God rewards us. The best way to guard against this is to remember to thank Him--continuously (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Of all the promises presented in Scripture, none are more meaningful than those that promise divine blessing after human suffering, hope after affliction. Let us take a moment to look at some examples of this kind of promise from both the Old and New Testaments.

### **Responses We Can Learn From Job**

Tucked away in the Old Testament is a Book that reads more like a private journal, a chronicle of calamity. It is named for its main character, Job, and details how he was assaulted by loss, death, disease, grief, and misguided friends. In chapter 23 Job vents some of his frustration over God's seeming silence and hiddenness.

*Oh that I knew where I might find Him,  
That I might come to His seat!  
I would present my case before Him  
And fill my mouth with arguments . . . .  
Behold, I go forward but He is not there,  
And backward, but I cannot perceive Him;  
When He acts on the left, I cannot behold Him;  
He turns on the right, I cannot see Him. Job 23:3-4, 8-9*

---

Job wants the *why* and *how long* questions concerning his suffering answered. He wants an opportunity to argue his innocence before God and end his pain and suffering. But he cannot present his case because he cannot find the Judge.

In the midst of this long, dark night of suffering, Job reminds himself of a fact, a promise, a hope.

*But He knows the way I take;  
When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold. Job 23:10*

Notice Job said, "When He has tried me," which implies the passage of time. There is no such thing as a quick way to refine gold. The process of refining, purifying, and perfecting gold is a lengthy, painstaking process. In the same way, God uses the painstaking process of our afflictions and sufferings to refine and perfect His gold like qualities in us. (Keep in mind that all this has nothing to do with externals. Job does not say, "When He has tried me He'll double the wealth He took away," or "When he has tried me my husband will turn around and say he's sorry, and our relationship will be better than before." No. He is saying "I'll come forth as gold; I'll be wiser, purer, more like Him."

### Responses We Can Learn From Peter's Epistle

Over in the New Testament the same kind of promise is anchored amidst some intense affliction in 1 Peter 5. According to verse 6, something was happening that prompted Peter to remind his readers to *humble* themselves and not resist God. Verse 7 addresses feelings of *anxiety*. Verse 8 talks about the enemy, the devil, desiring to *devour* them. And verse 9 plainly states that they were going through some kind of *suffering*, though what it is not explicitly stated. Finally, in verse 10 comes the promise that can keep all our lives from being capsized by troubles:

*And after you have suffered for a little while,  
the God of all grace,  
who called you to His eternal glory in Christ,  
will Himself perfect,  
confirm,  
strengthen  
and establish you.*

When the testing has ended, when the flames have surfaced and consumed the dross of self-centeredness, you will come forth as gold. Do not resist trials and affliction as intruders (James 1:2-4). Rather, submit to God in the midst of them, allowing Him to perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish your character for His purposes, A. W. Tozer said,

It is necessary for God to use the hammer, the file and the furnace in His holy work of preparing a saint for true sainthood. It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until He has hurt him deeply (*The Root of the Righteous*, 137).

Joseph had been hurt deeply. God allowed him to be put through the refining fires of misunderstanding, slavery, false accusations, imprisonment, abandonment, and more. But there was gold in the making--a purified character that God could use to greatly bless the lives of many.

Sometimes the pain of waiting is beyond earthly words. At those times, only the words of God seem to have any real strength and comfort in them. So if your heart is crying out to God today, if the anguish of your waiting is expressible only through tears, meditate on these words of His and know that He understands.

*Though the fig tree should not blossom,  
And there be no fruit on the vines,  
Though the yield of the olive should fail,  
And the fields produce no food,  
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold,  
And there be not cattle in the stalls,  
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.  
The LORD God is my strength,  
And He has made my feet like hinds' feet,  
And makes me walk on my high places.* Habakkuk 3:17-19

*For His anger is but for a moment,  
His favor is for a lifetime;  
Weeping may last for the night,  
But a shout of joy comes in the morning.* Psalm 30:5

*Therefore we do not lose heart,  
But though our outer man is decaying,  
yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.  
For momentary,  
light affliction  
is producing for us an  
eternal  
weight of glory far beyond all comparison,*

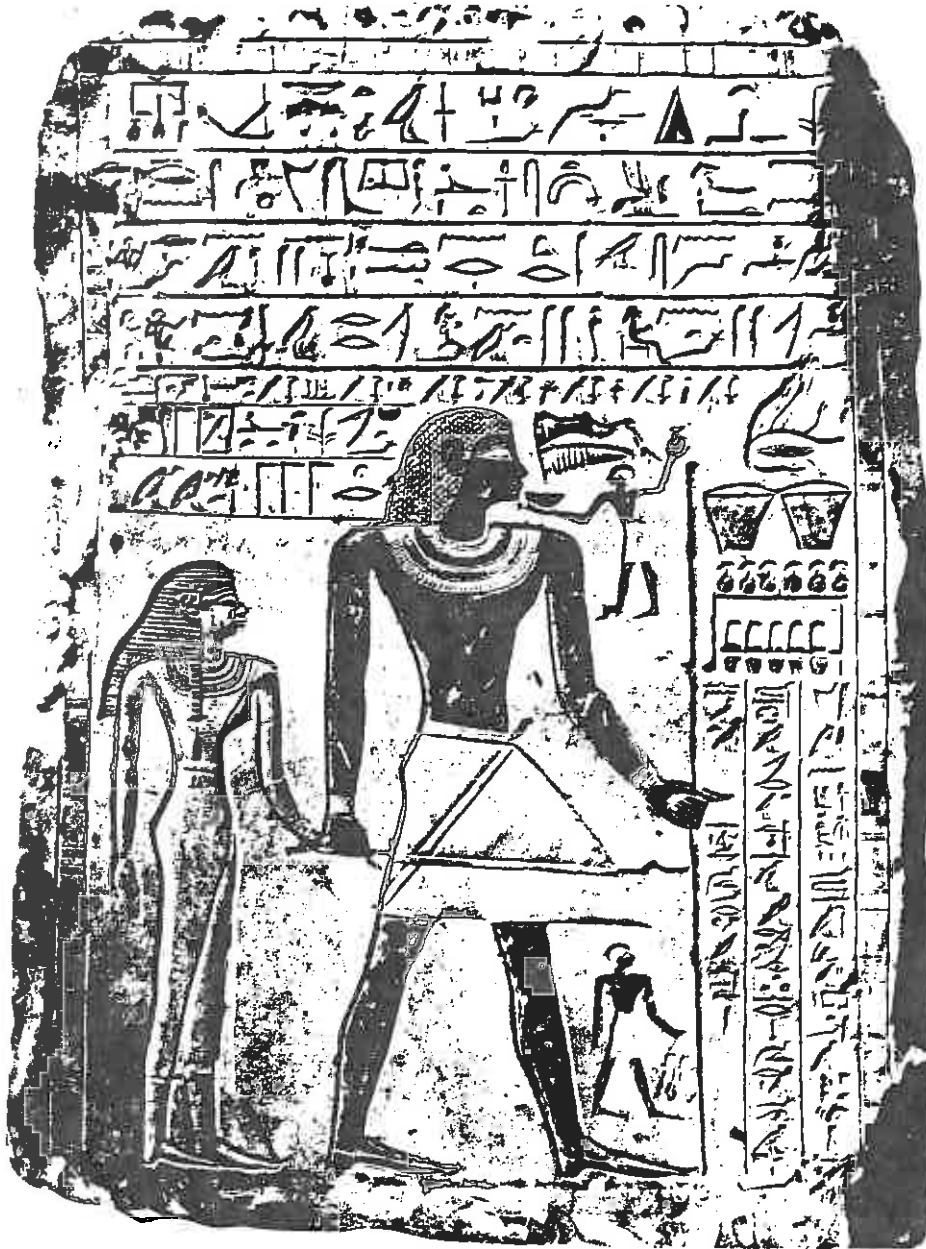
*while we look not at the things which are seen,  
but at the things which are not seen;  
for the things which are seen  
are temporal,  
but the things which are not seen  
are eternal. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18*

*Be anxious for nothing,  
but in everything  
by prayer and supplication  
with thanksgiving  
let your requests be made known to God.*

*And the peace of God,  
which surpasses all comprehension,  
shall guard your hearts  
and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7*

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of Pharaoh dreaming twice?
2. What is the significance of Joseph's new name?
3. What is the significance of Joseph's two sons' names?
4. What is the biblical definition of "wisdom"? How does Joseph exemplify wisdom? How do the elements in this chapter generally harmonize with wisdom literature motifs?
5. Explain literarily why Joseph is entirely dropped from being mentioned from Genesis 40:23 until Genesis 41:14.
6. Why is Pharaoh always referred to in third person?
7. What is the primary theological thrust of the chapter?



A limestone stele, dated between 2475 and 2000 B.C., showing an Egyptian official and his wife (Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1925)

Figure 16.



## Genesis 42:1-38

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# Activating a Seared Conscience

### THE AWAKENING OF CONSCIENCE

The previous chapter has recorded Joseph's rise to power. This chapter turns to the divine purpose behind his miraculous rise. At the conclusion of this long and complicated section, Joseph recounted to his brothers the ultimate purpose behind the Narrative: "And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance" (Gen. 45:7).

Chapter 42 shifts in theme and tempo, from the story of Joseph to the story of his relationship to his brothers. This shift is made possible by the famine motif. Joseph has been placed in Egypt by the sovereignty of God. It is God's will also that the sons of Israel journey to Egypt, escaping the destruction of the famine and become a great nation. Joseph is the first fruits of the migration into Egypt; he will prepare the way for his family's coming. This chapter documents the first phase of the "whys and hows" the sons of Israel descended into Egypt.

This chapter also begins dealing with Joseph's testing of his brothers who were important in God's plan to channel His blessing through the seed of Abraham. God had planned to bring the family to Egypt so that it might grow into a great nation. But because the people who would form that nation had to be faithful, the brothers needed to be tested before they could share in the blessing. Joseph's prodding had to be subtle; the brothers had to perceive that God was moving against them so that they would acknowledge their crime against Joseph and demonstrate that they had changed. If they failed the test, God could have started over with Joseph, just as He had said He would with Moses in Exodus 32:10, when His wrath was kindled against Israel.

Chapter 42 is an episode in the story of Joseph and so must be interpreted in the light of what has gone before and in anticipation of what is to follow. The episode provides a complication of the plot that parallels chapter 37: the oppressed became the oppressor, the spy accused the brothers of being spies, and the one who had been thrown into prison by his brothers put them into

prison. All this pressure was applied as a deliberate test of the brothers--the text makes clear that Joseph recognized them and remembered their deeds, and although they did not recognize him, they began to remember their deeds.

Joseph is cast into the role of a savior of his people. Though that is the primary meaning of the Joseph Narrative, there are still many subplots along the way. Indeed, this section of Genesis becomes extremely complex in both plot and motive. It is also complicated even further by numerous repetitions in the reporting of the events. Nearly every major event is told twice, once by the narration of the event itself and then by one of the chief characters in the narrative.

This repetition suggests that this chapter maintains itself at a consistently high level of dramatic tension. It occurs between the climax of Joseph's rise to power and the denouement of Joseph's revelation of himself to his brothers. It is the narrative of the first descent of the brothers to Egypt. They get the food that they came to buy and return (minus Simeon) to Canaan. Already the providential goal of preservation of the family from starvation is being met, but the estrangement remains.

Perhaps, since this chapter bridges two dramatic high points of the Narrative (chapters 41 and 43-45), we could consider that the treatment at this juncture is intentionally less dramatic. On the other hand, we might better conceive of the dramatic suspense as being held here at a relatively high level *throughout* the Narrative instead of being clustered around a central peak, and thus the multiple chiasmic structure which will be discussed in the notes. The potentate on whom the success of the journey of Jacob's sons depends is their long-lost brother; thus the narrative becomes a dramatic episode in the context of the Narrative as a whole.

It should be noted from the outset that almost every section of this chapter, as well as those following, contains an ironic allusion or connection to the preceding chapters. At the outset, Joseph has not seen his family for at least twenty years. He is now second in command over all Egypt, and controls the food supply for the entire world. The author has tied chapters 41 and 42 together with the motif of buying and selling. The Hebrew root *sbr* provides the basis for "grain," "buy grain," and "sell grain" (Gen. 41:57--42:6). Thus those who sold their brother into slavery in Egypt come to him (unknowingly) to buy grain. This ironic reversal will develop until chapter 45.

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The opening paragraph (Gen. 42:1-5) also contains a new motif that will become increasingly significant as the Narrative progresses. Jacob orders his sons to go to Egypt for grain, "that we may live, and not die" (v. 2). Here his remark is limited to physical survival, but as the Narrative progresses "live and not die" will come to signify a deeper meaning--the survival of God's chosen (cf. Gen. 45:7).

### Source Criticism Considerations

Those who divide the sources generally divide the passage between "J" and "E." The reasons for this division of the material need not be discussed in detail at this time. We have previously discussed the use of the names "Jacob" and "Israel" (cf. pages 54-58), in chapter 37. Some of the other grounds for ascribing this to more than one source are discussed in the expository notes which follow.

The factor that is most frequently emphasized by source critics is that the discovery of the money in the sacks is mentioned first in verses 27 and 28 and then is repeated in verse 35. Even some conservative scholars are convinced that verse 35 is an insertion into the text by a later editor. The fact of the matter, however, is that at first only one of the brothers found money in his grain sack while the rest of the brothers did not make this discovery until they reached home and opened their sacks in the presence of Jacob, their father. This moreover, does not conflict with Genesis 43:21, since both of these discoveries are there treated as one incident. When the brothers discovered the money after they reached home in Canaan, they concluded that it had already been in their sacks when they made their first stop on their return journey.

## THEOLOGICAL IDEAS

Overall, the episode shows how a wise ruler tested the faithfulness of those who would participate in the theocratic program, a testing process that was necessary because of the past actions of these men. In fact, Joseph uses the word "to test" (*bāhan*) when he established the way that they could prove they were honest men (v. 15). This first test was meant to awaken their consciences and so was essentially a preparation for the next test.

All the activities of Joseph were designed to bring the brothers to a point of remorse over their evil. If they would not manifest guilty consciences,



there would be no reason to continue. But the brothers did show such a change, because their response now to the idea of getting rid of Joseph (cf. Gen. 37:20) sounds very different in verse 21, they knew they had been indifferent to Joseph's cries for mercy. Then, as things gradually unfolded, the brothers sensed that God was beginning to deal with them for their crimes. In other words, guilt was present, even though there had been no punishment. The exposition must therefore capture both sides of this episode: Joseph's testing of his brothers, and the brothers' realization that God had found out their guilt.

It should be pointed out that the Narrative returns to Jacob, who has been out of the picture since Genesis 37:34. As is frequently the case in biblical narratives, the words spoken at the beginning of a story foreshadow the final outcome. Jacob, sending his sons to Egypt, said, "Go down there and buy some for us from that place, so that we may live and not die" (Gen. 42:2b). Jacob's words also serve to align the deeds of Joseph with the larger theological themes of the Torah, namely, the theme of "life" and "death" (Gen. 2:7, 9; 3:22; Deut. 30:15). In so doing the events that follow are cast as a narrative picture, showing the way to return to the gift of life that was lost in the Garden of Eden.

The first act records how Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy grain--all except Benjamin, for he would not risk losing his other son of Rachel. Benjamin figures prominently in these narratives. In the first and third acts Jacob was resolute that Benjamin would not go down. In the second act, however, Joseph demanded that they bring him down. Jacob thus stood in the way of their proving to Joseph their honesty. His refusal to send this boy reflects the attitude that everything seemed to be against him. Besides, the characteristics of the other sons may have given him cause to suspect that more trouble lay ahead.

## STRUCTURE, SYNTHESIS, AND TRANSLATION

### Structure

A few words concerning overall structure of this chapter in relationship with the preceding ones and chapters 43--44 are needful. Beginning with chapter 42 and extending to chapter 44, form a nice counter-balance to chapters 39--41. In Genesis 37:6-9, Joseph dreams two dreams. The first was about the "bowing down" of the sun, moon and stars. It may be that both dreams refer to rule over his family. But after chapter 37, the Narrative is

**CONNECTIONS BETWEEN NARRATIVE AND SPEECH  
IN GENESIS 42**

<b>Narrative Itinerary</b>	<b>Speech</b>
Jacob learned there was grain in Egypt (1) The brothers journeyed to Egypt (3)	Rebuke and commission of brothers (2-3)
Benjamin was not sent (4a) The brothers came to Joseph (5-6)	Precaution (4b)
Joseph recognized them (7a)	Interrogation and response (7b)
Joseph knew and remembered (8-9a).	Accusation (9b) Self-defense (10-11). Repeated accusation (12) Repeated self-defense (13) Testing instructions (14-16)
Joseph imprisoned them (17).	New testing instructions (18-20a)
The brothers agreed (20b).	Confession of guilt and indifference (21). Accusation by Reuben (22).
Joseph understood and wept (23-24a). Joseph ordered the test (24b-26).	
The brothers discovered money (27).	Bewildered realization (28).
The brothers returned (29).	Report of events (30-34).
All the brothers discovered the money (35).	Lament of Jacob (36). Oath of Reuben (37). Refusal of Jacob (38).

Figure 17.

developed in two quite distinct directions. Chapters 39--41 concern Joseph's rise in the Egyptian empire and his *rule over Egypt*. Parallel to that, chapters 42--44 concern his *rule over his brothers and his father*. Thus, the present chapters more directly concern the fulfillment of the dreams over the family. And yet, the *rule over his brothers* could only happen as a result of his *rule over Egypt*. Chapter 42 returns to the theme of the brothers in 37, which has not been mentioned in chapters 39--41.

In chapters 42--44, Joseph's dominant role in Egypt is necessary and presumed. But nothing is made of it except as a condition for dealing with his brothers. These three chapters (chps. 42--44) which we will treat as a unit are structured in two parts, each part containing two encounters as well as an introduction and two interludes, as the following chiasmus indicates.

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#### CHIASTIC STRUCTURE OF CHAPTERS 42--44

##### *INTRODUCTION (42:1-5) The famine as life/death issue for Israel*

- A 42:6-25 First meeting between Joseph and brothers  
(Interlude in 42:26-28: departure and trick)
- B 42:29-38 First meeting of Jacob and sons
- B' 43:1-15 Second meeting of Jacob and sons  
(It is not simple continuation of the proceeding. There is discontinuity caused by the severity of famine).
- A' 43:16--44:34 Second meeting between Joseph and brothers  
(Interlude in 44:1-5: departure and trick)

Figure 18.

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The unit is developed in terms of a chiasmus, with the first sequence Joseph and then Jacob; the second sequence is reversed, with the sequence of Jacob and then Joseph. The encounters in A/B/B'/A', that is, Joseph/Jacob/Jacob/Joseph, provide the framework for the tension and drama.

Furthermore, it should be observed that the overall drama of the Narrative moves from the dream of 37 to chapter 45, where the fulfillment becomes visible. This movement can be diagrammed as follows:

- 37 Joseph's dreams of rule
- 39--41 Joseph's rule over the Egyptian empire
  - 42--44 Joseph's rule over his family
- 45 The fulfillment of Joseph's dreams.

Chapters 37 and 45 provide the focal points for theological interpretation. The two intervening sections of 39--41 and 42--44 develop and enhance the plot, heighten the suspense, and retard the tempo. In 39--41, the development is external and public. In 42--44, the interplay is primarily relational.

Chapter 42 unfolds in three acts: (1) the brothers and Jacob in Canaan, (2) the brothers and Joseph in Egypt, and (3) the brothers return to Jacob in Canaan. The first act (vv. 1-5) is a commission to go to Egypt and buy grain; the second is the confrontation with Joseph (vv. 6-26), and the third is the fear and lament over the situation (vv. 27-38). As with previous sections of Genesis, the Narrative works primarily with speeches that are connected with Narrative reports and comments (see Figure 17: Connections Between Narrative and Speech in Genesis 42).

#### CHIASTIC ARRANGEMENT OF GENESIS 42

- A Jacob sends his sons to Egypt to buy grain (1-5)
- B Joseph is the ruler over all the land (6)
- C Joseph recognizes and remembers (7-9a).
- D Joseph accuses his brothers of being spies (9b-13).
- E Joseph's 1st test (14-16).
- F **JOSEPH PUTS HIS BROTHERS IN PRISON (17).**
- E' Joseph's 2nd and new test (18-20).
- D' Brothers confess their guilt (21-22).
- C' Joseph understands and weeps (23-24).
- B' The brothers' dealings with the "lord of the land" (25-34)
- A' The opening of the grain sacks in Canaan before Jacob (35-38)

Figure 19.

Not only do the first and last acts frame the account of the confrontation, the structure of the central act focuses attention on the brother's imprisonment in Egypt--just as Joseph had been imprisoned at their hands. Having to explain that one of their brothers was dead (v. 13) put the sale of Joseph in the forefront of their thinking. Then, having to spend three days in jail in Egypt gave them time to think it through. These events awakened their consciences.

It should be noted that both of Joseph's crucial pronouncements within this section are chiasmic--each bordering on the central point that Joseph put them all in prison. The first is Genesis 42:14-16:

- a "It is as I said to you, 'You [are] spies';
- b by this you will be tested: by the life of Pharaoh you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here!
- c Send one of you that he may get your brother while you remain confined,
- b' that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you.
- a' But if not, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies."

The second chiasmus is found in verses 18-20:

- a "Now Joseph said to them on the third day, 'Do this and live, for I fear God:
- b if you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined in your prison
- c but as for the rest of you, go, carry grain for the famine of your households,
- b' and bring your youngest brother to me, so your words may be verified,
- a' and you will not die." And they did so.

These pronouncements of Joseph (vv. 14-16 and 18-20) are the crucial information that the brothers carry back to Jacob in Canaan. Their report of the second speech to Jacob, however, does not reflect the chiasmic structure of the speech as originally given. This chiasmic structure marks two crucial bits of information rather than closure. This highly chiasmic structure underscores the importance of Joseph's actions toward his brothers within the Narrative.

## Synthesis

By putting his brothers into prison as spies when they came to Egypt for grain and by keeping Simeon hostage while the others returned to bring Benjamin back, Joseph awakened his brothers' guilty consciences.

## Translation

- 1 When Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you keep looking at one another?"
- 2 Now I hear," he went on, "that there is grain in Egypt. Go down and procure grain for us there, that we may live and not die."
- 3 So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to get grain rations in Egypt;
- 4 for Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, since he feared that he might meet with disaster.
- 5 Thus the sons of Israel were among those who came to procure grain, for the famine extended to the land of Canaan.
- 6 Now Joseph was the vizier of the land; it was he who dispensed rations to the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed low to him, with their faces to the ground.
- 7 When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them; but he acted like a stranger toward them and spoke harshly to them. He asked them, "Where do you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan, to procure food."
- 8 For though Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him.
- 9 Recalling the dreams that he had dreamed about them, Joseph said to them, "You are spies, you have come to see the land in its nakedness."
- 10 But they said to him, "No, my lord! Truly, your servants have come to procure food.
- 11 We are all of us sons of the same man; we are honest men; your servants have never been spies!"
- 12 And he said to them, "No, you have come to see the land in its nakedness!"
- 13 And they replied, "We your servants were twelve brothers, sons of a certain man in the land of Canaan; the youngest, however, is now with out father, and one is no more."
- 14 But Joseph said to them, "It is just as I have told you: 'You are spies'!
- 15 By this you shall be put to the test: unless your youngest brother comes here, by Pharaoh, you shall not depart from this place!
- 16 Let one of you go and bring your brother, while the rest of you remain confined, that your words may be put to the test whether there is truth in you. Else, by Pharaoh, you are nothing but spies!"

- 17 And he confined them in the guardhouse for three days.
- 18 On the third day Joseph said to them, "Do this and you shall live, for I am a God-fearing man.
- 19 If you are honest men, let one of your brothers be held in your place of detention, while the rest of you go and take home rations for your staving households;
- 20 but you must bring me your youngest brother, that your words may be verified and that you may not die." And they did accordingly.
- 21 They said to one another, "Alas, we are being punished on account of our brother, because we looked on at his anguish, yet paid no heed as he pleaded with us. That is why this distress has come upon us."
- 22 Then Reuben spoke up and said to them, "Did I not tell you, 'Do no wrong to the boy'? But you paid no heed. Now comes the reckoning for his blood."
- 23 They did not know that Joseph understood, for there was an interpreter between him and them.
- 24 He turned away from them and wept. But he came back to them and spoke to them; and he took Simeon from among them and had him bound before their eyes.
- 25 Then Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, return each one's money to his sack, and gave them provisions for the journey; and this was done for them.
- 26 So they loaded their asses with the rations and departed from there.
- 27 As one of them was opening his sack to give feed to his ass at the night encampment, he saw his money right there at the mouth of his bag.
- 28 And he said to his brothers, "My money has been returned! It is here in my bag!" Their hearts sank; and, trembling, they turned to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?"
- 29 When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had befallen them, saying,
- 30 "The man who is lord of the land spoke harshly to us and accused us of spying on the land.
- 31 We said to him, 'We are honest men; we have never been spies!
- 32 There were twelve of us brothers, sons by the same father; but one is no more, and the youngest is now with our father in the land of Canaan.'
- 33 But the man who is lord of the land said to us, 'By this I shall know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, and take something for your starving households and be off.
- 34 And bring your youngest brother to me, that I may know that you are not spies but honest men. I will then restore your brother to you, and you shall be free to move about in the land.'"

- 35 As they were emptying their sacks, there, in each one's sack, was his money-bag! When they and their father saw their money-bags, they were dismayed.
- 36 Their father Jacob said to them, "It is always me that you bereave: Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you would take away Benjamin. These things always happen to me!"
- 37 Then Reuben said to his father, "You may kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my care, and I will return him to you."
- 38 But he said, "My son must not go down with you, for his brother is dead and he alone is left. If he meets with disaster on the journey you are taking, you will send my white head down to Sheol in grief."

### EXEGETICAL OUTLINE

- I. When the family of Israel was out of grain, Jacob sent his sons down to Egypt to buy grain but did not send Benjamin (1-5).
  - A. Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy grain in order to preserve the life of the family (1-2).
  - B. Jacob's sons went to Egypt, but Benjamin remained at home (3-5).
    1. Jacob kept back his son Benjamin, fearing that something evil would happen to him (3-4).
    2. The brothers joined a caravan and went to Egypt (5).
- II. Joseph tested his brothers when they came before him, accusing them of being spies, putting them in prison, and holding Simeon while the others returned to get Benjamin to prove that they were truthful men (6-26).
  - A. Joseph accused his brothers of being spies and put them in prison until one could go and get Benjamin, but then he let them go while one remained in prison until they brought Benjamin (6-20).
    1. Joseph accused his brothers--who did not recognize him--of being spies (6-9).
    2. They defended themselves by explaining their family situation and then declaring that their father had sent them to buy food (10-13).
    3. Joseph put the men in prison, demanding that one of them bring down Benjamin to prove their story (14-17).
    4. Joseph allowed the men to return home, but he kept one as a hostage (18-20).



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- B. The brothers confessed their guilt over the way they had treated Joseph, who, having understood their words, was overcome with emotion (21-26).
    - 1. The brothers repented over their putting Joseph into such distress twenty years earlier (21-22).
    - 2. Joseph heard his brothers and was overcome with emotion (23-24).
    - 3. Joseph had Simeon bound and dismissed the brothers, but he put money in their sacks (25-26).
  - III. As the brothers returned to Jacob in Canaan, they were dismayed to find money in their sacks; Jacob, upon hearing of the events, refused to permit Benjamin to return with them to Egypt (27-38).
    - A. On the way home one brother found money in his sack, and they all trembled with fear (26-28).
    - B. The brothers returned to Canaan and related what happened to them in Egypt (29-34).
    - C. The family was dismayed to find money in all the sacks of grain (35).
    - D. Jacob refused to send Benjamin to Egypt with the brothers, in spite of Reuben's appeal, for he was afraid that Benjamin too would die (36-38).

### EXPOSITION OF THE PASSAGE

#### I. *God uses the circumstances of life to bring about His (revealed) plan for His people (1-5).*

Twenty-one years have now passed since Jacob cried out "Torn to pieces is Joseph!" (cf. Gen. 37:33). Meanwhile all of Jacob's sons had established families (cf. Gen. 46:9ff.). Benjamin himself was about twenty-three years old. By now not only Rachel but also the other three mothers were dead: Leah was buried in the family sepulcher at Hebron (cf. Gen. 49:31), and neither Bilhah nor Zilpah is among the house of Jacob that entered Egypt a year hence.

Joseph's ten older brothers had been living with a guilty secret for twenty some years. They must often have thought of Joseph, and what they had done to him; and they must have wondered what had happened to him, down in the land of Egypt. Jacob himself had never stopped grieving over Joseph.

The family was now beginning to go through hard times. The famine which had settled on Egypt had also affected Canaan and the other lands of the region. Their business was predominantly cattle and sheep raising, rather than agriculture, but the drought had seriously damaged the entire economy. Furthermore, even though they still had great wealth, money could not buy grain if there was no grain to be bought.

### Jacob Sends His Sons to Egypt to Buy Grain (verses 1-5)

**1** Now Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, and Jacob said to his sons, "Why are you staring at one another?"

"Jacob" occurs twice in verse 1, thus not only reestablishing him as a participant in the Narrative, but also underscoring his initiative: he "saw" (אָרָא/*wayyar*) his countrymen returning from Egypt laden with supplies. When the narrative spotlight last shone on Jacob, we witnessed a pitiable spectacle of an inconsolable father mourning his "dead" son. Now, after an interval of over twenty years, the old patriarch is once again the man of action, exercising authority and initiative in a critical situation.

The NASB consistently translates אֶשְׁבֵּר/*šeber* as "grain" (Gen. 42:1,2, etc.) and its verbal counterpart אֶשְׁבַּר/*šbr* as to "buy grain" (Gen. 41:57; 42:3,5, etc.). Perhaps a better translation would be "food rations," being understood that they were mainly used in emergency situations. This alternate translation takes in account that both the nominal and its verbal forms are derive from a stem meaning "to break" or "to crush" (Lev. 21:19; Isa. 30:14; 65:14); thus in our context, the famine was so severe that it was crushing the people from hunger, so that "food rations" had to be bought.

Jacob's first speech seems to have an accusing character to it: "Why are you staring at one another?" These are the words of a father frustrated with his sons' inactivity and helplessness. This is borne out by the Hebrew Hitpaal verb אֶתְרָאוּ/*titrā'û*, translated as "staring at one another" (the hitpaal is usually explained as reciprocal, viz., "keep looking at each other," NIV). This is not a common expression, as is witnessed by the diversity of translations among the versions. Elsewhere, this form of the verb is always followed by פָּנִים/*pānîm*, "face," in the sense of "to meet in combat" (2 Kgs. 14:8, 11; 2 Chron. 25:17, 21): an apt introduction to the series of events in which Joseph's ten brothers will be forced to confront one another over their past actions.

What is even more prominent as an introductory note is the fact that this segment of the narrative begins with the brothers inactive, made the object of Jacob's rebuke. There is a hiatus of silence between verses 1 and 2, between "Jacob said" and his saying again, a silence which tends to confirm Jacob's charge that his sons are simply standing there staring at one another when urgent action has to be taken.

The brothers' reluctance to go and buy food rations in Egypt was no doubt because of their guilty conscience. We remember that Egypt was the place into which these men--Benjamin had not been among them--had sold Joseph. Then the brothers devised a lie to explain his disappearance to Jacob. As time passed by, they would have naturally tried to put the incident from their minds. But they could not. We can imagine the secret glances between them whenever Joseph's name would be mentioned, and we can imagine the weight that must have descended on them whenever the place of their brother's "enslavement" was spoken. Egypt? . . . Egypt? Judah must have looked at Reuben, and Reuben at Simeon. Levi perhaps had thrown anguished glances at Zebulun. "Why are you staring at one another?" Jacob asked. Egypt? That was the last place on earth these brothers would have chosen to go. Jacob's reproach was of no avail to stir them from their perplexity, each brother expecting advice and initiative from the other. As Shakespeare said, "Conscience doth make cowards of us all."

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**2** And he said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down there and buy *some* for us from that place, so that we may live and not die."

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Under a father's eye Jacob's sons' actual crimes might be covered up, but not their character. Out of frustration, Jacob finally commands his sons to go to Egypt and buy food that they "might live and not die" (v. 2). Jacob insisted that they go, each to bring back food for his own family and servants; for they now reached the point where there was imminent danger of death by starvation.

Ten of Joseph's brothers undertook the journey to the land of the Nile. Their reasons for going as a group were probably to enable them to jointly bring back a larger supply of food. Reasons of security may also have dictated the need to travel as a convoy on the journey, which lasted a week each

way. This latter consideration, moreover, motivated Jacob to keep Benjamin, Joseph's only full brother, safely at home.

It probably was not expedient for Jacob himself to try to migrate to Egypt, as Abraham had done in an earlier famine, because his holdings would be quite large by this time.

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- 3 Then ten brothers of Joseph went down to buy grain from Egypt.**  
**4 But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, "I am afraid that harm may befall him."**
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The brothers, then, follow their father's command, in virtual or actual silence, and the narrator is careful to inform us that they are ten when they go down to Egypt, for the exact number of the brothers, indicating who is present and who is absent, will be important in what ensues. The descriptive "brothers of Joseph" (v. 6) in place of the expected "sons of Jacob" is a subtle anticipation by the narrator of the ensuing encounter.

Underlying the Hebrew clause, , "So Joseph's brothers went down" (וַיֵּרְדוּ אֶחָיוּ יוֹסֵף), is a possible allusion to the reversal of fortunes that has taken place since Joseph was "brought down" (וַיְהוּרָד) to Egypt (Gen. 39:1).

The "twelve" (vv. 13, 32) sons of Jacob are divided into two groups throughout the Narrative. There are the "ten of Joseph's brothers" (v. 3) and then the "two" sons of Jacob by Rachel, Joseph and Benjamin. These two sons of Rachel are contrasted with the two sons of Leah, namely, Reuben and Judah. Both Reuben and Judah play an important and similar role in the Narrative (cf. Reuben, vv. 22, 37; Judah, Gen. 43:3, 8). They speak on behalf of the other brothers and are the catalysts in the resolution of the plots instigated by Joseph. It was Judah, however, who saved the day by offering himself as a pledge ("I myself will be surety for him"; Gen. 43:9) for the young lad Benjamin; and it was Judah who repeated Jacob's thematic words "that we may live and not die" (Gen. 43:8; cf. 42:2). Finally, it was Judah who spoke before Joseph and offered himself as a substitute for Benjamin, lest he cause any evil (עָרָא) to come on his father, Jacob (Gen. 44:33-34).

That Benjamin is explicitly called "Joseph's brother" underlines the reason for Jacob's fear, and so verse 4 is a precautionary explanation why Jacob did not send Benjamin with his brothers: "I am afraid that harm may befall

him." This expression could be Jacob's reasoning rather than a verbalized explanation to the other sons; for Benjamin's mother, Rachel, and his brother have both met with misfortune in the course of a journey (Gen. 35:16; 42:38; 44:29). Jacob was concerned that they be preserved alive, especially Benjamin; but the famine created a tension for that survival. We are told nothing of the ten brothers' response to their father's withholding of Benjamin, a repetition of the privileged treatment he once gave Joseph. Thus, inadvertently Jacob contributed to placing his sons in the same position they once occupied relative to Joseph. In this he unwittingly helps to produce the conditions by which Joseph wishes to redeem his brothers.

When Benjamin is designated "Joseph's brother," the phrase means something different genealogically and emotionally, for he is Joseph's full brother, the only other son of Rachel, a fact that will be significant in subsequent developments. There is, then, a delicate play of ambiguous implications in verses 3 and 4 as we move from "Joseph's brothers" to "Joseph's brother" and "his [Benjamin's] brothers," and this interplay brings into the foreground the question of fraternity soon to be dramatically resolved.

What is about befall Joseph's brothers in this narrative is artfully prepared: Benjamin was not to be exposed to any situation in which he could be killed, as supposedly had occurred with Joseph. In this we see the same preference made of the other son (but the youngest of all!) of the one wife whom Jacob loved above all his others. All Jacob's hopes were wrapped up in Benjamin (v. 38), just as they had been in Joseph. Thus, inadvertently Jacob contributed to placing his sons in the same position they once occupied relative to Joseph. In this he unwittingly helps to produce the conditions by which Joseph wishes to test and ultimately redeem his brothers.

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**5** So the sons of Israel came to buy grain among those who were coming, for the famine was in the land of Canaan *also*.

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At this point, the narrator, in the characteristic rush of biblical narrative to the essential moment, catapults the brothers from Canaan to Egypt and into the presence of Joseph. But they do not come as the "sons of Jacob" (cf. Gen. 34:7, 13, 25, 27; 35:5, 22, 26) but as the "sons of Israel." The change in designation is significant, an intimation that the journey to Egypt has national import.

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By the narrator first calling them "his (Jacob's) sons" (v. 1), then "Joseph's brothers" (v. 3) and now "sons of Israel," the text seems to intimate the master-motif of the entire Narrative, the progression from "his sons" via "Joseph's brothers" toward "sons of Israel." Hence, the Narrative will show how the ten, "his sons," become in truth "Joseph's brothers," and will, together with him and Benjamin, mature to become the nation, *the children of Israel*.

The ten sons of Israel equipped a donkey caravan and headed for Egypt. They were not unique in this respect. Many other caravans were entering Egypt in those days on a similar mission, as the famine had become severe everywhere. The "sons of Israel" were just one among many such groups who came from neighboring countries--yet they alone attract attention.

Unwittingly the brothers began to fulfill the dream revelation of Joseph as they left for Egypt to buy grain--from Joseph. God had used many unusual and unexpected events to bring about this fulfillment. In this instance, the famine proved to be the means of bringing the family to Egypt.

In these five verses there is a hint at the underlying theme of the chapter--the awakening of their consciences. The mention of possible harm to Benjamin in the midst of the family's attempt to buy grain to live would have put the events of the past in the minds of the brothers.

## II. *God's chosen leaders must ascertain the faithfulness of those who would participate in God's program (6-28).*

Throughout the Narrative the plot has woven around the interplay between Joseph and Judah, and in the end it was Judah who resolved the conflict. By the same token it was Joseph who created the conflict and tension throughout the Narrative. When his brothers approached to buy grain, he "disguised himself to them" (v. 7) and spoke harshly, accusing them of being spies.

What motivated Joseph? Was it revenge? Was he trying to get even with his brothers for what they had done to him? The writer immediately pushes aside such a possibility with the comment that Joseph "remembered the dreams which he had about them" (v. 9). Thus the reader is advised that Joseph's plans against his brothers were motivated by the dreams of the earlier narratives and not by the events his brothers had done to him.

Joseph had dreamed that his brother's harvested sheaves bowed down before him, and here they were, all except the youngest, Benjamin. And he had also dreamed that the sun, moon, and twelve stars--Joseph's entire family--bowed down before him. Finally, the puzzling pieces of his youthful dreams were coming together (cf. Gen. 37:6-7, 9).

But they were bowing down and showing respect to the vizier of Egypt, not their brother Joseph. Somehow he had to find out, without revealing who he was, whether they still hated him, whether they had since felt any sorrow or guilt over what they had done to him.

#### Joseph Is The Ruler Over All The Land (verse 6)

- 6a** Now Joseph was the ruler over the land;  
**b** he was the one who sold to all the people of the land.

The title of Joseph **הַשָּׂרֵלִיט**/*haššallîṭ*, "vizier," emphasizes Joseph's complete sovereignty over the land. But we hardly need to be told that Joseph was vizier of Egypt and chief provisioner because both his investment in high office and his economic policy were related in detail in the last part of the preceding chapter. Our writer desires to underscore these facts again by casting this information in a Hebrew nominal clause: first by placing "Joseph" preposition in the clause (emphasizing the subject, which singles out and contrast him with other possible or actual alternative[s]), and secondly, the separable personal pronoun "he" (**הוּא**) before each of his offices "vizier" and "the one who sold." This thematic unity of repeating this information in summary form with this added emphasis just as the brothers arrive is evident. Joseph, whom his brothers thought they had done away, was now the person whose favor they were to seek!

As Grand Vizier over all the land, Joseph will interrogate and accuse his brothers. The Hebrew term for "vizier" is otherwise only found in Ecclesiastes 7:19; 8:8; 10:5. Nevertheless, it is of interest that the Hyksos founder of the Fifteenth Dynasty in Egypt was King Salitis, a name that seems to reflect the same word. Furthermore, *šaltum* and *šalītum* appear in Old Assyrian documents. It is also to this word that we evidently trace the Arabic and Turkish "sultan," the title of the chief ruler.

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The ten brothers had no idea that Joseph would turn out to be the one from whom they would have to purchase the grain. Joseph was vizier and he apparently maintained close personal supervision over his stores of grain, realizing how critical these were to the survival of Egypt during the long years of famine ahead of them. Apparently, everyone coming into Egypt from foreign lands to buy grain had to obtain a direct permit from Joseph before they would be allowed to do so. It might well be that, under cloak of such a purchasing mission, foreigners might enter the land for subversive purposes. Foreign kings might covet Egypt's wealth and desire to infiltrate and sabotage and possibly invade and plunder the land. It was up to Joseph to carefully screen all such alien travelers to be sure of their purposes.

Joseph's first dream is now beginning to be literally fulfilled, for in keeping with the customs, Joseph's brothers bowed down before this august authority, with their faces to the ground. Thus his first dream of sheaves of grain bowing down to him, points more particularly to his role as provisioner.

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**6c** And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down to him with *their* faces to the ground.

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Something that the reader has been anticipating since chapter 37, but like Joseph, not quite knowing how his dreams of rulership over his family would be resolved. After we are told again that Joseph was the "ruler" over the land and the sole provider of food, "Joseph's brothers came and bowed down to him with their faces to the ground" (v. 6c). As did everyone who came into Joseph's presence, except Pharaoh himself (Gen. 41:43), they bowed down before him, a gesture of absolute obeisance concentered by the addition of the emphatic phrase "their faces to the ground" (וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּוּ לֹאֲפַיִם אֶרְצָה). The word "bowed down" here in verse 6c is the exact same verb used in Genesis 37:7! Joseph's brothers did not realize, of course, that in so doing they were making the very dream come true for which they had hated Joseph (Gen. 37:7, 8).

It goes without saying that not all who came to buy grain appeared before Joseph personally. Much of the responsibility was of necessity delegated to lower officials. It is possible that Joseph involved himself personally with those who came from other lands to buy grain. There probably were special reasons why these ten men who arrived from Canaan were ushered into the presence of the supreme official in charge of this operation: the very size of the group would have attracted attention.



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**Joseph Recognizes and Remembers (verses 7-9a)**


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- 7a** When Joseph saw his brothers he recognized them,  
**b** but he disguised himself to them and spoke to them harshly.
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Beginning with verse 7 (because verse 6 is given to the reader as background material) and extending to verse 24, there is a chiasmic structure which highlights that Joseph is now in total control over his brothers; for just as they had thrown him into the pit some twenty years ago, he now turns the table and throws them into prison.

As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them (v. 7a) but, as can readily be understood, they did not recognize this high Egyptian official as their younger brother. Their ignorance of Joseph's actual identity is an ironic complement to their earlier failure to recognize his true destiny. The Hebrew hitpa'el stem has the flavor of "keeping" or "hiding one's identity" from another (reminiscent of Tamar). Joseph purposely hides his identity from his brothers instead of immediately revealing who he was. But why?

In verse 7a there is a play on words in the Hebrew that Joseph recognized them (וַיִּכְרֶם/*wayyakktrēm* < *nākar*) but pretended not to know them (וַיִּתְנַכֵּר/*wayyitnakkēr* < *nākar*) and spoke to them harshly. Using the same root word with different verb stems it says that Joseph recognized his brothers but he made himself unrecognizable; but also is perhaps playfully allusive to Genesis 37:18, וַיִּתְנַכְּלוּ/*wayyitnakkēlû*, "they conspired." This is more easily understood when it is remembered that the Hebrew letter כ (k), the last consonant in *wayyitnakkēr* ("he disguised himself," NASB), and the Hebrew letter ל (l), the penultimate letter to *wayyitnakkēlû* ("they conspired"), interchange occasionally. Thus the play on words indicate that Joseph now schemes against the onetime schemers.

As the punned Hebrew words indicate, Joseph's first concern was to hide his identity from his brothers as soon as he recognized them. The reason must be that he recalled that in his dream they (i.e., their sheaves) did not bow before "Joseph," but to his sheaf (i.e., his person unknown). As soon as Joseph's brothers prostrated themselves, he recognized that all of his first dream had come true, even though Benjamin was not in their company; for one wrongly assumes that since only ten of Joseph's brothers bow before him, the first dream was not yet fulfilled, because not only in the second dream that it is

explicitly mentions "eleven" (stars; Gen. 37:9), but also that Benjamin was much too young to "bind sheaves," for he was only two years old at the time of Joseph's dreams.

After Joseph recognized his brothers, he "spoke to them harshly" (v. 7b). Why does Joseph speak to them in this manner? Is it only to help to keep his brothers from recognizing his real identity? Perhaps, but we must also see his demeanor tied to his dreams as indicated in verses 7 and 9. Perhaps it is that his second dream showed also "the moon" (i.e., his mother) already dead. Possibly now, he thinks, "what if by now also 'the sun' and the 'eleventh star' are also dead? What if the ten, who had blotted out their love and reverence for their father and their compassion for him, had eliminated also Benjamin, the favored wife's second son?" Joseph is now about to "spy" (cf. Gen. 42:9) on his brothers by accusing them of espionage to determine their integrity.

To help us gain a deeper appreciation of this scene, let us look at some of the reasons why it would have been difficult for Joseph's brothers to recognize him. First, remember that more than twenty years have passed. The teenager the brothers had known was now a mature man in his forties. Joseph's voice has matured, and he is also fluently speaking a foreign language as if it were his native tongue. Also, the Joseph they had known could speak Hebrew, but this individual uses an interpreter to carry on their conversation (v. 23). They also did not recognize him because Hebrews wore beards, and Joseph's face is clean-shaven in the manner of the Egyptians. Everything Joseph is wearing, from his headdress on down, has an Egyptian designer label, not Jewish. And even if the brothers had anticipated the remote possibility of seeing Joseph, they would have been searching the faces of Hebrew slaves, not Egyptian royalty, for they had disposed of him as a slave bound for Egypt some years before. On top of all this, Joseph disguised his kingship even further by speaking harshly to them.

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**7c** And he said to them, "Where have you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food."

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So Joseph speaks harshly to his brothers: "Where have you come from?" Had Joseph merely wanted to ask "Where do you come from?" (as NASB translates) he would have said in Hebrew מֵאֵינָהוּן/mē'ayin 'attem (cf. Gen. 29:4) instead of מֵאֵינָהוּן/mē'ayin bā'tem. Besides, since they entered

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Egypt at the northeastern border, wearing Canaanite garments and speaking its language, "Where have you come from?" would have been superfluous.

Since Joseph's brothers were Canaanites, they were both foreigners and who had entered Egypt from the northeast. This was the land's most vulnerable border. Incursions into Egypt by Asians coming via "the 'Way of Horus," the military highway from Canaan that led through Gaza to El-'Arish, were a recurrent phenomenon. Frontier guards would routinely check every traveler, for the discovery of spies might herald an imminent attack. Moreover Joseph's brothers must have registered their name and homeland at the point of entry. Thus, "Where have you come from?" is "spoken harshly," implying that before having arrived at the vizier's residence and after having left Canaan they may already have reconnoitered something at Egypt's border. Therefore, he acted harshly and as though he was very suspicious of their motives for coming to Egypt.

The brothers sense Joseph's suspicion, so they reply to Joseph's question, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food" (v. 7c). They not only tell Joseph from "where" they came, but also with unsolicited information "why." They asseverate that nothing but "to buy food" is the purpose of their trip.

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**8a** But Joseph had recognized his brothers,  
**b** although they did not recognize him.

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After the initial inquiry of their purpose in Egypt, this editorial note is repeated: "Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him." The opposition between Joseph's *knowledge* and his brothers' *ignorance* is focused once again through the insistence of the play on words here in the Hebrew, which is impossible to catch in English (cf. Gen. 42:7). The repetition underscores that Joseph was successful in disguising himself so that his brothers did not recognize him.

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**9a** And Joseph remembered the dreams which he had about them.

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It is at this juncture that the Narrative asserts that Joseph remembered the dreams. Like the reader, Joseph remembers not the betrayal or suffering brought about by his brothers, but his dreams! This is one of those rare

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moments in the Bible when a narrator chooses not only to give us temporary access to the inward thoughts of a character (cf. Gen. 38:11 for the last such occurrence), but also to relate the character's thoughts concerning his past. Therefore, this rare insight into Joseph's mind must be significant.

This unusual chord is entirely appropriate here both because Joseph himself is struck by the way past dreams have turned into present fact, and because he will force his brothers into a confrontation with their own past (see notes on Gen. 42:1). The two previous chapters (Genesis 40 and 41) have been devoted to knowledge of the future--Joseph's interpretations of the dreams of the cupbearer and baker, then Pharaoh's two dreams. Genesis 42, by stark contrast, is devoted to knowledge of the past.

Our narrator specifies no causal connection between the fact of Joseph's remembering his dreams and with his subsequent accusation of espionage he immediately charges against his brothers. This is a characteristic biblical reticence that allows for overlapping possibilities of motive. The narrator presumably knows the connection or connections but prefers to leave the reader pondering imaginatively what the text deliberately does not explicitly tell us. The absence of explicit information which would supply specific connections between Joseph's remembering and his speaking conveys a rich sense of how the present is overshadowed by the past; for in this characteristic biblical perspective no simple linear statement of causation could adequately represent the density and the multiplicity of Joseph's motives and emotions.

Does the recollection of the dreams, coupled with the sight of the prostrate brothers, trigger an entire train of memories in Joseph--from the brothers' scornful anger after his report of the dreams to his terror in the pit, not knowing whether the brothers had left him there to die?

At first sight Joseph's rough handling of his brothers which now dominates the scene to the end of chapter 44 has the appearance of vengefulness. Nothing could be more natural--yet nothing further from the truth. When he saw his brothers bow down before him he did not gloat. Behind the harsh pose there was concealed warm affection, for tears came into his eyes and he had to withdraw in order to recompose himself (Gen. 42:24ff.). It is impossible to construe this as the reaction of a vengeful man. Then after the brothers' testing, overwhelming kindness. Even the threats were tempered with mercy (cf. Gen. 42:16-19; 44:9, 10), and the shocks that were administered took the form of embarrassments rather than blows. A vindictive Joseph could have dismayed his brothers with worthless sack loads, or tantalized them at his feast as they had

tantalized him (cf. Gen. 37:24, 25); his enigmatic gifts were a kinder and more searching test. Just how well-judged was his policy may be seen in the growth of quite new attitudes in his brothers, as the alternating sun and frost broke them open to God. The narrator tells the story in such a way to let his readers know that Joseph was genuinely fond of his brothers and that from now on he was, as the proverb has it, being "cruel to be kind."

We should take particular note of the fact that there seems to be three redundancies in verses 8 and 9 and try to uncover their significance.

- (1) Does not "Joseph had recognized his brothers" simply repeat verse 7a?
- (2) Is not "although they did not recognize him" superfluous (v. 8b)? They had not seen Joseph for twenty-one years, he was Egyptianized in appearance, rank, speech (cf. v. 23), and name (cf. 41:45).
- (3) Is not "And Joseph remembered the dreams which he had about them" obvious when they prostrated themselves (v. 9a)?

Repetition provides a surplus of information by rehearsing details that are already known to the readers. The frequency of these apparently superfluous repetitions makes this stylistic characteristic all the more glaring; why should the writer be so "stingy" in his descriptions and so "wasteful" with unnecessary repetitions? In biblical narrative each repetition is individually tailored to fit its context and is potentially meaningful on a number of different levels. The repetition in our context emphasizes the present moment by supplying the perspective of an earlier time (cf. chapter 37); by enriching and providing depth, context, and background, with the results that it makes the previous material poignant and helps the narrative build internal consistency toward a single direction (i.e., to its climax; cf. Gen. 45:1-4).

It will be recalled that Joseph named his first born son Manasseh because "God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household" (41:51), but now Joseph remembers his dreams (42:9a). This parallels the cupbearer forgetting Joseph until the opportune moment he remembers him before Pharaoh (cf. Gen. 40:23; 41:9-13). Could Joseph have remembered his own dreams and not be able to interpret them correctly? I think not! We know that he has already correctly interpreted the dreams of the cupbearer and baker, and subsequently Pharaoh's dream, which he added the proper course of action in order to avert mass starvation.

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So now it is when he sees his own brothers bowing down before him: verse 9 clearly links Joseph's decision to treat his brothers harshly with his remembrance of his dreams. Joseph correctly hides his identity because the symbolism in his first dream indicates that his brothers *do not know* that he is Joseph: "behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect; and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf" (cf. Gen. 37:7; note that the symbolism is agricultural and Joseph is functioning as the "Minister of Agriculture," cf. Gen. 41:46-49!).

Whereas Pharaoh's dreams occurred on the same night, it meant the same event. But because Joseph's dreams occurred on separate nights, foretold two different events! All of this is striking when we examine Joseph's second dream: "Lo, I have still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me" (Gen. 37:9). In his second dream Joseph is cognizant that his identity is known to them. Thus his identity is first unknown, and so hides his identity; and then subsequently known, and thus reveals himself (Gen. 45:1-4).

A technical note is in order to bring out the flavor of verse 9a. The usual translation is "Joseph remembered the dreams which he had about them." The Hebrew text clearly says, however, "he had dreamed for them." When the sheaves of the brothers had gathered around his sheaf and bowed to it, its meaning for him had not been that he would once rule over them or be able to tyrannize them (which really does not happen later at all), but that he would care for them, protect them, keep them alive, like an ideal ruler, and they would thank him for it. In the second dream he had not thought that sun, moon, and stars and the entire universe would pay homage to him. He thought that it would be his God-given destiny to bring honor and splendor on parents and brothers; they would gratefully acknowledge it by bowing to him. He would be the center of his family by giving them light and life.

Joseph realizes that it was his dreams and his father's favoritism which his brothers resented, and that their resentment had become bitter hatred when he received the tunic and that their hatred had only increased when he told them his first dream. While to him, it meant the confirmation from on high of his father's destining him to receive the "blessing," to them it reflected his ruthless ambition to dominate them. While to him their sheaves forming a ring around his sheaf and bowing had previously meant that they would acknowledge him as their "lord," he now perceives it as meaning that though they would plot against him before, in the end, they would be grateful to their "keeper" and

provider. What caused their misinterpretation, he now knows, was their hatred and their projecting on him their overweening pride.

It is at this moment that Joseph ponders about those benevolent dreams of childhood. He considers how he may completely fulfill them and gather not only the already present brothers but the entire family around himself as distributor of blessings. And so, Joseph is ready to begin to do something about his guilty brothers and bring the entire family into reconciliation. This can bring true satisfaction only if they have changed to become truly his brothers; he must speak roughly to them in order to test them. This test shall also bring the last, still absent, brother and the father to him. All of this is wonderfully accomplished by the events and through Joseph's wisdom and love.

### *The Plan of Joseph*

The initial testing by Joseph was designed to apply pressure to his brothers by reminding them of their crimes. Joseph began with a false accusation that they were spies. Now Joseph was turning things around to put them into situations similar to those that he had faced in order to awaken their seared consciences.

It is instructive to observe that when Joseph meets his brothers he is in an analogous situation to that of Esau in Genesis 33. Both he and Esau meet the agents of their previous injustices after an absence of twenty years, and are both in a position of power: Joseph as Grand Vizier, Esau with four hundred men. Yet Esau acts in a completely different manner. He does not plan an elaborate series of self-concealments, nor does he demand any repentance, but immediately "ran to meet [Jacob], and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept" (Gen. 33:4). An immediate (unspoken) pardon was Esau's response to a brother who had cheated him, and this resulted in reconciliation.

### **Joseph Accuses His Brothers of Being Spies (verses 9b-13)**

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**9b**            **And he said to them, "You are spies; you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land."**

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When Joseph's brothers told him they had come from Canaan simply to buy food, he replied by accusing them of being spies, using a food-

purchasing mission as a cover for finding those parts of Egypt which might be vulnerable to invasion. Ancient Egypt's distrust of travelers is well known. The frontiers toward Syria were strongly fortified and strictly guarded; all who came and went were noted and the authorities were kept informed about them.

Is it possible what is being reflected in the mirror of this scene is that which took place twenty years ago in Dothan (cf. Gen. 37:14, 18-24)? When Joseph had been sent by his father to check on their conduct and bring back a report (could be construed as "spying"), it is not unlikely that when Joseph's brothers saw him coming towards them (in his prince like dress), they had rushed at him, accusing him of having come to spy out their corrupt behavior, and take back an evil report to their father, as he had done before (cf. Gen. 37:2). If so, this would explain why Joseph now suddenly accused them of being spies. No doubt the young Joseph had protested that he was not a spy--that he had only come to inquire after their welfare--but they had met his protestations with rude violence in much the same way as the rough-speaking vizier now treated them. If this is the case--and it seems most credible--it would be a powerful appeal to their conscience and memory, and one that could not fail to awaken both.

In the unusual description of Joseph's thoughts in Genesis 42:9, the syntax connects his remembering the dreams with the accusations that he is now leveling at his brothers. This syntactical juxtaposition suggests that *everything* that follows is now related to his dreams. At first there seems to be no logical connection, especially if, with the majority of scholars, one assumes that *both* dreams have already been fulfilled. But if it is recognized, as it surely must be, that only the *first* dream has been fulfilled, then a possibility suggests itself. Joseph's accusation of his brothers is the beginning of fulfilling the *second* dream. This suggestion is given credence when after the initial thrust of claim and counter claim between the two parties, Joseph utters his ultimatum, "By this you shall be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here" (Gen. 42:15).

The specific charge that Joseph made against his brothers were that they came to Egypt to spy out the "undefended parts of our land," presumably for an invasion. The Hebrew for "undefended parts of our land" (NASB) is אֶרְצוֹת הַנְּאֻרָּץ / *et 'erwat hā'āreṣ*, and has its analogy in Isaiah 20:4, "the nakedness of Egypt," in the sense of "the shame of Egypt" as a conquered state. Similarly, at the downfall of Jerusalem, people are said to "have seen her disgraced" (Lam. 1:8). Thus the figure here means to uncover any defects in its fortifications.



Accusing them explicitly and persistently of espionage, Joseph realizes will not only compel them to disclose sooner or later whether or not the father and Benjamin are still alive but will in the end also enable him, if they are, to compel the ten to bring Benjamin, required in his finalized plan as foreseen in his second dream. That a band of ten men, crossing the eastern border, should induce suspicion was not unusual in ancient Egypt. Its defenseless spots required fortification and special garrisons. The vizier accuses them of being professional spies, having just returned from an exploratory trip.

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**10** Then they said to him, "No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food."

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Joseph's brothers vociferously denied the charge of espionage and reiterated that they came to buy provisions. Exactly who was acting as spokesman is not said; evidently the brothers were speaking and protesting more or less together.

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**11** "We are all sons of one man; we are honest men, your servants are not spies."

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The brothers counter Joseph's accusation that they were spies by mentioning their family relationship and the family's reputation. If their arrival as a group caused the suspicion that they are a group of spies (the vizier's first accusation), their coming *together*, on the contrary, proves them to be harmless, for they are "all sons of one man," and thus brothers. No foreign king (Jacob) would have sent ten brothers on a spy mission, especially if they were all his own sons. It should be noted that their claim that they were sons of one man did at least suggest to this vizier that they were not all sons of the same mother. "We are honest men" seems to imply being well-known as reputable people about whom it would be easy to obtain information.

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**12** Yet he said to them, "No, but you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land!"

**13** But they said, "Your servants are twelve brothers *in all*, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is with our father today, and one is no more."

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Nevertheless, intent upon their disclosing information about his father and Benjamin, Joseph brushes off their desperate attempts to clear themselves (with the appearance of being unconvinced by their protestations of innocence) and kept insisting that they were spies, thus doubting their story about family connections. "No, but . . ." (יָדָא' לֹד' *ki*) is used in Genesis 18:15 as an emphatic reassertion of a denied accusation. Their following reply was induced by Joseph's added demand to tell him more about their claim to belong to the same family, perhaps by sarcastically pointing to their dissimilar facial features.

With the repetition "sons of one man" (cf. v. 11), the ten explain that their dissimilarity is due to the fact that their father took several wives, their mothers. Still, having the same father, they are brothers. Joseph witnesses the dark shadow of the "lost" but unforgotten brother strike their emotions. What elates Joseph is that they have just included him and Benjamin, calling all of them what he never before heard them say, "brothers." In the past, only he had thought and spoken thus as in "I am looking for my brothers" (cf. Gen. 37:16).

Here is the point about which they were to be tested! Were they faithful? Would they now bear true faith with Jacob their father? Would they stick together for the sake of all that none should die? Would they together guard their father from bereavement? Or would they callously destroy Benjamin for the sake of preserving their own miserable selves?

The preceding dialogue (vv. 9-13) between Joseph and his brothers is remarkable in how it repeatedly plumb depths of moral relation of which the brothers are totally unaware. Outwardly the dialogue is a political interrogation, it is really however, the first of three climactic dialogues between Joseph and his brothers about their shared past and the nature of their fraternal bond.

There is dramatic irony in this dialogue, the ten brothers, of course, being the object throughout this irony, not knowing what both Joseph and the readers know explicitly. For example, when they announce, "We are all the sons of one man" (v. 11), they do not perceive that Joseph too was a son of this "one man"--that the "one is no more" is indeed before them!

"One is no more"? But what if he is not? Joseph thought. What if he is alive and before you? Will you rejoice and embrace him, or remain bed-fellows with your seared consciences? These words stab Joseph so keenly that he almost drops his mask, all the more because they show the ten's compassion.

But he swiftly rehearses his task and persists, for at stake is not his but God's forgiveness, requiring their radical repentance. Besides, would not his own forgiveness, if declared now, fix them in their hatred against him, their "lord"?

But this dramatic irony outdoes itself through a series of psychologically loaded double meanings that trace the intricacies of their troubled fraternity. We are "twelve," the brothers tell Joseph--despite the more logical translation, "we were," the nominal Hebrew clause of verse 13 invites the temporal aspect to be construed as a present-tense statement. Only the two sons of Rachel are distinguished from the twelve: the youngest one is with his father and another, also unnamed, "one is no more" (v. 13b). The phrasing may either reflect their uncertainty as to Joseph's fate or be a delicate way (euphemism for death) of saying that he was dead. This ambiguity aptly reflects the ambiguity of the brothers' intentions toward Joseph and the uncertainty of their knowledge about what has become of him. First they had thought of actually killing him, and Reuben, who tried to save him and subsequently found the pit empty, apparently still imagines that Joseph was killed (see Gen. 42:22). In any case, having sent Joseph southward to a distant slave market, the brothers might properly think Joseph gone forever, as good as dead, or perhaps after all these years of grinding servitude, dead in fact.

Joseph surely, all the time they had been talking, had been wondering about Benjamin, who obviously was not with them. Could they have possibly resented Benjamin, as they did him, since they two had the same mother and were their father's favorites? Now they had just said Benjamin was still at home, but they had also said Joseph was "no more." Since they had lied in the one case, perhaps they also had in the other. Before he could really accept them and proceed to a reconciliation he would have to know the truth about his younger brother.

#### Joseph's First Test (verses 14-16)

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- 14 And Joseph said to them, "It is as I said to you, you are spies;  
 15 by this you will be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go  
 from this place unless your youngest brother comes here!  
 16 Send one of you that he may get your brother, while you remain  
 confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in  
 you. But if not, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies."

Joseph therefore persists in his accusation against his brothers. Why, after all, should the admission of the ten that they have two more brothers, one at home and "one is no more," be offered as proof? One may guess that the brothers' veiled statement about Joseph's fate ("one is no more") triggers his memory of their treachery and thus drives him to repeat the accusation of espionage.

Joseph's response is sharp, but now he now offers them a way to prove their innocence. He demands that Benjamin be brought to him, not only because he may be eager to see his full brother but also because, with the memory of the ten brothers' act of betrayal uppermost in his mind, he can hardly trust these sons of Leah and the concubines. So the initial testing by Joseph was designed to apply pressure to his brothers by reminding them of their crimes.

The "test" Joseph proposes has only a surface logic in the interrogation of spies: he implies that if one part of their statement about their family condition can be shown to be false, then there is no truth in them and they must be spies. However, this obviously could not work as a test of spies because the converse would not hold: they might be telling the truth about their brother at home and yet be in Egypt to gather intelligence for unspecified Canaanite powers. But the test has a profound logical function in the circuitous interrogation of his brothers: if in fact they have left Benjamin unharmed all these years, the truth of their words will be confirmed, that, despite past divisiveness, "we are twelve . . . brothers, the sons of one man."

At this point he proposed that he would test the validity of their story about being brothers by having them send for their younger brother. This is the meaning of the peculiar phrasing in v. 16, "send one of you" (שְׁלַחוּ מִכֶּם). In the meantime, he would continue to assume they were spies, and keep them all in prison until their story could be verified and that "whether there is truth" in them. The Hebrew word for truth is אֱמֶת/*emet*, which can be translated "firmness, faithfulness, truth." Concretely it refers to something permanent, stable, and capable of being relied upon.

Joseph's words in verse 15 bring to them the beginning of suspense, fear, remorse, self-examination, and the frightening realization that they were on trial for their past crime against Joseph (cf. v. 21). Either they would divide and fall, or unite together for mutual safety. The demand for Benjamin to be produced brought the utmost of consternation to them. This was the sorest point among them. It was the one thing that was too much to ask! But Joseph

was adamant. They were to prove their integrity by producing Benjamin before his eyes!

Joseph devised two plans to test his brothers. The first was that "one" (*'ehād*, v. 16) of the brothers should return for the youngest and the rest remain in prison. After three days the second plan was announced, "one" (*'ehād*, v. 19) of the brothers was to remain behind and the others were to return to get the youngest. The double plan fits into the overall Narrative scheme of repetition in that for both plans it is the "one" (*'ehād*) brother who rescues the others that is central. Within the Narrative this "one" (*'ehād*) brother appears to be an echo of the "one [who] is no more." It is no wonder then that the brothers' own conclusion from within the Narrative is that their present distress had been caused by the distress that they had brought on Joseph (vv. 21-22). In this way Joseph tests his brothers by putting them in the same position relative to Benjamin as they once were relative to him!

Joseph's test was solemnized by the oath taken: "by the life of Pharaoh." This phrase gives the following statement the character of an oath, validated and sanctioned by the awesome power of the king, who in Egypt thought of himself as a god! An oath of this type is found in an Egyptian inscription as early as the twentieth century B.C. In Israel, too, it was the practice to swear by the life of the king (cf. 1 Samuel 17:55; 2 Samuel 14:19) as well as by God (cf. 1 Sam. 25:26; 2 Sam. 15:21).

### Joseph Puts His Brothers In Prison (verse 17)

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**17    So he put them all together in prison for three days.**

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After his pronouncement and without warning, Joseph decided to imprison them all. This imprisonment on the surface was intended to demonstrate a certain toughness on the part of this Egyptian official and to impress on the brothers the seriousness of their situation.

Putting the brothers in prison for three days would have continued to work on their consciences. The threat to Benjamin had surfaced twice now, and this imprisonment would have given them a taste of what Joseph must have experienced. How would they stand the strain of imprisonment? What rivalries would surface as a result of their awareness that only one would return to Canaan and that the fate of all others would depend on that one? It was so

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similar to what they had done to him that on release they could not but make the obvious conclusion: they were reaping what they had sown.

The alertness to analogy to which this narrative has laid the groundwork cannot be overlooked: there is first a reversal, then a repetition of what Joseph's brothers did to him. They once cast him into a pit where he lay uncertain of his fate; now he throws all ten of them into the guardhouse (the same term as used previously for the place of Joseph's imprisonment) where he lets them stew for three days; then, as they did before, he isolates one brother--"one" of you brothers like the "one" who is said to be no more--and deprives him of his freedom for a period that might prove indefinite. When Jacob learns of Simeon's absence, he is quick to make this equation: "Me have you bereaved. Joseph is gone and Simeon is gone" (Gen. 42:36). We as readers knowingly perceive this analogy between Joseph's past plight and the present one of the brothers.

Joseph wanted to give them three days time in prison to change their minds (cf. Gen. 22:4; Ezra 10:8), knowing that they will consent and choose their delegate, lest their father, Benjamin and all their families starve to death. There can be no doubt, however, that Joseph never intended to persist in his order that only one of them return to Canaan. By exposing them for three long days to the excruciating pain and dilemma of whom to choose as their delegate, he compels them to review each brother's part in the crime and to ponder not only who would best be able to persuade the father to entrust Benjamin to him but also who would most deserve the chance to save his own life by leaving for Canaan. Joseph hopes that their agony will cause these headstrong men, who had never felt the deep agony of pain of being wrongly suspected, imprisoned and threatened with death, to correlate their desperate plight with the suffering they had inflicted upon Joseph and thus fathom God's retribution.

#### **Joseph's Second and New Test (verses 18-20)**

The initial testing by Joseph was designed to apply pressure to his brothers by reminding them of their crimes. Joseph began with a false accusation that they were spies. Now Joseph had turned things around to put them into situations similar to those that he had faced. He appeared on the surface to be handling them roughly, but underneath the severity there was affection, as witnessed by the emotional responses (cf. v. 24).

In addition it becomes Joseph's task to get Israel to Egypt, but not until he was sure they were ready. Thus, to establish that the men were honest

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and faithful, he demanded that they bring their youngest brother down to Egypt. Joseph would be risking the life of Benjamin, as far as he knew, but the purpose was great.

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- 18 Now Joseph said to them on the third day, "Do this and live, for I fear God:  
 19 if you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined in your prison; but as for *the rest of you*, go, carry grain for the famine of your households,  
 20 and bring your youngest brother to me, so your words may be verified, and you will not die." And they did so.
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Assuming that the three days of affliction have had the effect he expected, Joseph then visits his brothers with his interpreter (cf. v. 23) who informs them that his master has changed his mind. Whereas Joseph insists on the youngest's appearance to exonerate them, he sends the other back to prevent their and their families' unnecessary suffering. All that Joseph needs to insure the arrival of Benjamin is to retain but one hostage, again of their choice, while the other nine may leave with provisions for their families.

Joseph's words upon their release from prison were designed to focus their thoughts on God, not just on the dilemma they faced over Benjamin. Joseph's explanation of the change in plans also ties the Narrative to the larger theological theme of Genesis. Joseph said about his plan, "Do this and live, for I fear God (v. 18) . . . that you may not die" (v. 20). The motif of the fear of God was thus brought into the perplexing events that reminded them of their crime, but it also again identifies Joseph's plans with the will of God (cf. Gen. 50:20). Joseph has forced the brothers into a position in which they have no choice but to bring Benjamin in order to avoid dying of hunger. And so his brothers "did so" (v. 20) is an editorial remark which echoes verse 18; it means they agreed to the conditions.

***God awakens the consciousness of guilt in His people (21-28).***

The brothers who had already resigned themselves to the original condition (cf. v. 16) were naturally very glad about its modification. Thereupon the interpreter was dismissed and the vizier stayed on, ostensibly to wait for their selection of the hostage.

The circumstances and the test by this governor immediately evoked guilt feelings in the brothers. Assuming that the vizier cannot understand their language, they are much too excited to restrain themselves in his presence.

### Brothers Confess Their Guilt (verses 21-22)

21 Then they said to one another, "Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen; therefore this distress has come upon us."

They confessed to each other that, because they heard Joseph's cries for mercy and would not respond, this distress had come upon them. There is a word play in verse 21 that shows the link between their crime and this dilemma: they had seen the anguish (נִפְשׁוֹ/šārat napšō), and now distress (הַצָּרָה/haṣṣārâ) had come on them. The Hebrew word is used in both clauses to emphasize again the aspect of retributive justice. Their infliction of anguish was the crime; this trouble was the just punishment. At this point their spiritual discernment was correct.

By this time, their emotions and consciences were surely in considerable turmoil. Their minds were now well exercised in remembering what they had done to their younger brother, and in sensing that all of this was a very appropriate punishment. The term for punishment (אֲשֵׁמַיִם/ašmeym, v. 21) can mean both guilt and its consequent punishment (cf. Psa. 34:22), the two being inseparable. In this moment of common adversity, their long-smoldering, tortured consciences erupt.

When the brothers begin to talk among themselves about the distress they had brought on Joseph, the reader can again catch a glimpse of where Joseph's plans are leading. Reuben's words focus our attention on the central point of the Narrative: "Now comes the reckoning for his blood" (v. 22). At this point we can see that Joseph's plans were not in revenge for how his brothers once treated him; rather they were to show how, in God's world, the "guilt" of the brothers came back on them and called for justice.

To fully appreciate the intensity of this conversation, it is helpful to know that the word "we" used here in the Hebrew is extremely emphatic. "We



are guilty"; "we saw the distress of his soul"; "we would not listen." In his *Exposition of Genesis*, H. C. Leupold notes,

Whatever they may have said in prison, now at least they speak in terms of their guilt in the matter of Joseph. Their conscience has awakened mightily during these three days. They feel that a just retribution has come upon them, and are apparently all of one mind in regard to the matter. They admit guilt, the "only acknowledgment of sin in the book of Genesis" (II:1053).

One of the first signs of a conscience wakening is the admission of personal guilt. Notice that the brothers did not blame their father for being passive; they simply confessed their own guilt.

At this moment the brothers began speaking in Hebrew, thinking that Pharaoh's vizier minister would not understand any of it. But Joseph did understand. He witnesses their confession of sin (though, so far, it has been under duress). Moreover, he hears not only Reuben's speech (vv. 22), but also other words of Reuben that must have preceded it since the text has "And Reuben answered them." As to the omitted words our narrative invites the following speculation: When the brothers had decided to choose their delegate, Reuben may have persuaded them that he be it, being the eldest. When, however, the vizier reversed his decree, the Nine may again have chosen him, for the eldest must bear the responsibility, i.e., be the hostage. This is what incensed Reuben and to which he "answered."

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**22**      **And Reuben answered them, saying, "Did I not tell you, 'Do not sin against the boy'; and you would not listen? Now comes the reckoning for his blood."**

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These words of Reuben were craftily omitted between verses 21 and 22 in chapter 37. He now reminds his brothers that he attempted to persuade them how foolish their fear of Joseph was since he was a mere "child" (יָלֵד/*yeled*), that he was the only one who had wanted to save him, wherefore singling him out to be the hostage would only aggravate their guilt. This guilt, he continues, was not merely their mercilessness, as they now "rationalize," but their hatred which caused Joseph's death. Consequently, Reuben warned, the blood of Joseph would be required, a warning that more anguish lay ahead for the guilty. The demand for blood from the guilty recalls the ancient oracle of

God to Noah that the one who sheds blood will be so punished (Gen. 9:5-6). The brothers had not actually shed blood, but for all they knew they had, and they had certainly passed the matter off to Jacob as if blood had been shed.

The remarkable message of the Narrative, however, is that Joseph had already forgiven his brothers of the evil they had done to him. As verse 24 shows, Joseph had to turn away from them to hide his sorrow for the distress his plan now caused. His tears, however, could also be that of relief and joy. For years he had waited, hoping he could be reconciled to his brothers and be part of his family again. Now that day was dawning. What awaited the brothers was not the "evil" (רָעָה/ra') they intended for Joseph but the "good" (טוֹב/ṭōb) God intended for them through Joseph (cf. Gen. 50:20).

It is noteworthy that, although there are many sins recorded in the Book of Genesis, both of God's people and of others, this is the first time the guilty ones actually make a confession of sin! The ten brothers had gone through a truly traumatic experience the past few days, and it had stirred their consciences to the depths. Not only had they conspired to slay, and then, changing their minds, to sell, their brother, but they had ignored his anguished pleadings to spare him. They realized fully that they were now receiving what they had long deserved, and so their bitterness was directed against themselves, not against the vizier.

Now, as the brothers finally face their culpability two decades after the criminal fact, it is the voice of Reuben that is heard, accusing them of fratricide, and no one tries to deny the accusation because for all they know that may be, at least in effect, the crime they have committed by selling him as a slave. Reuben was not quite as guilty as the others, but neither was he innocent. He, like the others, assumed that most likely Joseph had died in Egypt, and they were all therefore guilty of his blood. Now it seemed as though their own blood would sooner or later be required in payment.

None of them, of course, had any idea that Joseph could understand what they were saying. He had been careful to carry out his conversations with them through an interpreter.

#### Joseph Understands and Weeps (verses 23-24)

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23            They did not know, however, that Joseph understood, for there was an interpreter between them.

At precisely this point the narrator, who has been absent since the first half of verse 9, except to convey tersely the information that Joseph placed his brothers under arrest (v. 17), steps forward to report something about Joseph which changes the entire emotional configuration we have been observing.

First, there is another piece of delayed exposition which was cunningly withheld for the perfect moment. Until now, we have not been encouraged to question the language in which Joseph and his brothers communicated. Perhaps we might even have supposed that this Egyptian vizier exhibited a fluency in Canaanite dialects. But in fact, we find out only now that Joseph and his brothers have been communicating through the services of an interpreter. This is the only instance in the patriarchal narratives when free and direct communication is explicitly told to be impeded by differences in language.

This, incidentally, provides a clue to the otherwise somewhat enigmatic fact that, in spite of the confusion of languages that had taken place at Babel, all through the Book of Genesis we read about people of different nations apparently freely conversing with each other. This reference makes it obvious that, in most cases at least, such conversations were carried out through interpreters. In those days, as in ours, people were able to learn foreign languages; and evidently there were linguistic specialists who actually made a profession of working as translators and interpreters. Apparently this was so common that ordinarily it is not even mentioned except when, as here, it has a vital bearing on the Narrative. Joseph himself had evidently learned the Egyptian language while he was a servant in Potiphar's house.

The purpose for suspending the information about an interpreter until now would have blunted the sense of immediate confrontation which, as we have seen, is so essential psychologically and thematically in the progress of that scene. Now, when we are told that all along they have been speaking with a translator as intermediary, we are taken by surprise. Suddenly we realize that there is an added technical dimension to the opposition between Joseph's knowledge and the brothers' ignorance: throughout this encounter, unknown to them, he has "understood" them or "listened to" them, and at this point he has just heard them twice confess their own past failure to listen to or understand him.

Joseph had remained with them as if he were waiting for their decision whom to choose as the hostage. Yet he did not intend to let it come to

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their resolution of this terrible dilemma, for it would cause them irreparable discord. What he now heard hit him harder than he anticipated.

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**24a** And he turned away from them and wept.

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Until this moment, we might have assumed a continuity between Joseph's harsh speech and his feelings. But it seems far more likely that as Joseph hears his brothers' expression of remorse, the first strong impulse of reconciliation takes place in his own feelings, though he cannot yet trust them and so must go on with the test.

Except that Joseph "pleaded" (v. 21), we do not read that Joseph cried when his brothers seized and flung him into the pit. Neither did he cry when he was sold as a slave or, when Potiphar's wife falsely accused him of rape with the result that he lost the high position entrusted and was thrown into prison. Nor are we told that he cried when the cupbearer forgot to remember him before Pharaoh. But from now on, Joseph will cry on seven different occasions (Gen. 43:30; 45:1, 14, 15; 46:29; 50:1, 17). In contrast, Jacob, supposedly more emotional than Joseph, Genesis mentions his tears only four times (cf. Gen. 29:11; 33:4; 37:35; 46:29); and of Abraham's weeping, Genesis speaks only after Sarah's death (cf. Gen. 23:2).

Joseph's weeping, moreover, at the end of this first encounter between the brothers initiates a beautifully regulated crescendo pattern in the Narrative. Twice more he will cry. The second time (cf. Gen. 43:30-31), when he first sets eyes on his full brother Benjamin, is an expansion of this first report of crying: "Joseph hurried out for he was deeply stirred over his brother, and he sought a place to weep; and he entered his chamber and wept there. Then he washed his face, and came out; and he controlled himself." Unlike the account in chapter 42, the motive for the weeping here is clearly stated, and the specification of minute actions--wanting to weep, going into another room, weeping, washing his face, composing himself--is far beyond the Hebrew laconic norm, thus focusing the event and producing an effect of dramatic retardation in the Narrative tempo. Manifestly, we are moving toward a climax, and it occurs in the third act of Joseph's weeping (cf. Gen. 45:1-2), as at last he makes himself known to his brother.

As Joseph heard them, he realized that his dreams were truly "for them" (cf. v. 9). They had actually come to the point of confession and

remorse for their sin. But mere remorse was not a basis solid enough on which to base their assumption of repentance for their previous sin. There had to be evidence of their awareness of their past hideous acts. To that end Benjamin had to be brought, that they might all be placed in a situation as alike to that which had occurred when they had conspired against Jacob and sold Joseph some twenty years earlier.

Joseph became so overcome by his emotions that he had to make a hasty exit from their presence, lest he should give his identity away and they see him weeping. After regaining control of himself, he returned (with his interpreter) and resumed his instructions to them.

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**24b** But when he returned to them and spoke to them, he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes.

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What he said to them when he "spoke to them," was not only what they were to report to their father (cf. v. 34), namely that once they are exonerated, they may "trade in the land," but what is more important, why he would rather pick the hostage than leave the choice up to them.

As Joseph stated in verse 19, one of them must stay bound in prison while the others went home. Joseph, having heard that Reuben had at least partially tried to prevent their crime, realized that Simeon must have been chiefly responsible. It is perhaps during his brothers' vehement discussion, that he had overheard that Simeon was among those who had plotted his death (cf. Gen. 37:18, 20) and together with Levi had perpetrated the massacre at Shechem. Therefore, he had his guard take Simeon, and put him in bonds before their eyes, a phrase which shows that Joseph's threats were to be taken seriously and to test their solidarity. Simeon needed the instruction of a time in prison and chains more than any of the others.

The nine other brothers must have noticed with some surprise the apparent coincidence that the vizier would place in prison the one among them who had been most responsible for their heinous act and therefore for the retribution that now seemed to be overtaking them. They possibly regarded Simeon's seizure as further evidence of God's overruling justice.

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**The Brothers' Dealings With The "Lord of the Land" (verses 25-34)**


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**25** Then Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain and to restore every man's money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. And thus it was done for them.

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Joseph then gave orders with respect to the departure of his brothers for their homeland in Canaan--in the Egyptian language, of course. The containers they had brought for carrying food to their homes were all filled. The word used for these containers is a very general word (<sup>קִיִּי</sup>/k<sup>e</sup>lî), and can designate any kind of container in which material is transported. Our translators have rendered the word "sacks." Others use the term "packs" such as were commonly used on pack animals. They probably were some kind of sacks or bags. Since the word sacks is used later in a slightly different connotation, however, we might better use the word "packs" in this connection.

Joseph's first order, being part of the purchase, was carried out by the granary workers. "He did this for them" refers probably to his trusted steward (cf. Gen. 43:16; 44:1). Secretly, the steward put the money-bags into the fodder bags. Since each one probably transported more than one sack of grain, this money was then placed in one of the sacks of each of the brothers. The Hebrew for "money" (<sup>קַסְפֵּהֶם</sup>/kaspêhem) is the plural form of "money," which is also used in verse 35 and employed nowhere else in biblical Hebrew. The plural indicates that there were several individual bags of money.

Presumably, Joseph reimbursed their money for two reasons: (1) he wants to be his family's provider from the outset and to prevent them from running out of cash for another purchase; (2) the shock effect which was to make them relate also this mystery to their guilt, furthering their repentance even before their return to their father. All of this would aggravate their apprehension and to keep up the pressure of the trial of their integrity and honesty.

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**26** So they loaded their donkeys with their grain, and departed from there.

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These rations were in "their bags" (v. 25), which the brothers themselves loaded on their pack animals. Their riding donkeys each carried saddle-

bags, hanging down on either side and containing personal belongings and a "sack" for fodder.

The brothers were no doubt relieved that they had been given at least a temporary respite from punishment. Obviously, they were anxious to get home with the badly needed supplies. Apparently they were not overly grieved at having to leave Simeon, since they later seemed in no hurry to go back to Egypt to retrieve him. Simeon was hardly the best loved among them, for obvious reasons. Finally the animals were all loaded and the caravan departed from Egypt and headed for Canaan.

#### *The Return to Canaan (vv. 27-38)*

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- 27 **And as one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money; and behold, it was in the mouth of his sack.**
- 28 **Then he said to his brothers, "My money has been returned, and behold, it is even in my sack." And their hearts sank, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?"**
- 

Their journey back home must have been over a distance of about 250 miles or more. Presumably Jacob was still living in Hebron, and Joseph's headquarters were possibly at or near the city of Memphis, which is about ten miles south of the present city of Cairo. Thus, the journey would take them most of two weeks.

The second phase of Joseph's testing was to plant their money in the sacks to compromise them and quicken the fear of God in them. Somewhere along the way on the road to Canaan (and too far to return) their extra provisions were used up, and when they stopped at a night encampment one of the brothers discovered money in one of his sacks. He was shocked to find some money there on top of the grain.

His brothers were likewise afraid when he told them what he had found (v. 28). It apparently did not occur to them at the time that money would be found in all the sacks. They knew they had paid for the grain, but now it was obvious that somehow not all the price had been paid, and this was real grounds for alarm.

Genesis 43:18-22 reports the brothers' terror that, upon their return to Egypt, they will think they will be charged with embezzlement. However, when the brothers later return to Egypt to buy more grain, no mention is made of this money. Even when they return the money and offer an explanation of what happened, the issue of possible theft is not suggested. The suggestion that Joseph had some hostile motive in returning the money is nowhere supported in the text. It seems obvious that Joseph's motives lay in his unwillingness to accept money from his own family for the food he was able to supply them.

The English obscures the fact that the second Hebrew term used for "sack" in verse 27 is completely a different term used in verse 27a and verse 25. The Hebrew word *אֲמָחַת*/*'amtahat* is employed eleven times in the Joseph Narrative, but never elsewhere in the Bible (see notes on Gen. 44:15 for the significance of this). On the basis of the Assyrian *matāhu*, "to bear, carry, lift up," it perhaps means "a pack," and it was so understood by the Targums. It is thus to be distinguished from "a sack" (*שַׁק*/*saq*; vv. 25, 27a). It should be noted that *befi*, "at the mouth of," is used only with *אֲמָחַת*/*'amtahat*, never with "sack" (*שַׁק*/*saq*), and that the latter term appears only in the Narrative framework, never in reported speech, which is concerned with the actual discovery of the money. It must be assumed, then, that the "pack" (*אֲמָחַת*/*'amtahat*) was inside a sack.

The sense of guilt already aroused made the group quick to see the hand of God in the ruler's actions. The rhetorical question "What is this that God has done to us?" has a note of irony to it. So far in Genesis this kind of expression had been used to interrogate the guilty ("What is this you have done?" in Gen. 3:13; 4:10; 12:18). In this context the guilty brothers expressed their fear of events by the question. It was all an ominous note of foreboding. The words may imply ignorance at what God was doing, but inwardly the brothers knew that he was bringing their guilt out into the open. God was behind it all and through it all was working out His purposes (cf. Gen. 50:20).

The brothers' discovery of the money ties in with the theme of Joseph's knowledge opposed to his brothers' ignorance, which is central to both meetings in Egypt and, indeed, to the entire Narrative. When the brothers ask, "What is this that God has done to us?", conveys the sense of being completely at the mercy of fate. But we as readers perceive a dramatic irony continuous with the dramatic ironies of the previous scene in the vizier's palace: Joseph in fact is serving as the agent of destiny, as God's instrument, in the large plan of the Narrative; and the very brothers who earlier were shocked at Joseph's dream of having the sun and moon and eleven stars bow down to him now unwittingly



say "God" when we as reader know that they are referring to that which Joseph has brought about through his wisdom.

At this point a digression might be properly made to discuss the practically complete absence of the name YHWH, and to observe that the name ELOHIM ("God") is used after Genesis 39:21. This large section is dealing with creation--creation of the people of God, first through the trial of Joseph's brothers and then the removal of Jacob (the clan of Israel) to Egypt, where in the cycle of human generation, ELOHIM would make them a great nation. Not until Exodus 3:4 is YHWH ("LORD") used again except in chapter 39 and Genesis 49:18. But the occurrence of the name in the context of the covenant made with Abraham (cf. Ex. 3:8 with Gen. 15:13, 14) brings before us the fact that when redemptive aspects of God's covenant with Israel are in view, then the name YHWH is employed. Thus one need not postulate theories of documents to explain the almost exclusive use of ELOHIM in the last chapters of Genesis. Only in chapter 39 and again in Genesis 49:18 is YHWH used. In chapter 39 (eight times), He is the covenant God preserving His servant for a special task. In Genesis 49:18, Jacob makes a plea for His covenant activity, as well. Thus there is reason for its use. Otherwise, as noted above, "ELOHIM" is required.

This view stands in contrast to another theory that so long as Israel dwelt in another land, the name "ELOHIM" was necessarily used, for Israel's faith was low, and they did not have the full knowledge of YHWH. By way of answer, it may be pointed out that the development of faith is not *per se* under consideration here, as in the case of Abraham; so then the emphasis is misplaced by those who posit a low level of Israel's faith in a foreign land. Since reclamation of erring men is under consideration, other manifestations of the Deity are appropriately required. Thus the use of YHWH is largely discontinued and ELOHIM, the Creator, is portrayed.

### **III. *God's people who know their sins will be willing to prove themselves before God and other people (29-38).***

The last few verses of this scene record the report of these events to Jacob, but in an abbreviated form. The report included the requirement of bringing Benjamin to Egypt to prove themselves honest and to retrieve Simeon. They could not return to Egypt for more grain without Benjamin; they could not even go for Simeon without Benjamin.

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Thus, their focus was on the plan of Joseph for the return of the youngest son. We must again ask why the writer has allowed this portion of the narrative to be retold. It certainly is a part of his overall strategy in telling the story, but what specifically does he intend? The solution lies in Jacob's response: "You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and you would take Benjamin; all these things are against me" (v. 36). As if he knew all that had in fact happened between his sons and Joseph, Jacob's words ring truer than he would ever have suspected. To the sons, and to the reader, his words were curiously true. The brothers had deprived him of Joseph, and it was because of them that Simeon was not now with them and that Benjamin was to be taken away. Thus now, in the words of their father, there was a reminder of the guilt that lingered over their treatment of Joseph.

Before Jacob's response is recorded, the narrative inserts the notice of the discovery of more money in the sacks (v. 35). Once again the brothers, and now also the patriarch, were afraid when they saw the money. The money in the sacks had now become an omen that something--God or fate--was menacing their lives. The brothers, who knew they were guilty, could perceive that it was God's retributive hand, for this was the second time they had come home with money, having abandoned a brother to prison in Egypt.

This bit of irony should not be overlooked: the ten brothers sold Joseph into slavery to those going down to Egypt for twenty pieces of silver (Gen. 37:26-28); now Joseph has turned the table and has retained Simeon in Egypt while they returned to Canaan and has placed money in each of their sacks. Thus the mirroring correspondence of the latter narrative material is reflected once again in the former, building to a mighty climatic crescendo (not to mention the fantastic chiasmic structure of the Narrative).

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**29** When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying,

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After the shocking discovery, recorded in verses 27 and 28, the rest of the trip to Canaan was uneventful. Immediately after the discovery of the silver in the bag at the encampment, the brothers are placed back in Canaan in the presence of their father.

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However, all the way back "to the land of Canaan," to which they were given permission to return, their minds and conversations were occupied with "the fear of God" and their anxiety about the anguish which their report would cause to their father. Apparently, they decided to tell him only what was essential to explain why Simeon had not returned and to obtain permission to bring Benjamin to the vizier so that Simeon could be released. In addition, they seem to have decided also not to tell their father about the money that the one brother found in his sack. In spite of Jacob's advanced age, he was still very much the dominant figure in the family.

Their return to Jacob is marked by disclosure in detail of the rough handling they had experienced in Egypt. In the record this disclosure stands in marked contrast to their deception of Jacob in the selling of Joseph. They did not now wish to conceal anything of what had happened in Egypt, so that they could not be blamed for any harm to Simeon or to Benjamin. If Benjamin was to go down, it had to be by the consent of Jacob, under the full knowledge of their circumstances. The declaration of the conditions thus indicates a change in the attitudes of the brothers toward their father. Their stress on the ruler's interrogation of them regarding other brothers is to show that they themselves had not jeopardized Benjamin in any way. Their carefulness contrasts sharply with their deceit in Joseph's case. It is one indication of change. But their new character needed further refining and testing.

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- 30 "The man, the lord of the land, spoke harshly with us, and took us for spies of the country.
- 31 But we said to him, 'We are honest men; we are not spies.
- 32 We are twelve brothers, sons of our father; one is no more, and the youngest is with our father today in the land of Canaan.'
- 33 And the man, the lord of the land, said to us, 'By this I shall know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me and take *grain for* the famine of your households, and go.
- 34 But bring your youngest brother to me that I may know that you are not spies, but honest men. I will give your brother to you, and you may trade in the land.'"
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What is reported in these verses is just as we would expect of the Bible's convention of verbatim repetition; they report what has befallen them in Egypt by an almost exact restatement of extensive phrasal elements from their earlier dialogue with Joseph. Understandably, this recapitulation of the

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previous scene in Egypt abbreviates it, but apart from the deletions, which speed up the narrative tempo in a way appropriate for the report of what has already been told, small, subtle changes in the phrasing and word order of the original dialogue nicely reflect the fact that they brothers are now addressing their father.

Their return to Jacob is marked by disclosure in detail of the rough handling they had experienced in Egypt. In the record this disclosure stands in marked contrast to their deception of Jacob in the selling of Joseph. They did not now wish to conceal anything of what had happened in Egypt, so that they could not be blamed for any harm to Simeon or to Benjamin. If Benjamin was to go down with them the next trip, it had to be by the consent of Jacob, under full knowledge of the circumstances. The declaration of the conditions thus indicates a change in the attitudes of the brothers toward their father. It is one indication of change. But their new character needed further refinement.

The subtle changes in the phrasing and word order of the original dialogue should not go unnoticed. Joseph here is twice referred to as "the man who is lord of the land," in still another unwitting confirmation, this time shared by father and sons, of the dream that the sun and moon and eleven stars would bow down to him.

In the brothers' version for Jacob's benefit, first they affirm to Joseph the fact of their honesty and that they would never be spies, then that they are the twelve sons of one man, whereas in actually speaking to Joseph they first announced that they were all the sons of one man, as a necessary preamble to their declaration of honesty (see notes on v. 12).

"We are twelve brothers," they restate for Jacob their earlier speech to Joseph, "the sons of our father. One is no more and the youngest is with our father today in the land of Canaan." Naturally, when speaking to Jacob they refer to him as "our father" and not as "one man in the land of Canaan." They also reverse the order of the information they gave to Joseph, placing the brother who is no more first and the brother who is at home second. Perhaps they mean to suggest to their father that they divulged this precious fact of Benjamin's existence only grudgingly, at the end of their speech to the Egyptian vizier. In any case, "one is no more" is the climactic statement for Joseph, while "the youngest is with our father" is the crucial revelation for Jacob, and so in each case what touches most deeply the person addressed is reserved for the last.

When Joseph told the brothers of his intention to take a hostage, he said that one of them would be "detained" (the Hebrew word, **סָדַן**/*sr*, quite plainly means, "be fettered") in prison; in repeating Joseph's words to Jacob, the brothers diplomatically soften this to "Leave one of your brothers with me." This apt substitution of a tactful euphemism for the concrete image of incarceration beautifully demonstrates how the minor variations in the Bible's verbatim repetition are part of a deliberate pattern, not a matter of casual synonymity. Indeed, they say nothing of all ten being three days in detention, and the shackling of Simeon "before their eyes."

Finally, Joseph had concluded the terms of the test by saying that Benjamin would have to be brought to him if the brothers were to escape death; the brothers, in their report to Jacob, are careful to edit out this threatening speech of death and to make the vizier's speech end on a positive note, present only by implication in the actual words he used to them: "That I may know that you are not spies, but honest men. I will give your brother to you, and you may trade in the land."

Having finished their report they hope that it has reassured their father that Simeon will return after Benjamin's appearance before the vizier, and they wait for his consent. Jacob says not a single word, not because he disbelieves their strange story; not yet. It is because he is dismayed about their having volunteered, as he thinks, the information about his two other sons. Only later in Genesis 43:6 will he reproach them for it, saying, "Why did you treat me so badly by telling the man whether you still had *another* brother?" But now he remains silent. For the brothers there was nothing else to do but to unpack their belongings and the sacks of grain.

#### **The Opening of the Grain Sacks in Canaan Before Jacob (verses 35-38)**

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**35** Now it came about as they were emptying their sacks, that behold, every man's bundle of money *was* in his sack; and when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were dismayed.

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It goes without saying that when they returned home and after their report to their father, they all unloaded their pack animals and emptied their sacks of grain to provide food for their people and their animals. At that point they discovered that not just one of them had his money returned but it had been returned to all of them. It is not surprising that they had not discovered this

earlier. All of the grain needed for the return trip could very well have been taken from the one sack that was opened on the first evening of their journey. Then when they arrived home, all of the sacks were emptied and it was not until then that they discovered that all of their money had been returned.

Some commentators have claimed that there is a conflict between verses 35 and 25, which, of course for them, points to a separate source. But this apparent conflict can be readily resolved if we accept the following chain of events. Although Joseph's intent was to place the money in the sacks of grain that would provide food for the families after they returned to Canaan, because of an oversight in one case, the money was actually placed in the sack that contained food for the journey--on top no less. Thus, when they were on their return journey the money was discovered in this one sack. Meanwhile, the rest of the money was not discovered until they reached home and the animals were unloaded.

An interesting word play occurs in verse 35: וַיִּרְאוּ . . . וַיִּדְאוּ, "they saw . . . they were dismayed."

One should note that the discovery of the money for the second time occurs in their recapitulation for Jacob of Joseph's speech to them (vv. 33-34) at the exact point where, following the actual speech (vv. 20-21), they "discovered" their guilt toward Joseph. In characteristic biblical fashion, their guilt is not spelled out by the narrator, only intimated in the verb of fearing, then picked up in dialogue as Jacob responds--and it is important to understand that it is a response--to the brothers. With them, he has seen the money. He also must have seen their fear. Then, as though giving voice to their unspoken guilt at the discovery of the money, he turns to them with an accusation.

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**36** And their father Jacob said to them, "You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and you would take Benjamin; all these things are against me."

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Like his speech in Genesis 37:35 after Joseph's bloodied tunic was brought to him, Jacob expresses himself with the dramatic heightening of scannable verse, placing himself and his suffering ("Me have you bereaved . . . Upon me are all these things") at the beginning and the end of his bitter lament. Interestingly, when Joseph disappeared, Jacob made no direct accusation against his sons; but here, as though the momentum of his rhetoric were carrying him

to the brink of the literal truth (more than he knew), he charges them with having bereaved him of both Joseph and Simeon.

Actually, Jacob was being unfair to his sons. At this time he did not know what part they had played in the disappearance of Joseph, and they certainly could not be faulted for the harsh treatment they had received from the official in Egypt. Even so, Jacob's sons must have felt the sting of their father's lament because they realized that there was more truth in Jacob's words than Jacob did himself. They had indeed deprived him of Joseph, and when they were in Egypt they sensed that what happened to them there was a just punishment from God for their misdeeds. Indirectly they were also responsible for Simeon's imprisonment. And could they be certain that, if they took Benjamin to Egypt, they would be able to bring him back safely to his father?

The scene ends with the discussion over Benjamin's accompanying them to Egypt on the next trip. Jacob, seeing the ominous nature of all the events, lamented the loss of Joseph and Simeon and the imminent loss of Benjamin--everything seemed to be against him. The Hebrew verb behind "you have bereaved me of my children," was probably meant to say that the brothers had twice brought back news of the loss of a brother. But it probably carried a greater meaning for the guilty brothers. Also the translation of the clause suffers because it does not recognize the emphatic position of the accusative particle ahead of the verb. The sense is: "It is I who suffer; it is my sons who disappear!"

In spite of all this, the brothers really had no choice. If they did not return to Egypt, Simeon would be killed as a hostage and their families would die of starvation. After having been tormented by the vizier's acrimony and suspicion, by the torturing suspense during their three days in custody and the shock over their replaced money, the brothers are now horrified that their father suspects them about Joseph, about Simeon and about Benjamin. What tortures them most is that the father's suspicion may now doom Simeon. Yet they do not dare to speak. At this point, his first born steps forth.

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**37** Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, "You may put my two sons to death if I do not bring him *back* to you; put him in my care [hand], and I will return him to you."

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Reuben breaks the deaden silence with an illogical and impetuous outburst, not only because he is "uncontrolled as water" (Gen. 49:4), but also because he is the eldest son and because he desires probably to redeem himself and regain the father's forgiveness for his sin with Bilhah (cf. Gen. 35:22). His oath, even though a foolish way to guarantee the safety of Benjamin (would Jacob actually kill Reuben's sons?; If Benjamin was harmed, what good would two more deaths accomplish?), demonstrated his concern for the safety of Benjamin--as if Benjamin were his own son. The brothers, and especially Reuben, were willing to comply with the Egyptian governor's test, for they had changed.

There seems to be a deliberate matching of two lives for two here, for in Genesis 46:9 lists four sons of Reuben going down to Egypt. It is possible that two more were born to him from his wife or wives in the period between their first trip to Egypt and their final removal thereto. This period could have been from six months to a year in length. Reuben's reference may have been partitive: "two of my sons." Again, as in the case of Jacob, he may have spoken of sons of a chief wife, those listed later being sons of a secondary wife.

However, within the context of the Narrative, it appears that Reuben's oath only add insult to injury. Exactly what satisfaction he thought his father could derive from killing two of his grandsons, after already losing his sons, is hardly clear. Reuben simply spoke without thinking. He perhaps was trying to appear noble to his father, who had long since been badly disappointed in this eldest son of his; but he only succeeded in looking still more foolish. Jacob's reply to Reuben not only summarily dismissed Reuben's pledge, but it raised one more time the matter of the loss of Joseph.

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**38** But Jacob said, "My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he alone is left. If harm should befall him on the journey you are taking, then you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow."

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Jacob does not even honor Reuben's rash if well-meaning offer with a reply, but instead pronounces his determination not to allow Benjamin to go to Egypt. Before, he had said euphemistically and a little ambiguously that Joseph was gone; now he flatly states that Joseph is dead.



Astonishingly, Jacob remains as oblivious to the feelings of his ten sons as he was during Joseph's childhood. "He alone is left," he tells them to their faces, omitting the necessary phrase "from his mother," as though only the sons of Rachel, and not they were his sons. Indeed, this is underscored when Jacob calls Benjamin "his son," not "your brother," and Joseph "his [Benjamin] brother"; this is bitter for the others, as if he only had these two. The formulation, "my son," instead of "your brother," may well imply a rebuke, in that it echoes what the brothers said when they had Joseph's tunic sent to their father: "Is it your son's tunic?" (cf. Gen. 37:32).

Jacob refused for the present, saying that Benjamin's brother was dead and that, if any harm should fall on Benjamin, he would die in sorrow. Jacob's reference to himself by the figure of gray hairs (metonymy) indicates his grief and sorrow already over the loss of Joseph. The loss of Benjamin would be the death of him.

Jacob is ever the rhetorician of grief, fond of verbal symmetries in his laments, and so his speech begins with the words "he shall not go down" (לֹא יֵרֵד), and concludes with the "bringing down" (הוֹרֵדְתֶם) of his old man's head to Sheol, thus forming a nice inclusio. There may be an ironic play between Sheol, the underworld, and Egypt, that alien land to the south famous for its monumental cult of the dead. Benjamin, of course, will finally go down to Egypt, and as things turn out, Jacob will be brought down by his sons not to Sheol but to Egypt, where Joseph is alive and resplendent in his vice regal power.

"My son" is the last son of Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel. "His own brother," Joseph, never returned from his journey. Though Reuben may have abated the father's suspicion, Jacob insists that Benjamin stay with him. Neither Jacob nor his sons utter the name "Benjamin," the second "Joseph." The whole family remains in trepidation. None of the brothers says anything further. Judah may have proposed leaving their father alone: if the famine continues, the father will be compelled to give in. Until then, Simeon will have to remain in prison.

It is possible to view that Jacob's remarks about bringing his gray head down to Sheol in the midst of sorrow are to be taken as the measure of his spiritual hopes, in that Jacob was doing what Isaac had done: he sought to determine the messianic heir. His hopes were wrapped up in Benjamin, since, as he believed, Joseph had been eliminated. Though Judah was to bear the messianic line (cf. Gen. 49:8-12), Jacob as of yet could not know this. Yet Jacob's

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emphatic refusal serves to indicate the concern he had relative to the continuity of the messianic line. In this regard one must see that it is not the parent who was to choose the one to succeed to this position, but that it was the prerogative of God to reveal him through particular circumstances (cf. Shem, Gen. 9:24-27). When finally the son was chosen, he--Judah--had evidenced his suitability in the wisdom and parental loyalty he displayed before Joseph in appealing for clemency for them on behalf of their father (cf. Gen. 44:14-34). The Narrative, therefore, proceeds on the basis that Jacob's extreme apprehensions will not be realized, that even his views on this matter must be changed, for Jacob had to learn God's choice.

### FURTHER REMARKS ON JUDAH AND REUBEN

Many scholars see both Reuben and Judah playing the "good brother" role in Genesis 37. In the original version there was one good brother, they claim, and the present confusion in the text results from a conflation of sources. Once such source critic scholar, Donald B. Redford goes on to say, in fact, that Judah's role is not only a secondary intrusion into the narrative, but it also represents a diminution of the story's overall literary artistry.

It is unfortunate that scholars such as Redford do not perceive the great artistry which the narrator displays in order to show the contrasting roles that Reuben and Judah play. Whereas Reuben will gradually weaken and disappear as the story unfolds, Judah will undergo the most important change of any of the characters so that he will play the key role in catalyzing the reconciliation. To what extent has the narrative prepared us for Judah's dramatic rise in Genesis 43--44?

Reuben, the first-born, is portrayed as the "good" son in chapter 37. When the brothers see Joseph coming in the distance and plan to kill him, it is Reuben who seeks to foil the plan. Whereas the brothers plot a violent death for Joseph, Reuben sets limits: "Let us not take his life" (Gen. 37:21). Acceding to part of the brothers' plan, he suggests that Joseph be thrown into a nearby pit alive rather than dead. The basis for his request is the prohibition against shedding blood. But the text makes clear that Reuben's interest is to rescue Joseph and restore him to his father. When the unexpected intervention of Midianites foils Reuben's plan, he bursts out in lamentation for himself: "where am I to go?" (Gen. 37:30). This may mean merely, "How can I face my father?" But might he see himself as banned fugitive, unable to return to his father because he has not lived up to the responsibility of first-born in protecting his brother?

Judah, the fourth-born of Leah, plays a role that sets him in contrast with Reuben. The text makes no mention that Judah's interest is to rescue Joseph. Instead Judah piously speaks of not laying a hand on a brother; but the effect of his suggestion is not so different from murder: Joseph will be removed from their midst and reduced to slavery. In many ways biblical law equates selling a person into slavery with murder (cf. Ex. 21:16; Deut. 24:7). Judah wants the same results as his other brothers, but he seeks profit from the deed (Gen. 37:26-27).

Both plans--Reuben's to save and Judah's to profit--are forestalled. Out of nowhere come the Midianites, and in a half verse they carry out the action contemplated by the brothers. Like the nameless stranger who met Joseph at Shechem and told him his brothers had moved on to Dothan, the Midianites are mere agents of the plot. They appear suddenly in the story to frustrate the opposing machinations of Reuben and Judah and disappear after they have served their function.

N. Leibowitz, backed by midrashic interpretation, understands Joseph's nameless stranger as a divine emissary. Given the normal economy in biblical narrative style, there seems to be no need to tell us that Joseph was sent first to Shechem but then redirected to Dothan. Like the Midianites, the stranger appears from nowhere. He engages Joseph in a conversation that could easily have been omitted, and then he disappears from the story. Leibowitz infers that the narrator is going out of his way to emphasize the divine intent behind Joseph's fateful encounter with his brothers. This author would argue the same thing for the role of the Midianites. They frustrate the plans of Reuben and Judah, but their sudden intervention into and disappearance from the story may cause us to anticipate that a larger plan, not yet revealed to characters or reader, is being carried out.

One must examine the larger context of the Joseph story to determine why Reuben and Judah play these opposing roles. Deriving his line of argument from midrashic interpretation, J. Goldin points us in a fruitful direction by referring to Genesis 34--35. In Genesis 35:22 we learn that Reuben had sexual relations with his father's concubine, Bilhah. He may have been attempting to assert the rights of primogeniture and assume the role of the father, but we learn from Genesis 49:3-4 that in fact his premature action had caused him to lose this status in his father's eyes. Goldin suggests that, besides fulfilling his special responsibility as first-born, Reuben may have been desperately attempting to regain his lost/threatened status by saving Joseph's

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life. When Reuben finds the pit empty, his response, as translated by Goldin, is "what now is left me" (Gen. 37:30b). This alternate translation, like the conventional translation used above, leaves Reuben bemoaning his own fate as a response to Joseph's tragedy.

What about Judah, the fourth-born? His star may be on the rise. Levi and Simeon, the second and third-born sons, had fallen from favor through their deceitful destruction of the city of Shechem (Genesis 34). Jacob rebukes them for the recklessness (Genesis 34:30) and refers to it again in Genesis 49:5-7 in declaring their reduced status. Judah is next in line. If he stays out of trouble, and if Reuben does not regain favor, the special status of family leadership may fall to him. The only remaining rival is Joseph, the son favored by his father. Thus not only does the larger context of Genesis 37 show us how important it is for Reuben to save Joseph and return him to his father; it also reveals how much Judah stands to gain by being rid of the only other rival for special status among his brothers.

When the harsh-speaking Egyptian lord begins to test the brothers in chapter 42, Reuben still appears to be the "good brother." But there are now further ambiguities: his goodness has even more self-centeredness than before. The brothers speak with one accord in remembering and repenting their guilt; they admit that they did not heed Joseph's appeals for mercy. Only Reuben breaks the brothers' eloquent solidarity. Shrilly he turns on them with an "I told you so," refusing to accept the guilt while recognizing that he must share the judgment. The brothers remember not heeding Joseph. Reuben attempts to identify himself with the innocent, wronged younger brother--reminding them that they also did not heed him earlier. But they had indeed followed his lead in chapter 37. It was Reuben's advice to throw Joseph into the pit, as part of his plan to save the lad and return him to his father. Reuben's goodness was ineffective. His plan did not work, and we learn later that if it had worked, Jacob's family would not have survived the famine. As chapter 37 concluded, we found Reuben proclaiming his tragic isolation. The brothers did not heed his words, probably because of their irrelevance to the problem of explaining Joseph's disappearance to their father.

Reuben's goodness is similarly ineffective in chapter 42. The threatening situation before the Egyptian lord did not require a querulous expression of innocence that resulted in division and recrimination. The true first-born should provide leadership that assumed at least a shared responsibility for the situation. He should be the spokesman, coming up with an imaginative response to the Egyptian lord's accusation that would enhance the unity of the

family and deliver the brothers from their peril. His lack of leadership here is a foil for the later doubling situation. Chapter 44 will portray another brother taking action before the Egyptian lord in even more threatening circumstances with vastly different results; and the reader is forced to compare the two spokesmen in these analogous situations.

When the brothers return to Jacob and describe their Egyptian adventures, they try to soften the severity of their position. Simeon is not a hostage bound over into prison, but simply a brother left to stay with the Egyptian. There was no threat of death to Simeon for failure to bring Benjamin to Egypt--only the promise to hand over Simeon and to allow the brothers to purchase grain in Egypt. The aged Jacob's response to this news is full of self-pitying, ineffective recrimination. After twenty years he still grieves for Joseph. Because he fears for Benjamin's life, he is incapable of an imaginative response. Here Reuben steps forward, making a statement more reckless than Jephthah's, offering the life of two sons as pledge for Benjamin's; or because of Reuben's personal guilt surfaced in this chapter, is one son in payment of Jacob's other beloved son, Joseph, and the other for Benjamin?

Reuben's language reminds readers of his earlier intent *to bring him [Joseph] unto his father* (Gen. 37:22). In chapter 42 the same words are used to express Reuben's promise regarding Benjamin: "two of my sons you may kill if I do not bring him unto you" (Gen. 42:37). We know that Reuben tried and failed before. If Reuben fails again, his suggested resolution will wreak further death in Jacob's family. Many years ago Jacob had jumped to secure the birthright of Esau--the foolish, impulsive first-born. Now as a father he must be haunted to see Esau's traits reappear in his first-born, Reuben--so desperate to win favor that he will risk cutting off his own descendants. Jacob's impulse is to refuse, to cut his losses and take no further risk of lives in the family. Simeon's fate remains in abeyance until the grain sacks are emptied as the famine continues.

When the famine had first hit, Jacob had been quick to seize the initiative in preserving life among the family (Gen. 42:1-2). The key words here are "so that we might live and not die." The brothers, on the other hand, are depicted as "staring at each other," helpless and paralyzed, incapable of taking productive measures. Later in chapter 43 we see a father who is unwilling to risk Benjamin's life, begging his sons to "return, bring for us a little food." With the wisdom of the senile, he does not mention Benjamin, hoping that his sons have forgotten the awful terms. Perhaps they can secure a few scraps without risking Benjamin's life. At this point Judah intervenes to make

things clear to his father. Joseph had told the brothers that if they did not bring Benjamin with them they would die (Gen. 42:20). He knew that the famine would continue and that the brothers would be forced to return to Egypt to survive. Judah had understood Joseph's meaning precisely, and he twice repeats that if they do not bring Benjamin they will not have access to the Egyptian who is the sole dispenser of the grain.

Judah has become the spokesman and leader. The main turning point is reached, however, when Judah offers to assume personal responsibility for Benjamin's life in Genesis 43:8-10. Just as chapter 37 forced us to contrast the two brothers' attempts to deliver Joseph from death, the analogy between the offers of Reuben and Judah to be responsible for Benjamin forces us to contrast their words in order to see why Reuben's offer hardened Jacob's resolve not to send Benjamin, whereas Judah's words won him over.

Unlike Reuben, Judah is successful because he sets Jacob's decision in a larger context. He sees clearly that the continuation of the whole family is at stake, and he is able to get this insight through to his father by picking up and building on the same phrase Jacob had used in Genesis 42:2 to respond to the famine: "*so that we might live and not die--also we, also you, also our offspring.*" Whereas Reuben offered to destroy part of the next generation if he could not return Benjamin to his father, Judah emphasizes the necessity that the next generation must continue. He shows Jacob that Jacob's efforts to save the life of the younger, favored son are threatening the continuation of the entire line.

How was Judah led to this conclusion?

It has already been demonstrated the literary unity and parallels which exists between Genesis 38 (the Judah-Tamar episode) with that of 37 and 39. The integration between chapter 38 and chapters 37--39 is primarily on the plane of images and themes: Judah goes down from his brothers and Joseph is brought down to Egypt; Jacob mourns for "dead" Joseph, and Judah mourns for his dead Canaanite wife; a garment is dipped in kid's blood and the ten brothers send the bloodied garment to their father; to unmask deception, a pledge is taken by Tamar for a kid; Tamar's successful seduction is deemed righteous, but Potiphar's wife's attempted seduction is a sin against God.

Earlier, these themes were demonstrated, especially deception and recognition, go back to Jacob's early struggle with Esau for the blessing and at the same time look forward to Joseph's recognizing his brothers while they were unable to recognize him. Just as Jacob had put kidskins on his arms and neck to

deceive Isaac and as Tamar had changed her garb from widow to harlot to deceive Judah, so Joseph's royal garb, given much attention in the Narrative, effectively prevents the brothers from recognizing him.

Another key thematic relationship between Genesis 38 and the Joseph narrative has not been pointed out by other scholars. It is introduced in Judah's interior speech in Genesis 38:11. After losing Er and Onan, Judah sends Tamar back to her father's house until his younger son shall grow up. Readers learn instantly what only gradually becomes apparent to Tamar: Judah's action is a ruse to protect the life of his youngest son, "for he though 'lest he die also like his brothers'." Marriage to Tamar seemed to invite death. Chapter 38 proceeds to describe the desperate risk that Tamar takes so that she may bear a child so that the family of Judah will continue. She deceives the deceiver. Tamar becomes pregnant by Judah; and when the patriarch recognizes the pledge tokens and realizes the meaning of her action, he says, "She is more righteous than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah" (Gen. 38:26). Thus we see Judah's growth in Genesis 38 as he moves from an understandable desire to protect his youngest son, given in interior speech, to a public proclamation of his wrong. The episode ends with a description of Judah's line continuing--not through Shelah, who remains outside this story, but through the twin offspring of Tamar!

Furthermore, Onan's selfish refusal to continue the family of his dead brother through Tamar establishes a thematic parallel with the action of the brothers in Genesis 37, who become callous wasters of life through their hatred of Joseph. The real point of Genesis 38, however, is that Judah is at first also a waster. Ironically he becomes a waster by trying to safeguard the life of Shelah, his youngest son.

By now it should be clear why it is Judah who can step forward to convince Jacob to send Benjamin. We have noted that Jacob has changed from the bold initiator of Genesis 42 who saves his family from famine to the pathetic pleader in chapter 43, shriveled into paralysis because he has put Benjamin's safety above all other considerations. In Genesis 38 Judah learned the crucial importance of the continuation of the family. He is able to bring Jacob back to his senses by demonstrating that his protective favoritism for Benjamin will destroy the future generation of the family of Israel. Judah demonstrates to Jacob that Israel must live into the future. Whereas he left personal items in pledge (עֶרְבָן / *'rbn*; Gen. 38:18) to Tamar until the kid be brought, he now pledges himself (אֶעְרָבְנִי / *'e'erbēnū*; Gen. 43:9) to Jacob until Benjamin be returned safely. If not, says Judah, he (not his sons, the next generation) will

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bear the guilt all his days. That is, Judah is now willing to risk giving up the first-born/favored status he had schemed to win in chapter 37.

After, the divining-cup incident Judah again emerges as the brothers' spokesman before the Egyptian lord. Whereas Reuben turned against his brothers and proclaimed his innocence in a similar setting (Gen. 42:22), Judah admits to Joseph that God has "found out the guilt of your servants" just as surely as the cup had been "found" in Benjamin's sack.

Judah's speech before the Egyptian lord also takes a different direction from his speech to Jacob. Whereas he stressed the preservation and continuation of the family in confronting his father, Judah now focuses on the preservation of the father in addressing the Egyptian lord. As he summarizes the past (once more tying past crime to present predicament), Judah highlights his father's fragility, his total attachment to the one remaining son of Rachel, and the threat that if harm befall Benjamin the brothers will *bring down . . . my father, mourning, to Sheol*. Whereas he had told Jacob that not risking the life of the son will be the death of Israel as a continuing family, Judah now tells the supposed Egyptian that the life of the father is bound to the life of the youngest son, and that the loss of Benjamin will be the death of Israel, the family's progenitor. True, Judah is himself the pledge for Benjamin's safety, but his speech shows that his father's life is more important to him. Thus he offers to remain in Egypt as slave so that Benjamin may go up with his brothers and so that Israel may live.

Joseph's dreams were partially interpreted by his brothers and father in Genesis 37, but not until Judah's speech are we given sufficient narrative perspective to reach a more complete interpretation. Judah's speech shows what the brothers have learned, that the loss of a brother would be the death of Jacob-Israel. Perhaps Joseph did not realize what additional grief to his father his test of the brothers would cause. Paradoxically, there is something more important that *Joseph* must learn from *Judah*: the risking/offering up/suffering/descent of a brother can mean life for the family of Israel.

Judah twice alludes to the Sheol descent motif in his speech pattern of the opening chapters of the Joseph Narrative is a threefold descent: into the pit, into Egypt, and into prison. Both in the narrative structure and in the mind of Joseph, the hero who had dreamed of dominion was descending. The brothers see Joseph coming and ambiguously refer to him as "ba'al of the dreams." The allusion to Baal--the Canaanite vegetation god who annually descends into the pit and then arises--underscores the mythic descent pattern of the



hero. This pattern is further underlined by Jacob's outburst upon learning of Joseph's death: "Surely I will go down ( $\text{yrd}$ ) to Sheol in mourning for my son" (Gen. 37:35). Meanwhile, we learn, Joseph was "brought down" ( $\text{yrd}$ ) to Egypt (Gen. 39:1). In Genesis 40:15 Joseph comments to the cup-bearer and baker on his innocent suffering, designating the prison in which he remains as "the pit"--a term synonymous with Sheol in biblical tradition and used only one other time in the Hebrew Bible for a prison (Jer. 37:16)!

When Judah offers to remain enslaved in Egypt so that Israel will not enter Sheol and "the lad might go up with his brothers," Joseph is finally able to perceive the full meaning of his life. In chapter 45 he correlates his dreams of ascendancy with his past suffering: "And now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here [descent] . . . but God . . . has made me a father to Pharaoh [ascendancy] and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt" (Gen. 45:5, 8). And the purpose of it all? Now Joseph sees, is "God sent me before you to preserve life . . . to keep you alive by a great deliverance" (Gen. 45:5, 7).

Judah did not realize that, in offering to remain enslaved so that Benjamin could return, he was helping this strange Egyptian understand the meaning of his own life. In fact, however, Joseph was learning the same lesson that Judah had taught Jacob. The narrator underscores this by developing the symmetry between what Joseph claims that God has done with him and what Judah had earlier insisted that Jacob must do with Benjamin: "Send the lad with me . . . that we may live and not die . . . also our offspring" (Gen. 43:8) That is, the favored one must descend/be offered up/be risked so that "Israel" (referring both to the father and to the clan) might not perish.

Joseph's speech before his brothers in Genesis 45 suggests analogies with Abraham, Judah, Jacob in their respective narratives. What Abraham had done willingly with Isaac, what Judah could not do with Shelah, and what Jacob had done grudgingly with Benjamin, God did with Joseph. As the brothers learn that the divine favoritism they had once hated involved the risking/descent of the chosen one so that Israel might live, they can now perceive Joseph's dreams of ascendancy in a new light. But reconciliation among the brothers, a major theme in the Genesis narrative, can begin only as the brothers realize that they have passed the test. They have affirmed their solidarity with Benjamin by returning with him to Joseph's city. And one of their number has gone even further, offering up not his son but himself so that Israel would not enter Sheol and "the lad might go up with his brothers."

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In chapter 42 Jacob the "heel-grabber" had become Jacob the son-grabber, unwilling to risk Benjamin's descent so that the family might live on. When he hears that Joseph is alive, Jacob determines to go down to see him before dying. The father who once moaned that he would go down, mourning, to Sheol to seek out his dead son Joseph now prepares to go down to Egypt to meet a living ruler. But as he reaches the border, he hesitates, offering "sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac" (Gen. 46:1). Sheol and Egypt have become analogous in the Narrative. Jacob is about to leave the Land of Promise, about to enter Egypt. Jacob and the reader must recall earlier episodes involving the ancestors and Egypt in the context of famine: Sarai and Abram go down in Genesis 12:10-20. More recently, Isaac was commanded by God not to go down to Egypt when famine again struck the land (Gen. 26:2ff.). Small wonder that Jacob holds back. Is he risking the promise through this descent into Egypt? Will "the God of his father Isaac" sanction this going down?

The descent-ascent motif continues as God addresses Jacob in a night vision. Here the patriarch must appreciate the lesson his sons have learned, that he should not fear to descend, for "I will go down with you" (Gen. 46:4). As God's presence prospered Joseph in Potiphar's household and in prison (Gen. 39:3-5, 21-23), so God's presence will prosper Jacob in his descent, making Israel a thriving nation down in Egypt. "And I will also bring you up again." As God caused Joseph's ascendancy in Egypt, delivering the family and land from famine, so Jacob will be brought up again to Canaan. Israel is now content to accept a mysterious providence that has brought and will continue to bring blessing and tempered reconciliation out of favoritism and conflict.

Ironically, Judah, the son who had schemed mightily to assume the role of the first-born and had then been willing to give it all up in Egypt, will indeed have his brothers bow down before him in days to come (Gen. 49:8-12). The son who had let his staff depart from him, given to Tamar because he had been unwilling to send Shelah to her, will indeed not lose his staff/scepter of rule again "until Shiloh (Shelah?) comes" (Gen. 49:10). Judah had met Tamar on the road to Timnah, which is located in the valley of Sorek ("vineyard"). This may be the reason for Jacob's strong imagery of vineyard imagery in his oracle to Judah. Judah's folly had resulted in the near breaking of the family vine, as Joseph was sold into Egypt. Tamar turned the tables, however; and the profound ironic and paradoxical end result of the rule of Judah's line will be a paradisiacal abundance with grapes and milk in such great supply that clothes can be washed, wine can be drunk, and asses can be tethered without concern for the waste of broken vines. God's ways are truly unsearchable.

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## APPLICATION

Chapter 42 provides a complication for the family of Jacob over Benjamin's fate. Using this theme, the chapter forms an inclusio with the words of Jacob in Canaan: in verse 4, Jacob refused to let Benjamin go, lest some harm fall upon him; and in verse 38, he continued to refuse, lest some harm fall upon him. In between the events in Canaan is the meeting in Egypt, in which Joseph demanded that the brothers prove themselves by bringing Benjamin down to Egypt.

The complication, then, put the brothers in a dilemma. By focusing on the problem they began to see that God was at work, bringing them to face their past crimes. Only when they began to have their consciences awakened could they perceive their guilt, and only then would they be willing to prove themselves honest and protect their brothers at the same time. ***IF BELIEVERS HAVE UNRESOLVED GUILT IN THEIR LIVES, GOD WILL STIR UP THEIR CONSCIENCES TO SEE IF THEY ARE SPIRITUALLY SENSITIVE ENOUGH TO SHARE IN HIS PROGRAM.*** He may do this through deliberate testings by His wise administrators. If such people are fit for service, they will have to prove that they are sensitive to their guilty consciences, that they have changed to become honest people, and that, if put in similar circumstances, they can be trusted to act righteously.

There are two important lessons to remember. First, God activates our seared consciences when we are victims of unfair treatment similar to what we once gave someone else. God used the distress of being falsely accused and imprisoned to rouse the brothers' consciences, bringing to mind the distress they had caused Joseph.

It is significant how differently the narrator describes what the brothers did to Joseph in Genesis 37:24 and 42:21. In the former, nothing is said about Joseph's reaction as it had no function there. In the latter, when faced themselves with the fear of death, they remember; they looked on unmoved at their brother's anguish; he pleaded with them but they did not listen. The interplay of crime and punishment is built into the very existence of man. The Joseph Narrative is saying something more. Sin and punishment do not always immediately follow each other as in Genesis 3 and 4. Punishment does not always come on the heels of the crime; guilt can accompany a person without there being punishment. One's own experience of suffering or danger of death can be recognized as punishment, bring about a change of heart, and

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offer the opportunity for forgiveness. But the forgiveness does not take the place of the discipline; rather, it includes within it the experience of discipline.

Second, God activates our seared consciences when we are recipients of undeserved expressions of grace. His brothers deserved imprisonment or even worse for what they had done to Joseph. But what they received instead was their money back for the grain they were carrying home to Canaan. It was an act of grace from Joseph that God used to further convict his brothers and draw their attention toward Him.

Every day Joseph's ten older brothers had to choose whether to continue living a lie or to break free of their self-imposed darkness and walk in the light of truth. And every day of those twenty-plus years they had chosen to lie.

Chapter 42 reports how Joseph has wisely forced his brothers to acknowledge God's "measure-for-measure" retribution: He places his brothers in analogous situations which prompts them to reflect on what they had done to their own brother, Joseph. In verse 21 they already speak of retribution; in v. 22 Reuben implies God is the Judge. Finally, the Nine articulate it. Yet in reality all this is Joseph's own doing. He has once again wisely discerned the proper course of action to achieve the maximum benefit—for all those concern.

If you find yourself caught in the mire of sin, confess it to God. He awaits. Believe in the promise of Scripture that states:

*If we confess our sins,  
He is faithful and righteous  
to forgive our sins  
and  
to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9*

Like his son Joseph, Jacob was a man well acquainted with pain and grief. But what a difference in the way the two men faced the hardships life brought them! Where Joseph responded to unfair treatment with integrity and trust in God, Jacob had only his own checkered character and a timid, fearful faith in God to fall back on.

But before we go pointing our finger at Jacob, most of us would probably have to admit that we, too, respond to life's difficulties more like Jacob than like Joseph. So let us examine our own responses and identify any trouble spots. The psalmist said it this way:

*Search me, O God,  
and know my heart;  
Try me  
and know my anxious thoughts;  
And see if there by any hurtful way in me,  
And lead me in the everlasting way. Psalm 139:23-24*

As you are reading Scripture, take time to search your heart and conscience for any places that might be seared. If you find any such areas, bring them before God, for as the psalmist said, "A broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise" (Psa. 51:17b).

Perhaps you may be feeling today that you seem to be alone in your determination to live for God in this wicked, spiritually hostile world. You may believe that everything and everyone is against you. But this is not the case. You are not alone. God is with you--He alone is greater than any opponent you may face (Heb. 13:5).

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why was it necessary for Joseph to delay telling his brothers who he was?
2. Why is it important that our narrator reports that when Joseph sees his brothers that he remembers his dreams?
3. Why does Joseph feel it necessary to test his brothers? Explain the reasoning behind Joseph's tests.
4. Correlate and list all the "mirror" fulfillment of Joseph's dreams in chapters 37 and 42.
5. Is there any correlation between Joseph's charge against his brothers that they have come to spy out "the nakedness of the land" with that of Joseph's past relationship with his father and brothers?
6. What is the literary significance of telling us only now that Joseph spoke to his brothers through an interpreter?
7. Explain the irony behind Joseph's brothers finding their silver in their sacks when they returned to Canaan. What major themes are tied together in the Narrative by their discovery?



## Genesis 43:1-34

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### The Testing For Jealousy

#### SUSPICION HAUNTS THE GUILTY MIND

The famine continued, and the family needed more grain. But Benjamin would have to go with the brothers to Egypt if they were to be received by the ruler of Egypt. Before long Jacob is forced to abandon his resolution concerning Benjamin by the brute force of circumstances: the persistence and worsening of the famine. Jacob was reluctant but had to entrust Benjamin to his brothers if they were to get grain and live. This step, of course, was the precise plan of Joseph, even though it involved some risk to Rachel's second son.

The reader at this time should pause and reflect why Joseph focuses on bringing only Benjamin to Egypt, without Jacob. Although he does ask about Jacob's welfare, he makes no effort to include him in his demand. When we look more closely at Joseph's dreams, however, we see that obeisance appears in both dreams (Gen. 37:7, 9); but the first dream points only to the brothers, while the second includes the entire family. Thus Joseph's dream sequence establishes the pattern for his course of action after his brothers come to Egypt.

This chapter forms a link between chapters in that it builds on the first journey to Egypt by the brothers (chapter 42) and prepares for the resolution of the matter (chapter 44). The tension in this episode appears to ease when the brothers were greeted with peace in Egypt and when their honest explanation about the money was set aside with the attribution of the gift to God's intervention. And yet, within their peaceful and joyous visit to Joseph's house, they were uneasy over the seating and the gifts. There seemed to be a nemesis at work. Indeed, Joseph was deliberately favoring Benjamin over his brothers, providing them with reason for jealousy and preparing them for the opportunity to rid themselves of Benjamin as they had Joseph.

In keeping with the general motif of "pairs" of events throughout the Joseph Narrative, this episode now begins the "second" journey of the sons into Egypt. The famine was still in the land, and the grain purchased earlier was gone; so the father sent his sons back for more (vv. 1-2). This time it was

Judah who insisted on taking Benjamin back with them in accordance with Joseph's demands (vv. 3-5). In the previous chapter it had been Reuben (Gen. 42:37).

In persuading his father, Judah gave expression once more to the central theological themes of "life" and "death" that have been carefully interwoven throughout the Joseph Narrative (v. 8). In a way similar to Reuben (Gen. 42:37), Judah offered to take full responsibility for Benjamin if he was allowed to accompany the brothers to Egypt: "I myself will be surety for him" (v. 9). The fact that both Reuben and Judah had suggested ways in which Benjamin could be safely taken to Egypt provides another reminder that the events depicted here have already been foreshadowed in the events of chapter 37, the brothers' maltreatment of Joseph. In that episode both Reuben and Judah attempted to save Joseph's life in the face of the brothers' evil plan (Gen. 37:21, 26). Both Reuben and Judah attempt to save Benjamin from the plan that Joseph had initiated against the brothers. Such reversals are commonplace by now throughout the Joseph Narrative and serve to show that the whole series of events recorded here were part of a larger plan, a divine plan (cf. Gen. 50:20).

As a further reminder to the reader of the "repetition" throughout the Narrative, Judah is allowed to express his impatience with Jacob by making explicit reference to the fact that this was the "second" time a journey to Egypt had been made: "For if we had not delayed, surely by now we could have returned twice," thus continuing theme of "twice" (v. 10; cf. Gen. 41:32).

Jacob, or Israel as he is known throughout this chapter, gave in to Judah's plan. Just as it was Judah's plan in chapter 37 that ultimately saved the life of Joseph (Gen. 37:26), so now it was Judah's plan that saved the life of Simeon. Jacob's farewell words provide the narrative key to what follows: "May God Almighty grant you compassion in the sight of the man" (v. 14a). As so often in the patriarchal narratives, the events that follow seem to be guided by just these words. At the conclusion of the episode, when the sons reached Joseph and he saw Benjamin, we are told that "his compassion grew warm" (v. 30; untr. in NIV) toward his brother. It is important that in these words of Jacob the compassion that Joseph was to find toward his brothers was given by "God Almighty." Again these subtle and indirect ways the writer informs the reader of the power of God in directing the lives of His people and in carrying His plans to fruition.

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In verses 15-25, it is curious that the whole problem of the brothers' being "spies" (Gen. 42:9) is not raised again. The reader, of course, knows the brothers were not spies; so the writer simply allows the whole issue to drop without further comment. We are left instead with the apprehensions of the brothers themselves as they were ushered into the royal house of Joseph. Their fears and misgivings reveal to the reader their conviction that nothing good was going to come of this. The reader, however, is told at the start that the brothers were being taken into the house for a great feast (v. 16). We know that the brothers' fears in v. 18 were misguided. They need not have feared becoming Joseph's slaves. But it is precisely that misguided fear that to which the writer wishes to draw our attention.

To show the underlying cause of the brothers' misgivings and to show just how misguided they actually were, the writer allows them to repeat to the steward the account of their finding the money in their grain sacks (vv. 19-21). The purpose of this is to get the steward's response. The picture that emerges is that of the brothers vainly trying to explain themselves to anyone who will listen and vainly trying to return the money they had found in their sacks. But no one seems to take their explanation seriously, nor will anyone take their money. Joseph's steward brushed off their explanation with the remark, "Be at ease, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks" (v. 23a). There has been no mention of money given to the steward. From the narrative itself we are apparently to understand that the steward has been in on Joseph's secret plan all along. But, as is often the case in these narratives, unwittingly the steward expresses one of the central themes of the book: "Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure" (v. 23).

In verses 26-34 the narrator goes to great lengths in depicting the scene of the banquet. Joseph was conspicuously careful to ask about the well being of the brothers' father and the lad, Benjamin, whom they had brought back with them (vv. 26-29). The reader almost has to remind himself that the brothers still did not know it was Joseph who was entertaining them. It is only when we see Joseph hurry to another room to hide his tears (v. 30) that we are sure his identity was still unknown.

The question that naturally arises out of this passage is what the brothers themselves thought about Joseph's questions and their treatment in his house. They had come expecting to be made into servants, but it was they who were being served (vv. 31-32). Did they not suspect something? Did they not have questions about Joseph's curiosity about their father and his special treat-



ment of Benjamin? The writer answers all such questions by simply stating that the brothers were "dismayed" (וַיִּתְּמְחוּ/*wayyitmeħū*, v. 33; NIV, "in astonishment"). They asked no questions and seemed to accept the words of Joseph's steward ("the God of your father has given you treasure," v. 23) and Joseph's words to Benjamin ("May God be gracious to you, my son" v. 29) as the most plausible solution. For the writer, of course, Joseph's steward had unwittingly given the correct explanation, and Joseph's words have provided a cryptic confirmation.

### Source Criticism Considerations

Those who divide the sources generally give nearly all of chapter 43 to "J." The only exceptions are verse 14 and the closing words of verse 23, "Then he brought Simeon out to them." This line is ascribed to "E." Insofar as they consider part of this chapter as being derived from "E," these critics allege that there are certain conflicts between this chapter and the account in chapter 42. It is claimed that, as in the case of Genesis 42:27-28, the discovery of the money in the grain sacks took place when they camped for their first night on their return journey. But in Genesis 42:35 the discovery was not made until they arrived at home in Canaan. This alleged conflict has already been discussed in chapter 42. The conversation between Joseph and his brothers allegedly also is different here from what is recorded in chapter 42. In Genesis 42:13, it is pointed out, Joseph's brothers offered the information that they had a younger brother at home, while here in verse 7 Joseph specifically asked whether they had another brother at home. At the appropriate place in the expositional notes, it will be shown that there is no basis for the claim that this is evidence for two different sources for this material.

Chapter 43 only has meaning as a link between the first journey in chapter 42 and the resolution in chapters 44--45. If it is deprived of its place here by source division, it loses the meaning which the narrator has given it by his setting. What happens here takes place against the gloomy background of a mounting famine (v. 1): there is the father's request, Judah's definitive demand, reference to the death that threatens the little ones, the brothers' fear of the potentate before whom want forces them to appear. The entire chapter is really concerned with departure and arrival. This ordinary, everyday event becomes a tense drama because of the famine on the one hand, and the threat and unpredictability of "the man" on the other. However, the drama takes place in the simple events that are part of departure and arrival.

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Two stylistic observations are further argument that Genesis 42:1-2 is a continuation of chapter 42. The pronoun of אֲלֵהֶם/*lyhm* ("to them") in verse 2 refers to the brothers who are mentioned in Genesis 42:38. If chapter 43 were an independent literary unit, then the noun ("brothers") would have to stand in place of the pronoun. The second observation is that the speaker in verse 2 is "their" father; and the same holds here; the proper name "Israel" or "Jacob" would have been appropriately substituted; and according to literary criticism it should be "Israel." But when the name "Israel" is missing from the introduction proper to a textual unit characterized by that very name, then this criterion for source division loses a great deal of weight. If chapter 43 comes from a writer for whom the father is called "Israel," then this name should stand here at the beginning in verse 2.

Another difficulty the critics have pointed out is that in chapter 42 it was Reuben who assumed responsibility for the safe return of Benjamin, while here it is Judah who accepts that role. But there is no conflict here, because it is obvious that we are dealing with two different occasions separated by some time. There is no reason why the one son could not offer to take this responsibility on one occasion while another son could do so at a later occasion.

The reason that is given for ascribing verses 14 and 23b to "E" is that mention is made of Simeon's imprisonment in Egypt, while the rest of chapter 43 makes no mention of this. This leads to a fourth point of alleged difference between the two passages. It is argued that the imprisonment of Simeon was intended to bring Joseph's brothers back to Egypt, but according to Genesis 43:3-5 Joseph told them that under no circumstance would they see his face again unless they brought their younger brother with them. Again, this offers no true conflict. Joseph could very well have surmised that his brothers would return without Benjamin and this he wanted to prevent with a strong condition. It has also been pointed out that according to chapter 43 Joseph's brothers made no mention of Simeon's imprisonment as motive for their return. But the fact that Simeon's imprisonment was well known to Jacob and his other sons made any further reference to this completely unnecessary. The primary issue was whether Benjamin was to go along or not. It has also been observed that Jacob's hesitancy to let Benjamin go had its background in what we are told in Genesis 43:36-38, and the imprisonment of Simeon had a definite bearing on that.

## THEOLOGICAL IDEAS

Joseph continued to demonstrate wisdom in leadership. Other kings and judges would learn from Joseph's example that they were responsible for preserving righteousness in the nation. Envy and hatred among God's people would be disastrous to the unity of the nation and so could not be left unchecked.

In this chapter Joseph continued his efforts to evaluate his brothers by testing them for jealousy. Accordingly, the episode centers on Benjamin and how the brothers would respond to his being favored. Benjamin's favored status appears early in the chapter with Jacob's hesitancy to let him go, and it is prominent at the end of the treatment by Joseph.

The motif of favoritism is balanced by the emphasis on God's mercy (v. 14), God's provision (v. 23), and God's grace (v. 29). The first came in Jacob's prayer as the brothers were leaving; the second, in the steward's response to their explanation about the money; and the third, in Joseph's blessing of Benjamin. In view of this emphasis, and because of the apparent changes in the brothers, the favoritism of Benjamin did not seem to pose a problem for the brothers.

## STRUCTURE, SYNTHESIS AND TRANSLATION

### Structure

Repetition in the Joseph Narrative is an important literary tool. Repetition involves the strategic reuse of key words or themes that bind together all or part of a unit and underscore basic themes, through the repeating of a key phrase or sentence by both the narrator and a character in the story, to the verbatim or near verbatim repeating of larger units, and on to the appearance more than once in extended units of basically the same scene or theme.

The largest example of repetition in the Joseph Narrative reaches across a wide expanse of the Narrative, chapters 42--44: the paired journeys to Egypt undertaken by the brothers. The second journey of the brothers to Egypt covers chapters 43--45. It is only at the end of chapter 45 that their return to their father is reported. A comparison with the structure of the account of the journey of chapter 42 shows agreement in the three parts:

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Departure of the brothers:	42:1-5/43:1-15
Sojourn in Egypt:	42:6-25/43:16-34; 44:4--45:24
Return to the father	42:26-38/44:1-3; 45:25-28

The difference between the accounts is the interruption of the return to Canaan in Genesis 44:4--45:24. This brings the brothers back to Egypt and is the turning point. Without this interpolation the structures are parallel. Figure 20 sets out points of connection which also serve as counterpoints that transpose each journey into a commentary on the other.

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### STRUCTURE OF THE JOURNEYS TO EGYPT BY JOSEPH'S BROTHERS

<i>Points</i>	<i>Gen. 42</i>	<i>Gen. 43-44</i>
<i>Initiation:</i>		
Sent by Jacob	42:1-2	43:1-2, 11-12
Benjamin excepted/sent	42:4	43:3-10, 13-14
Journey by ten brothers	42:3, 5	43:15
<i>First Audience with Joseph</i>	42:6-16	43:15c-16a
<i>Interlude: Prison/welcome</i>	42:17	43:16b-25
<i>Second Audience with Joseph</i>	42:18-22	43:26-34
Joseph's private reaction	42:23-24	43:30-31
<i>Interlude: Homecoming</i>	42:25-28	44:1-13 (aborted)
<i>Third Audience with Joseph</i>	42:29-34 (anticipated)	44:14-34

Figure 20.

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The same fundamental structure clearly shapes the account of each journey, even as the specific elements of this structure serve often as contrasts to counterparts in the other account. The difference between the two accounts is that this

second return to Canaan is interrupted by the arrest and return to Egypt for the resolution of the matter (chapter 44). The entire narrative of the second journey frequently refers to the first journey, showing how this one parallels it.

Accounts that are structurally mirror images of each other tell of journeys that are in impact and in import very different in many ways. Each is initiated by the father, the first briefly and brusquely, the second with elaborate preparations that overcome the father's reluctance only with difficulty. In each Benjamin is noted as he is first excepted and then included. In the first it is stated that ten brothers went; in the second it is all too poignantly clear to the reader and the family that ten brothers set out for Egypt.

There are three audiences between the brothers and Joseph, either related or anticipated. The first, harsh and threatening in chapter 42, is summarily narrated in Genesis 43:15c-16a. The interludes offer the contrast of imprisonment with the welcome into Joseph's establishment by his steward. In chapter 42 the second audience provides small relief for the brothers, as they are sent home without Simeon. The account of the second audience in chapter 43 continues the tone of the interlude, opening as it does with its burst of *shaloms*. The second audience is punctuated in each instance by a notice of Joseph's personal and private reaction to the words of his brothers. In both accounts the second audience ends with the return of the brothers' silver, and on the second occasion the addition of a special gift for Benjamin (Gen. 44:1-2).

The interlude between the second and third audiences relates in chapter 42 a homecoming that is accomplished if troubled and in chapter 44 a homecoming that is aborted. The third audience is only anticipated in chapter 42 as the brothers tell their father of the reception they experienced and the conditions "the man" set for any future journey to Egypt. One knows that even in their anticipatory account of what befell them they hope never to make that trip again. As readers we know with Joseph that the famine will be of extended duration and trust that the supplies provided by Joseph were so measured out as not to last. They must seek the third audience in their second journey, for the homecoming is aborted; this leads to the further heightening of tensions just prior to the climax.

Even on the level of word selection is this development across these journeys carefully revealed. In each case the brothers fulfill unintentionally Joseph's dreams of chapter 37 as they prostrate themselves before him. In Genesis 42:6 and 43:26, they "do obeisance to him." After the aborted return on the second journey, Judah and the others starkly "fall before him" (cf. Gen.

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50:18). Homage gives way to fear; and with the niceties of formal respect stripped from them, the stage is set for the resolution.

The first journey, begun so ominously, promised total disaster for a time, but came to a conclusion in which provisions were obtained, their money returned, and only one brother held in "temporary" custody. The second journey began auspiciously, in spite of the brothers' fears, and then degenerated into disaster. The first journey clearly anticipates a second, and the second is experienced by reader and the family of Jacob in the light of the first.

At this macroscopic level of repetition as well as at the more microscopic level of key words and repeated occasional phrases or sentences, we find a rich tonality provided through a technique that may seem at times inelegant to modern ears and too often therefore lost in translations. But it is through this rhetorical technique in its many forms that the author highlights, nuances, and shapes the narrative so that it provides commentary on itself.

#### The Structure of Chapter 43

The structure once again is largely dialogue interspersed with narrative comments. The first dialogue is between Jacob and his sons, notably Judah, over the taking of Benjamin to Egypt. It includes the brothers' refusal to go without Benjamin (vv. 3-5), Israel's perplexity about their telling the ruler about Benjamin (v. 6), their explanation (v. 7), Judah's impassioned appeal (vv. 8-10), and Jacob's reluctant agreement, advice, and prayer (vv. 11-14).

The second part of the travel account, has the dialogues in Egypt: Joseph's instructions that they be taken to his home (v. 16), the brothers' expression of their fears (v. 18), their explanation to the steward (vv. 20-22), the steward's comforting reply (v. 23), and Joseph's interrogation and blessing (vv. 27-29).

The third and last section is entirely narrative report without speeches or dialogue, except for the instruction to set food on the table (v. 31). The importance of the passage must thus be seen through the speeches and dialogue; the contrast will be clear between the fears in the family and the comfort from Joseph's household.

Finally, it should be noted that the second part of the travel account, the sojourn of the brothers in Egypt (vv. 16-34), may be divided into two parts: the brothers before the steward at the entrance to the house (vv. 16-25), and the

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brothers before the lord inside the house (vv. 26-34). One could give chapter 43 the title "Departure and Arrival" because everything revolves about a setting in which farewell and greeting are of the utmost importance. The journey itself is reported in a single sentence!

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### CHIASTIC ARRANGEMENT OF GENESIS 43

- A The famine was severe in the land (1-2)
- B Israel's release of Benjamin (3-15)
- C Joseph sees Benjamin; a meal is prepared (16-17)
- D The brothers' fear of retaliation (18)
- E The brothers' speech to the steward near the house (19-22)
- F **THE STEWARD'S RESPONSE: "PEACE BE WITH YOU, DO NOT BE AFRAID, YOUR GOD AND THE GOD OF YOUR FATHER HAS GIVEN YOU TREASURE IN YOUR SACKS" (23)**
- E' The brothers are brought into the house and provided for (24-25)
- D' The brothers' prostration and greeting (26-28)
- C' Joseph sees Benjamin; Joseph weeps and meal served (29-31)
- B' Joseph's preferential treatment of Benjamin (32-34b)
- A' The brothers feasted and drank freely (34c)

Figure 21.

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### Synthesis

After an impassioned dialogue with Jacob about taking Benjamin, the brothers brought Benjamin to Egypt; when they attempted to repay the money from their sacks, they received gracious and peaceful treatment from Joseph, which included lavish favoritism of Benjamin over the elder brothers.

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**Translation**

- 1 But the famine in the land was severe.
- 2 And when they had eaten up the rations which they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go again and procure some food for us."
- 3 But Judah said to him, "The man warned us, 'Do not let me see your faces unless your brother is with you.'
- 4 If you will let our brother go with us, we will go down and procure food for you;
- 5 but if you will not let him go, we will not go down, for the man said to us, 'Do not let me see your faces unless your brother is with you.'"
- 6 And Israel said, "Why did you serve me so ill as to tell the man that you had another brother?"
- 7 They replied, "But the man kept asking about us and our family, saying, 'Is your father still living? Have you another brother?' And we answered him accordingly. How were we to know that he would say, 'Bring your brother here'?"
- 8 Then Judah said to his father Israel, "Send the boy in my care, and let us be on our way, that we may live and not die--you and we and our children.
- 9 I myself will be surety for him; you may hold me responsible: if I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, I shall stand guilty before you forever.
- 10 For we could have been there and back twice if we had not dawdled."
- 11 Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, do this: take some of the choice products of the land in your baggage, and carry them down as a gift for the man--some balm and some honey, gum, ladanum, pistachio nuts, and almonds.
- 12 And take with you double the money, carrying back with you the money that was replaced in the mouths of your bags; perhaps it was a mistake.
- 13 Take your brother too; and go back at once to the man.
- 14 And may El Shaddai dispose the man to mercy toward you, that he may release to you your other brother, as well as Benjamin. As for me, if I am to be bereaved, I shall be bereaved."
- 15 So the men took that gift, and they took with them double the money, as well as Benjamin. They made their way down to Egypt, where they presented themselves to Joseph.
- 16 When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to his house steward, "Take the men into the house; slaughter and prepare an animal, for the men will dine with me at noon."
- 17 The man did as Joseph said, and he brought the men into Joseph's house.



- 18 But the men were frightened at being brought into Joseph's house. "It must be," they thought, "because of the money replaced in our bags the first time that we have been brought inside, as a pretext to attack us and seize us as slaves, with our pack animals."
- 19 So they went up to Joseph's house steward and spoke to him at the entrance of the house.
- 20 "If you please, my lord," they said, "we came down once before to procure food.
- 21 But when we arrived at the night encampment and opened our bags, there was each one's money in the mouth of his bag, our money in full. So we have brought it back with us.
- 22 And we have brought down with us other money to procure food. We do not know who put the money in our bags."
- 23 He replied, "Peace be with you; do not be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, must have put treasure in your bags for you. I got your payment." And he brought out Simeon to them.
- 24 Then the man brought the men into Joseph's house; he gave them water to bathe their feet, and he provided feed for their asses.
- 25 They laid out their gifts to await Joseph's arrival at noon, for they had heard that they were to dine there.
- 26 When Joseph came home, they presented to him the gifts that they had brought with them into the house, bowing low before him to the ground.
- 27 He greeted them, and he said, "How is your aged father of whom you spoke? Is he still in good health?"
- 28 They replied, "It is well with your servant our father; he is still in good health." And they bowed and made obeisance.
- 29 Looking about, he saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and asked, "Is this your youngest brother of whom you spoke to me?" And he went on, "May God be gracious to you, my boy."
- 30 With that, Joseph hurried out, for he was overcome with feeling toward his brother and was on the verge of tears; he went into a room and wept there.
- 31 Then he washed his face, reappeared, and--now in control of himself--gave the order, "Serve the meal."
- 32 They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves; for the Egyptians could not dine with the Hebrews, since that would be abhorrent to the Egyptians.
- 33 As they were seated by his direction, for the oldest in the order of his seniority to the youngest in the order of his youth, the men looked at one another in astonishment.
- 34 Portions were served them from his table; but Benjamin's portion was several times that of anyone else. And they drank their fill with him.

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### EXEGETICAL OUTLINE

- I. In an impassioned conversation with Jacob, the brothers, with Judah as their spokesman, gained permission to take Benjamin to Egypt in order to buy more grain (1-15).
  - A. The famine continued in the land, necessitating another trip to Egypt (1-2).
  - B. Judah and his brothers repeated the conditions of their return (3-10).
    - 1. Judah repeated the ruler's demands for their return to Egypt (3-5).
    - 2. Israel expressed his perplexity over their telling the man about Benjamin (6).
    - 3. The brothers explained that they had no idea that the ruler would make this demand (7).
    - 4. Judah appealed to his father to entrust Benjamin to his care (8-10).
  - C. Israel reluctantly agreed to send Benjamin with them, instructing them to take a gift to the man and entrusting them to the protection of God Almighty (11-14).
    - 1. Israel instructed them to take the man a rich gift and money (11-12).
    - 2. Israel agreed to send Benjamin, entrusting them to God Almighty (13-14).
  - D. The brothers returned to Joseph with their gift and with Benjamin (15).
- II. In a tense and emotional meeting the brothers offered their explanation of the money, only to find a peaceful and gracious response by the steward and Joseph (16-30).
  - A. Before meeting Joseph again, the brothers fearfully but honestly explained the presence of the money in their sacks, only to be treated peacefully and graciously by the steward (16-25).
    - 1. Joseph instructed his steward to prepare a feast and take the men to his home; when the men were in Joseph's home, they became afraid (16-18).
    - 2. When the brothers explained that they had been given back their money from the first visit, the steward comforted them by declaring that their God had given them the money (19-23).
    - 3. When the brothers were brought into Joseph's house, they prepared their gift (24-25).

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- B. When Joseph met the brothers at his house, he inquired of their welfare, but when he blessed Benjamin, he was moved with compassion (26-30).
    - 1. The brothers paid homage to Joseph and informed him of their father's welfare (26-28).
    - 2. Joseph blessed Benjamin but, moved by his intense compassion, hurried away to weep (29-30).
  - III. In a prepared banquet for his brothers, Joseph seated the men in the order of their births and favored Benjamin over the others with extra servings (31-34).
    - A. Joseph prepared the banquet (31-32).
    - B. The brothers were amazed that they were seated in order (33).
    - C. Joseph favored Benjamin over them all (34).

### EXPOSITION OF THE PASSAGE

#### I. *Those who would participate in God's program must demonstrate responsibility (1-15).*

In the last chapter we saw that Jacob absolutely refused to let Benjamin to descend with his brother to Egypt. In all of this Jacob never once stops to think or ask what God might be doing. The oldest son, Reuben, senses that his father's mind is quickly closing and becoming resistant to letting Benjamin go, so he makes a last-ditch offer (Gen. 42:37-38). But Reuben is too late. Jacob bluntly rejects Reuben's plea and offer. Further discussion is now futile. Jacob is emphatic and the door is shut--for a while. The brothers know that the fear of starvation will ultimately overcome their father's resistance. Indeed, Jacob has already recognized the need for another journey to Egypt.

This succeeding stage in the trial of Joseph's brothers is introduced by Genesis 43:1 in the remark on the severity of the famine, as the instrument of physical need by which the brothers were moved along in their reclamation, an instrument over which they had no control, an instrument of the sovereign God.

#### The Famine Was Severe In The Land (verses 1-2)

Verses 1-2 correspond to the beginning of chapter 42. Verse 1 is word for word the same as Genesis 41:57b. It is the same exposition, "the

famine was severe in the land" (cf. Gen. 12:10). Genesis 43:2a differs from Genesis 42:1b, 2, in that it describes a situation a situation that has changed. The reason for the new commission refers to the brothers' first journey down to Egypt to get grain. The grain that they had then brought is now exhausted. Israel's commission to his sons (cf. Gen. 42:2b) likewise refers to the earlier journey. Every sentence in Genesis 43:1-2 refers directly or indirectly to the first journey of the brothers to Egypt. Chapter 43 certainly presupposes a first purchase of grain in Egypt.

*Denial and Delay (vv. 1-5)*

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**1 Now the famine was severe in the land.**

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The dry brevity of the three words in Hebrew (eight in NASB) portray the indifference of time. The initial Hebrew conjunctive ׀ ("Now," NASB) has adversative force, and should be translated as, "But the famine was severe in the land." The conjunction is juxtaposed to Jacob's resolve not to allow Benjamin to go down to Egypt.

Finally, however, the famine became so grievous that their grain supply was nearly exhausted, and they had to do something. There must have been some food left from the past, otherwise their families could not have survived the next few weeks. That is, the provisions were rapidly coming to an end. There is just enough food left to enable their families to survive while the brothers travel to Egypt and back.

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**2 So it came about when they had finished eating the grain which they had brought from Egypt, that their father said to them, "Go back, buy us a little food."**

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Jacob again instructed his sons to return to Egypt to buy "a little food." Evidently he could hope only that they would be able to obtain a limited amount, since the Egyptians were carefully rationing all foreign sales; but any amount was better than none.

Jacob refuses to admit the necessity of Benjamin's leaving. He will not even look at it or discuss it with his other sons. Then he couples his denial

with a delay. Jacob eats the grain and attempts to go about business as usual, in hopes that the problem will go away. But the famine persists and it forces him, again, to face the sensitive topic of Egypt (compare this with the brothers' feelings about going down to Egypt, Gen. 42:1). But even when Jacob does address the need for food, he still completely ignores the real problem: they cannot return for more grain without Benjamin. Judah's reminder, however, moves his father to act.

### **Israel's Release of Benjamin (verses 3-15)**

The brothers' dutiful execution of their father's commission comes only in verse 15 after the elaborated conversation between Judah (and his brothers) and Israel. Notably, it is only in this dialog that the name "Israel" occurs in relationship to his sons outside of the sons of Rachel (vv. 6, 8, 11).

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- 3** Judah spoke to him, however, saying, "The man solemnly warned us, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.'  
**4** If you send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food.  
**5** But if you do not sent *him*, we will not go down; for the man said to us, 'You shall not see my face unless your brothers is with you.'"
- 

After the notice of the first verse regarding the famine, the passage records the discussion of Jacob and his sons over the return to Egypt. Judah, now emphatically assuming the role of spokesman, now succeeded where Reuben had failed (Gen. 42:37-38). This definitive reply to the father's request is the deliberate counterpart to Reuben's answer in Genesis 42:37, which was followed by the father's definitive refusal (Gen. 42:38). Just as in Genesis 37:21-22, 26-27, Judah's speech follow on Reuben's. Reuben's words had no success with the father (just as in Gen. 37:21-22), but Judah's made him give in; so from now on to the end Judah alone is spokesman for the brothers. Reuben is not heard from again, even though he is the first-born. The incident described in Genesis 35:22 shows that he has long been discredited. In addition Simeon was in prison in Egypt, and Levi was apparently also regarded now with some disfavor because of his association with Simeon, probably in the matter of Joseph's sale as well as in the case of the Shechemite slaughter.

Judah intervened with an inexorably clear and forceful but warmly personal initiative that the provisions can be obtained only if Benjamin comes along. None of the ten understands the father's fears so well and has so deep

compassion for him as Judah (for Judah too, by now, has lost two of his sons; cf. Gen. 38:7-10). "For the man said to us," he quotes Joseph, "'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you'" (v. 5). Judah makes the brothers' consent dependent on the father's permission to allow Benjamin to go with them. He proposes the alternatives, "If then you allow . . ." (v. 4) and "But if you do not allow . . ." (v. 5); they are enclosed within the condition that "the man" has laid down. The literary device of *inclusio* serves to strengthen the position: Judah asserts that for him and his brothers this condition is absolutely binding. This is expressed by the verb "warn" (וַיְנַחֵם/*hē'id*), strengthened further by the infinitive absolute (וַיְנַחֵם/*hā'em*) which together expresses a solemn admonition tantamount to a threat (Ex. 19:21, 23; 1 Sam. 8:9; 1 Kgs. 2:42).

Judah urged Jacob to recognize that they would be quite unable to buy even a little food, and probably would not even be allowed to leave Egypt, unless they took Benjamin with them. "The man" would not even talk to them without Benjamin; for without Benjamin they shall not "see his face." This expression is used in the context of not having an audience with the lord of the land (cf. 2 Sam. 14:28). And thus he would simply assume they had lied to him before about having another brother, and so would assume they were spies and either have them imprisoned or killed.

It is notable that "the man" is abbreviated from "the man who is lord of the land" (Gen. 42:30, 33). Joseph is henceforth called "the man," while the brothers are correspondingly termed "the men." This anonymity is an artful device of the narrator--just as events move toward the climactic moment when Joseph discloses his true identity and is reconciled with his brothers.

"Our brother" instead of "your son" is to convey that they all share the father's concern for Benjamin and that they will all watch for his safety. Though he was properly respectful of his father, Judah insisted that they could not go back to Egypt without their youngest brother because of Joseph's stern warning: "You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you."

What is surprising in this scene, though, is the sons' refusal to go to Egypt without Benjamin. The reason for the refusal was repeated to Jacob twice: "The man solemnly warned us, saying 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you'" (vv. 3 and 5). The brothers were eager to return to Egypt, but they were convinced that they had to take Benjamin to clear themselves and free Simeon. Judah refrains from mentioning Simeon lest the father be made to feel that Benjamin's life is being risked to liberate Simeon.

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*Blame and Deceit (vv. 6-10)*


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**6** Then Israel said, "Why did you treat me so badly by telling the man whether you still had *another* brother?"

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This forceful appeal prompted a frustrated rebuke from Israel. Israel knows that Judah is right and that he must yield if the family is to survive the famine. But it is human that he cannot do so quickly. At last the patriarch vents what he had suppressed ever since his sons' return, and he reproaches them for their seemingly foolish indiscretion in volunteering their disclosure about Benjamin (cf. Gen. 42:32); that was no affair of the Egyptians, so why did they bring it up?

As a side note, had it really been possible all these years for Joseph's brothers to conceal effectively what they had done with Joseph? Apparently so. But the load was to become much heavier before the matter reached its conclusion.

It is interesting that, at this point in the narrative, the name "Israel" begins to be used instead of Jacob. This name had not been used since Genesis 37:13. It seems that, as long as Jacob seemed completely broken and defeated by virtue of Joseph's apparent death, his old name, "Jacob," is used (cf. Gen. 37:34; 42:1, 4, 29, 36). Now, for the first time, he begins to consider the possibility of allowing Benjamin to go. His faith is in process of revival, and so he is called Israel again. Just as Joseph's words had caused Israel's re-emergence (cf. Gen. 37:2), so does the terrible present crisis.

Israel's querulously negative attitude is very true to life: his scolding was an escape from the decision he dreaded and a comfort to his self-esteem. But in clutching his advantage over those who had wronged him he was jeopardizing himself and them--including his beloved Benjamin, whom he must lose in order to save (cf. Gen. 27:41-46). It betrays his self-absorption that he still saw the threat to Benjamin primarily in terms of himself: "Why did you treat me so badly . . .?" His words of dismissal, with their levels of play between "your brother," "your other brother," and "the man" resonate with strains of grief.

It is striking that Israel asked, "Why did you treat me so badly (*hārē'ōtem rā'a'*) by telling the man whether you still had another brother?" This question of the patriarch's continues the theme of the evil that he was to

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endure at the hands of others. He saw their mentioning that they had another brother as yet one more sign that everything was against him (see Gen. 42:36). His sons explained that they had acted in ignorance (Gen. 43:7).

Instead of dealing with the real issues, Israel digresses into blaming his sons for all his troubles. He also clearly suggests, true to his character, that it would have been better if they had deceived the Egyptian official. Again Judah speaks, this time offering a solution to the problem, and Israel's resolve against the inevitable begins to weaken.

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**7** But they said, "The man questioned particularly about us and our relatives, saying, 'Is your father still alive? Have you *another* brother?' So we answered his questions. Could we possibly know that he would say, 'Bring your brother down?'"

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The narrator allows the brothers to reply so that they can take part in the conversation; they all support Judah's demand. Excitedly they say that they had not spontaneously spoken of Benjamin but had only answered the man's detailed questions (as in Ex. 34:27; Deut. 17:10). And more, they could never have known that he would demand that Benjamin come down. This second part of the argumentation is of itself sufficient and accords exactly with the interrogation in Genesis 42:15.

However, many commentators maintain that the first part is not in accord with chapter 42 because the Egyptian lord did not literally put these questions in his interrogation; but this is to misunderstand what is intended here. The course of the interrogation put the brothers under a definite constraint; first they had to reply to the allegation that they were spies (Gen. 42:9-10); then they gave a more precise answer, that they belonged to the one family (Gen. 42:13). It would not have been possible for them to explain to their father the precise details of the course of the interrogation. The narrator, quite deliberately and with profound insight, introduces variations. Furthermore, it must be assumed that chapter 42 represents a very abbreviated account.

In point of fact, these particular words do not appear in the dialogue between Joseph and his brothers, but of course Judah is trying to drive home the idea to his reluctant father that the man who holds the keys to the life-sustaining grain will remain totally inaccessible without Benjamin. Judah attributes one other utterance to Joseph which is not found in the actual dialogue in Egypt: the



question, "Is your father still alive?" The way the Old Testament narrative uses verbatim repetition with additions makes it at least possible to imagine that Joseph really asked such a question but that it simply was not included in the reported dialogue, so it is not absolutely necessary to construe it as an invention of Judah's.

A few words concerning biblical narrative dialogue would be appropriate at this time. Everything in the world of biblical narrative ultimately gravitates toward dialogue--perhaps partly because the ancient Hebrew writers understood, that they were made in the image of God. This "gravitation" often means that phrases or whole sentences first stated by the narrator do not reveal their full significance until they are repeated, whether word for word or extended additions (which were purposely originally omitted, paraphrased, or new additions), in direct speech by one or more of the characters. This means also that, quantitatively, a remarkably large part of the narrative burden is carried by dialogue; the transactions between characters typically unfolding through the words they exchange, with only the most minimal intervention of the narrator.

As a rule of thumb, when a narrative event in the Scriptures seems important, the writer will render it mainly through dialogue, so the transitions from narration to dialogue provide in themselves some implicit measure of what is deemed essential, what is conceived to be ancillary or secondary to the main action.

If, then, the very occurrence of extended dialogue should signal the need for special attentiveness as we read, there is a set of more specific questions we might ask ourselves about the way the dialogue emerges and develops. Is this the first reported speech for either or both of the two engaged in the conversation? If so, why did the writer choose this particular narrative juncture to make the character reveal himself through speech? How does the kind of speech assigned to the character--its syntax, tone, imagery, brevity or lengthiness--serve to delineate the character and his relation to the other part to the dialogue?

In looking for answers to this last question, it will be especially helpful to keep in mind the tendency of the biblical writers to organize dialogue along contrastive principles--short versus long, simple versus elaborate, balanced versus asymmetrical, perceptive versus obtuse, and so forth. Finally, we should be alert to the seeming discontinuities of biblical dialogue and ponder what they might imply. When do characters ostensibly answer one another

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without truly responding to what the other person has said? When does the dialogue break off sharply, withholding from us the rejoinder we might have expected from one of the two speakers?

Virtually everywhere dialogue in the Bible shows the clearest signs of using manifestly stylized speech, and it is always worth trying to see how the stylization makes the dialogue a more elegantly effective vehicle of meaning. Perhaps the most common feature of stylization in these spoken interchanges is the fact that the characters often repeat whole sentences or even series of sentences of each other's speech almost verbatim: A will tell B something regarding C, and B will then proceed to march off to C and say to him, "You know, A instructed me . . ." and quote A's words. Whenever we encounter this convention--and, of course, there are many variations on this paradigm--it behooves us to watch for the nuances that emerge in the general pattern of verbatim repetition.

To be sure, there are times when these differences may be quite inconsequential, as context and common sense should be able to warn us. But frequently enough, the small alterations, the reversals of order, the elaborations or deletions undergone by the statements as they are restated and sometimes restated again, will be disclosures of character, moral, social, or political stance, *and even plot*. Often, such revelations will be matters of spirited or instructive nuance, but sometimes they can be quite momentous. In either case, the reliance on this particular technique suggests how much the biblical writers like to lead their readers to inferences through indirect hints rather than insisting on explicit statement.

In any case, the main reason for introducing the question "Is your father still alive?" (v. 7) here is proleptic, pointing forward to Joseph's anxious inquiry (Gen. 43:27) of the brothers as to whether their father is still alive, and to his more urgent question, and to his more urgent question, "Is my father still alive?" (Gen. 45:3) once he reveals himself--that is, now that you really know I am Joseph, you can tell me the real truth about our father.

After the brothers' outburst (v. 7), Judah, having sensed the resurgence of "Israel," calmly but firmly resumes his point: Benjamin will live if the father sends him, but if not, he will die in Canaan from starvation.

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**8**     **And Judah said to his father Israel, "Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, we as well as you and our little ones.**

- 9 I myself will be surety for him; you may hold me responsible for him. If I do not bring him *back* to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame before you forever.
- 10 For if we had not delayed, surely by now we could have returned twice."

The argument has reached a dead end. Judah steps in to save the situation. His approach is forthright, firm, sober, and severely to the point. The issue must be confronted headlong. Judah cleverly takes up the words of his father from Genesis 42:2, extending them and nicely playing them out by triply underscoring the urgency: we--and you--and our little ones.

Quite likely they had heard reports of others starving in Canaan and nearby lands, and it now had become a very present danger in their own families. There was no time to waste any more. Unless Benjamin is sent, the entire family is doomed to slow death by starvation. That is the awful and urgent reality. There is no alternative.

Judah subtly makes three changes in verse 8 from his previous appeal. First, Judah modifies "send off" (v. 4) to the more tender plea "Please let go," and instead of "our brother," he affectionately says "the boy" (נָעָר/*na'ar*), another "Joseph" (cf. Gen. 37:2). Benjamin is referred to in this manner repeatedly in the next chapter (Gen. 44:22, 30-34). Elsewhere he is described as "the youngest" (Gen. 42:13, 15, 20; 43:29; 44:23, 26), and even as "a child" (יָלֵד/*yeled*) of old age" (Gen. 44:20), while Joseph blesses him as "my son" (Gen. 43:29). We are given the clear impression that Benjamin is still very young. The probability of his youthfulness accords with, and renders particularly poignant, Jacob's fears and reluctance to let him undertake the journey to Egypt. The term "lad" (נָעָר/*na'ar*) as used here, is flexible in biblical Hebrew and can be used of any male from infancy (Ex. 2:6) to marriageable age (Gen. 34:19). Finally, instead of the more common "with me" (עִמִּי/*immi*)--he makes it more emphatically "together with me" (יְחַדְּמֵנִי/*itti*).

Judah voluntarily pledges his own self as a guarantee for Benjamin's safety (v. 9). The addition of the separate personal pronoun (אֲנִי/*nōkî*, "I,") has the force of an emphatic meaning, "I personally." Moreover, to underline the seriousness with which he is willing to assume the guardianship of Benjamin, Judah employs two distinct legal idioms.

The first legal idiom is the Hebrew word עֶרֶב/'*rb*, translated as "surety," and is most frequently used in reference to the acceptance of legal responsibility for a debt contracted by another. The guarantor may undertake to insure that the borrower will not disappear, or he undertakes to repay the loan should the borrower default (Prov. 6:1-5; 11:15; 17:18; 20:16; 22:26-27; 27:13. See also Gen. 38:17, 18, 20; Neh. 5:3). The second idiom, מִיֵּאָדֵי תִבְקַשׁוּנִי/*miyyādî t'baqsennû*, translated as "you may hold me responsible," means "to hold responsible," "to require an accounting for," and is particularly used with respect to bloodshed (Gen. 31:39; 1 Sam. 20:16; 2 Sam. 4:11; Ezek. 3:18, 20; 33:8).

Judah's appeal is further underscored by his personal indebtedness: "If I do not bring him *back* to you and set him before you, then **let me bear the blame before you forever.**" The literal translation is merely "I will have sinned before you forever." This final clause connotes a self-imposed ostracism out of the deepest sense of guilt and shame (cf. Num. 12:14; Psa. 88:9; Job 10:14ff). The term "sin" (חַטָּא/*hātā*) encompasses not merely the offensive act itself but also its aftereffects: the deleterious psychic, spiritual, and emotional state that it produces (same term used in Gen. 39:9; 40:1; 41:9). This consciousness of ineradicable personal guilt and blame would weigh upon Judah "forever" as an oppressive burden.

Judah has demonstrated to his agonizing father his deep compassion and tender love, for after vv. 1 and 3, followed by the definite ultimatum and the father's oblique yielding (cf. v. 6), Judah's self-immolation was actually no longer needed. Judah resumes and concludes his argument with verse 10. He concludes by reminding Jacob that, if they had not procrastinated so long, he would have been relieved of his anxiety and they could already have made the trip to Egypt and back twice. Judah's mild reproof hides his deep emotion.

Thus, these verses have put forth Judah's own loyalty and concern for Benjamin: Judah demanded that he himself be blamed forever for any loss of Benjamin. Such a demand is to be interpreted as a guarantee that Judah would use every effort to bring back Benjamin safely to Jacob. This required that ultimately Judah should stand forth and make the passionate appeal before Joseph when Joseph was "determined" to keep Benjamin as a slave in Egypt (cf. Gen. 44:2, 9-10, 16-34).

It is here that a change in attitude among the sons is clearly evident. Judah could have simply said that they must go, including Benjamin, with no reference to guaranteeing Benjamin's safety. But when Judah made himself

responsible, it reveals his own personal concern for Jacob's happiness, revealing the about-face of character necessary to those who were to carry the witness of God to the world. This is the first clear evidence of change. It anticipates Judah's appeal before Joseph. But the brothers had yet to face "the man" in Egypt!

*Tolerance and Uncertainty (vv. 11-12)*

In his closing words (vv. 11-14), Israel begins by submitting resignedly to necessity (v. 11a), and ends with a lament acquiescing in the inevitable (v. 14b). In between he gives his sons instructions for the journey (vv. 11b-14a).

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- 11 Then their father Israel said to them, "If *it must be* so, then do this: take some of the best products of the land in your bags, and carry down to the man as a present, a little balm and a little honey, aromatic gum and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds.
- 12 And take double *the* money in your hand, and take back in your hand the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks; perhaps it was a mistake.
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Grim-faced, Israel agrees to let Benjamin go. Israel's words sound pitiful as he relinquished Benjamin for the journey. He had no choice. Judah's forceful speech has its effect. The aged Israel offers no further resistance and resigns himself to the inevitable. The breaking of the deadlock is doubly instructive: the cruel pressure of the famine (cf. Hosea 5:15) and the warmly personal initiative of Judah were each needed to reinforce the other. So Judah now succeeded where Reuben had failed.

Since they were going, Israel gave them instructions that might secure favor from the ruler. "Do this," Israel instructs his sons, and unwittingly echoes Joseph's own words in Genesis 42:18.

First, Israel wisely instructed his sons to take a lavish gift to the man in Egypt in order to obtain mercy (v. 11). The term for "present" (מִנְחָה/*minhâ*) signifies a gift brought as a token of submission and was an almost indispensable courtesy when approaching a person of rank (Gen. 32:14; 1 Sam. 16:20; 17:18; 1 Kgs. 10:25; 2 Kgs. 17:4).

Since there is no evidence of apiculture in Israel in biblical times, it is not certain whether Hebrew *שֶׁבַע/d'bas* means bees' honey, cultured or wild (cf. Deut. 32:13; 1 Sam. 14:25ff; Psa. 85:17), or the thick, intensely sweet syrup made from dates and grape juice and called *dibs* by the Arabs. A celebrated description of the land is one "flowing with milk and honey" (Ex. 3:8), and the latter is listed as one of its seven characteristic products (Deut. 8:8). According to rabbinic tradition, the reference here is to date syrup. "Honey" was one of the products Israel exported to its neighbors (Ezek. 27:17). Of interest in connection with the gift brought to Joseph is the Story of Sinuhe, a popular Egyptian tale from Middle Kingdom times, in which "the land of Yaa" (southern Syria or northern Israel) is described as "a good land" where figs and grapes were plentiful and honey and olives abundant, with every kind of fruit on its trees, much barley and emmer, and cattle galore.

The second order which Israel gives to his sons is that the payments for the grain that they found in their sacks must be returned (v. 12). The Hebrew *מִשְׁנֵה הַכֶּסֶף/w'kesep misneh*, an appositional phrase, literally means "money, double amount." The rest of the sentence literally translates "and the money that was returned . . . ." The meaning at first is ambiguous. It could be either that Jacob is recommending the payment of a double restitution or that the brothers are being advised to purchase double rations this time in order to avoid having to return to Egypt again. However, verse 15 mentions only "double the money" and verses 21-22 make clear that it is only twice the purchase price of food, and no other money, that is involved. Hence, the second clause of this verse must be understood as clarifying the reason for the double amount.

We have seen the double motif, namely, money and costly products once before when Joseph, some twenty years before, was sold into slavery (cf. Gen. 37:25). Coincidence? Hardly!

By giving these orders to his sons, Israel unwittingly carries forward the pattern of restitution that marks the entire conclusion of the Narrative. Money--specifically, pieces of silver--passed from the hands of the Ishmaelite trader to the brothers in exchange for Joseph, who was carried down to Egypt. Then Joseph sent money hidden in the bags back northward to Canaan. Now Jacob orders double the money to be sent back to Egypt (the money/silver motif, as we shall soon see, will be given one more climactic twist; cf. Gen. 44:2, 8-13).

Moreover, it is interesting to note also that, since there were ten brothers involved in these two purchases, in effect there were twenty bundles of

money involved. It seems possible that the brothers themselves may have noted the ironical connection between the facts that they had sold their brother for twenty pieces of silver (cf. Gen. 37:28) into Egypt, and that now they were having to pay into the treasuries of Egypt not merely twenty pieces of money but twenty bundles of money. The words "silver" and "money" are the same in the original (קֶסֶפֶת/*keseṣep*).

The ironic connection with the Ishmaelite traders is ingeniously reinforced by the other half of Jacob's instructions: that caravan long ago was seen (Gen. 37:25) "bearing aromatic gum and balm and myrrh, on their way to bring them down to Egypt." Now the brothers will constitute another such caravan, bearing exactly the same goods together with a few extra items, not bringing Joseph as a slave but headed, unaware, to the discovery of his identity as supreme master to whom they shall bow down.

*Guarded Faith and Abandonment (vv. 13-14)*

13 "Take your brother also, and arise, return to the man;"

Jacob leaves the most painful item till last. Only after all has been prepared does Israel utter with heavy heart the decisive "Take your brother also." He says "your brother," rather than Benjamin, in order to underscore their fraternal responsibilities. The term translated as "arise" (קוּמֹה/*qûmû*) has the force "at once," especially in this sequence of verbs (Gen. 27:43).

Jacob has just instructed his sons to immediately leave, but perhaps because they hesitate, he asks, "Why do you stare at me; is there anything else you need?" They reply, "Father, it is your blessing!" And thus, Israel issues a patriarchal blessing:

14 "and may God Almighty grant you compassion in the sight of the man, that he may release to you your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."

Having done all that is humanly possible, Israel leaves the matter to God, whose blessing he invokes. Israel is now left trusting the LORD to work things out according to His own good will.

Jacob's prayer at their departure is very important to the theme of the chapter: he entrusted them to God Almighty ('*el šadday*) for mercy (*rahāmim*) before the man, that he might release Simeon and Benjamin to them. But there was a resignation in his words that he might have to live with bereavement: "If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved!" (v. 14). Hundreds of years later, Queen Esther would utter a similar statement of resignation: "If I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16). This is not awe-inspiring faith. Yet the words still show a glimmer of faith.

Two names are significant in these verse: first, "Israel," which was Jacob's new or covenant name, and second, "God Almighty," to whom the patriarch appeals. When Abram's name was changed to Abraham, the old name was never used again; the new name represented a profound and permanent growth in his character. It has been otherwise with Jacob. His name was changed to Israel at Jabbok, but it is not often after this that his new or covenant name is used. Usually he was thinking and operating much as the old Jacob had done. He was self-centered, self-serving, complaining. However, at this point of the Narrative we see Jacob emerging as Israel ("God fights"; cf. Gen. 32:28 and Hosea 12:4 describe Jacob's activity as a fight. The meaning of "Israel" would then be defined as "God contends; may God contend, persist"). In this character he rightly appeals to the sovereign God, "God Almighty," for the issue's outcome.

'*El Shaddai* is the most common of the several divine names constructed with an initial '*el* ("God") element. Like '*el 'elyon* (Psa. 78:35, the Exalted One"), it could be a fusion of an initially independent element *shaddai*, with '*el* or the compound could be original. One way or the other, the distribution of *shaddai* both with an without the accompanying '*el* is highly instructive. This divine name appears nine times in the Books of Moses, of which three are in poetic texts (Gen. 49:25; Num. 24:4, 16). All but two of the other thirty-nine usages are likewise poetic (Prophets, Psalms, and Job). The prose exceptions (Ruth 1:20-21) are more apparent than real since the Book of Ruth possesses a poetic substratum and frequently displays archaisms.

These statistics have an important bearing on the question of the antiquity of usage. The overwhelming appearance in poetic contexts points a priori to a venerable tradition, for Hebrew poetry tends to preserve or consciously to employ early forms of speech. The remarkably high incidence of *Shaddai* in Job is of particular importance in light of that Book's patriarchal setting. All the true prose usages are concentrated within the Genesis narratives (Gen. 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:3; 49:25), a fact that is in perfect harmony with



Exodus 6:3: "I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai," a text explicitly assigning the divine name to the pre-Mosaic age. Significantly, of the vast store of biblical personal names, only three are constructed with the element *Shaddai*. These are Shedeur (= ? Shaddai-Ur), Zurishaddai, and Ammishaddai--all appearing solely in the lists of Numbers 1--2. Each is the father of a tribal representative at the time of the Exodus.

Interestingly, the personal name *Shaddai-'ammi*--that is, the Hebrew Ammishaddai with its two components inverted--has turned up in a hieroglyphic sepulchral inscription as the name of a petty official in fourteenth-century B.C. Egypt. Since it cannot be explained as Egyptian, and because it is written in the syllabic orthography often reserved for foreign words, there is every reason to believe that the name belongs to a Western Semite in Egyptian employ. It is indeed known that Semites served the Egyptian bureaucracy in the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C. There is thus additional evidence of the use of *Shaddai* in pre-Mosaic times.

The great antiquity of the name and its obsolescence in Israel in the Mosaic period explain why there are no consistent traditions as to its meaning and why the ancient versions have no uniform rendering. The Septuagint (LXX) variously has "God," "Lord," "All-powerful," and "The Heavenly One," among others, as well as the transliteration *shaddai*. The Vulgate has "Omnipotens," from which the English tradition "Almighty." The Syriac has "The Strong One," "God," and "The Highest," as well as *shaddai*. The Greek rendering *hikanos*, "He that is Sufficient," found in the versions of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotian, reflects a rabbinic suggestion explaining the name as a combination of the relative particle *sha* with *dai*, meaning "sufficiency." The modern understanding that has gained widest circulation connects *shaddi* with the Akkadian *šadu*, "a mountain," often used as a divine (and royal) epithet. The name would originally have meant, "The One of the Mountain," probably referring to a cosmic mount or corresponding to the divine epithet "The Rock." This last epithet is interesting in light of Matthew 16:18 where Christ, being the LORD God incarnate, calls Himself "The Rock"!

In the characteristic rapidity with which biblical narrative elides unessential transitions, the brothers are now immediately placed in Joseph's presence.

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15 So the men took this present, and they took double *the* money in their hand, and Benjamin; then they arose and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph.

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In contrast to the preparations, one brief sentence takes them from their father to their brother (this time they "stand before Joseph"; last time they "bowed with faces to the ground"). This verse compresses into one sentence the brothers' bidding farewell to their loved ones, their departure, the long journey (some 250 miles) and their arrival in order to indicate their eagerness to redeem Simeon. But eleven verses separate their arrival from their actual audience with Joseph!

But even this brief transition allows us to picture them as they "took this present, and they took double *the* money in their hand, and Benjamin." The "and Benjamin" hangs like the resigned sigh of a father trapped between the need to live and the possibility of a life made utterly empty through another loss.

Since on this occasion there is no contact between Joseph and the brothers, the clause, "and stood before Joseph" may simply mean that they have arrived at the trading post over which Joseph presides. Perhaps he deliberately ignores them so as to feed their anxiety and intensify their fears. In addition, when told to proceed to the vizier's house, the brothers must have become filled with dread. Of course, the surprise meal in his house is a necessary prelude to the subsequent scene. The convivial atmosphere deceptively dispels all foreboding while the stage is set for the contrived "theft" of the silver goblet.

This time it is Joseph's brother who goes down to Egypt with a "caravan . . . with their camels bearing aromatic gum and balm and myrrh, on their way to bring *them* down to Egypt" (Gen. 37:25) with other products. No doubt that would have waited in line with many others who waited their turn, hoping that soon the vizier would nod to them to display their gifts before him.

## II. *Those who would participate in God's program must make restitution for any appearance of wrongdoing (16-25).*

Joseph had expected that his brothers would return and had given orders to be informed. He now sees them as they arrive and the eleventh, who can only be Benjamin, with them. Joseph has already prepared the reception by the steward: he planned to entertain them with a meal in his house. This decision, although probably intended as an act of kindness in setting the men at ease before testing their jealousy of Benjamin, evoked great fear and guilt in the

men. They were afraid that he was laying a trap for them because of the money. This fear hastened their attempt at making restitution for the money that had been in their sacks.

By dividing the passage into two scenes the narrator has been able to settle the matter of the silver (vv. 18-23), and allay the fear of the brothers (vv. 24-25) before their meeting with Joseph, i.e., with "the man."

### Joseph Sees Benjamin; A Meal Is Prepared (verses 16-17)

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- 16 When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to his house steward, "Bring the men into the house, and slay *an animal* and make ready; for the men are to dine with me at noon."
- 17 So the man did as Joseph said, and brought the men to Joseph's house.
- 

Joseph sets in motion his preconceived plan: Simeon has to be released and the brothers have to be given satisfaction for wrongly having been suspected of espionage. Above all, he wants to have Benjamin seated next to him, hear his voice, speak and laugh with him and rejoice in their reunion after so many years though, before he can permit himself to shed his mask, he must have his brothers undergo the severest test.

Joseph orders his "house-steward" to bring the men to his home for the midday meal (cf. the reception of the three men by Abraham; Gen. 18:2-5). Literally, "house-steward" means, "the one who is over his house." This man seems to be the same whom Joseph had told to secretly replace the brothers money (cf. Gen. 42:25). He has earned his master's confidence and is briefed to release Simeon, kept in the vizier's home, and to amicably settle the anticipated matter of the silver before the vizier's arrival with other invited guests for the festive meal.

Thus, as soon as the brothers arrive, they are brought in haste by Joseph's house-steward to the vizier's palace, which makes them fear they are about to be accused of having stolen the money they had found in their bags.

The contrast with the earlier reception, when the first words of this man were words of suspicion, is deliberate. The steward follows instructions and brings the brothers into Joseph's house. The verb "he brought" (בָּרַךְ)

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*/wayyābē*') is to be understood in the sense of "he set about . . ." or "he made preparation to bring." The repetition of the verb in verse 24 frames the interruption of the action, verses 18-23, which takes place in the courtyard. It is significant that there is no description of the house.

#### **The Brothers' Fear Of Retaliation (verse 18)**

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**18** Now the men were afraid, because they were brought to Joseph's house; and they said, "*It is because of the money that was returned in our sacks the first time that we are being brought in, that he may seek occasion against us and fall upon us, and take us for slaves with our donkeys.*"

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The ten brothers (now eleven), who had been so apprehensive about merely seeing this man again, hardly knew what to make of this invitation. He had been so harsh with them, and here he was inviting them to dine with him! They fear that they have been refused permission to see the vizier and are being marched off to the vizier's quarters to suffer there the fate of embezzlers. The brothers were probably aware of the fact that high Egyptian officials maintained private dungeons in their homes (cf. Gen. 39:20). Surely, they thought, it must be some strange, sadistic device for mocking them, because they alone, of all the buyers of grain, are singled out for this treatment. After they were gathered in the dining hall, unarmed and unprepared to offer any resistance, he would probably have his guards men fall on them, making them slaves and beasts of burden out of their donkeys.

Shakespeare once wrote, "Suspicion always haunts the guilty mind." So when Joseph's steward escorted the brothers to the prime minister's home instead of the public grain mart, the guilt-ridden brothers immediately became suspicious. Since they had brought Benjamin with them, as they had been instructed, the only remaining excuse the vizier could have for taking such action would be the money that had been found in their sacks when they returned home after their first trip to Egypt. Accordingly, they refused to enter the house, attempting instead to persuade the steward that they are victims of an error.

**Brothers' Speech To The Steward (verses 19-22)**

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- 19       **So they came near to Joseph's house steward, and spoke to him at the entrance of the house,**  
20       **and said, "Oh, my lord, we indeed came down the first time to buy food,**  
21       **and it came about when we came to the lodging place, that we opened our sacks, and behold, each man's money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full. So we have brought it back in our hand.**  
22       **We have also brought down other money in our hand to buy food; we do not know who put our money in our sacks."**
- 

After the brothers' pleading for a hearing, the steward stops before entering Joseph's house and listens to their story. With the utmost brevity, in this case demanded by courtesy, they justify themselves by laying the facts before him. In their plea the brothers recall their first journey (v. 20). Then they give an account of how they found the silver in their sacks (v. 21); the speaker immediately adds, "We have brought it back with us!" They add further that they have brought more silver for their intended purchase of grain (v. 22a). The final appendage, that they do not know how the silver came to be in their sacks, leads back once more to the main issue. All of this reveals the state of agitation in which they told their story.

These brothers felt themselves most insecure! Hounded by insecurities, Joseph's brothers feel the need to assuage their guilt by explaining themselves, by setting the record straight. Even if it means telling everything to a perfect stranger who can do nothing about.

Yet had they but considered, they could have been taken at the time of their entry into the land. However, if they were honest men and concerned to demonstrate it, they would explain the return of the money on their own initiative, as they now do. Their consciences so troubled them for what they had done to Joseph that they had to use great care to demonstrate they were no longer such deceitful persons. They had come to understand that their own lives depended on a strict accounting. Nothing could save them but the truth. No longer could they live a lie.

It is interesting that the brothers, in order to avoid resentment, delicately no longer state that their money was "put back" (cf. Gen. 42:28; 43:12, 18), insinuating a frame-up and of chicanery on the part of the official, but they simply say "put" (v. 22).

There are some who, in the interests of source division, want to attribute the report in verse 21 to a different source from Genesis 42:27 where one brother only finds the silver. However, this is to fail to notice the difference in the situation. The very brief account to the steward repeats what is essential. The difference shows just how realistic is the narrative style.

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**The Steward's Response: "Peace be with you!" (verse 23)**

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**23** And he said, "Be at ease, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks; I had your money." Then he brought Simeon out to them.

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The tension reaches its climax in the greeting of peace with which the steward answers the brothers' fearful explanation. His answer comes as a complete surprise to the brothers and is the turning point in the episode (and thus the center of the chiasmic structure). It is the representative of the dread potentate who takes away their fear: "Peace to you! Do not be afraid, your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks!" This greeting of peace from the foreigner in this moment of mortal fear, not only assures the brothers to let their fear abate, it also foreshadows in the broader context of the Joseph Narrative that there is peace once more and that the breach is healed.

This extraordinary change is confirmed by the man's greeting when the word **peace** sounds three times in the dialog (Gen. 43:23, 27<sup>2</sup>). The steward's answer, commissioned by higher authority, corresponds in wording (form and content) to the later assurance of well-being which has an important place in Israel's worship, and which the prophet Isaiah takes up in his preaching to his contemporaries. Without the experience narrated here neither this liturgical assurance of well-being nor its resumption by Isaiah would be possible.

It is important to examine closely the response of the steward to the men's explanation of the money. He said, "Peace be with you (*šālôm lakem*)! Do not be afraid! Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure

in your sacks; I had your money." This communication would have set the men at ease with regard to the Egyptian ruler's anger but would have troubled them in their understanding of God's dealings with them, for they knew they were guilty. According to von Rad,

The master of ceremonies' gracious answer is the jewel in this masterful scene. It is reassuring and intended to distract the upset men from the object of their fear; but its dark ambiguity touches the innermost mystery of the whole Joseph story: God's concealed guidance. God is at work in the events and therefore nothing is said now about money but rather about a "treasure" which God has placed for them in their sacks. This answer may at first have reassured the brothers somewhat, but they could only understand it later. (*Genesis*, 1972:388-89).

What is peculiar about the steward's speech is that the assurance bridges a wide gulf and is heard beyond it. It comes from the foreign potentate, in a foreign land, and in the territory of another religion!

The steward not only offers them encouragement, he communicates it in Hebrew, the brothers' own language. In addition, it is the first time anyone has suggested seeing the money they found in their sacks from a divine perspective. We, the readers, know that it was Joseph who told his steward to put the money in their sacks, but now the steward expresses once again the underlying point of the narrative, God was behind it all and through it all was working out His purposes (cf. Gen. 50:20). One must not miss the point that Joseph is functioning as an agent of divine destiny.

The brothers have barely finished hearing the steward's astonishing words when they are hit with a second unexpected surprise. "Then he brought Simeon out to them" (v. 23b), i.e., into the courtyard where the conversation took place. Thus the charge of spying is withdrawn without there being any need to speak of it. One of the father's wishes has been fulfilled (cf. v. 14).

The clause "I had your money," literally is "your silver came to me" (כִּסְפְּכֶם בָּא אֵלַי), and is indicative of a legal formula of West Semitic traders confirming receipt of full payment and implying renunciation of any claim (J. Muffs, "Two Comparative Lexical Studies," *JANES* 5 [1973]:287-294).

Now the brothers must be really confused. Here they are, standing at the entrance of the prime minister's home, whom they have not even seen

yet, and already their brother is being released to them. What can possibly happen next?

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**The Brothers Are Brought Into The House And Provided For (verses 24-25)**

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- 24** Then the man brought the men into Joseph's house and gave them water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their donkeys fodder.
- 25** So they prepared the present for [until] Joseph's coming at noon; for they had heard that they were to eat a meal there.
- 

Verses 24-25 form a bridge between the scenes of vv. 17-23 and 26-34. The verbal clause, "brought the men" is repeated from verse 17 to resume the narrative after the digression (cf. Gen. 39:1). A wordless pause is deliberately put in here; the events themselves speak. The steward brings them into Joseph's house; what was interrupted in verse 17 is now brought to its conclusion.

The brothers now enter the coolness of the house where they can wash their feet and feed the donkeys. This simple security, the relief and relaxation of man and beast, this is the peace into which they are received by the steward's greeting (v. 23).

The brothers came to Egypt fearing the worst and, so far, have been given only the best, for, strange to say, they are now guests (cf. Gen. 18; 19; 24:25, 32b). Still, the brothers cannot imagine the harsh prime minister being gracious to them, so they prepare to present their gifts that they intend to present to the lord with whom they are to dine in the hope that it will appease his anger.

**III. *Those who participate in God's program must rejoice in their provisions—even when a brother receives more (26-34).***

While the vizier's servants are busy preparing for the meal (cf. v. 16), the brothers use every minute before his arrival to arrange their gifts according to protocol, before their reception before Joseph.



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### The Brothers' Prostration And Greeting (verses 26-28)

This greeting is a miniature of artistic narrative style. To understand it, one must know the significance of greeting in the world in which it is narrated. For us it still remains a mere marginal matter; but for the ancient world it was of central importance for the life-style of that community. The rites of greeting were of great consequence for social status and relationship.

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- 26 When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present which was in their hand and bowed to the ground before him.
- 27 Then he asked them about their welfare, and said, "Is your old father well, of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?"
- 28 And they said, "Your servant our father is well; he is still alive." And they bowed down in homage.
- 

The brothers' approach to Joseph was humble; they prepared their gifts carefully. Finally, Joseph arrived. After bowing before him once again, they gave him their present. Once again, Joseph's dream was fulfilled as he saw his brothers bowing down before him.

Joseph's words, however, brought them comfort in what must have been a frightening moment. He asked them of their welfare (*l<sup>e</sup>šālôm* - what he had originally been sent to find out in Gen. 37:14) and the welfare (*šālôm*) of their father. After they responded that Jacob was alive and well, they bowed again and did obeisance. Thus their prostration in verses 26 and 28 frame the greeting. The double prostration is intentional; it is appropriate to the situation (as in Gen. 33). The prostration here thus differs from that in the first meeting. Mere prostration is submission, but prostration with the presentation of gifts is homage, as in Matthew 2:11. The scene is frequent in Egyptian representations.

Joseph's question concerning their father is not a mere matter of courtesy (v. 27). He perhaps trembles at the thought that the brothers' return was so long delayed because their father had refused to be parted from Benjamin, so that Benjamin's arrival became possible only after the father's death. The adjective "old" which here describes their father, was not reported in the account of the brothers' first meeting with Joseph, but Genesis 44:20 shows that it had indeed been used.

When Joseph inquired concerning their father's health in verse 27b, a closer inquiry concerning the father's *shalom* (health) is sought. The Hebrew term for health in v. 27b is *ḥay* (*hay*), and literally Joseph is asking if their father is still living (cf. 1 Kgs. 20:32). Joseph's two questions in verse 27 may be an instance of *hysteron proteron*, a figure of speech in which a logical sequence is inverted. Alternately, Joseph may immediately ask how Jacob is and then realize he should first inquire if he is still alive.

There is a sharp contrast between this reception and the first. The first took on a political character because Joseph's accusation of his brothers being spies; the second is also political inasmuch as "the man" is the lord before whom the brothers prostrate themselves; Joseph turns it into a family greeting by his questions and inquiries, which are important in family meetings. The foreign lord thus silently withdraws the charge of spying. The change in the nature of the greeting is effected by the word "peace" (*shalôm*), the theme word through verses 27 and 28 (repeated three times). Joseph confirms the reception in peace into his house, thus echoing and reinforcing his steward's blessing (v. 23). They prostrate themselves before the man. The gesture sufficiently expresses what they feel.

As we have seen elsewhere, repetition plays an important part in the Joseph Narrative. One of the key terms used repeatedly is "peace" (*shalôm*), "harmony, peace, well-being." We are mindful in the last clause of the opening exposition that sets the stage for the narrative that Joseph's brothers hated him and "could not speak peaceably (*l'shalôm*) to him" (Gen. 37:4b). After the opening episode in which the dreams of Joseph are recounted and elicit characteristic reactions from his brothers and father, we find that Jacob sends Joseph to his brothers and instructs him: "Go now, see if it is well with (*re'et et shalom*) your brothers, and well with (*'et-shalom*) the flock." Translations, like the RSV here cited, often omit all indication of the second *shalôm* before flock and use different words to capture distinct nuances of *shalôm* in Genesis 37:5 and 37:14. While offering more natural English, they deny the reader the pleasure of recognized irony: Jacob, earlier blind to or unconcerned with the wider impact of his token of special favor bestowed on his favored son, now sends him to look into the *shalôm* of those with whom this emissary has absolutely no relationship of *shalôm*, as the narrator told us at the outset. What will take place is, of course, the antithesis of *shalôm*.

In Egypt, just after Joseph is summoned from prison to an audience before Pharaoh, Joseph responds to the ruler's request for an interpretation of his dream with "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable (*shalôm*) ans-

wer" (Gen. 41:16). However, the interpretation of the royal dream do not anticipate *šālôm*, and it is Joseph's advice and his ability to execute it that will preserve *šālôm* in Pharaoh's Egypt.

Now, in our passage (Gen. 43:27-28), Joseph and his brothers meet face to face again, the conversation between these sons of Jacob who earlier could not speak to each other in *šālôm* opens with a veritable burst of *šālôms*. Finally, in a setting characterized by anything but *šālôm* for the brothers, Joseph addresses them with pretended fairness: "Only the man in whose hand the cup was found shall be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace (*l'ešālôm*) to your father" (Gen. 44:17). The quite conscious twist given to the term in this last use by Joseph simply underscores its use throughout as a counterpoint to the actual situation of this family throughout the Narrative. The term is used no more, for following Judah's extended plea and the climactic self-revelation by Joseph, *šālôm* is truly restored to the family and the counterpoint no longer serves a purpose. It is a nice touch that when *šālôm* is restored, the term never again appears in the Narrative.

#### Joseph Sees Benjamin; Joseph Weeps And Meal Served (verses 29-31)

**29** As he lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, he said, "Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me? And he said, "May God be gracious to you, my son."

Joseph now has a special greeting for his only full brother Benjamin. "As he lifted his eyes and saw . . ." is idiomatic and is said when seeing another person introduces a further event. The lord of the land only "sees" someone when he will take notice of him.

Joseph appears to be calm and casual as he inquires about the brothers and their father. But the moment the conversation shifts to Benjamin, "his mother's son," he can barely contain his love and excitement. At last Joseph sees his full brother, Benjamin, "his mother's son." The additional descriptive phrase, "his mother's son," is very telling, for Benjamin is the only other son of his beloved mother, who died giving birth to him (cf. Gen. 35:18). In addition, Benjamin would have only been two years old when Joseph had last played with him.

The passage presupposes a great difference in age between Joseph and Benjamin. Joseph first addresses the other brothers and asks them if this youngest brother is Benjamin; as he had done when inquiring about the father, so too here he refers back to the first meeting with the words "of whom you spoke to me?," showing the brothers his interest and the fact he has forgotten nothing. The brothers' silence is sufficient answer.

There is a bit of irony in the vizier's use of "little," for actually now Benjamin is no longer the little boy the brothers had made him out to be. Originally (cf. Gen. 42:13) the brothers referred to him as "the youngest." Yet when they implored the vizier to desist from his demand to have him come before him (cf. Gen. 42:16) as cited subsequently (Gen. 44:20), they called him "little, the son of his old age" to move Joseph to pity. At the same time "little" expresses how Joseph himself used to think of him.

Hardly able to contain himself any longer, he yet managed to inquire formally whether this was indeed the younger brother of whom the men had spoken. The brothers must have thought that at this point, they were to be vindicated, because here sits the "one" of which they truthfully had spoken. They waited in vain for Joseph to pronounce them honest men. This was what they waited to hear, to be absolved of any false dealing, but it did not come.

Apprehensive that he might lose his self-composure, Joseph does not wait for the brothers' reply and, turning directly to Benjamin, his voice choking in his throat, he quickly blurts out a blessing on his younger brother. Joseph's blessing is significant in the scene: "May God be gracious (יְיָ־רַחֵם/yaḥn<sup>o</sup>ka) to you, my son." The essence of this phrase will become well known and loved in benedictions and prayers of later years (Num. 6:25; Psa. 67:1).

This is not a common, formal greeting: it is a wish that has in mind God's personal attention (cf. Gen. 33:5, 11 and the promise in Isa. 30:19). We may well be hearing echoes of the beginning of chapter 39 when Joseph, like Benjamin now, comes to Egypt as a helpless stranger and an Egyptian lord bestows favor on him.

In actuality, Joseph's blessing is the fulfillment of Israel's prayer! The father wishes God's mercy (*rah<sup>m</sup>mîm*). The brother wishes that God would be gracious (*ḥānan*). The two lines together frame the movement of Benjamin from one generation to the next. It is further worth noting that the two blessings together comprise a fundamental formula as Israel speaks of the LORD's purposes for them (cf. Ex. 34:6; Neh. 9:17, 31; Psa. 86:15; 103:8; 111:4;

112:4; 145:8; Joel 2:13). Together, these two blessings bestow upon Benjamin the most profound blessing Israel has in its power to give.

Though Joseph was Benjamin's full brother, in the blessing he called him "son." Perhaps by calling him "son" it was a part of his disguise before them that he affected to be much older than Benjamin (and, indeed, he was quite a bit older--15 years older--though hardly old enough to be his father).

Having blessed Benjamin, Joseph could not refrain from emotionally responding. The tender mercy for which Israel prayed (Gen. 43:14) came naturally from one who was moved by compassion for his brother. And the dam holding back Joseph's emotions cracks and now quickly collapses.

- 
- 30** And Joseph hurried *out* for he was deeply stirred over his brother, and he sought *a place* to weep; and he entered his chamber and wept there.
- 31** Then he washed his face, and came out; and he controlled himself and said, "Serve the meal."
- 

The meeting of the two sons of Rachel is a very emotional stirring moment. The Hebrew idiom "his mercies were heated up" (translated as, "deeply stirred over," NASB) occurs elsewhere exactly only in 1 Kings 3:26, where it means "to have compassion for." Here, however, Benjamin is not an object of pity. The sight of him arouses overwhelming feelings of tenderness and affection in Joseph. He can find relief only through tears. The Midrash aptly says, "Tears extinguish the heart's burning coals."

Joseph is "warm" ("stirred") for Benjamin. This term is used in a parallel way only Hosea 11:8 referring to the LORD's deep passion for Israel. The terms of Genesis 43:30 and Hosea 11:8 are close parallels and may be used to interpret each other. What is said here of Joseph, Hosea dares to say of God. The deep yearning and profound emotional response are parallel in the two dramatic portrayals. Joseph is moved with a passion he cannot resist.

Later, when Joseph is finally able to control his emotions, he returns and orders the promised meal to be served (v. 31). It is a poignant note that now Joseph hosts a meal for his brothers, who years before had callously sat down to eat while he languished in the pit (cf. Gen. 37:25)!

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**Joseph's Preferential Treatment Of Benjamin (verses 32-34b)**

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- 32** So they served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians, who ate with him, by themselves; because the Egyptians could not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is loathsome to the Egyptians.
- 

Herodotus (Histories, 2.41), Diodorus, Strabo and other ancient classical Greek writers have commented on the exclusiveness of the Egyptians concerning eating practices with Asiatics. In keeping with their segregation practices, three separate tables had to be set: one for the Hebrews, one for the Egyptians guests, and one for Joseph himself--the last table because of his exalted status.

In particular, the Egyptians abhorred the thought of eating at the same table with Hebrews. Herodotus gives as a reason for the separation the fact that the Canaanites ate animals, some of which were sacred to the Egyptians, for example, the cow. Herodotus further states that because the cow was taboo to Egyptians but eaten by Greeks, no native of Egypt would kiss a Greek, use his kitchen utensils, or even eat the flesh of an ox that had been cut with the knife of a Greek. It is therefore likely that Egyptian particularism asserted itself here because the Hebrews were shepherds--an abhorrent profession (cf. Gen. 46:34)--and because they ate sheep--an abomination to Egyptians (Ex. 8:22). The reference to the abhorrence in which the Hebrews, as a people of Canaan, were held, without other explanation, is one of the "eyewitness" notes that appear in the biblical narrative and argue strongly for authenticity.

Of course the Egyptians knew that Joseph was a Hebrew and that he worshiped the Hebrews' God; this had been clearly expressed by Joseph when he first met Pharaoh and was appointed to his position. Nevertheless, as far as social customs were concerned, he now had an Egyptian name, an Egyptian wife, and in general lived in the manner of Pharaoh. He therefore could not eat directly with his brothers without giving undue offense to the Egyptian guests who were present.

This meal which Joseph shares with his brothers is remarkable in many respects. Its significance in the course of the Narrative consists primarily in this, that it expresses the change over against the first journey of the brothers to Egypt; the brothers are now the guests of the most powerful man in Egypt

after the Pharaoh! This joyful meal brings to an end the brothers' journey with all their fears and dread anxieties; hence the narrator lays particular emphasis on it by reporting a rare event that takes place.

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- 33** Now they were seated before him, the first-born according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth, and the men looked at one another in astonishment.
- 34a** And he took portions to them from his own table;
- b** but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs.
- 

In what must have been a troubling display of apparent divine intervention, the brothers realized they had been seated, from eldest to youngest: the contrast between Joseph's knowledge and their ignorance is thus acted out in a kind of ritual performance. In his commentary on Genesis, Henry Morris describes their astonishment:

After they were assigned to seats at their table, the eleven brothers noted a remarkable thing. They had been seated in order of age, from the eldest through the youngest. If this were a mere coincidence, it was indeed marvelous. One can easily show . . . that there are no less than 39,917,000 different orders in which eleven individuals could have been seated! . . . Evidently, this man knew a great deal more about their family than they had realized; or else he had some kind of supernatural power. They had no answer, and could only wonder about it (*The Genesis Record*, 1976:610).

Evidently, this man knew a great deal more about their family than they had realized; or else he had some kind of supernatural power (cf. Gen. 44:15) because most of them had been born within only six years. They had no answer, and could only wonder about it. They had not revealed their birth order to anyone in Egypt, and yet they were seated accordingly. So, too, our LORD will arrange His "brothers" into the twelve tribes of Israel in a coming day--a feat the Jews themselves cannot do at the present.

It is possible that Joseph's seat (and small table) may have been at the apex of a triangle, the brothers placed on one side, the Egyptians on the other. This arrangement would enable him to be inconspicuously seated next to Benjamin.

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Joseph had portions of the food he ate served to his guests. This was a display of honor for one's guests. This baffling situation gave way to the real issue, the favoritism toward Benjamin. Now that Joseph had increased their uneasy sense of exposure to God's intervention, he focused their attention on Rachel's son by favoring Benjamin five times over them. When a guest was deemed worthy of very special honor, the portion served was made especially generous. If they retained any envy for this son of Rachel, Jacob's favorite of the group, this treatment was bound to excite it. The test was calculated to give them the opportunity to rekindle the old animosity. As on a former occasion (Gen. 37), the youngest is given precedence over his elders.

### **The Brothers Feasted And Drank Freely (verse 34c)**

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**34c So they feasted and drank freely with him.**

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Everyone knew that it was taboo for an Egyptian to share a table with a Hebrew. And yet here was the Grand Vizier of Egypt (who by the way was a Hebrew) sharing the food from his privileged table with eleven of them. And to one, Benjamin, he bestows an even greater honor by giving him five times as much as the rest. Apparently, none of the brothers resented Joseph's attention to Benjamin, and they all relax and enjoy the meal together. Thus this brings to a high point the account of the brothers' second visit to Egypt. One big happy family--almost.

This encounter between brothers ends not with jailing as in their first encounter with Joseph, but with a feat in which all are honored and the youngest singled out with a portion five times as large as that of the others. Once more in the theme of reversal, as even now the brothers are not treated with strict equity, we suspect that they are beginning to recognize that this is an inescapable fact of life.

## **APPLICATION**

This episode presents the brothers in a different light than before. From Judah's kind speech to his father, in which he was willing to take the blame for any harm to the lad, to their open acknowledgement regarding the money, to their enjoyment at the feast in spite of the favoritism to Benjamin, the brothers displayed a great maturity about their lot in life. They were aware of



God's intervention more than ever before, and so they demonstrated the proper response under the testing of Joseph--but one more severe test was needed to be sure.

The strengths that the brothers manifested in this chapter were also necessary for the nation (or the church) if they were to be God's servants through whom the blessing would be continued. In this chapter the brothers promised to take the blame for any catastrophe (responsibility); they acknowledge their culpability and made restitution for the money in their sacks (honesty); they retrieved their brother from prison in Egypt (unity); they recognized that God was at work in their midst (belief); and they rejoiced in their provisions, even when a brother was receiving more than they were (gratitude). Such is the maturity of the people of God whom God will use to bless the world. ***THOSE WHO WOULD PARTICIPATE IN GOD'S PROGRAM MUST BE WILLING TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR ACTIONS, MAKE RESTITUTION WHEN THEY ARE CULPABLE, AND ACCEPT THEIR GOD-GIVEN POSITION IN LIFE GRATEFULLY AND WITHOUT JEALOUSY.***

Behind the scenes of this family reunion are two important principles that we can apply in our lives today. To help us find out what those two principles are, let us turn to Isaiah 30.

In this section of Isaiah's writings, he addresses a rebellious people. In fact, they are called "rebellious children" (v. 1). God's warning to them is, "Woe to you," meaning, "as long as you are rebellious, woe to you."

When people rebel against God, many live with a sense of dread and anxiety, thinking that God is just waiting for the moment they repent so He can club them! Joseph's brothers felt and thought exactly the same thing about Joseph. They returned to Egypt feeling guilty, anxious, and afraid that the moment the prime minister saw them he would imprison them or worse! But punishment is not what Joseph had planned for them, nor is it what God intends for those who return to Him.

In poetic form, verses 15-17a of Isaiah 30 describe a rebel who was running from God but has now returned, repentant. He stands naked and alone before God, like a solitary flagpole standing on a hill (the Hebrew word for "flag" in Isaiah 30:17 literally means "a pole" or "a stake"). There he stands, with head bowed, waiting for the ax of God to fall on his life. Surprisingly, however, it is not God's wrath that rains down on this person.

*Therefore the LORD longs to be gracious to you,  
And therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you.  
For the LORD is God of justice;  
How blessed are all those who long for Him. (Isaiah 30:18).*

The LORD waits for us to quit running so He can show us His *grace*. In the same way, it was not Joseph's wrath that his brothers received, it was his love poured out in a gracious feast he had longed to give them.

From Isaiah's words and Joseph's example there are two things for us to remember. First, *waiting allows time for repentance*. Joseph could have revealed his identity the moment he first saw his brothers. But by waiting he has given his brothers the time they needed to have their consciences activated. Second, *waiting results in learning how to rest*. God waits for us to stop running so He can show us His grace. And we must learn that it is only when we stop running and wait on Him that we find rest (cf. Isaiah 40:28-31).

In addition, our passage reveals deep currents of emotion running through Joseph's heart, currents that found their release only through an uncontrollable flood of tears. Look again at Genesis 43:30, reading slowly so you can capture the intensity of the scene:

*And Joseph hurried out  
for he was deeply stirred over his brother,  
and he sought a place  
to weep; and he entered his chamber and wept there.*

Overcome with mounting emotion, Joseph, the prime minister of Egypt, all but ran from his brothers' presence as waves of sobbing came crashing through the defenses of his heart. If, like Joseph, you need a place to go to pour out your heart, you **will** find a refuge in God. Will you not flee into His presence today?

**Let us therefore draw near with confidence  
to the throne of grace,  
that we may receive mercy  
and  
may find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:16**

It is recorded that our LORD Jesus too, shed many tears. He wept over Jerusalem (Lk. 19:41), and at the tomb of Lazarus (Jn. 11:35). His tears flow because of sin, and because of its consequence: death. Truly, He can "be touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb. 4:15).

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why is it necessary for Joseph's brothers to make two trips to Egypt before he reveals himself?
2. List all the tests that Joseph arranges for his brothers. Can you explain the reasoning behind each of them?
3. Why was it so important to bring Benjamin down to Egypt?
4. What other customs or details in the Joseph Narrative thus far argues for the Narrative's historical authenticity?
5. What does the name "God Almighty" mean? What is its historical and biblical development? Why is it significant that it occurs in Genesis 43:14 and on the lips of "Israel"?
6. What is significant about the brothers eating with Joseph? Be sure to include in your explanation its significance in light of chapter 37.
7. List at least two new observations that you have learned concerning the Joseph Narrative from your study of chapter 43.



## Genesis 44:1-34

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### The Testing For Loyalty

#### MASK TO UNMASK

Joseph, already brilliantly successful in creating tensions during his brothers' two visits, now produced his master stroke. One more test was necessary before Joseph could disclose himself to his brothers and move his family to Egypt: he tested their loyalty for Benjamin in order for them to recognize their evil. Joseph had to see if they would abandon Rachel's other son, the favored Benjamin, if it should come to their life or his. Joseph gave them the opportunity in this calculated test. Dods remarks:

Everything falls short of thorough repentance which does not prevent us from committing the sin anew. We do not so much desire to be accurately informed about our past sins, and to get right views of our past selves; we wish to be no longer sinners, we wish to pass through some process by which we may be separated from that in us which has led us into sin. Such a process there is, for these men passed through it. (*Book of Genesis*, n.d.:387).

This episode forms part of the account of the brothers' second journey to Egypt which began in Genesis 43:1 and ends with Genesis 45:28; it is an interruption of the return journey to Canaan that was due to the stolen cup in Benjamin's sack. The chapter is a narrative report in the first half (vv. 1-17) that leads into Judah's speech on behalf of his brother in the second half (vv. 18-34). This marvelous speech elicits Joseph's emotional response in chapter 45. This narrative thus builds to a climax in the testing of the brothers, for the events recorded here threatened Benjamin and provided the occasion for either a new way of dealing with the matter or a repetition of the events in chapter 37.

Chapter 44 concludes the role reversals of chapter 37. In this episode we find Joseph is the powerful, whereas his brothers were in chapter 37; Joseph's brothers fulfill his dreams, whereas before they tried to stop them; then his brothers plotted against him, now he plots against them! In retributive fashion the deceivers are being deceived--not for evil, but for their good! The following indicates this plot reversal:

Benjamin carried to Egypt  
 Brothers plead with Joseph  
 Judah sacrifices himself for Benjamin  
 Joseph carried to Egypt in caravan  
 Joseph pleads with brothers  
 Judah argues to sell Joseph

### Source Criticism Considerations

Chapters 44:1--45:28 form one unit. Those who divide the sources, however, what to give chapter 44 to "J," while they divide chapter 45 between "J" and "E," with the larger portion going to "E." It is generally admitted among these scholars that making a proper division of this material presents some real difficulties. As a consequence there is little agreement among them as to the exact division of the material among the alleged sources. A few even want to bring in a third source, "P," especially in Genesis 45:17-21 and 25-27.

The bases for ascribing chapter 45 to more than one source are the following alleged repetitions. At the scene where Joseph makes himself known in verses 3 and 4; when Joseph tells his brothers to let his father know about his high position in Egypt in verses 9 and 13; when Joseph orders them to bring his father to Egypt in verses 13, 18 and 19. The critics also point to certain supposed contradictions. They charge that in verse 1 Joseph took certain measures to prevent the Egyptians in his court from learning about his family ties with these strangers from Palestine, while in verse 2 we are told that he wept so loudly that everyone in the court could hear him (see also Gen. 45:16). It is further claimed that in verses 19 and 27 mention is made of wagons for bringing the family to Egypt, while in verse 23 it is implied that only donkeys were used.

None of these arguments carries much weight. The alleged repetitions can easily be explained by the vagaries of the narrative style of the ancient East. They can also be understood in the light of the emotional crisis described here. The repetition of the order to bring Jacob to Egypt, it should be noted, is actually one order given by Joseph and one by Pharaoh. The alleged contradictions obviously result from a misunderstanding of the text. Thus verse 1 merely says that Joseph did not want any of his Egyptian cohorts present when he made himself known to his brothers. The distinction between wagons and donkeys, which is a bit silly, can readily be explained when we assume that Jacob and his sons' families would be carried in the wagons while the provisions they brought with them would be loaded on donkeys and other beasts of burden. Taken as a whole, we once again come to the conclusion that there is no substantial

evidence in the text for ascribing this material to multiple sources, which are then intermingled in the episode we have before us.

### THEOLOGICAL IDEAS

Joseph further tested his brothers by having his cup and Benjamin's money returned in Benjamin's sack of grain. The purpose of the act is clear from what Joseph instructed his house steward to say. When he overtook the brothers, he was to say, "Why have you repaid evil (*rā'āh*) for good (*tôbāh*)?" (v. 4), and "You have done wrong (*h'erē'ōtem*) in doing this" (v. 5).

If we are to judge by the brothers' response when the servant reached them with Joseph's message, the word that the servant spoke was more detailed than what we are given in the narrative. The brothers immediately made reference to the silver and gold that was supposedly in their sacks (v. 8). But why were Joseph's words reported only in such general terms?

The solution lies in the fact that the words spoken by Joseph expressed the central question of the Joseph narrative: the contrast between the "evil" (*rā'āh*) done by the brothers and the "good" (*tôbāh*) intended and accomplished by God (cf. Gen. 50:20).

When stated in such a general way, Joseph's question looks as if it included the question of the brothers' treatment of him in chapter 37. The question does, in fact, raise again within the narrative the matter of the brothers' guilt in their treatment of Joseph. Whether the brothers realized this or not, the function of Joseph's question within the narrative is to point out to the reader that a residue of guilt still hung over the brother's heads. It seemed as if everywhere they turned, they heard an echo of their mistreatment of their brother Joseph. The effect of such narrative strategies is to present a picture of a world in which ultimately justice does prevail and where an "evil" once done will not go unnoticed or unattended.

Thus the important theological point of the passage is the brothers' acknowledgement that God had found out their iniquity (v. 16). This motif is underscored by the fact that the verb "to find (out)" occurs eight times in the narrative. Their consciences may have been bothering them for some time, but through the testing their senses were exercised to be reminded of the loss of Rachel's son. The brothers were accused of something they had not done

(spying), and Benjamin was accused of doing something he had not done (stealing). Yet they acknowledged that they had been found out for their crime against Joseph.

This theological idea of guilt over past sins informs the central point of the passage—love for the brother. The passage teaches that, in order for brothers to live together in unity, they must have self-sacrificing love for one another; but it teaches this lesson by demonstrating that those who have not possessed such love will be called on to demonstrate it. Judah's speech focuses on this point, for he appealed for Benjamin for his father's sake and willingly offered himself in the place of Benjamin. He did so because he knew that God had found out their past sins and that the present difficulty was a part of the retribution.

## STRUCTURE, SYNTHESIS AND TRANSLATION

### Structure

Within the account recorded in this chapter (together with Gen. 45:1-9) deals almost exclusively with an interruption of the return journey (apart from Gen. 44:3, 4a), caused by the false accusation of stealing the silver goblet. Within the interruption only Genesis 44:1-17 is concerned with dramatic action; all is centered on Judah's address to Joseph, vv. 18-34, and Joseph's action, Genesis 45:1-9, which leads to sibling rival resolution.

### CHIASTIC STRUCTURE OF CHAPTERS 44-45

- A The aborted trip to Canaan (44:1-10)
- B Search and discovery of the one silver goblet (44:11-13)
- C Joseph's accusation (44:14-17)
- D JUDAH'S SPEECH: VICARIOUS SUFFERING (44:18-34)
- C' Joseph's self-disclosure (45:1-15)
- B' Joseph gives many lavish presents (45:16-24)
- A' The brothers return to Canaan with gifts (45:25-28)

Figure 22.

The overall structure demonstrates the narrator's intention to bring the Narrative to its literary climax. The sudden dramatic reversal of fortune follows Judah's address. The literary device of parallelism appears in clear relief here. The mounting tension from the first to the second meeting leads to resolution and deliverance; two journeys and two meetings with Joseph on the second journey prepare it. The following overall chiasmic structure demonstrates our narrator's skill in presenting his material.

Chapter 44 corresponds rather closely to parts of chapter 43: Joseph's commission to the steward (43:16-17 and 44:1-2), the brothers' appeal to the steward (43:18-23 and 44:7-13), and the brothers' submission before Joseph (43:26-30 and 44:14-17, 18-34). Such parallelism in the story of Joseph is common. Here it serves to heighten the tension of the testing by Joseph before there could be any resolution.

Within the chapter itself repeated elements reinforce the message. The motif of evil occurs in verses 4, 4, and 34, stressing that the brothers had done evil and would again bring sorrow to Jacob. The Hebrew preposition, "instead of" (תַּחַת/*tahat*), occurs in verses 4 and 33, relating their doing evil for good and Judah's desire to be Benjamin's substitute in captivity.

The expression *hālilâ*, "Far be it," is used twice, once by the men when accused (v. 7), and once by Joseph when he chose to keep only Benjamin (v. 17). The verb "to die" is repeated; it is used by the brothers when they rashly put a death penalty on Benjamin (v. 9), and then by Judah when he realizes that it would kill Jacob to lose Benjamin.

Finally, the verb "to find" occurs eight times (vv. 8, 9, 10, 12, 16<sup>2</sup>, 17; 34). Its central use is in the explanation of God's finding out their iniquity (v. 16), showing how they understood the other findings.

## Synthesis

Having forced the brothers to bring Benjamin down to Egypt, Joseph tested their concern for him by framing the lad and blaming him for taking the cup, all of which prompted the brothers' acknowledgment that God was finding out their sin against Joseph, and Judah's intercessory plea on Benjamin's behalf.



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### CHIASTIC ARRANGEMENT OF GENESIS 44

- A Joseph's instructions to his steward concerning the ruse (1-2)
- B Brothers' departure from the city (3-4a)
- C Joseph's instructions to his steward (4b-6)
- D Brothers' protestations of innocence (7-10)**
- C' Steward's search and discovery of the silver goblet (11-12)
- B' Brothers' reaction and return to the city (13)
- A' Joseph's accusation: His ruse succeeds (14-15)

### JUDAH ACKNOWLEDGES THE BROTHERS' GUILT (16)

- A Joseph's judgment: Benjamin shall remain (17)
- B Judah's request for Joseph's judgment reversal (18)
- C Judah's rehearsal of the 1st journey (19-23)
- D Brothers' justification before their father (24-29)**
- C' The consequence if Benjamin does not return (30-31)
- B' Judah's basis for Joseph's reversal (32)
- A' Judah's plea: He shall substitute himself for Benjamin (33-34)

Figure 23.

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### Translation

- 1 Then he instructed his house steward as follows, "Fill the men's bags with food, as much as they can carry, and put each one's silver in the mouth of his bag.
- 2 Put my silver goblet in the mouth of the bag of the youngest one, together with his money for the rations." And he did as Joseph told him.
- 3 With the first light of morning, the men were sent off with their pack animals.
- 4 They had just left the city and had not gone far, when Joseph said to his steward, "Up, go after the men! And when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why did you repay good with evil?'"
- 5 It is the very one from which my master drinks and which he uses for divination. It was a wicked thing for you to do!"
- 6 He overtook them and spoke those words to them.
- 7 And they said to him, "Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do anything of the kind!

- 
- 8 Here we brought back to you from the land of Canaan the silver that we found in the mouths of our bags. How then could we have stolen any silver or gold from your master's house!
- 9 Whichever of your servants it is found with shall die; the rest of us, moreover, shall become slaves to my lord."
- 10 He replied, "Although what you are proposing is right, only the one with whom it is found shall be my slave; but the rest of you shall go free."
- 11 So each one hastened to lower his bag to the ground, and each one opened his bag.
- 12 He searched, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest; and the goblet turned up in Benjamin's bag.
- 13 At this they rent their clothes. Each reloaded his pack animal, and they returned to the city.
- 14 When Judah and his brothers reentered the house of Joseph, who was still there, they threw themselves on the ground before him.
- 15 Joseph said to them, "What is this deed that you have done? Do you not know that a man like me practices divination?"
- 16 Judah replied, "What can we say to my lord? How can we plead, how can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered the crime of your servants. Here we are, then, slaves of my lord, the rest of us as much as he in whose possession the goblet was found."
- 17 But he replied, "Far be it from me to act thus! Only he in whose possession the goblet was found shall be my slave; the rest of you go back in peace to your father."
- 18 Then Judah went up to him and said, "Please, my lord, let your servant appeal to my lord, and do not be impatient with your servant, you who are the equal of Pharaoh.
- 19 My lord asked his servants, 'Have you a father or another brother?'
- 20 We told my lord, 'We have an old father, and there is a child of his old age, the youngest; his full brother is dead, so that he alone is left of his mother, and his father dotes on him.'
- 21 Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, that I may set eyes on him.'
- 22 We said to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father; if he were to leave him, his father would die.'
- 23 But you said to your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, do not let me see your faces.'
- 24 When we came back to your servant my father, we reported my lord's words to him.
- 25 Later our father said, 'Go back and procure some food for us.'

- 26 We answered, 'We cannot go down; only if our youngest brother is with us can we go down, for we may not show our faces to the man unless our youngest brother is with us.'
- 27 Your servant my father said to us, 'As you know, my wife bore me two sons.
- 28 But one is gone from me, and I said: Alas, he was torn by a beast! And I have not seen him since.
- 29 If you take this one from me, too, and he meets with disaster, you will send my white head down to Sheol in sorrow.'
- 30 "Now, if I come to your servant my father and the boy is not with us--since his own life is so bound up with his--
- 31 when he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will send the white head of your servant our father down to Sheol in grief.
- 32 Now your servant has pledged himself for the boy to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, I shall stand guilty before my father forever.'
- 33 Therefore, please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord instead of the boy, and let the boy go back with his brothers.
- 34 For how can I go back to my father unless the boy is with me? Let me not be witness to the woe that would overtake my father!"

### EXEGETICAL OUTLINE

- I. When Joseph tested his brothers' concern for Benjamin, the brothers acknowledged that God had found out their iniquity in the evil done to Joseph (1-17).
- A. Joseph tested them by placing his silver cup in Benjamin's sack and accusing the brothers of stealing it (1-6).
1. Joseph commanded his servant to put his silver cup in Benjamin's sack (1-2).
  2. He commanded his servant to follow them and accuse them of stealing it (3-6).

- 
- B. Joseph's test elicited a defensive and unified response from the brothers (7-13).
    - 1. They responded to the accusation by affirming their honesty in returning the money from their first visit (7-8).
    - 2. They responded in confidence by offering the life of the one in whose sack the cup might be found (9-11).
    - 3. They responded in dismay when the servant found the cup in Benjamin's sack (12-13).
  - C. Joseph's test both prompted the brothers to acknowledge that God had found out their iniquity and examined the brothers' concern for Benjamin by declaring him to be a slave (14-17).
    - 1. Judah and his brothers bowed before Joseph (14).
    - 2. Joseph reiterated that he practiced divination (15).
    - 3. Judah confessed that God had found out their iniquity and declared that all of them were Joseph's slaves (16).
    - 4. Joseph declared that only Benjamin would be his slave and that the others could go free (17).
- II. Judah's intercessory plea on behalf of his brother Benjamin demonstrated his concern for his father and therefore the favorite son (18-34).
- A. Judah approached Joseph as the intercessor and recalled their first meeting with him (18-23).
    - 1. Judah approached Joseph as intercessor of the group (18).
    - 2. He recalled their first meeting, when Joseph demanded to see their youngest brother, Benjamin (19-23).
  - B. Judah recounted how they had told their father that they could not return to Egypt without Benjamin and reported Jacob's anxiety over his favorite son (24-29).
    - 1. Judah related how they told Jacob that they could not return to Egypt without Benjamin (24-26).
    - 2. He reported how Jacob expressed sorrow over losing Joseph and anxiety over relinquishing Benjamin (27-29).
  - C. Judah explained that Jacob would die in sorrow if Benjamin did not return and offered himself as a slave in Benjamin's place (30-34).
    - 1. Judah explained that, if they returned without Benjamin, their father would die in sorrow and he would bear the guilt for it (30-32).
    - 2. He offered to remain as a slave in Benjamin's place, demonstrating his concern for his father and his brother (33-34).

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## EXPOSITION OF THE PASSAGE

### I. *Because of their past failures, God may have to test His people's love and concern for others (1-17).*

Preparations for the journey home parallel the first trip (cf. Gen. 42:25). Joseph gives instructions to his steward, just as he had done on the occasion of the first departure from Egypt. But there is a difference; in the first all the brothers fell under the suspicion of theft; here it is only Benjamin. There is a mounting tension; in the first case it was a question of the silver; here it is a very valuable, personal possession of Joseph's, the silver divining cup. This, of course, makes the discovery scene, with Joseph's steward as the discoverer, all the more traumatic. The return home becomes a return to Egypt and a final meeting with this mysterious lord of the land. Judah's first plea to place all of them in slavery for Benjamin receives a balanced reply that stresses fairness: only the one who apparently took the cup will be his slave; the others may return in peace. The calm fairness of Joseph's words now contrasts sharply with his accusations and oaths of the first encounter.

Joseph intended to use his personal drinking cup as a snare, one that would bring his brothers back to him and also entrap them in an unfair situation. Why? Because he wanted to know if his brothers still saw life from a human perspective or if they had begun to develop a divine one that would enable them to see God at work even in difficult circumstances.

This episode flows from the last one without a break. This is evident that this new episode begins with "[Now Joseph]" he commanded his house steward . . .," without a subject (though supplied by NIV). The real break in the narrative comes at verse 3, "As soon as it was light," as the Hebrew syntax indicates (nominal clause with the inverted clause, "the men were sent away").

#### Joseph's Instructions (verses 1-2)

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- 1** Then he commanded his house steward, saying, "Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in the mouth of his sack."
- 

As Joseph's feast for his brothers drew to a close (cf. 43:32-34), Joseph took his steward aside and ordered him to fill the brothers' sacks with

food, as much as the sacks would hold and they could carry. Presumably, these preparations took place during the night while the brothers slept, for they left early next morning. In addition, Joseph instructed the steward to return and place each man's money at the top of his sack. "Each man's money" was that which belonged to the ten. Benjamin's money is mentioned separately in the next verse.

By having the brothers' silver placed back into their sacks, Joseph's request would have a twofold effect: first, by generously supplying his brothers with provisions in excess of what their money could buy, Joseph makes their "ingratitude" appear all the greater when they are apprehended for alleged theft (and thus renewing their sense of guilt); secondly, it would reinforce the steward's earlier statement that God was somehow working on their behalf (cf. Gen. 43:23).

But in Benjamin's sack, an additional item was stowed away:

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2 "And put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, and his money for the grain." And he did as Joseph had told *him*.

---

Joseph's strategy, already brilliantly successful in creating the tensions he required through the two visits of the brothers, now produced his master stroke: *the forsaking of selfish advantage and avowal in place thereof of family solidarity*. He tested their concern for Benjamin by giving them the opportunity to recall their evil and not repeat it. If they should have no compassion for their brother--the beloved son of their father--then they had no place in the development of the promise. The test involved placing Joseph's *silver* cup in Benjamin's sack and then pursuing them to arrest Benjamin.

The term for "cup" (גַּבִּי'א/*gābī'a*) is probably a loan word from Egyptian *kbhw*, "libation vessel." It appears in other contexts only in the sense of a container for wine larger than an ordinary cup and as a receptacle for oil in the lampstand which was the only light permitted in the Tabernacle (Ex. 25:31-34; 37:17, 19). Perhaps this term, together with the reference to light (אֹר/'*ôr*) in the next verse, suggests that our narrator is representing the silver cup as the vehicle which will bring spiritual illumination to the brothers.

In this context, the cup serves both as a drinking vessel and as a divining instrument (v. 5). The fact that we are told it is made of silver is not meant solely to emphasize its preciousness; the offense would be grave enough no matter what the composition of the cup might have been. The significance is that "silver, money," is a key and thematic term, reiterated twenty times in the episodes of Joseph and his brothers in Egypt (chapters 42--45). In this episode, we shall see later, the purpose of "silver/ money" reaches its climax in the Joseph Narrative (see notes on v. 15).

At dawn the next day, Joseph's brothers exchanged thanks and happily set out for home. However, just as they got outside the city, Joseph's steward quickly overtook them and sternly accused them of stealing the precious cup:

#### Brothers' Departure From The City (verses 3-4a)

- 
- 3** As soon as it was light, the men were sent away, they with their donkeys.
- 4a** They had *just* gone out of the city, *and* were not far off,
- 

The elation of the brothers must have been great. This man, whom they had feared so greatly, had turned out to be a most congenial host. Rather than being cast into prison or worse, they had been honored guests at the table of a great Egyptian ruler. Now they would be able to return to their father with an abundant supply of grain, with both Benjamin and Simeon accompanying them.

The next morning at dawn (a detail explaining why Joseph is still at home when the brothers later return, v. 14), the brothers found their donkeys loaded and ready to go. The misery they suffered for two years at the hand of this unreasonable Egyptian lord has finally drawn to an end: Simeon is released, Benjamin is safely in their care, and their sacks are full of food. They will soon be reunited with their father and their own families. Their hope is waxing brighter as the morning sun gradually illuminates the Eastern sky. Unknown to them, though, the dawning light brings another test by the Vizier.

The phrase, "morning light," seems to be significant here, especially in the Joseph Narrative, more so before the brothers' final test. The Hebrew word for "morning" (בֹּקֶר/*bôqer*) has the underlying meaning to "divide, split"

or "penetrate." As everyone knows, the morning dawn divides the day from the night, splitting the days apart by the penetrating rays of the sun. In addition, the word for light (אור/'*ôr*) is used representatively as a symbol for "wisdom" and "understanding" (Prov. 6:23; Psa. 119:130; Eccl. 2:13). Perhaps then, this phrase foreshadows Joseph's ingenious scheme to penetrate and split his brothers' conscience so as to lead them to uncovering their guilt.

After making proper expressions of gratitude and farewell, they set out on the journey for home, no doubt excitedly talking about the happy turn of events, anticipating their father's happiness upon their return. This is supported by "the men . . . with their donkeys" seems to allude to "us slaves with our donkeys" (Gen. 43:18), contrasting their horror *then* and their cheerful mood *now*.

#### Joseph's Instruction To His Steward (verses 4b-6)

- 
- 4b when Joseph said to his house steward, "Up, follow the men; and when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid evil for good?"
- 5 Is not this the one from which my lord drinks, and which he indeed uses for divination? You have done wrong in doing this.'"6 So he overtook them and spoke these words to them.
- 6 So he overtook them and spoke these words to them.
- 

Almost immediately after they had left, however, and were just beyond the city limits, Joseph sent his steward after them, instructing him carefully what to say and do. Joseph probably planned the location of their capture just outside the city limits, duplicating the location where his brothers sold him near Dothan (cf. Gen. 37:17), so that his brothers will once again sense the inescapable haunting crime.

By this time Joseph's steward had been told all about the purpose of the plot. He was also instructed how to address them, using the plural "you," implicating them all, but avoiding the words "theft," "thief," and "cup" when provoking their protestations to his mystifying innuendo. This deliberate vagueness is intended to fill the brothers with a sense of foreboding.



The accusation of what Joseph tells his steward to say is powerfully worded. First of all, he is to say, "Why have you repaid evil for good (לָמָּה לָּמַמְתָּם רָעָה תַּחַת טוֹבָה *lāmmâ šillamtem rā'â taḥat ṭôbâ*, v. 4)?" and "You have done evil (הָרַעְתֶּם/*hārē'otem*, v. 5b)." They had been greatly favored in Egypt but now were accused of responding to that good with an evil act. On a deeper level these words would have struck a responsive chord concerning the evil they had earlier done to someone who was good.

Joseph designs this accusation to vividly reenact the scene at Dothan twenty-two years ago. The Hebrew word for "repay" (שָׁלַם/*sālēm*) recalls the word "peace" (שָׁלוֹם/*sālôm*) in Genesis 37. In Genesis 37:13-14 Jacob sent Joseph to "see the welfare (שָׁלוֹם/*sālôm*) of your brothers and the welfare (שָׁלוֹם/*sālôm*) of the flock . . ."; but they rejected this good will and treated Joseph treacherously by selling him into slavery for twenty pieces of silver. They repaid evil for good.

The forceful wording continues: "Is not **this the one** from which my lord drinks," that is, the one they saw him using at dinner. If the cup is found in their possession, the brothers certainly cannot claim that it is their own property. The use of the pronoun, without reference to any antecedent, would indicate that he believed they all knew full well what it was they had stolen.

It is of interest that the cup is described here as the cup from which the high official drank daily. The fact that the cup was in use for drinking would point to the folly of expecting the theft to be unnoticed, and if it were also used for divining it would be doubly precious. Thus it was a very personal and intimate part of the vizier's life, and this was why its alleged theft was portrayed as a personal offense of serious proportions against this Egyptian ruler.

The "planted" silver cup and then the supposed "theft" of it, to which the Egyptian ruler supposedly is endeared, represents how his brothers have robbed their father his beloved son and how they have concealed the crime by perpetuating a lie. This silver divining cup should further lead their thought to Joseph, because Joseph was a diviner too. His brothers had heard how he told the future (cf. Gen. 37:5-10), and how he functioned as his father's "eyes" (cf. Gen. 37:2, 13, 14) much like the divining cup serves as a "third eye" to the Egyptian ruler. Their thought of Joseph and his exceptional endowment should implant among the brothers a terrorizing terror that they have violated a man of God and committed a great evil and that retribution of divine justice is inevitable.

Joseph had a well-deserved reputation for prophetic insight, and the brothers themselves had noted with wonder how Joseph had been able to have them seated at the table in order of their respective ages (cf. Gen. 43:33). The inference seems to be that the Egyptians attributed his powers to his cup of divination, and that this may well have been an object coveted by many. And now, here, these ungrateful (Hebrew!) foreigners had presumed to steal this remarkable cup for their own use!

It is not stated that Joseph actually believes in divination. He wants the brothers to think he does. The technique of divining by means of a cup is well known from the ancient world. It took various forms: the use of water (hydromancy), oil (oleomancy), or wine (oenomancy). The practitioner professed to be able to interpret either the surface patterns formed when a few drops of one liquid were poured onto another or the movement of objects floating on or sinking in the fluid. The aim of the exercise was to determine the future, to locate the source of trouble, or to apportion blame or credits, as in Genesis 30:27. They believed that the spirits who knew future events would act on the cup's contents in such a way as to form these messages.

Divining, whether by attaching meanings to the movements of liquids in a cup (and to other random configurations, cf. Ezek. 21:21) or by a kind of crystal-gazing, is fundamentally alien to Israel, to whom God revealed His will explicitly, as Balaam would reluctantly testify: ". . . Nor is there any divination against Israel; At the proper time it shall be said to Jacob and the Israel, what God has done" (Num. 23:23). The biblical warnings against the practice of any form of divination in Israel is legislated in Deuteronomy 18:10, which expressly forbids it.

In this connection there is a difference of opinion among biblical scholars regarding the meaning of the term that our translators have rendered "uses for divination" (שִׁנְיָהּ, שִׁנְיָהּ/*nahēs y<sup>e</sup>nahēs*). Other scholars feel that in this case the term should be read to say, "be sure to notice," that is, since it was his personal cup, Joseph would have quickly noticed that it was gone. Other scholars, as do I, believe that this clause should be translated as "about this he would certainly have divined." It is a small difference, but it would give added point to verse 15, where the implication would be: "Did you think you could be undetected?" (see notes on v. 15). The linguistic arguments with respect to the word used in the original is not conclusive. A good case can be made for these three possibilities, even when we compare this term as it is used here with other passages in which it appears.

It is probable that Joseph, in his preliminary dealings with his brothers, was still simply adapting his image to that expected of an Egyptian leader who had both priestly as well as political functions. In addition, although this ritual may well have been practiced in Joseph's court, it is not likely that a high official such as Joseph, would practice it himself. He would be more likely to delegate this to assigned magicians and soothsayers who were under his command.

Joseph's steward immediately carried out his master's orders and soon overtook Joseph's brothers and made his accusations. "These words" in v. 6 repeat exactly what Joseph had instructed his steward to say (cf. vv. 4b-5b); but v. 10 will show how much Joseph left to his steward's own discretion. His terrifying though restrained admonishment, presumably, caused the brothers' swift secretive huddling around Judah, their spokesman (cf. v. 14; see notes on Gen. 43:3).

#### Brothers' Protestations Of Innocence (verses 7-10)

- 
- 7        **And they said to him, "Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing.**
- 8        **Behold, the money which we found in the mouth of our sacks we have brought back to you from the land of Canaan. How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord's house?**
- 9        **With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we also will be my lord's slaves."**
- 

Joseph's brothers strongly denied the charges of theft that were made against them. Their anxious fears found immediate expression: "Far be it" (הָלִילָה/*hālilâ*). They protested their innocence by explaining how they returned the money they had found (מָשָׂא נֹחַ/*māšā'nû*)--they were honest men. They, of course, are aghast at this new charge. They were so confident of their innocence that they put a death penalty (וָמֶת/*wāmēt*) on the one in whose sack it might be found (יִמְמָשֶׁה/*yimmāšē*) and the rest would become slaves of the Egyptian official.

It should be noted that the steward's three-fold accusation meets the brothers' three-fold denial. Apparently the brothers' consciousness has not yet sunk into the deeper level of the accusation.

If we are to judge by the brothers' response when Joseph's steward reached them with his message, the message was more detailed than what we are given in the narrative. The brothers immediately made reference to the silver that was supposedly in their sacks (v. 8). But why were Joseph's words reported only in such general terms? The solution lies in the fact that the words spoken by Joseph expressed the central question of the Joseph Narrative: the contrast between the "evil" (רָעָה/*rā'āh*) done by the brothers and the "good" (טוֹב/*tōb*) intended and accomplished by God (cf. Gen. 50:20). The charge was to be general at first, then specific in the charge of the theft of the silver divining cup, as though all were aware of the fact.

When stated in such a general way, Joseph's question looks as if it included the question of the brothers' treatment of him in chapter 37. The question does, in fact, raise again within the Narrative the matter of the brothers' guilt in their treatment of Joseph. Whether the brothers realized this or not, the function of Joseph's question within the Narrative is to point out to the reader that a residue of guilt still hung over the brothers' heads. It seemed as if everywhere they turned, they heard an echo of their mistreatment of their brother Joseph. The effect of such narrative strategies is to present a picture of a world in which ultimately justice does prevail and where an "evil" once done will not go unnoticed or unattended.

This grim and rash promise, that the one guilty of the theft of the cup will forfeit his life, invokes a parallel to an earlier episode in their father's life when, pursued by a wrathful Laban in part because someone had stolen his household gods, Jacob confidently invited his father-in-law to search his tent and pronounced that if anyone were found to have taken the household gods, that person should not live (Gen. 31:32).

Laban accepted Jacob's offer and proceeded to search Jacob's tents, including the tents of Leah and the two slave women. Finally he came to Rachel's tent, Jacob's beloved wife. Rachel, however, had hidden the stolen objects in a saddle on which she was seated while the search went on. When Laban searched her tent, Rachel asked that she be excused from getting up because, she claimed, she was having her menstrual period. Thus, although the stolen cult objects were not discovered by Laban, Rachel however, seems to have suffered the consequence of Jacob's sentence when she died giving birth to Benjamin. Now, the shadow of a similar doom is made to pass over that very son!

---

Undoubtedly, the spontaneous pronouncement of a death penalty for the thief and of slavery for the others is rhetorical and intended to be a convincing and categorical assertion of innocence. It is not clear whether these penalties reflect contemporary law. The formula "shall die" has more of a judicial than an imprecatory ring (cf. Deut. 18:20; 19:12; 1 Kgs. 1:52).

Biblical law never legislates the death penalty for crimes against personal property. In the present instance, it is possible that the proposed punishments reflect Egyptian law, unknown to us from any other source. It is also likely that the theft of a sacred object entailed far more severe penalties than ordinary theft. Moreover, it is very possible that because the brothers are convinced of their innocence, they propose a harsher punishment for themselves than the law actually requires.

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10 So he said, "Now let it also be according to your words; he with whom it is found shall be my slave, and *the rest of you shall be innocent.*"

---

The opening words of the steward's response--literally "also now according to your words so it is" (גַּם עַתָּה כְּדְבָרֵיכֶם כֵּן הוּא)--are unclear. They could mean, "The penalties you invoke are indeed the law, but I shall be lenient." However, this interpretation is countered by Joseph's apparent rejection of the unfairness of collective responsibility in verse 17. The steward might also mean, "I accept the logic of your argument to the effect that you are generally honest." Thus with this understanding, the steward would be conceding that he was "wrong" to have suspected them all, for they had indeed proved their honesty.

All of this falls into line with Joseph's desire, thus his steward mitigates their proposed death penalty for the thief, since, Joseph had already decreed that if the thief be found, only he would be Joseph's slave. In addition the lessening of the punishment lightens the psychological torment the brothers otherwise will have to endure upon the discovery of the silver cup in Benjamin's sack. This interpretation seems to be the best, since he releases them from their voluntary offer of collective liability. Therefore the steward declares that only the one in whose sack the cup might be found would become a servant--the rest would be innocent. Thus by acting on the particular possibility of the guilt of one individual, the steward proclaimed that only the guilt one would suffer,

*thus putting the alternate choice of self-preservation versus Benjamin's welfare before them.*

The Hebrew term for "innocent" (נְקִיִּים / *nēqiyyim*) is a legal term for "cleared of offense or obligation."

The brothers would be horrified at how shrewdly the steward had pinned them down to their rashly delivered declaration, because they fear a frame-up which this time would not be resolved as it was with their replaced money sacks (cf. Gen. 42:27ff.; 43:18ff.).

They are so excited that they cannot bear the suspense of first returning before having their extremely heavy luggage unloaded, thus they do it then and there.

#### **Steward's Search And Discovery Of The Silver Goblet (verses 11-12)**

- 
- 11 Then they hurried, each man lowered his sack to the ground, and each man opened his sack.**
- 12 And he searched, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest, and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack.**
- 

The brothers' haste to unload is a demonstration of innocence as well as an attempt to dispose of the entire business as expeditiously as possible. They do not even help each other. Their frenzy gives them augmented strength.

The suspense of the narrative builds as we read that the sacks were searched, beginning with the one belonging to the oldest (Reuben) and ending with the one belonging to the youngest (Benjamin). One can easily imagine the rising self-confidence of the brothers after each successive search yielded nothing. By searching the brothers' sacks in this manner, starting with the oldest, this prevented their suspicion that the steward had known where the silver cup would be found. Moreover, in this manner, Joseph's steward adroitly manipulates the entire situation.

One may ask, "If the silver cup was on top of the grain as reported in verse 2, then why was it not immediately discovered? Surely it would not have required the extensive search that Joseph's steward conducted." This objection can be easily answered. When the steward caught up with them and

charged them with the theft of the cup, "each man opened his sack" suggests that each man in turn lowered his sack from his donkey and these were opened one by one. The brothers were so sure they were innocent in this matter that they were eager to avoid any suggestion that they had quickly opened their sacks and then hidden the valued cup elsewhere. Therefore, each sack was opened under the watchful eye of Joseph's steward.

As the sacks were opened, they must have seen their returned silver, which lay in full view of them all, but noticeably no mention is made of it, either by the steward or by the brothers! Some interpreters have suggested that since neither the brothers or steward mention the silver, the reference is a clumsy redactional (editing) intrusion (as well as the mention of silver in verses 1-2) into the text. This is certainly an arbitrary assumption! There is not a shred of evidence in the text that this was a later insertion. This reflects the felt need of the documentarians of predicating nonoriginal additions because repetition is not complete to provide for construction of parallels. However, the critical interpreters' suggestion stems from a general failure to recognize the narrative function of "silver" in the Joseph Narrative (see comments on verses 13 and 15). In addition, the presence of the money could not provide the basis of a charge of theft. A charge founded on this could easily be refuted by the brothers pointing out that the house steward had done it before and probably did so this time. But the silver cup was different and personal, and this is the new element on which the brothers were apprehended. But though the presence of the money did, no doubt, help to heighten tension in their minds, the omission is made because it was not primary.

It is instructive to notice the flow of the word "and" throughout this scene--especially where it does not occur:

and they hurried,  
 and they lowered [each man] his sack  
 and he searched [the steward]  
     with the oldest began he  
     with the youngest finished he  
 and was found the cup in the sack of Benjamin  
 and they tore their clothes  
 and they loaded [each] man his donkey  
 and they returned to the city

Note in the above scheme that the literal consistent use of "and" in each clause with the exception of the two inset clauses which depict with appropriate suspense the course of the search (v. 13 is also included).

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When all but Benjamin's luggage had been searched, they are already relieved, for he certainly has not stolen the cup; for the older brothers of course had no reason to believe that Benjamin would have stolen it. Neither do they fear a trumped-up charge against him, for he has just enjoyed the vizier's particular favor. Besides, he was innocent of their earlier crime against Joseph, and thus would not be culpable and share in its consequences! But when the search came to the last man, there was the crushing revelation as the steward withdraws the silver cup from Benjamin's sack. Behold, the silver cup! They freeze with terror.

This dramatic revelation is designed purposely to throw attention on Benjamin, and, the silver cup being found in his sack. Once again the brothers find themselves in the same relation to Benjamin as they once were relative to Joseph. Now the moment of truth was on them! Would they act to save their own necks at the expense of Benjamin and to the sorrow of Jacob?

#### **The Brothers' Reaction And Return To The City (verse 13)**

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**13** Then they tore their clothes, and when each man loaded his donkey, they returned to the city.

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That the brothers did not desert Benjamin was evidence of a permanent change in themselves, the change for which Joseph sought. Their dismay at what they could not explain caused them to rend their garments rather than allow Benjamin to be taken into slavery (v. 13). Now in mourning and despair, they must return and appear before the Grand Vizier, to them, an implacable foe. Now they had to rescue Benjamin somehow.

They are *all* too stunned to speak. The multi-colored garment that they tore off Joseph twenty-two years before, now is reenacted, but this time they tear off their own in speechless horror: "Then they tore their clothes in rage (lit. translation of the Hebrew text) and when each man loaded his donkey, they returned to the city." Under the same morning sun, a victory like march suddenly changes into a funerary-like procession. This unexpected fate-reversal recalls Joseph being suddenly stripped of his freedom and sonship and thrown into enslavement.

Curiously, their response was a mirror image of their father's response upon hearing their own report of the loss of Joseph (Gen. 37:34:



*wayyiqra' ya'qōb šimlōtāyw*). The grief they had caused their father had returned on their own heads. The idea of forsaking Benjamin (cf. v. 10) to reproach or even to ask him does not occur to them. "They tore their clothes," for what will happen to Benjamin will strike them all. His loss will be theirs, as Joseph's was the father's who "tore his clothes," crying out, "Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!" (cf. Gen. 37:33).

As already noted, according to the steward's bargain, only Benjamin had to return to Egypt. But, and note this, all the brothers returned to offer what help and defense they could. Commentator Henry Morris writes,

This decision on their part speaks volumes about the change in character that had taken place in their lives the past twenty years, and especially in the recent period associated with the famine and their experiences in Egypt. (*The Genesis Record*, 1976:615).

Joseph was waiting in great anxiety for the outcome of his test. He had exacerbated whatever hatred and jealousy his brothers may have had against the other son of his father's favored wife by giving Benjamin five times as much to him as he did with the others (Gen. 43:34). Just now he had also given them a perfect excuse to abandon the "thief," after having been exonerated themselves (cf. v. 10), tempting them to continue their journey back home with the urgently needed provisions. On the other hand, their experience with the silver in their bags was to recall the steward's statement: "Be at ease, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks" (cf. Gen. 43:23).

Above all, they were given the strongest motivation to intercede for Benjamin by making it the condition for sparing the father the heartbreak of losing another "Joseph." In the opening episode (chapter 37), they were consumed by their hatred of Joseph without any regard for the feelings of Jacob. That the effect of their action upon Jacob would be so severe that he would long to be reunited with Joseph even in death went beyond their egocentric imaginations. That deep suspicion would prevent Jacob from accepting their consolation, leaving them permanently alienated from their father.

Four things give Joseph hope: (1) the ten had proved to be "forthright" (cf. Gen. 42:13); (2) they had shown compassion for their father (cf. Gen. 42:16 with 44:21ff.); (3) fearing for their lives, i.e., under duress, they had shown indications of repentance for their crime against Joseph (cf. Gen. 42:21ff.); and (4) Reuben at least had not meant to do him any harm (cf.

Gen. 42:22). What Joseph does not know as of yet is their deep sense of guilt when they found their money returned (cf. Gen. 42:28), and that Judah had offered himself as surety for Benjamin (cf. Gen. 43:8ff.).

This present crisis corresponds to the crisis in chapter 37. The brothers both then and now had responsibility for the welfare of the younger sons of Jacob. While there is no evidence that Jacob overtly flaunts his partiality toward Benjamin, as he had toward Joseph, it is clear that he favors Benjamin above the others, as he had Joseph. The central question is: Will the brothers revert to character, and welcome the opportunity to leave Benjamin, this time with a genuine excuse? This was the test.

#### Joseph's Accusation: His Ruse Succeeds (verses 14-15)

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- 14 When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, he was still there, and they fell to the ground before him.
- 15 And Joseph said to them, "What is this deed that you have done? Do you not know that such a man as I can indeed practice divination?"
- 

With foreboding consternation, the brothers reloaded their donkeys and unresistingly all returned to the city and again bowed before Joseph. Though the words are slightly different, "and they fell to the ground before him" (לִפְנֵי אֶרְצָה / *wayyiplû l'pānāyw 'ārṣāh*) appears to continue the allusions to Joseph's dreams (cf. Gen. 37:10). "To the ground" is an unique addition to the usual phrase expressing their abject state of utter despair. Ironically, their fate must now submit to the control of the one whose fate once had to bow to their cruel power.

Joseph has not yet left his house for his place of work because it is still very early in the morning (cf. v. 3). Joseph's presence, therefore, does not raise any suspicion of trickery. Joseph purposely remained, so that in the event that reconciliation should be possible, it might be made apart from observation by the court, to save his brothers from embarrassment or public shame. Their being led by Judah was an intimation that he, too, had come to maturity.

Feigning anger, Joseph addresses them, collectively, implying that they are all involved in the theft. At this moment it may have dawned on the brothers that the Grand Vizier divined their ages by means of his cup (see notes

on Gen. 43:33), and perhaps even their past. They think that he uses the plural "you," as the steward had done (cf. vv. 4, 5, 6), because their all bowing low to him makes him assume that they are all accomplices. His "leniency," soon to be displayed (v. 17), thus appears to be all the more generous.

With a simple question, "What is this deed that you have done?" Joseph judiciously probes his brothers' attitude toward God (v. 15a). The general terms in which Joseph couches his accusation touches all the way back to his brothers' criminal act against him two decades ago. "Do you not know," --and of course there was all too much they did not know-- "that such a man as I can indeed practice divination?" (v. 15b).

Again, it is important to notice how the narrative protects Joseph from the charge of actually practicing divination. When he told his steward to say, "and which he indeed uses for divination" (v. 5), it was all part of a larger scheme to mislead his brothers; and when he said to his brothers, "such a man as I can indeed practice divination" (v. 15), he cautiously avoided saying that he in fact used the cup. All he said was "such a man as I" used the cup for divination. Moreover, this statement, incidentally, calls attention to the fact that he did not really depend on this cup for his prophetic powers. He could "divine" who had stolen the cup even without having it.

Joseph's choice of the silver divining cup for this false accusation of Benjamin is an ingenious fusion of the motif of silver--ultimately linked with the brothers' guilt toward Joseph--with the central theme of knowledge, for it is an instrument supposedly used by Joseph to foretell the future, as he has done more prominently with dreams (cf. Gen. 43:11-15).

It is only at this climactic intersection do we discern Joseph's--even our narrator's--purpose for this thematic development throughout the Joseph Narrative. In order to receive the impact of our narrator's usage of "silver/money" in this narrative, we must first recapitulate some thoughts and events and then discern its thematic significance at its climatic usage in this passage.

First of all, and very significant, the Hebrew word for "silver" or "money" is *קֶסֶף*/*kesep*, and forms an artful sound play on "Joseph" (*יֹסֵף*/*yôsef*). This word-play (assonance) would have been transparent to a native speaker, especially when we remember that the ancient Hebrew text was non-vocalized (without verbal pointing: *קֶסֶף* ["silver"]; *יֹסֵף* ["Joseph"]). Thus when Joseph (*יֹסֵף*/*yôsef*) is sold for twenty pieces of silver (*יֹסֵף*/*kesep*, cf. Gen. 37:28) into

slavery, he has been effectively substituted for silver in the life of the family. Therefore, each time "silver" (כֶּסֶף/*kesep*) appears in their sacks, it is a haunting reminder for the brothers of their treachery for selling Joseph (יֹסֵף/*yōsēp*) into slavery.

To underscore the idea of substitution, that silver is being understood metonymical (which is a figure of speech that consists in using the name of one thing for that of another: *the pen [the power of literature] is mightier than the sword*) within the Joseph Narrative, our narrator employs a rare term for "sack" (אֲמָתָה/*'amtahat*), which has already been noted earlier (~~see page 666 of the notes~~), but its contextual significance only hinted. But how does one obtain the idea of "substitution" from the word "sack"?

First of all, let us remember that our narrator uses another word for "sack" (שַׂק/*saq*) within the Joseph Narrative (cf. Gen. 37:34; 42:25, 27, 35<sup>2</sup>) which is very common in biblical Hebrew; 48x); then seemingly, he switches--notably even in the same verse--to a rare word for "sack" (אֲמָתָה/*'amtahat*), which in all biblical Hebrew is only used eleven times--and all of its occurrences are only found in Genesis 42--44. Is there a purpose for our narrator using this rare word? Indeed there is! To observe themes and a narrator's choice of words is of paramount importance, especially when the words are unusually rare.

It is very probable that our writer uses אֲמָתָה/*'amtahat* because of its consonantal importance, i.e., because the last three consonants in Hebrew (if used as a preposition) corresponds to a very common Hebrew preposition תַּחַת/*tahat*) which means "instead of" or "for (the sake of)" (Gen. 4:25; Ex. 21:26), the very primary meaning of the term "substitution"!

Furthermore, when we overlay the occurrences of "sack" (אֲמָתָה/*'amtahat*) with that of "silver" (כֶּסֶף/*kesep*) within the Joseph Narrative, we surprisingly find that these two words are located within the same context--even in the same verses!! The occurrence of "silver" in Genesis 37:28 is the only reference that does not have a correspondence with "sack." We should not except one, however, as already noted above, for this is when Joseph was substituted for "silver" by his scheming brothers, a plan which was put forth by Judah and agreed to by all the brothers.

**SACK** (תַּחַת/amtahat)

42:27, 28  
43:12, 18, 21<sup>2</sup>, 22, 23  
44:1<sup>2</sup>, 2, 8, 11<sup>2</sup>, 12

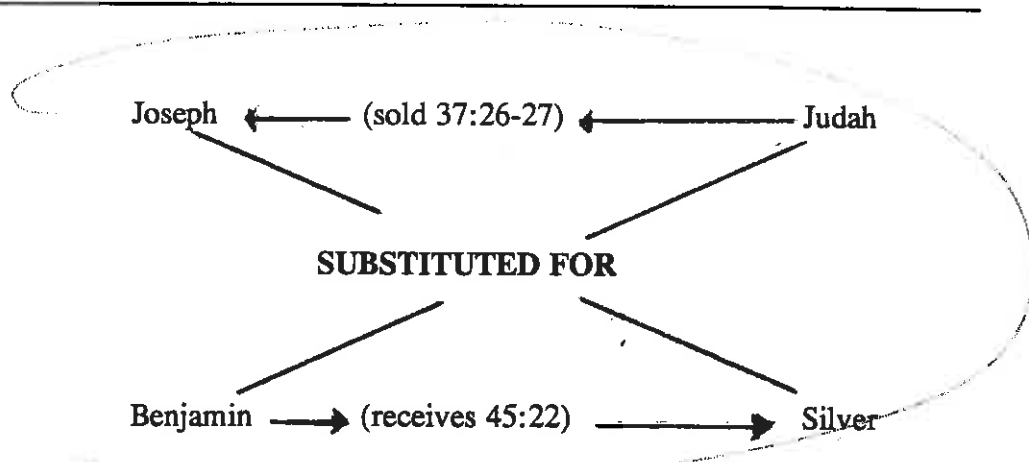
**SILVER** (כֶּסֶף/kesep)

37:28  
42:25, 27, 28, 35  
43:12, 15, 18, 21, 22, 23  
44:1, 2<sup>2</sup>, 8<sup>2</sup>

The term for "sack" is cleverly used by our narrator who only employs it in the narrative framework, never on the lips of the brothers. And one should note--and note it carefully--that once the identity of Joseph is known to the brothers, both the word "sack" and "silver" in relationship of Joseph to the brothers is dropped from the Joseph narrative! After Judah's plea before Joseph and the brothers' guilt is confessed, Joseph makes his identity known--as the brother whom they sold into slavery--thus Joseph no longer has to activate their seared conscience concerning their sin against him, and so the equation of "Joseph" and "silver" is no longer needed.

If this is not enough indication that this rare word for "sack" is being used in a word-play by our narrator to indicate substitution, then one should also consider that the actual Hebrew preposition for "substitution" (תַּחַת/*tahat*) is used in Gen. 44:4, 33 (translated as "for" and "instead of," respectively), which is not found anywhere else in the Joseph Narrative!!

These two references concerning substitution in Genesis 44 are crucial in understanding one of the principle themes of the Joseph Narrative. As noted in the notes of Genesis 44:4, Joseph's instructions to his steward in what he was to tell his brothers once he had overtaken them, is powerfully worded: "Why have you repaid evil for (תַּחַת) good. In the overall narrative plot, the brothers have exchanged (substituted) Joseph's goodness with that of evil. In Genesis 44:33 this Hebrew preposition for substitution is quite dramatic when Judah pleads before Joseph: "Now, therefore, please let your servant remain instead of (תַּחַת) the lad a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. The one who twenty-two years earlier had plotted to sell Joseph for silver, is now pleading to be the substitute for Benjamin's punishment! This grand theme of substitution in the Joseph Narrative can be diagrammed as follows:



Continuing the theme of "silver" through the Joseph Narrative, it will be remembered that it was for "profit" that Joseph's life had been spared (Gen. 37:26). Joseph had literally been treated as a commodity and his bodily presence exchanged for silver. Thus when the brothers come to pay Joseph in silver for the grain, the silver assumes a negative valence in relation to him. By covertly returning the money the first time (Gen. 42:25-28) he gives his brothers an additional means of proving their honesty to him. This attempt is even more ironically related to their dishonesty in their selling of Joseph than the attempt to disprove the spying charge by bringing Benjamin.

Although our narrator does not tell us specifically what the brothers did with this "profit," there is now a metonymic, figural (if not literal) continuity between Joseph and the family silver in the laconic economy of this closed narrative structure. The appearance of the silver coincides with the disappearance of Joseph! The commercial transaction which began with his sale is not complete until the "profit" is used. By accepting the silver he would be participating in the closure of the commercial transaction by which he was excluded from the family, and would thus be tacitly entering into his brothers' deception. To refuse the money prohibits this closure. Thus when the money is returned in their sacks of grain, they are indeed shocked and dismayed. The narrator says that "their hearts sank" (Gen. 42:28).

Now, in this episode of the Joseph Narrative, the equation of Joseph and the silver becomes more explicit when Joseph's *personal* silver divining cup, which, as we shall see, is a metonymic symbol of Joseph himself, is added to the silver being returned to his brothers.

But, more significantly, they see in the uncanny return of the silver the action of God: "What is this that God has done to us?" Just as they immediately linked the demand that Benjamin be brought to Egypt with their guilt over the crime against Joseph, so now they link, implicitly, the return of

the money with their guilt over his sale. When later in chapter 44, in a similar circumstance at the climax of this thematic element, Benjamin has been discovered with the silver cup which has been "planted" along with the money, Judah explicitly states to Joseph, "God has found out the iniquity of your servants" (Gen. 44:16), referring indirectly to the deeper guilt from the past. In reference to the connection made here between the surfaced events and the deeper guilt Westermann comments:

Therein is the work of God seen here in that a connection is made in the inconceivable comings and goings of the life of a man, between guilt and punishment, and with that also a meaning (*Genesis*, 1986:121).

It will be remembered that the next mention of the silver comes immediately after the brothers, at home again in Canaan, have reported to Jacob the loss of Simeon in Egypt, and the necessity of bringing Benjamin with them on their next trip to obtain food. As they empty their sacks before Jacob, the silver also spills out. The shocking appearance of the excess silver thus coincides in the eyes of Jacob with the report of the disappearance of yet another brother.

Each report of the discovery of the silver thus serves a different narrative function. For the brothers it evokes their guilt over the sale of Joseph, whereas in the encounter with Jacob it exacerbates his suspicions of the brothers and leads to the strongest accusation of their guilt in the matter of Joseph noted in the notes of Genesis 42:36: "You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and you would take Benjamin." Due to the strategy of Joseph, the disappearance of a son from the family coincides with an increase in silver!! Silver has thus become a mute voice crying out concerning the brothers' unspeakable crime against Joseph.

Next, when the time has come for the second trip to obtain food (Gen. 43:1, 2), Jacob resists sending Benjamin but finally has to bow to necessity (Gen. 43:6, 11). It will also be remembered that Judah gives his personal guarantee of Benjamin's safety which is reluctantly accepted by Jacob. Jacob explicitly instructs the brothers to return to Egypt with double the required money along with some gifts (Gen. 43:11, 12). We have already noted the ironical connection between the facts that Joseph's brothers had sold Joseph for twenty pieces of silver into Egypt, and that his brothers were going down to Egypt, not merely with twenty pieces of silver, but twenty bundles of money.

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In the last episode, upon arrival in Egypt, Joseph has his brothers brought directly to his house for a feast to celebrate his reunion with Benjamin (Gen. 43:16). But immediately they interpret this generous act in terms of their guilt and fear regarding the silver, and they suspect that Joseph is about to charge them with theft in order to entrap and enslave them (Gen. 43:18). Of course their perception that Joseph is entrapping them with the money is ironically correct, but not in the sense they expect. The brothers are thus portrayed as vaguely sensing what is happening to them under the surface, but failing to penetrate the outer appearances.

Joseph steward's response to the brothers' fears regarding the money mirrors their own first reaction to its discovery, that is, God has done this (Gen. 43:23). But for the brothers this divine action is a reason to fear, whereas the Egyptian official presents it as a source of comfort, thereby providing an ironic interplay of perspectives reflecting the tension between the two levels of the narrative.

But another, more significant irony is present here. The official knows that Joseph and not God is responsible for this action. His response thus deliberately plays upon the popular tendency to see in the uncanny the action of the divine (Gen. 43:23). But in so doing, he offers yet another example in this narrative of the correlation of the role of Joseph as being the "vizier" of God. Here, however, it is done with conscious intent by one of the characters to outwit those who deceived their father some twenty-two years ago concerning the true fate of Joseph. This free use of the idea of divine action as a literary device shows the same type of strategy present in Jacob's similar scheme with Isaac, his father (Gen. 27:20).

Now, in this episode, in preparation for their second return, Joseph not only has their money again returned, but now includes with it another piece of silver--his personal drinking cup, made of silver and beautifully ornamented, in Benjamin's sack--a silver divining cup no less, used for professional divining, in keeping with his probably reputation now as a seer. With the hiding of the cup, the connection between Joseph and the silver hidden in the sacks becomes more explicit.

In Joseph's astute and calculated ploy, the divining cup is a metonymic figure for himself, the seer who reads the meaning of dreams and foretells the future. He is figuratively linked to silver by the brothers' initial exchange. When he hides the cup in the sacks of grain, causing the brothers to "steal" it, he forces them to reenact, figuratively, his own abduction and sale.



It is important to remember that Joseph was very conscious that he too was "stolen" (Gen. 40:15). As the result of this theft, the divining cup comes to rest on top of the Egyptian grain in the feed sacks, corresponding to Joseph's administrating over the storage binds of Egypt!!!

The meaning of Joseph's ploy has now finally come to fruition, which is made explicit when he asks Judah: "What is this deed that you have done? Do you not know that such a man as I can indeed practice divination?" (Gen. 44:15). To steal the divining cup from a diviner is self-defeating. So at the deeper level, the theft of Joseph, whom the brothers should have known could see the future, was foolish since his destiny revealed by his dreams would inevitably lead to the exposure of their crime!

The same interplay between hidden and surface meanings is also at work in his instructions to his steward as to what he should say when he caught them. He was to ask: "Why have you repaid evil for good?" (Gen. 44:4). The brothers are being accused of committing a crime against Joseph when they intended to be acting more than honorably. Their good actions are apparently resulting in evil consequences due to the intervention of Joseph which reverses their significance.

The mystifying contradiction between the intentions and their effects corresponds to the larger pattern of events which Joseph understands. Due to the actions of God, the evil intentions of his brothers against him are producing good effects. For the brothers to experience the evil effects of their actions, which contradict their good intentions, thus prepares them to accept the reverse proposition which Joseph offers them in the next scene regarding the meaning of the larger course of events.

Nowhere can Joseph be more clearly seen to assume the role of God. But, more immediately, this charge and the investigation which follows it lead to the final resolution of the conflict between Joseph and his brothers. The brothers, blind to the hidden agenda at work, use their attempt to return the money as the basis of proving their absolute honesty. So certain are they now of their honesty in this situation that they make the ultimate vow: that the guilty person, if he be found, die, and the others be thrown into slavery (Gen. 44:9). With this foolhardy declaration of their innocence, they throw themselves with blind abandonment into the very teeth of Joseph's trap, and in so doing complete their absolute subjection to and humiliation before him.

The discovery of the planted silver cup in Benjamin's sack breaks the tenuous thread of credibility that linked the brothers with Jacob. Judah's absolute pledge to return Benjamin safely is the last bond which unites the brothers with their father. Joseph's steward again pretends to moderate their abject proposal, and requires *only* the enslavement of the guilty party (Gen. 44:9). When Benjamin is discovered with the cup, the final link to Jacob is broken and their entire world falls apart (Gen. 44:12-13). The truth must now be presented concerning the family if all is not to be lost.

#### Judah Acknowledges The Brothers' Guilt (verse 16)

**16** So Judah said, "What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? And how can we justify ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants; behold, we are my lord's slaves, both we and the one in whose possession the cup has been found."

We now come to the threshold of a climactic turning of this extraordinary Narrative. Judah comes forward to speak for all the brothers and confesses their frustration, admitting that God had found out their iniquity: "What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? And how can we justify ourselves?" (v. 16a-c). The rhetorical answer to these questions is an implied negative: We have nothing to say; we cannot show ourselves to be right. Thus the conclusion they drew as "God has found out the guilt of your servants" (v. 16d).

Judah's retort is significant. When he said, "What can we say to my lord? What can we speak?" he meant to say, "What defense have we? This is our just desert for sin we committed long ago." It can be nothing less or more than punishment for having sold Joseph into slavery. Apparently he felt that expiation could come only as they, too, endured a time of slavery under the vizier of Egypt, as Judah declared, "behold, we are my lord's slaves." This is the fifth and sixth time that the word "found" appears (cf. vv. 8, 9, 10, 12, 17, 34): What was looked for is one thing, yet what was "found," uncovered by God, is their guilt about Joseph, for so mysterious a misfortune as theirs can only be His righteous retributive judgment for their crime.

It should be remembered that in Genesis 37:14, Jacob sent Joseph to look (רָאָה/*rā'ah*) after his brothers' welfare. Although he found (מָסָא'/*māsā'*) them at Dothan, he could not look after their welfare; for he did not find his

brothers, but a group of evil men. As a result of these men's evil act, Joseph lost his family and his mission, and Jacob lost his son and the brothers their "overseer." But interestingly enough, what was lost in Genesis 37 is now recovered in Genesis 44 one by one! First, Joseph resumed his mission to "look for" his brothers. Then he devices clever conditions to draw his brothers to "uncover" their hideous sin. The brothers respond to the tests and "discover" their sin and "recover" the fear of God. From this point on, the tone of the narrative is upwardly resounding: Joseph finds a group of changed brothers, Jacob finds his lost son and the brothers find Joseph.

This is not a contrived confession about the silver cup. Rather, it is a genuine admission of guilt concerning what the brothers had done to Joseph years ago. We know that the brothers knew they had not taken the silver divin- ing cup. So, when Judah speaks of God uncovering their guilt we are forced to generalize their sense of guilt within the context of the narrative as a whole; thus an open admission of guilt which at least psychologically must refer to the real crime, the selling of Joseph for silver, and not to the imputed crime of stealing the silver cup.

Judah then declares that they would all be his slaves--"both we and the one in whose possession the cup has been found" (v. 16e). He and his brothers were deeply burdened with the enormity of their deed in selling Joseph into bondage twenty-two years ago; now, it was only fitting that they them- selves should also become slaves in Egypt for the rest of their lives.

Again, it is interesting that "Elohim" (God) and not "YHWH" (LORD) is judiciously used in this context. No covenant of grace is in view here; judgment is present and this is because consciousness of sin has now been awakened. God is their pursuer to this sad hour. Hence, "Elohim," as *the title of the Judge of men* is logically the only name that can be used.

#### **Joseph's Judgment: Benjamin Shall Remain (verse 17)**

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**17** But he said, "Far be it from me to do this. The man in whose pos- session the cup has been found, he shall be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace to your father.

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In his response, however, Joseph steered the matter in a direction that even more closely resembles his brothers' treatment of him. Thus, Judah's

self-judgment was rejected by Joseph in that it did not make Benjamin the point of conflict. Therefore Joseph demanded that Benjamin alone be surrendered to face punishment. This brought the brothers to focus on the real issue: will they sacrifice Benjamin to their own pleasure?

To their consternation, Joseph said, "Far be it from me to do this" (*ḥalîlâ*, v. 17a)--only the guilty would be a slave; the rest were free to go in peace (*l<sup>e</sup>šâlôm*, v. 17d). Therefore Joseph demanded that Benjamin alone be surrendered to be sold into slavery in Egypt, and the brothers were to return to their father.

Benjamin is a close duplicate of Joseph in the family: he is Rachel's son, Jacob's favorite child, a "son of his old age" (Gen. 37:4; 44:20); and, of course, the full brother of Joseph. He is, however, not distinguished as a seer or a gifted dreamer and leader as Joseph. His theft of the divination cup seemingly attributes to him the quality he lacks to become another Joseph, at least in his brothers' eyes.

What was going through the ten brothers' minds? Are they remembering how Benjamin's mother, Rachel, stole her father's cultic gods to bring additional power to the family? Are they remembering Rachel's eldest son, Joseph, how he was a diviner who dreamed of ruling over the family and seemingly interested in power? Now, could it be that Benjamin is just another of the same breed, ambitious of gaining supremacy in the family by means of supernatural assistance?

This brought the brothers to focus on the real issue: on the surface, Joseph is testing his brothers' concern and compassion for Benjamin. "*Will they dump Benjamin into my hands as callously as they dumped me into the hands of those foreign traders so many, many years ago?*" At the same time, he is also testing their love for Jacob. "*Are they the least bit concerned about how this will affect their father?*"

We must understand and reflect on the historical importance of the brothers' decision. Right at this point hangs the outcome of whether Joseph would reveal himself to them, and in turn whether they would become the vehicle through which God would bless all mankind. On so short a space of time turned a matter of momentous consequence for them and the world. Yet in spite of the possibility of their failure, Joseph had believed in the promises of God that Jacob's people would become the vehicle of God for the salvation of

the world. Joseph had to be a submissive instrument of God to allow God to work the change in his brothers.

Thus Joseph concludes the scene with these stabbing "kind" words ("but as for you, go up in peace to your father") to induce them to pass the test by having one of them offer to suffer vicariously for Benjamin. When the Hebrew text was subdivided in chapters, it would have been more appropriate to end chapter 44 at this point, where the *Masorah* concluded the second *Sidrah* of the Narrative (thus the unusual formation of the chiasmic structure).

## **II. *Those who truly acknowledge their iniquity will follow a very different course when given another opportunity (18-34).***

The Grand Vizier has spoken; their plea is rejected. Judah arises with his brothers who had made him their spokesman. What follows in verses 18-34 is an impassioned speech that is unexcelled in all the Old Testament, although it could not have lasted more than five minutes. In its spirit it bears comparison with the intercession of Moses (Ex. 32:9-14, 31ff.), though this indeed was made by the innocent for the guilty.

This is the lengthy appeal of Judah, in which he pours out his heart and shows himself to be a man fit for leadership. His intercession on behalf of Benjamin, a fine and moving appeal, demonstrated great love for his (half) brother and great concern for his father. This was not the Judah of Genesis 37 or 38.

Judah's final speech in the Joseph Narrative retells the whole of the Joseph story. His own retelling of the story reveals the brothers' perception of the events, as well as the hopelessness of their situation. Judah is about to appeal to the vizier's "fear of God" which had not only prompted him to change his original demand that the Nine remain as hostages until the tenth had brought the youngest before (cf. Gen. 42:18) but has just made him also refuse as inequitable the brothers' plea to share the punishment of Benjamin. Judah appeals to this humaneness of the vizier: to evoke his empathy with the father's sorrow over the lost son; his old age; his sorrow for the death of the two sons' mother; his protective love for the remaining youngest, "the son of his old age"; and with the ten's anguish, particularly his own, since he has personally guaranteed the safety of the youngest.

In outline form, Judah's speech may be divided into three parts: the address recapitulates recent events (vv. 18-29), stresses the adverse impact of Joseph's act upon their father (vv. 30-32), and culminates in a personal offer to take Benjamin's place as a slave (vv. 33-34). Judah makes no mention of the theft of the silver cup or of the innocence or guilt of Benjamin. This shrewd but simple appeal to Joseph's sense of fairness and mercy attempts to invoke his humanity through repeated reference to the state of their aged father. It is also designed to impress Joseph with the speaker's noble self-sacrifice.

#### **Judah's Request For Joseph's Judgment Reversal (verse 18)**

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**18** Then Judah approached him, and said, "Oh my lord, may your servant please speak a word in my lord's ears, and do not be angry with your servant; for you are equal to Pharaoh."

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Standing against each other are Joseph in terrifying power, and Judah in purified self-abasement. In the background are Benjamin--the innocent victim of a mysterious intrigue--his helpless brothers, and the father who is in danger of also losing the last son of his youthful love. From a prostrating position, Judah now arises and bravely draws near to Joseph's side and courteously pleads for a hearing.

The "word" Judah desires to have with the vizier is his final plea in v. 33 to accept him as a slave, a substitute for Benjamin. Verses 18-32 are a long preamble, giving the reasons why, even if the law requires the punishment of the youngest, the vizier should accept Judah's vicarious enslavement.

Judah begins his preamble by acknowledging that once a judgment had been issued, it is final so that his appeal is improper. But as the king can revise a decree so can the vizier, "for you are equal to Pharaoh." The phrase is not mere flattery but a subtle reminder of Joseph's power to grant a pardon by virtue of his exalted position.

#### **Judah's Rehearsal Of The 1st Journey (verses 19-23)**

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**19** "My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father or a brother?'

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20 And we said to my lord, 'We have an old father and a little child of his old age. Now his brother is dead, so he alone is left of his mother, and his father loves him.'

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To what Judah refers in verse 19 must have been after the vizier had so emphatically reasserted his suspicion following the brothers' asseveration of their forthrightness (cf. Gen. 42:12). Most poignant for Joseph is Judah's omission that it all originated in the vizier's accusation that the ten are a gang of spies.

Judah's words reveal something more to the reader than even he intended. His words show that he lies with the "evil" intention of the brothers toward their younger brother, Joseph. Once again his words raised the issue of the brothers' mistreatment of Joseph. Curiously, at this point Judah said of Joseph, "[he] is dead" (Gen. 44:20), rather than what was said of Joseph on all other occasions, namely, that "[he] is no more" (Gen. 42:13). The meaning of the expression "he is no more" within Genesis does not imply that one is dead (cf. Gen. 42:36: "Simeon is no more [אֵין/ʾēnennû]; Gen. 5:24: "Enoch walked with God; then he was no more [אֵין/ʾēnennû], because God took him away").

Joseph must have pondered why Judah now calls the other brother "dead" though the brothers had first called him "missing" (cf. Gen. 42:1). Then he may have realized that Judah became convinced of his death, because when the ten were told that None of them would be kept as hostages, Reuben exclaimed, "Now comes the reckoning for his blood" (cf. Gen. 42:22).

We can see, then, that in retelling the story Judah added a dimension to the brother's recounting of the events to Joseph that was not previously there. The net effect is that the narrative now resembles the original intention of the brothers, which was "to kill" (*lah'mîṭô*, Gen. 37:18) Joseph; and it corresponds to the story that the brothers gave to Jacob. What in real life would have perhaps been a "slip of the tongue" is now, within the narrative, a clue to the state of mind of the brothers as well as to their guilt. But Judah's account raises even further the issue of the brothers' guilt regarding Joseph when he recounted Jacob's response to the demand that Benjamin be taken to Egypt. On that occasion Jacob had said, "You know that my wife bore me two sons; and the one went out from me, and I said, 'Surely he is torn in pieces'" (Gen. 44:27b-28a).

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Judah's words thus declared that it was not their intention to involve Benjamin in any way, so that no sorrow would thereby come to Jacob their father. This last, remaining son was truly the beloved of the father (v. 20), here cited as the element which has now become their concern as well. Judah's resume was designed to stress their honesty and integrity. This avowal gave meaning to their earlier words, "We are sons of one man"; that is, they were not about to cause him grief by divisions among themselves.

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- 21 "Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him.'  
22 But we said to my lord, 'The lad cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.'  
23 You said to your servants, however, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall not see my face again.'"
- 

At this juncture Judah cited the first element in their decision not to grieve their father: Benjamin would not now be in jeopardy if the governor had not insisted on his presence (v. 21). Their appeal to the vizier not to require his presence fell on deaf ears (vv. 22-23), even though this could be the occasion of sorrow to Jacob their father. Furthermore, they did not conceal the demand from their father, so that no possibility of deceit could be laid against them should Benjamin come to harm (v. 24). Judah said that they had not wished nor engineered the threat to their father's happiness.

Judah subtly cites (what was not mentioned but must have been said by the vizier) "that I may set my eyes on him." This expression derives from language of the court and means "to show someone special favor" (cf. Jer. 39:12; 40:4), and may be further defined as to advantage (Jer. 24:6) or disadvantage of the one watched (Amos 9:4). This is what initially the vizier had actually done (cf. Gen. 43:29 and 34). Judah thus implies that once the vizier had explicitly made such a promise, he would have to live up to his word even if that person had turned out to be a real thief. Thus Judah may be subtly calling Joseph's integrity and fair play into question. He had inferred from the request to bring Benjamin an assurance on the part of Joseph that no harm would befall the lad.

The subject of the Hebrew verb "die" in verse 22, "his father would die," is actually ambiguous. Literally the Hebrew reads, "if he should leave his



father, he shall then die." It may be either Benjamin or the father who will actually die. In light of verse 31, however, the latter is the more likely.

With verses 19-23 Judah reminds the vizier of what essentially preceded the brothers' return to Canaan. What is significant is that he left out is how the vizier made them suffer during their three days in custody (cf. Gen. 42:17-22) and that Simeon was "bound before their eyes" (cf. Gen. 42:24), and was retained as the hostage.

#### **Brothers' Justification Before Their Father (verses 24-29)**

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**24**        **"Thus it came about when we went up to your servant my father, we told him the words of my lord."**

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Judah now turns to the events that followed the brothers' departure from Egypt. Aside from what was already reported to the steward (cf. Gen. 43:20-22) nothing had been related about it to the vizier except that their father was still alive (cf. Gen. 43:27); for during the banquet there was only banter and pleasantries. The most important thing in what is to follow now should naturally have been Judah's contesting the mystifying supposed evidence of Benjamin's "thievery." Nothing in Judah's speech is as eloquent as his complete silence about it.

By leaving out the word "all" before "the words of my lord," Judah hints that the father was spared learning of the agonies they had suffered, except that Simeon would be released as soon as "the son of his old age" should appear before the vizier.

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**25**        **"And our father said, 'Go back, buy us a little food.'**

**26**        **But we said, 'We cannot go down. If our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down; for we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.'**"

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Now Joseph realizes that it took the brothers so long to return to Egypt with Benjamin because the father would rather have Simeon linger in prison than consent to sent Benjamin to Egypt, had the famine in Canaan ceased.

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These words of Judah exhibit further the care exercised by the brothers to preserve Benjamin from being brought into danger. Jacob had told them again to buy food, as though he had forgotten the warning. The sons again told their father explicitly of the demand of the governor, that they would not be able to buy food unless Benjamin were with them. So exact had been the injunction that it had become a question of Benjamin and food, or starvation.

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27 "And your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons.'"

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During the brothers' first visit Joseph had already learned about four of the ten's six purgative actions (see notes on Gen. 44:13). They had since shown their solidarity with Benjamin by returning to Egypt with him. Moreover, they confessed their sin of the past.

Yet what convinces Joseph even more of their radical repentance is Judah's citing his father's words, "my wife bore me two sons." These seemingly simple words express not merely that the father considered only Rachel his "wife"--as if the other mothers were only his concubines--but also show Joseph to his amazement and joy that Judah cites them without resentment. This is further proof for Joseph that the brothers have overcome their grudge about the father's having favored Rachel over their own mothers, and, after having realized the tragic aspect of it all, had accepted the father's compensatory transference to Rachel's orphans of his affection for them.

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28 'and the one went out from me, and I said, "Surely he is torn in pieces," and I have not seen him since.

29 And if you take this one also from me, and harm befalls him, you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow.'

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Judah set before Joseph the attitude of Jacob, showing the passionate love Jacob had for the sons of his beloved Rachel. Later Jacob will note her untimely death (Gen. 48:7) as the cause of his appropriating Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph's sons, as his own. By presenting him with other sons, Jacob would have had Rachel's love evidenced to him. So Judah mentioned this deprivation as that only two sons were born of her whom Jacob called his wife.

In Middle Eastern lands the birth of no more than two sons is a loss, as Judah well understood. Judah would not permit the loss of the second, if he could prevent it, for this would be the tragedy that would cause his father's life to collapse. The question hung in the air: Was this what the vizier desired? But Judah for one was not willing, even at the loss of his own freedom, if this would release Benjamin, to cause the death of Jacob. Only the hardest heart could insist on retaining Benjamin. Judah pointed up the fact that the incarceration of Benjamin in Egypt will do the very thing he has pictured.

These words inform Joseph that his father never told his family that he was the one that had sent him off (cf. Gen. 37:14), for he said "one went out from me." Was it because, when Joseph did not return, his father felt guilty at having asked him to go alone on that perilous trip to Shechem to bring about his reconciliation with his brothers?

In addition Joseph now discovers just what took place at home after he was taken to Egypt. His brothers never reported having met him in Dothan and never confessed their guilt to their father, for Judah cites the anguished cry of his father "I said, 'he must have been torn to pieces!'" (Gen. 37:33). Instead, the brothers must have pierced and bloodied the tunic which they had stripped off of him and had it sent to their father, who recognized it. The use of direct speech within speech here, as Judah uses Jacob's actual words, makes the father's grief and fear all the more present and palpable.

How could Judah recount the story this way? He surely knew that Jacob's words were mistaken. It was not a wild animal that had killed Joseph; it was the brothers themselves who had sold him into slavery. But could Judah have told the story any other way? Clearly he could not. To tell the story the way it actually happened would be to admit to a guilt even greater than that of which they were presently accused. Thus even when retelling the story to demonstrate his own innocence, Judah gave testimony, to the reader at least, of his own guilt and the guilt of his brothers.

Though it is through Judah's speech that the reader is again reminded of the brothers' guilt, we should not lose sight of the fact that once again it was Judah who intervened on behalf of Benjamin and ultimately, within the narrative, his words that were compelling and saved the day.

Then, however, Joseph hears the enigmatic sequential "and I have not seen him since." It excites him, for how could his father have expected to see him again after having been "torn in pieces," unless he had regained hope

that he was still alive. Was it because of Joseph's dream, foretelling his future destiny of ruling over the family? Perhaps it gave the father the thought that it was Joseph who tore and bloodied his tunic to convince the father that he was dead and not to attempt to search for him? Does not "one went out from me" perhaps even imply his later wondering whether Joseph may not have given up all hope of fulfilling the father's desire that he attempt a reconciliation with the ten and have instead gone into the world, trusting his dream that the time would come for the attainment of his destiny?

#### The Consequence If Benjamin Does Not Return (verses 30-31)

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- 30 "Now, therefore, when I come to your servant my father, and the  
lad is not with us, since his life is bound up in the lad's life,  
31 it will come about when he sees that the lad is not *with us*, that he  
will die. Thus your servants will bring the gray hair of your servant  
our father down to Sheol in sorrow.
- 

Beginning with Judah's words in verse 30 which were spoken in the singular, Joseph expects that Judah is now coming to the "word," for which he wanted an audience with Joseph--Judah's final plea to the Grand Vizier.

Yet Judah cannot tear his thoughts from his father, not yet. In these three long and climactic verses, he makes the vizier visualize the father's immediate death when he returns to Canaan without the youngest.

Instead of saying "you will have brought . . . our father . . . to Sheol . . .," Judah tactfully asserts that the patriarch's sons would have caused his death. "For your servant became surety . . ." gives the reason: When the "surety" returns without the youngest, the father will immediately assume the boy's death.

#### Judah's Basis For Joseph's Reversal Of Judgment (verse 32)

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- 32 For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him *back* to you, then let me bear the blame before my father forever.'

Judah is quick to point out that they would see to it that such would not happen. "For," he pled, "your servant became surety for the lad to my father." This is a complete reversal of their attitude from the day they sold Joseph. Then they cared only for self, caring nothing for their father's feelings. Now that cared about their father, for it was a matter of his well-being far more than theirs.

Now at last, Judah utters his presaged "word," his intercession that the vizier accept him as his slave:

#### **Judah's Plea: He Shall Substitute Himself For Benjamin (verses 33-34)**

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- 33     **"Now, therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers.**  
 34     **For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me, lest I see the evil that would overtake my father?"**
- 

Finally, Judah comes to the climax of his desperate plea. Even though he was confident Benjamin could not be guilty of the theft, he could not argue Benjamin's innocence, for there was clear evidence against him, and no contrary evidence at hand. But, assuming that Benjamin was guilty and that, therefore, he deserved punishment, would it not be possible that Judah himself might bear his punishment in substitution? He would claim the bag in which the cup had been found as his own, and Benjamin could take Judah's. Though Judah was innocent, he desired so keenly to see Benjamin spared, for his father's sake, that he was willing to be pronounced guilty in his stead and to suffer the punishment which otherwise would be meted out to Benjamin.

Judah had promised Israel he would be surety for Benjamin, perhaps not fully realizing at the time how near this promise would come to fulfillment. He was willing to follow through, however, bearing the blame forever if Benjamin could only return to his father. Judah's intense love for his father is exhibited most of all in his final plea: "how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me, lest I see the evil that would overtake my father?"

These final words show that a genuine change had come about--not only of Judah, but all of the brothers. Judah appealed to Joseph on the basis of evil (עָרָא/*bārā'*) that would come upon his father if he returned without Rachel's son--he would die. Before, they had not considered that consequence

and were overwhelmed when they could not console Jacob over his son. It appears from this verse that the anguish of the father had been felt by all. Judah, exhibiting a self-sacrificial loyalty, requested that he be kept instead of (תחת/*tahat*) Benjamin.

In the light of all that has transpired in the Joseph Narrative and his brothers, it should be clear that this remarkable speech is a point-for-point undoing, morally and psychologically, of the brothers' earlier violation of kindred and filial bonds.

A basic biblical perception about both human relations and relations between God and man is that love is seemingly unpredictable, and at times perhaps seemingly unjust. Now, Judah comes to an acceptance of this fact with all its consequences.

His father, he states clearly to the Grand Vizier (whom he yet knows to be his brother), has singled out Benjamin for a special love, as he singled out Rachel's other son before. It is a painful reality of favoritism with which Judah, in contrast to the earlier jealousy over Joseph, is here reconciled, out of filial duty and more, out of filial love. In addition, Judah's speech is motivated by the deepest empathy for his father, by a real understanding of what it means for the old man's very life to be bound up with that of the lad. He can even bring himself to quote sympathetically (v. 27) Jacob's typically extravagant statement that his wife bore him two sons--as though Leah were not also his wife and the other ten brothers were not also his sons.

Twenty-two years earlier, Judah engineered the selling of Joseph into slavery; now he is prepared to offer himself as a slave so that the other son of Rachel can be set free. Twenty-two years earlier, he stood with his brothers and silently watched when the bloodied tunic they had sent ahead to Jacob which catapulted their father into a fit of anguish; now he is willing to do anything, *anything* in order not to have to see his father suffer that way again. Indeed, twenty-two years ago these same brothers had broken their father's heart with a blood-stained lie they used to cloak the truth. Now, their hearts are the ones that are breaking at the thought of causing their father any more grief.

Because Judah's heart is bursting with pain, Judah fails in verse 34 to observe protocol and omits "your servant" before the words "I" and "my father." Judah uses the word most sacred to him, "father," fourteen times in his plea for his brother, and it is his final, climactic word which gathers into itself all the passion of his appeal.

In this willingness to give his own life in place of his brother's, for the sake of his father, Judah becomes a beautiful type--a pattern--of Christ: "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive by the Spirit" (1 Pet. 3:18). Again, Judah becomes a type of Christ, more fully and realistically than even Joseph himself, who is often taken by Bible expositors as a type of Christ. "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:16).

In fact, although Scripture does not say this explicitly, the problem as to why Judah, rather than Joseph, was selected to be the ancestor of the Messiah probably finds its solution in this passage of Scripture. Judah, in his willingness to sacrifice himself, the innocent for the guilty, had become the most Christlike of all his brothers.

Judah, then, as spokesman for the brothers, has admirably completed the painful process of learning to which Joseph and circumstances have made him submit; the only essential thing he still does not know is the vizier's identity.

With all his ardent wish that he might change the Grand Vizier's mind, Judah cannot know the almost unbearable agitation he has caused in the vizier. At last Joseph has found his brothers (cf. Gen. 37:16). As long as he had to test them, he could "control himself" (cf. Gen. 43:31) and conceal his turbulent feelings, as he did when he overheard his brothers' confession, culminating in Reuben's speech (cf. Gen. 42:24) and when he greeted his only full brother, Benjamin (cf. Gen. 43:29ff.). Yet he no longer needs the strength to curb himself, because his most fervent hope that his brothers would pass his long protracted ultimate test is now fulfilled.

All through Judah's speech the reader has been charmed, fixing his gaze upon the speaker's lips, letting it wander only to the powerful man opposite to read what is on his face. One can conceive of no scene simpler and yet more powerful.

### APPLICATION

In this final and great test the brothers thus demonstrated that they had changed, that they were repentant over their sin against their brother. There was now concern for the father and self-sacrificing love for the half-

brother, Benjamin. No nation could long survive without such care and compassion. As Westermann says, "There is a path that leads from the Joseph story right up to the very threshold of community; the healing of a breach is possible only when there is one who is ready to take the suffering upon oneself" (*Genesis*, 1988, III:178). Consequently, Joseph would make himself known to them.

In the testing the brothers had responded correctly and showed themselves worthy. They demonstrated that they knew what kind of spirit was needed in the family, in the nation. Sadly enough, this lesson was learned by Judah through the divine activity in his conscience—he learned first the evil that results from hating a brother and then, to prevent such evil again, he would sacrifice himself for his brother. ***GOD REQUIRES SELF-SACRIFICING LOVE AMONG BELIEVERS, BUT SUCH LOYALTY MAY NEED TO BE FOSTERED THROUGH THE UNCOVERING OF PAST SINS.*** If believers have been envious and hateful of others in the past, then God might have to put them through stressful situations to make them realize how much they must do for their fellow believers to prevent great evil in the family of God. But once they come to the point of laying down their lives for others, they find that there is truly no greater love.

Some commentators contest that there has been any change in Joseph's brothers. But the mere fact that the narrator reconstitutes the initial situation of chapter 37 in chapter 44 shows that it is his intention to make clear in this way that something has changed in the brothers. One can describe it as a change of heart, true repentance. But what is peculiar to the present situation is that the change of heart is the result of the brothers' experience. Searching reflection in the real sense of the word is a necessary consequence. The presupposition is that the hour for such a change of heart must come. The Joseph Narrative shows here that acknowledgment of one's own guilt and the resulting change of heart acquire their meaning and integrity from the journey through life as a whole, and that often that journey is long. But what alone is decisive is the recognition that it was God who led the brothers, as well as Joseph, this long journey to the hour that Judah speaks of in verse 16.

Here, at the climax and turning point of the Joseph Narrative, the Bible speaks for the first time of vicarious suffering (vv. 18-34). All commentaries consulted regard and evaluate this passage as the literary high point of the Narrative. Attention should be given to the theological aspects alike. Many describe the verses as a masterpiece of rhetorical art; the narrator has thus succeeded in bring his story of Joseph and his brothers to an artistic climax. But



this does not suffice to say what is the real significance of the address in the Narrative as a whole. The narrator has achieved something that apparently is but seldom achieved in the literature of the world; at the climax he presents the whole story in a nutshell in the argumentation underlying Judah's request. Judah's address links what has happened since the first journey with what has preceded, right back to the beginning (vv. 27-29), and with what is to be expected in the future (vv. 30-31)--Jacob's death--so as to form a self-contained sequence. Readers thus have the opportunity to reflect on the Narrative as a whole from this short summary.

The theological aspect of Judah's address is not immediately evident; there is not a single sentence about God. However, it is a necessary consequence of what Judah had already said in verse 16. God has discovered the brothers' guilt; hence, one of them offers himself as a slave in a foreign land in place of the youngest. He prefers to take the punishment upon himself rather than cause his father distress yet again. This is indeed vicarious suffering. There is a path that leads from the Joseph Narrative right up to the very threshold of community; the healing of a breach is possible only when there is one who is ready to take the suffering upon oneself.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What specific role does the restoration of the brothers' money play this time, since it plays no apparent role in the accusation that is made against them by Joseph?
2. What is the purpose of Joseph testing his brothers in this chapter over and above the others?
3. Do you think the silver divining cup has a greater significance in the Joseph Narrative than a means of testing? Explain.
4. Contrast the appeal for Benjamin by Judah with the treatment of Joseph earlier (cf. Gen. 37).
5. Explain the significance of "silver" and Joseph's "silver divining cup." Correlate our narrator's special lexical term for "sack."
6. Reword the chapter's theological thrust. How does it fit within the Joseph Narrative?
7. How is Judah a type of Christ in this chapter. Please be specific and correlate New Testament passages.



## Genesis 45:1-28

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### Disclosure and Reconciliation

#### THE BROTHERS' BROTHER

This episode presents the favorable resolution to the tension of the Narrative that began in chapter 37. It is also the turning point of the Narrative. Judah's eloquent speech reveals the suffering of his father over Joseph's assumed death and the disarray in which this sad episode has left the family. It also brings to expression Judah's capacity for noble self-sacrifice for the sake of maintaining his commitment to Jacob regarding the return of Benjamin. The basis of trust now exists for Joseph, as does the possibility that the brothers can accept themselves and their own past without undue self-incrimination.

Relationships and the complex psychological lines of emotion that bind these relationships together have reached a climatic point that demands resolution. Judah's offer must be accepted or rejected, and the consequences of each course is clear. Judah's speech reveals that profound changes have taken place in the brothers, that they have changed in their very acceptance of what will not change and what they cannot change. Their father will love one son more than the others; love is not nicely balanced, and its disproportions can result in pain and insensitivity. But even one who loves in an excess that must result in imbalances and pain can be understood, and must be loved, for through this love ties that bind sons to father.

The brothers demonstrate this change, but the distance between them and Joseph is immense and now cries out to be bridged. It is a distance in knowledge, a gulf that accents what Joseph and the reader know that the brothers do not know. There is also the distance between what we as readers know now about the brothers--what moves and motivates them, how they are changed--and what we know of Joseph. We have had brief hints in two short balanced notices of his private outbursts of emotion: in Genesis 42:24, where he turns away from their sight and weeps, but also in the same sentence throws Simeon into prison before their eyes; in Genesis 43:30 the encounter with his full brother leads him quickly to retire and weep, but then to mask all signs of this before his return. Now, in this episode, Joseph weeps a third time (Gen. 45:2), and this time there is notice that he removes himself. Indeed, the Egyp-

tians overhear the outburst, now these distances in knowledge and power are bridged.

With this development, Joseph's inner struggle to conceal his identity from his brothers comes to an end. Now he can bring the family down to Egypt and settle them in the best of the land where they can survive as the people of God.

The first fifteen verses of this chapter essentially record Joseph's emotional speech, in which he made himself known to his brothers. After what had happened between them in the past, a speech of this type is the only thing that would have relieved guilt, eased their fears, and prevented bitterness. There would be no retaliation from Joseph, not just because he had seen that they had changed, but because he had a proper understanding of how God had been working in his life.

Everything about the passage is positive, from the delight of Pharaoh over the discovery to the reunion of Jacob with his lost son. Not only does the unit trace the reconciliation through to its completion, it does so within the fulfillment of the dreams as well; the family will now live together in Egypt under the rulership of Joseph. This episode then, forms the beginning of the conclusion of the Joseph Narrative.

Preparations seem almost to tumble over each other as both Pharaoh and Joseph make provisions for the family to come and settle in Egypt. The pattern of pairs is augmented once more as Joseph provisions the brothers for a return to Canaan. As before, they carry a special gift, and Benjamin is given an extra treasure (Gen. 45:22; cf. 42:25; 44:1-2). But this time the gifts and treasures are not hidden, awaiting later discovery. No further deception awaits them on the way back to Canaan.

### Source Criticism Considerations

Chapter 45 presents the favorable resolution to the tension of the immediately preceding chapters, which is a sufficient proof that this chapter must be from the narrator of the foregoing Narrative; and in like manner chapter 45 leads directly to chapter 46. Nevertheless the critics assign this chapter mostly to "E" on the ground of alleged discrepancies with what precedes and follows.

Source criticism of chapter 45 reached its high point with H. Gunkel and O Procksch; each proposes something very complicated and very different. H. Gunkel acknowledges that it is uncertain. Hence J. Skinner concludes that a complete separation into sources is not possible; likewise E. A. Speiser. H. Donner has studied the division into sources in chapter 45 and concludes that it rests merely on "external formalities of literary style" which show no signs of serious contradiction or tension (*Die literarische Gestalt*, 1976:20-24).

A particularly weighty argument is the apparent repetition in verses 3 and 4. H. Gunkel writes, "Joseph reveals himself twice--3a/4b." But they are two different sentences, the second a necessary expansion of the first. D. B. Redford comments that the separation of verse 3 from verse 4 into two sources "rends asunder a passage as delicate in feeling as any in the Joseph-story . . . . That Joseph should repeat his words under these circumstances would be the most natural thing in the world! And why should a redactor preserve variants virtually identical?" (VT.S 20, 1970:109).

## THEOLOGICAL IDEAS

One major theological idea affirmed in this passage is that God sovereignly preserves life on the earth. He overcomes this crisis of the famine by preparing a deliverer who would be able to save his people and all the world. Though the brothers were responsible for Joseph's being sold into Egypt, and though they intended "evil," God was ultimately behind it all and had worked it out for the "good" (cf. Gen. 50:20). As he told his brothers, "It was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you" (v. 5), and, "God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives" (v. 7). In the Narrative thus far, this theme has been expressed by Jacob (Gen. 42:2) and Judah (Gen. 43:8) and has also been indirectly alluded to by Joseph himself (Gen. 42:18). Here, however, and in Genesis 50:20, the theme is given its full expression in the words of Joseph.

Joseph's words pull back the narrative veil and allow the reader to see what has been going on behind the scenes. It was not the brothers who sent Joseph to Egypt; rather it was God. And God had a purpose for it all. We have seen numerous clues throughout the Narrative that this has been the case; but now the central character, the one ultimately responsible for initiating the plots and subplots of the preceding scenes, reveals the divine plans and purpose behind it all. Joseph, who could discern the divine plan in the dreams of Pharaoh, also knew the divine plan in the affairs of his brothers. Through it all

he saw God's plan to accomplish a "great deliverance" (v. 7b). Joseph's speech dominates the passage. In it he explained God's purpose in all that had happened and advised his brothers on what they were now to do.

A second idea, growing out of the first, is that God uses even evil that people do to bring about His plan. Here is the inscrutable balance between the sovereign will and the human will--they had sold him in hatred, but God sent him to Egypt to save them. The righteous can discern that God works even through the evil plans of humans (cf. Acts 2:23). Those who do evil are responsible for their actions, but God will use even those actions for His glory.

Out of this theological point grows a practical matter. The perception of this second truth by the righteous will enable them to forgive others, for if God includes all in His sovereign plan, then they must give no room to retaliation or bitterness.

Another important theme which finds its culmination in this chapter is the tension between "knowing" and "not knowing." The first scene which involves Joseph's brothers in Egypt begins with Joseph knowing and his brothers not knowing (Gen. 42:6-26). Consequently, Joseph has control over the present and the future, whereas his brothers do not. The truth "you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (Jn. 8:32 is fleshed out in these chapters. Throughout the Joseph Narrative, the brothers are in antithesis of this truth. The brothers are not free because they did not know. They found themselves controlled by the "knower" or the one who was able to discern between good and evil. The drama reaches its climax when Judah confesses the brothers' guilt and Joseph lets his family "know" the good which God has brought about and has in essence triumphed over their evil. The shadow of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden reminds us that those who cannot discern the good (obedience to God) from the evil (disobedience to God) can only bring disaster.

## STRUCTURE, SYNTHESIS AND TRANSLATION

### Structure

The passage begins and climaxes with narrative reports. The first two verses record Joseph's emotional revelation to his brothers and their perplexity, and the climactic verses (vv. 14-15) record the warm reunion with the

brothers. The latter part of the chapter again begins with a narrative report (v. 16) and ends with Israel's speech that he will go to Egypt and see Joseph before he dies (v. 28).

Joseph's speech dominates the first half of the chapter. In it he explained God's purpose in all that had happened and advised his brothers on what they were now to do. The structure includes a double revelation in verses 3 and 4, which would be necessary under the circumstances, an explanation of his circumstances (vv. 5-8), and instruction for their migration to Egypt (vv. 9-13).

The beginning revelation and the closing instructions concern family matters. ("I am Joseph. Does my father yet live?" And, "Now your eyes see that it is my mouth that speaks to you . . . tell my father of all my glory in Egypt.") But Joseph's explanation of his circumstances provides the main point of the speech; it stresses God's sovereignty, for the phrase "God sent me" is repeated three times, affirming that the brothers did not send him--God did. His purpose in this emphasis was to set the brothers at ease over their past guilty offense and lend support to the instructions he was about to give.

The second half of the passage which follows the climax traces Pharaoh's confirmation of the invitation to the father (16-20), Joseph's discharging his brothers on the mission (vv. 21-24), and their arrival in Canaan with the news (vv. 25-28). This section is narrative report interspersed with speeches.

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#### CHIASTIC ARRANGEMENT OF GENESIS 45

- A Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers (1-4)
- B Joseph's address to his brothers and God's provision (5-8)
- C Joseph's invitation (9-13)
- D JOSEPH EMBRACES HIS BROTHERS (14-15)**
- C' Pharaoh's invitation (16-21a)
- B' Joseph's provisions and address to his brothers (21b-24)
- A' Brothers reveal that Joseph is alive (25-28)

Figure 24.

## Synthesis

In a burst of unrestrainable emotion, Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers, assuring them that it was God's sovereign purpose in sending him to Egypt and instructing them to bring his father to Egypt, and then, after he warmly greeted his brothers, they brought news of Joseph's survival and prosperity in Egypt to their father in Canaan.

## Translation

- 1 Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone withdraw from me!" So there was no one else about when Joseph made himself known to his brothers.
- 2 His sobs were so loud that the Egyptians could hear, and so the news reached Pharaoh's palace.
- 3 Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still well?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dumbfounded were they on account of him.
- 4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come forward to me." And when they came forward, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, he whom you sold into Egypt.
- 5 Now, do not be distressed or reproach yourselves because you sold me here; it was to save life that God sent me ahead of you.
- 6 It is now two years that there has been famine in the land, and there are still five years to come in which there shall be no yield from tilling.
- 7 God has sent me ahead of you to ensure your survival on earth, and to save your lives in an extraordinary deliverance.
- 8 So, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, lord of all his household, and ruler over the whole land of Egypt.
- 9 Now, hurry back to my father and say to him: Thus says your son Joseph, 'God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me without delay.
- 10 You will dwell in the region of Goshen, where you will be near me--you and your children and your grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all that is yours.
- 11 There I will provide for you--for there are yet five years of famine to come--that you and your household and all that is your may not suffer want.'
- 12 You can see for yourselves, and my brother Benjamin for himself, that it is indeed I who am speaking to you.

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- 13 And you must tell my father everything about my high station in Egypt and all that you have seen; and bring my father here with all speed."
- 14 With that he embraced his brother Benjamin around the neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck.
- 15 He kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; only then were his brothers able to talk to him.
- 16 The news reached Pharaoh's palace: "Joseph's brothers have come." Pharaoh and his courtiers were pleased.
- 17 And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do as follows: load up your beasts and go at once to the land of Canaan.
- 18 Take your father and your households and come to me; I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you shall live off the fat of the land.'
- 19 And you are ordered, 'Do as follows: take from the land of Egypt wagons for your children and your wives, and bring your father here.
- 20 And never mind your belongings, for the best of all the land of Egypt shall be yours.'"
- 21 The sons of Israel did so; Joseph gave them wagons as Pharaoh had commanded, and he supplied them with provisions for the journey.
- 22 To each of them, moreover, he gave a change of clothing; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and several changes of clothing.
- 23 And to his father he sent the following: ten he-asses laden with the best things of Egypt, and ten she-asses laden with grain, bread, and provisions for his father on the journey.
- 24 As he sent his brothers off on their way, he told them, "Do not be quarrelsome on the way."
- 25 They went up from Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan.
- 26 And they told him, "Joseph is still alive; yes, he is ruler over the whole land of Egypt."
- 27 But when they recounted all that Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived.
- 28 "Enough!" said Israel. "My son Joseph is still alive! I must go and see him before I did."



### EXEGETICAL OUTLINE

- I. When Joseph could no longer restrain himself, he revealed his identity to his brothers and assured them that it was God's sovereign purpose to send him to Egypt in order to preserve the family (1-8).
  - A. Joseph dismissed the Egyptians when he was moved to reveal himself to his brothers (1-2).
  - B. Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers and inquired about his father's welfare--all of which cause his brothers to be panic-stricken (3).
  - C. Joseph urged his brothers to forgive themselves for selling him, explaining that God had brought him to Egypt in order to preserve the family from starvation (4-8).
    1. He reiterated his revelation that he was Joseph, whom they sold into Egypt, but urged them not to be angry with themselves (4-5a).
    2. He explained that God had sent him to preserve them with a great deliverance (5b-7).
    3. He clarified the point that they had not sent him there--God had; and God had made him a ruler over all Egypt (8).
- II. Joseph instructed his brothers to inform his father of all his glory in Egypt and to bring Jacob to Egypt so that the whole family could dwell in security with ample provision (9-13).
  - A. Joseph instructed his brothers to inform his father of all his glory in Egypt and to bring Jacob to Egypt so that the whole family could dwell in security with ample provision (9-13).
  - B. He explained that they would live in security and plenty during the rest of the famine (10-11).
  - C. He assured them that he was Joseph, as they could plainly see, and told them to bring his father down to Egypt (12-13).
- III. Joseph reunited himself with his brothers (14-15).
  - A. Joseph reunited with Benjamin (14).
  - B. Joseph reunited with his ten (half) brothers (15).
- IV. After the brothers returned to Canaan to tell of Joseph's survival and prosperity in Egypt, Israel decided to journey to Egypt to see his beloved son (16-28).
  - A. When Pharaoh heard about the brothers, he commanded Joseph to have his family move to Egypt, where they could be cared for with the best of the land (16-20).
    1. Pharaoh was pleased to hear about Joseph's brothers (16).

2. He issued an invitation for the family to sojourn in Egypt and promised to sustain them there (17-18).
3. He reiterated the invitation (19-20).
- B. In compliance with Pharaoh's commands, Joseph provided gifts and provisions for the brothers as they departed for Canaan (21-24).
  1. Joseph provided gifts and provisions (21-23).
  2. Joseph sent them on their way, instructing them not to quarrel (24).
- C. After Jacob's sons told him about Joseph, Israel was stunned, but he resolved to go to Egypt to see his son (25-28).
  1. When they told their father the news, he was stunned (25-26).
  2. After seeing the gifts and provisions, Jacob revived and resolved to go to Egypt (27-28).

### EXPOSITION OF THE PASSAGE

#### I. *A proper understanding of the sovereignty of God enables the believer to forgive others (1-8).*

Judah's plea had a tremendous emotional impact on Joseph. He now saw clearly how much his brothers had changed since that fateful day when they sold him as a slave into Egypt, without a concern for their father's broken heart. Now they were ready to pay any price to prevent the grief that would be heaped on their aged father if Benjamin did not return. Joseph can gain nothing more from his stratagems. He was satisfied.

All that Joseph has heard and seen from them he has observed as if from behind a see-through mirror. Jacob has given up Benjamin, the brothers have confessed their guilt, and Judah has offered himself as a slave--all to Zaphenath-paneah, the vizier of Egypt, and not to Joseph. If it had been otherwise, if Joseph had immediately disclosed himself to his brothers and they had professed their guilt and repentance for their wrong to him, would he really had known if their repentance was genuine? Would *we*?

Joseph's strategy has not been to revenge the wrong done him, but to create a situation in which circumstances would make it difficult for the brothers not to assume a responsible stance toward Jacob and the sons of Rachel, unless they were indeed hopelessly corrupt. The experience of assuming such a position would restore their personal dignity and parity with Joseph

more than would a contrite confession to him of their sin (which he bluntly rejects when they offer it in the final episode, Genesis 50:19). Such a confession would make their status dependent upon his grace and would thus establish them in a position spiritually inferior to him.

The logic of Joseph's strategy is thus to bring the brothers to the point where they can regain their self-respect so as to be able to accept moral parity with Joseph. The length and eloquent passion of Judah's speech makes it clear that, whatever the forces of necessity operating upon him, he speaks the truth which is decisive for this Narrative. In his commitment to sacrifice himself in Benjamin's place for the sake of his old father's feelings, he undergoes a transformation, and with him, the brothers whom he represents.

Although this unit is largely the speech of Joseph, it begins with a narrative report about Joseph's desire to reveal his identity to his brothers. The story has previously hinted at Joseph's emotional response to his brothers (Gen. 43:30); Joseph is overwhelmed with the proof that these are not the same brothers that sold him into bondage years ago. And now that they have passed his tests, now that their hearts are right and repentance has done its work, he finally discloses his true identity.

#### **Joseph Reveals His Identity To His Brothers (verses 1-4)**

**1** Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried, "Have everyone go out from me." So there was no man with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers.

Overcome with a mounting crescendo of emotion, as waves of sobbing came crashing through the defenses of his heart, Joseph orders his court officers (including the court interpreter, cf. Gen. 42:23) to leave him alone with these men. Joseph is so excited that he cannot help disregarding his courtly protocol: instead of telling his great entourage that he desires to be left alone with his brothers from Canaan, "he called out" (וַיִּקְרָא/*wayyiqrā*).

Joseph's dismissal of the Egyptian attendants heightens both the parallel and contrast with the scene in chapter 37: once more the brothers are alone, but the power relationships are now reversed.

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It is difficult to overlook the caution Joseph takes to be alone with his brothers (13 words in the Hebrew):

*He cried,  
"Have everyone go out from me."  
So there was no man with him  
when Joseph made himself known to his brothers.*

First, Joseph orders all his servants to leave; then the results is narrated, thus building the suspense. When Joseph ordered all others removed from his presence, no doubt the brothers must have been startled at it, wondering if he was to reject Judah's plea, if sorrow was to fall on their father, after all.

It is evident that Joseph wishes no outsider share this intensely intimate, climactic moment of self-revelation and reconciliation. There is virtue at some times in concealing sins--from some ears. Besides, Joseph would not want the Egyptians to know that his own brothers had sold him into slavery.

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**2**     **And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard *it*, and the household of Pharaoh heard *of it*.**

---

Imagine the confusion of the eleven brothers. First the vizier clears the room. They probably wondered, "What is he going to do to us!?" And then he begins wailing uncontrollably right in front of them: "he [Joseph] wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard of it"; literally, "the house of Pharaoh heard." The report was quickly bruited about so that it reached the court of Pharaoh.

Twice before Joseph had wept--when he overheard Reuben describe the agonies of his sale into slavery (Gen. 42:24) and when he first set eyes on Benjamin (Gen. 43:30ff.). On this last occasion Joseph had succeeded in controlling himself, but he can no longer contain his pent-up feelings, and the previously hidden weeping is now done in the presence of his brothers, turning into a tremendous sobbing that even the Egyptians standing outside can hear. The rising pattern, then, of three repetitions, begun with the eavesdropping Joseph of Genesis 42:24, is not only a formal symmetry through which our narrator gives shape and order to his story, but also the tracing of an emotional process in Joseph. Manifestly, we have reached the climax of this Narrative.

It should be observed furthermore, that each time Joseph has wept, he regains a brother (the same in vv. 14-15 with Benjamin and all his brothers). Joseph further weeps at the reunion with his father (cf. Gen. 46:29) and over his father's dead body (Gen. 50:17). He has tears only for his father and brothers, never for his own misery. Joseph's tears have marked all the moments of tension and transition of the family in Egypt (Gen. 42:24; 43:30; 45:15; 46:29; 50:1, 17).

The scene quickly deteriorates into a strange and uncomfortable one. The brothers look at each other, their questioning eyes full of fear, "Will the Egyptians think we have harmed their vizier?" But no one dares to move or say a word to this man of great power who has frightened and confused them since the day of their first visit.

Eventually, the brothers can tell that the vizier wants to say something. But who will understand him? A vizier of Egypt would not know Hebrew . . . and . . . none of the brothers know Egyptian.

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**3a** Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?"

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When the Grand Vizier speaks, he speaks two words in Hebrew: **אני יוסף** ("I am Joseph"). Let it be noted that in this disclosure Joseph used the language expressing personal identity, specifically employing twice the pronoun **אני**/*'ānī*, which emphasizes the person (cf. Gen. 27:19). Joseph used this pronoun to stress his identity, for that is the point under consideration: I am [really] Joseph!

Joseph's revelation is simple and direct. The results are striking. It was like a lightning bolt! This was beyond belief. Joseph, their brother, the supreme ruler of Egypt?! As the truth began to dawn on them their fear mounted also. From his present position of power he could now repay them for the scandalous way they had treated him in the past. They were so stunned by the whole experience that they could not say a word.

Words not only fail the brothers, they fail expositors also who would try to describe this indescribable scene. Perhaps the most dramatic confrontation and reunion in all literature, it is far more than literature. This narrative carries the stamp of one of those great inspirational moments in time.

Alexander Maclaren says, "If the writer of this inimitable scene of Joseph's reconciliation with his brethren was not simply an historian, he was one of the great dramatic geniuses of the world, master of a vivid minuteness like Defoe's, and able to touch the springs of tears by a pathetic simplicity like his who painted the death of King Lear. Surely theories of legend and of mosaic work fail here."

Though the brothers have already told him that their father is still alive (cf. Gen. 43:28), Joseph now repeats his question because he perhaps yearns to say the wonderful word אָבִי /'ābî--"my father."

The statements follow in rapid succession with no pause between them. Judah could not have known it, but more than anything, it was the repeated mention of the aged father--no less than fourteen times--that shook Joseph and brought his self-restraint to an end. No wonder, then, that Joseph's first thought is for the welfare of his father. True, he had already sought and obtained the information he wanted, yet the terrifying picture Judah has painted makes Joseph cry out in such a way that his words are more an exclamation than an inquiry. That is why there is no reply and Joseph does not press the point.

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**3b But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence.**

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The brothers' response to this sudden revelation was understandable, given all that had gone on before--they could not answer him because they were terrified at his presence. They were confused and terrified by the sudden revelation, unsure to what it might all lead. It is worth noting, that, in verse 1, Joseph could not (לֹא יָכֹל /lō'-yākōl) restrain himself because of his emotions, and in verse 3, his brothers could not (לֹא יָכִילוּ /lō'-yākēlû) speak because of their terror.

In addition, twenty-two years earlier they had mocked "the lord of dreams" (בַּעַל הַחֲלֻמוֹת / ba'al haḥalōmôt; Gen. 37:19), before whom now they are terrified (נִבְהָלוּ מִפְּנֵי / nibhalû mippānāyw; Gen. 45:3). It is possible that our narrator wishes to word-link the reason why they are so "terrified" בְּהַל /bhl is because Joseph whom they had maltreated has now indeed become their "master" בַּעַל /b'ēl. Indeed, because of their hatred of him twenty-two years ago, "they were not able [to return] his greeting" (literal translation of Gen. 37:3), but now because of terror, they are unable to speak to him!

Because our narrator reports that the brothers "were dismayed at his presence," rather than responding with spontaneous joy, it reveals that the healing of the breach in the family and the achievement of the major goal of the plot will not be the simple consequence of Joseph's self-disclosure. This opens a new narrative episode that differs fundamentally from the foregoing scenes.

The normal plot structure would end at this juncture, with the brothers being overjoyed at discovering their brother in such a position of power and still so eager now to accept them. But our narrator is not given to glossing over the deeper complexities of human relations: As we have seen, the reunification of Joseph into the family presents serious problems for the brothers since it means that Jacob now will certainly learn the truth of what they have done to his son.

Our narrator's report of the brothers' inability to respond to Joseph's revelation signifies that the Narrative is led by a goal deeper than that of the dream and its fulfillment. The movement of the Narrative from this point on will be generated not by a revelation of the end of the story in its beginning, but by the interaction of Joseph's self-disclosure with the terrified minds and emotions of the brothers.

This poses very clearly the deeper problem with which the Narrative is concerned: the restoration of communication between Joseph and his brothers which was broken at the outset of the Narrative by rivalry between them for the affection of the father. This problem has arisen repeatedly in the course of the Genesis narrative, and has never been satisfactorily resolved. One rival has been consistently excluded from the history of the promise (Cain, Ishmael, Esau) with only a minimum of divine protection. Now, however, with the end of the patriarchal age coming before the settlement of the land, the promise must be a common possession of all the brothers in the lineage of Abraham. Unless the chronic problem of rivalry is solved, the familial unity will be torn apart and its future imperiled.

Joseph realizes that their shock, shame and fear have stunned them, and he now drops all etiquette to put them at ease. Confronted by their silence and dismay, Joseph goes on, and our writer suggests a full extent of a pause that leaves them suspended.

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- 4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me." And they came closer. And he said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt."

It is worthy to note the caution Joseph takes to keep the brothers' crime a secret, that is, from those outside in the court who might overhear or those trying to eavesdrop. Joseph requested his brothers to "draw near" (נָגַס/*nāgas*). The Hebrew verb used here is frequently used to indicate closeness as to proximity, as when someone would embrace or kiss someone. This is the same term used when Judah "approached" Joseph (Gen. 44:18).

So why would Joseph ask them to draw so closely to him? First, he called them near to tell them, "I am your brother Joseph . . . ." Joseph now adds "your brother" to "I am Joseph" (cf. v. 3a) to express more warmth of feeling for them, particularly because he has to add: "whom you sold into Egypt" (v. 4c). These words uttered by Joseph was the first line of proof he offered to his brothers; for no one outside of his brothers--no one but Joseph--could have possibly known this terrible truth. Only by showing that he knows their secret does he prove his identity beyond doubt.

Second, this verb invites the possibility that Joseph desired to show his brothers he was circumcised (and so wanted them to draw close), which would have been irrefutable proof that he was in the lineage of Abraham, and indeed Joseph.

The way in which our writer presents Joseph's speech to his brothers is tailored to allow the reader to savor the full impact of the disclosure and to wonder along with the brothers just what this strange Egyptian is up to now. His invitation to them to approach is interrupted by our narrator's statement that they did approach and by still another introduction to Joseph's further words. In but four verses there are three introductions to Joseph's speeches and two narrated interruptions. Even in such a brief span of words the author is able to retard the pace of the story, so that each stroke of revelation is allowed its full impact on the brothers and on us. One can also sense the pauses between each element in what comes next:

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me." And they came closer. And he said, "I am your brother

Joseph . . . ,

whom you sold into Egypt.

And now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here;



for God sent me before you to preserve life."

.....

"Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt" (Gen. 45:4-5, 8).

The first half of Joseph's speech opened the way for reconciliation between them. It is one of the clearest statements of the sovereignty of God in Genesis. After identifying himself as Joseph, whom they sold into Egypt (this relative clause convincing them he was not a pretender), he told them not to be grieved or angry with themselves, because God had sent him to Egypt to prepare for the famine in order to deliver their lives.

#### **Joseph's Address To His Brothers And God's Provision (verses 5-8)**

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**5 "And now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life."**

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In these words we see evidence of Joseph's greatness in his sensitive attitude and actions toward God and his brothers. First, Joseph shows grace and compassion to his trembling brothers. "And now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves" (v. 5a). Had we been Joseph, the first thing many of us would want to talk about is how they had wronged us and how difficult and painful our life had been as a result.

But not Joseph. His first concern is to comfort his terrified and anguished brothers. Where you would expect a bitter and revengeful attitude and actions, there is only grace and support. How was this possible? Because of Joseph's understanding of the LORD's involvement in his life--from the beginning to the end, through and through.

The words "you sold me . . . God sent me" are one of the classic statements of providential control. This biblical realism, to see clearly the two aspects of every event--on the one hand human mishandling (and the blink working of nature), on the other the perfect will of God--and to fix attention on the latter as alone being of any consequence, was to be supremely exemplified in Gethsemane, where Jesus accepted His betrayal as "the cup which the Father

has given me" (Jn. 18:11; see also Ps. 76:10; Acts 2:23; 4:28; 13:27; Rom. 8:28; Phil. 1:12).

Once Joseph has told them who he is, he does not demand an apology for their former acts, nor does he insist that they bow down before him as *Joseph*. Instead, he immediately absolves them of their guilt. Apparently he is not interested in personal vindication. From here on he will treat his brothers magnanimously, and he will continue to favor Benjamin (Gen. 45:22), but he will not be to the others as a lord to servants. He will be their brother.

Judah's long and impassioned speech that concludes, "Now, therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers" (Gen. 44:33) reveals the transformation of his and his brothers' character. But it is not only a revelation of their own character, but also that of Joseph. At last Zaphenath-paneah *is* Joseph. The arrangement of characters on the stage, as it were, already suggests Joseph's confirmation of his Hebrew identity; he removes all the Egyptians from the room before speaking those definitive words to his brothers (for the first time, in their common language)--"I am Joseph." When Joseph embraces his brothers, he also embraces who he has always been--a Hebrew, one of the twelve brothers--in the context of who he is--the Egyptian vizier. Joseph reaffirms his identity within his family, and thus within the larger Narrative in which this family plays the central role.

At the same time that Joseph reaffirms his identity as one of the children of Israel, he also recognizes that his personal identity is relatively unimportant when compared to his role as an agent within the narrative of "Israel." For the first time in the Narrative, Joseph's words provide an explicit statement of the theological purpose that has been at work throughout the Narrative.

When the author told us earlier that God was "with" Joseph, he did not tell us why (cf. Gen. 39:2-5). Now, three times Joseph affirms that God sent him (Gen. 45:5, 7, 8), not simply to make him "a successful man" (Gen. 39:2) and eventually "lord of all Egypt" (Gen. 45:9). Much more was at stake than his own favored son-to-rags-to-riches life: "For God sent me before you to preserve life . . . , to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance" (Gen. 45:5, 7).

The important Hebrew verb is "sent." We knew that Joseph had been bought and sold, thrown into prison, and exalted to power, but we did not

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know he was on a *mission*, much less a mission of the LORD! This same Hebrew verb will remind the reader of commission narratives in which the leader could announce that God had sent him (Ex. 3:15).

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- 6     **"For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting.**  
 7     **And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance."**
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The famine that had been raging for two years was to continue for another five. Joseph states that "there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting." More literally the Hebrew reads, "no plowing and harvesting." This is a compound expression for agricultural activities (Ex. 34:21; 1 Sam. 8:12). Since the farmer would certainly till the soil, the phrase here means there will be no effective plowing, none that will produce a yield.

The purpose of Joseph's being sent before them was to preserve a posterity in the earth and to save their lives by a great deliverance. The use of words such as "posterity," or "remnant" and "deliverance," is the lot of survivors, brings forward the motif of rescue that is thematically important in Genesis. These two words, which occur predominantly in prophecy, express the expectation of salvation from judgment (see Isa. 10:20; 15:9; Ezra 9:14). Joseph's whole purpose was to ensure that the remnant of God's people would be saved in this crisis. In addition, the Hebrew word *וַיִּלְחֶם יְהוָה* "to save you alive" is a reference to the same word in Genesis 6:20: God has made Egypt for Jacob's family what the Ark was for Noah's.

Joseph's speech forms a classic expression of providence; it was his conviction that God's will, not the will of human beings, was the controlling reality in the events of his life. His explanation that the brothers had not sent him to Egypt meant that they had not acted independently of God's will--they were part of God's greater plan to bring Joseph to Egypt to deliver them. They had attempted to be rid of their brother by selling him into Egypt, but as Calvin asserts, God from heaven overruled their counsels and attempts and, in short, did by their hands what he had himself decreed. The act of sending Joseph to Egypt was thus attributed both to men and to God, but for very different purposes--they acted because they hated him, but God planned to use Joseph as their deliverer.

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Dods correctly cautions that "the discovery that through our evil purposes and injurious deeds God has worked out his beneficent will, is certainly not calculated to make us think more lightly of our sin or more highly of ourselves" (*Book of Genesis*, n.d.:394). The knowledge that God overruled an evil plan may have brought great relief from years of guilt, but also fear and sadness from realizing what might have happened (cf. Isaac in Gen. 27:33).

They had maliciously sold Joseph, hoping that his dreams would be put to an end; God used that means to bring him to Egypt so that they now might have a savior in the famine. God is able to bring good out of evil, as the developing message of Genesis has shown. But every sin, every failure, every self-deceiving enterprise that appears to work in one way, although evil, carries its own cost because it is sin.

The brothers' life was not what it might have been, had they not sinned; nevertheless, because of their sin and its pain, they developed a deeper appreciation for one another and a greater understanding of their sovereign LORD God. Had they but obeyed and followed God's plan, they would have enjoyed His blessings to the full and spared themselves and their family the pain. In spite of their attempts to change the divine plan, eventually they found out that God's plan would triumph. Through it all they learned which side to follow--not the side of evil borne of envy and hatred, but the side that can discern the hand of God in human affairs. They might not understand God's plan, but they must accept it and promote it.

This theology is the basis of reconciliation; without it there would be only bitterness and blame, rancor and revenge. The principle is that whoever is spiritual will perceive the hand of God in the course of events and therefore be able to forgive what others have done. No one who believes in the sovereignty of God in the affairs of life can bear a grudge or take revenge. Joseph magnanimously comforted his brothers with this sound doctrine.

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**8** "Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt."

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For the third time, Joseph reiterates the true significance of the fateful vicissitudes of his life. He does not accuse his brothers of having sold him but says they "sent" him, thereby substituting the beneficial result for their evil

purpose. By now Joseph may also have realized that when "Israel sent" him on his mission to the brothers (cf. Gen. 37:14), his father himself had unknowingly been God's tool by initiating the fulfillment of His prediction to Abraham (cf. Gen. 15:13-23).

Thus it was God who had brought Joseph into Egypt and not his brothers. Moreover, God has exalted him to this high position in order that he might be able to provide for the needs of his father and his family. Joseph described his high position in Egypt by using a number of graphic terms. He had become "a father to Pharaoh." No such title is known to us from ancient Egypt, and therefore attempts have been made to read this as an official title given to Joseph in Egypt. The closest to it in Egyptian seems to be *it ntr*, "father of god," in which "god" may refer to the king. It should be remembered, however, that at this point Joseph was not speaking to his brothers as an Egyptian but as a brother among his brethren, a Hebrew among Hebrews. It is more logical, then, to read this word "father" as a Hebrew expression indicating someone who was a trusted advisor and confidant (see Job 29:16; Isa. 22:21). In several biblical passages "father" is used as a title of honor for a prophet, a king, or a high administrator (2 Kgs. 2:12; 5:13; 1 Sam. 24:12; Isa. 22:21). To this purpose Pharaoh elevated Joseph to be ruler of the land. The description indicates that Joseph was more than vizier, even *vice-Pharaoh*.

Another possible understanding why Joseph calls himself "father to Pharaoh" is that he intimates that his dream in Genesis 37 did not mean what his brothers had thought, that he, Joseph, wanted to become their "ruler," but that God would make him Egypt's ruler!

Joseph further described his position as "lord" (אָדוֹן/*adôn*) over Pharaoh's household." Pharaoh himself had also used this term when he promoted Joseph to this position (cf. Gen. 41:40). Third, he described himself as "ruler" (מֹשֶׁל/*mōšēl*) over all the land of Egypt" (cf. Gen. 41:41, 43; 42:6). This last verb ("ruler") recalls the response of the brothers when they first interpreted his dream that he would be a ruler: "Will you indeed have dominion (תִּמְשֹׁל/תִּמְשֹׁל/*māšōl timšōl*) over us?" (Gen. 37:8). Thus, in describing God's care over him, Joseph made an allusion to the brothers' initial question regarding his dreams as a young lad.

In this same passage the title "Elohim" (God) is used, for this is providence, the government of the world ruled by God, and it is the Deity who orders all things according to the counsel of His own will. As signifying that power and that deity, "Elohim" is the only appropriate name. It is not used

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because it appeared in a document supposedly using only this title as some documentary source critics posit!

## II. *The forgiveness of others enables believers to enjoy complete reconciliation (9-15).*

Joseph now draws certain conclusions from his exaltation. God's providence required the presence in Egypt of Jacob and his clan. The brothers were to bring the others immediately (v. 9). Their place of residence was to be Goshen, in the eastern delta area, "where you will be near to me," he told them (v. 10). Joseph then assured them that the move to Goshen would be feasible and that they would be supported there (v. 11). He emphasized this provision by calling their attention to the fact that the second most powerful official in Egypt was promising to supply their needs (v. 12). In order to persuade Jacob to come, they were to describe his "glory" (status, position, way of life; v. 13) to their father. Respecting this point, he was possibly suggesting that Jacob was to recall the dreams of Joseph, finding in his status not only the fulfillment of the dreams, but certainly the urgency to go down to Egypt and there be preserved.

What is recorded also are the instructions for the immediate future of the clan of Israel. The report is clearly summary in character, topical in content. The note that he wept over Benjamin characterizes the deep tensions that had enveloped him while he was waiting for the day he could reveal himself to them (v. 14). It must be understood that the overall subject of the Joseph Narrative concerns how Israel came to Egypt and, through the trial of the brothers, reveals the working of God in people's hearts in preparing them to be founders of the nation of the people of God. The Narrative moves forward the redemptive history toward the exodus, the most significant redemptive event next to the incarnation and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Verses 14 and 15 are then a summary also of the emotion-filled hour of reconciliation. The words "afterward his brothers talked with him" indicate that he may have spoken to them of his experiences, explaining why he tried them and attempting further to convince them that he had long since learned to trust God in all things and to forgive them.

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**Joseph's Invitation (verses 9-13)**


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- 9** "Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, "God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay.'"
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When there is a lack of forgiveness between two people, the last thing either one wants is to be together, physically or emotionally. In a stirring scene of complete forgiveness, Joseph tells his brothers to make haste and go get their father and the entire clan and all of their possessions and return to Egypt.

In the second part of his speech to the brothers, Joseph made plans to bring his father to Egypt. He twice repeated that the brothers were to go to Jacob and with all haste bring him down to Egypt (vv. 9, 13). In his instructions Joseph continued to stress the sovereignty of God, instructing them to tell Jacob that God had made his son ruler over all Egypt.

From the assiduous wording of his message, Jacob would at once recognize Joseph as its author, and "God," its first word, would assure him that, though being "the lord of all Egypt"--and therefore too busy to bring him down in person--he has remained faithful to his father's way of life. His brothers are to hasten back not only to give Jacob the news about Joseph, but also probably to relieve him of his anxiety about Benjamin and Simeon.

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- 10** "And you shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children and your flocks and your herds and all that you have."
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The vizier may invite foreigners to settle in Egypt, though not in a specific region. This is why Joseph says, "you shall live in the land of Goshen" and not "I will settle you . . . ."

"You shall live" connotes not merely an invitation for a visit, but permanent residence in Egypt even after the famine. Thus Joseph clearly has in mind a thoroughgoing and long-term migration from Canaan to Egypt.

The term "Goshen" has not yet been identified as Egyptian and is most likely Semitic. It is probably connected with the Hebrew *גושן/guš*, meaning "a clod" (Job 7:5), referring to a type of soil. Another "region of Goshen" is a strip of land south of Hebron in the Land of Israel mentioned in Joshua 10:41 and 11:16. A hill city of the same name, situated in the southern extremity of Judah, southwest of Hebron, is listed in Joshua 15:51. The presence of such a name in Egypt accords with other Semitic place-names such as Succoth (Ex. 12:37), Migdol, and Baal-zephon (Jos. 14:1) in the same region, thus attesting to its early occupation by Semites.

Although no source defines the precise geographic location of Goshen, the cumulative effect of various pieces of evidence is to place it in the area of Wadi Tumeilāt, which stretches from the eastern arm of the Nile to the Great Bitter Lake. Egyptian texts confirm the presence of Semites and other Asians in the northeastern part of the country both at the end of the Sixth Dynasty (ca. 2250 B.C.) and about 1700 B.C. in the wake of the Hyksos invasion. Exodus 12:38 refers to a "mixed multitude," that is, foreign tribes, dwelling in the area of Israelite settlement.

Goshen is blessed with excellent grazing facilities (Gen. 46:32-34; 47:6, 11), and it is known that the Nile Delta was the center of cattle breeding. The natural route from Asia to Egypt emerges from Wadi Tumeilāt, and Joseph traveled to Goshen to greet his father, who arrived from Canaan (Gen. 46:29). Thus it could not have been too distant from the Egyptian frontier. The route of the Exodus from Goshen, where the Israelites were still living hundreds of years later (Ex. 8:18), also shows that it could not have been too far from the border (Ex. 12:37; 13:17f. In addition, Goshen is said to have been in the vicinity of Joseph's residence (Gen. 45:10) and also not too far from the royal palace (Gen. 47:1f.). This is possible only if the capital was situated in the Nile Delta region at this time.

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11     **There I will also provide for you, for there are still five years of famine to come, lest you and your household and all that you have be impoverished."**

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And now, in order for Joseph to fulfill his destiny as the deliverer of his family, the family would have to move to Egypt, where he could nourish them (*ʾwʾkikaltî*; see the usage of *kâl* in Ruth 4:15, 1 Kgs. 4:7, 27; 17:4, 9). This Hebrew word for "nurture" (cf. also Gen. 47:12; 50:21) used in the Narra-



tive only in relation to Joseph's family, connotes special solicitude. "Destitute" delicately paraphrases that they survive and not die (cf. Gen. 42:2; 43:8; 47:19). To remain in Canaan would have led to poverty and death in the five years remaining in the famine.

The fact that Joseph states that "there are still five years of famine to come" is to overcome Jacob's anticipated resistance to a massive migration from Canaan.

It can hardly be without purpose that this picture of God's chosen people dwelling safely and prosperously in the land that Joseph provided for them comes at the close of the Book of Genesis and that it is a near replica of the way things were in the beginning. The writer appears intentionally to draw our attention to the connection between the end of the Book and the beginning. Thus when the Pharaoh restated Joseph's offer and "twice" gave the brothers the "good" (vv. 18, 20; NIV, "best") of the land of Egypt, it is hard not to see in the purpose of this Narrative a conscious allusion to the "good" (cf. Gen. 1:31) land given to Adam in the first chapter of the Book. The picture of Joseph is a picture of restoration--not just the restoration of the good fortune of Jacob but, as a picture, the restoration of the blessing that was promised through the offspring of Jacob.

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**12 "And behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth which is speaking to you."**

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Joseph concluded his instructions to his brothers by appointing them, with special mention of Benjamin, as eyewitnesses to report to his father that he was still alive and that he had gained great power and honor in Egypt.

This sentence is not part of the message to the father but is directed at the brothers. If Joseph's message should not convince the father that it is indeed his own son, the brother will corroborate it as eye-and-ear witnesses. If the father should still doubt, Benjamin will bear them out that Joseph, in their own language had spoken all these words; for Benjamin had not taken part of the original deception of their father.

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**13 "Now you must tell my father of all my splendor in Egypt, and all that you have seen; and you must hurry and bring my father down here."**

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It would not be particularly easy for the brothers to take this message to Jacob (see Gen. 45:24), for in telling the good news, the brothers would need to include the bad news--how Joseph came to be in Egypt in the first place. Hard as it might have been, such open confession was necessary for the healing of the family. But no healing would have been possible without their recognition of God's mysterious ways.

Joseph told his brothers to return to Jacob with all the news of his glory (i.e., "importance" [*kābôd*]) in Egypt and with the instructions to move to Egypt to survive the famine. They were to return to Canaan and lose no time in bringing Jacob and the entire family to Egypt.

#### **Joseph Embraces His Brothers (verses 14-15)**

The passage closes with a brief report of the reunion of the brothers. First Joseph and Benjamin, and then all the brothers, were tearfully united. The emotional pitch that began the unit surfaces again at the end in this tearful reconciliation. The scene is reminiscent of the reconciliation of Jacob and Esau (Gen. 33:4); that reconciliation, however, was not a true one, for Jacob and Esau never did unite. Distrust and deception clouded that meeting. But here there was a new beginning.

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- 14** Then he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept; and Benjamin wept on his neck.  
**15** And he kissed all his brothers and wept on them, and afterward his brothers talked with him.
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While Joseph was speaking, the first shock and fear that his brothers had experienced began to wane. The truth began to dawn on them that this mighty ruler of Egypt was actually their brother whom they had sold into Egypt. They also realized that Joseph had no intention of seeking revenge for the cruel treatment they had afforded him when he was a boy.

Now at last Joseph can vent his emotion in open tears. Soon the tear began to flow and all the brothers were embraced with tears. Special mention is made of the greeting Joseph exchanged with his full brother, Benjamin. It is natural for him to approach Benjamin first, for these two full brothers' mutual affection is singular and has never been spoiled.

The narrative speaks only one line about Joseph's brothers response, only three words in Hebrew: "his brothers talked with him" (דִּבְּרוּ אִתּוֹ). This brief comment, characteristic of the reticence of Hebrew narrative, leaves unsaid as much as it says. Healing has happened. However, the record is not concerned primarily with this. Now the narrator records the next important action: the removal of the clan of Israel to Egypt out of temptation's way in Canaan. Thus the complex Narrative is a plot within a plot, but how beautiful a composition!

We are not told what the brothers talked about, but there can be little doubt that the centerpiece of attention must have been Joseph's attitude. Throughout history many great feats have been accomplished but none can surpass the glory and wonder of Joseph's godly attitude at this moment in history. After they began to talk, quite probably he called in his wife and his two sons and introduced them. For their part, his brothers told him all the news from home, about their own families, and everything that had transpired the past twenty-two years. It was a day to remember.

"His brothers talked with him"--finally, after so much talk that seemed at cross purposes, so much talk that was not really "with" him. This counterbalances as it rectifies the notice of the opening exposition to the Joseph Narrative that they "could not speak to him in peace" (Gen. 37:4). The brothers, who could not say a peaceful word to Joseph when the Narrative began, now speak to him. But what do they say? Do they trust Joseph's interpretation of the past or his intentions for the future? The brothers emerge very rarely as speakers in the rest of the Narrative (cf. Gen. 45:26; 50:15-17). When they do speak, they remain apprehensive about whether the proclaimed new future can really be trusted.

As the brothers at the outset tore Joseph from their father, so now they will arrange for the reunion of Jacob with Joseph in Egypt. The wound they caused, they will heal.

### **III. *Believers must be responsive to the LORD's plan, especially when it is so obvious in the circumstances of God's dealings with His chosen leaders (45:16-28).***

In the last scene, we remember that Joseph's brothers experienced an unplanned, unannounced, and unexpected reunion. Now, these same

brothers are going to travel back to their father in Canaan with news of this incredible event and with Joseph's offer to host a permanent family reunion in Egypt (Gen. 45:9-13). "Dad, you are not going to believe this . . .," you can almost hear them say--and, indeed, only the evidence of the goods Joseph sends with his brothers will make their story credible.

This paragraph brings before us the response of Pharaoh to Joseph's commands to his brothers. It may be thought, however, that Joseph had gone too far in telling his brothers he would care for them in Egypt, that he really did not have the authority to do so. However, Pharaoh's words are really the royal confirmation to Joseph's plans. Thus God turns men's hearts to His every will. Thus this paragraph begins with Pharaoh's delight and participation in the move of Israel to Egypt. By divine providence, Pharaoh not only endorses Joseph's plan to bring his family to Egypt, but he also graciously supplies the wagons that will speed the return of Joseph's aging father.

#### Pharaoh's Invitation (verses 16-21a)

**16 Now when the news was heard in Pharaoh's house that Joseph's brothers had come, it pleased Pharaoh and his servants.**

Verse 16 now resumes the scene in vv. 1-2. The attendants and courtiers had withdrawn (v. 1). However, because of the volume of Joseph's weeping, "the Egyptians heard it" (v. 2) the news of it was passed on to Pharaoh's household (vv. 2b; 16a). What was interrupted by the details of Joseph's self-disclosure, is now resumed and expanded. This report becomes the point of continuation of the narrative.

Just as Joseph's dream interpretation and his subsequent advice "pleased" (וַיִּשְׂמַח/wayyîtab) Pharaoh and all of his courtiers (Gen. 41:27) because it was for Egypt's welfare, so again they were now "pleased" (וַיִּשְׂמַח/wayyîtab). Joseph was greatly esteemed in Egypt, by everyone from Pharaoh on down. He in fact had been Egypt's deliverer, and the whole nation was grateful. Thus, they were pleased not only because they shared in Joseph's joy, but possibly also for other practical reasons: (1) The public will now learn the noble lineage of Joseph, the former slave who had been kidnapped (cf. Gen. 40:15); (2) If a family such as the extraordinary vizier's could be persuaded to settle in Egypt, it would be a great asset for the whole country; (3) If Egypt became their new homeland, the vizier would serve Pharaoh with even greater

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dedication; and (4) This would give Pharaoh and the Egyptians an opportunity to show Joseph their appreciation of what he had done for them.

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- 17 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do this: load  
your beasts and go to the land of Canaan,  
18 and take your father and your households and come to me, and I  
will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you shall eat the fat  
of the land.'"
- 

Joseph had the power to care for his family, but even a man of his stature ran the risk of jealousy from other officials, or criticism of his actions--especially in a time when food supplies were beginning to run so low. It was very important therefore to have Pharaoh enthusiastically concur with Joseph's instructions, and thus he does, but he even grants more than Joseph did.

When we read that Pharaoh instructed Joseph regarding the future of his family, because of Hebrew narrative reticence, we must assume that Joseph had personally communicated with Pharaoh about his contact with his brothers and the needs of his father's family in the foreseeable future. It is probable that Joseph had made some kind of request to Pharaoh with respect to his family in Canaan, and Pharaoh now responded favorably to this request. Thus Joseph's invitation to his family to settle in Egypt in verses 9-13, is now endorsed and confirmed by the king himself.

Yet there is this further thought, that this could well be considered the expression of Pharaoh's personal regard and gratitude to one whose works truly effected the deliverance of his land. (This fact has been overlooked by the source-documentarians as a sufficient reason for Pharaoh's command). Joseph was fully in command of the affairs of Egypt to do as he wished in the matter, but lest any other official think that Joseph was overstepping himself, Pharaoh's command settled the matter.

In addition, since this was perhaps the Hyksos period, the influx of Asiatic Semites is well attested as a matter of policy that would increase those on whom Pharaoh could depend in a possible contest of power with native Egyptians. The invitation of Pharaoh is not inconsistent with the times.

Pharaoh instructed Joseph to tell his brothers to load their beasts of burden with food and to return to Canaan. The term "load" (לָבַד/לָבַדָּה) is unique.

Egypt. Therefore they should not delay their departure by taking along all their things.

Contradictions have been posited by some critical scholars between Pharaoh's instructions and that of Joseph's (vv. 9-13). But there are no real contradictions; the repetition is intentional and therefore essential. First of all, it is recognized that the generous royal instructions of vv. 17-20 differ clearly from the sober and more modest instructions of Joseph (vv. 9-13). One certainly cannot say, however, that the Pharaoh's instructions stands opposed to Joseph's invitation. Essentially, Pharaoh confirms Joseph's invitation to his father by sanctioning it as his own command. But the Narrative as a whole tells us much more; the Pharaoh has occasion to do a service for his minister of state who had saved his kingdom from certain starvation, and he does it joyfully. Pharaoh understands the heart of Joseph and knows that he causes him the greatest pleasure by publicly honoring his father. What then follows is a statement of the Pharaoh to his vizier (v. 17a) who is to pass it on to the brothers (vv. 17b-18); it is thus the Pharaoh's command that the brothers carry out. Thus Pharaoh becomes an instrument in the divine plan for reuniting the whole family. When they fetch their father, they do so under the authority and instructions of Pharaoh.

The Egyptian empire has been opened for the sake of the descendants of Abraham. Such an eventuality is to be theologically explained. Undoubtedly, reasons of imperial policy could be found to justify such actions by Pharaoh. But that misses the point. It is a gift from God. That God has chosen to bless this family is the single ground for the new imperial posture (cf. Gen. 12:2-3).

It has been correctly observed by commentators that whereas the king allows Joseph much liberty in the matter of disposing of the affairs of the kingly realm, he lays strict orders upon him in the matters concerning his own welfare and says: "Now you are ordered, 'Do this . . .'" In fact, Pharaoh shows himself to be a man also accustomed to issuing orders; for his commands are curt.

Significantly the brothers are not called the "sons of Jacob," or "the brothers of Joseph," but auspiciously "the sons of Israel" as they were called in Gen. 42:5 on their first trip to Egypt to buy grain. As one entity, they resolved to comply with this injunction.

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The narrator states that "the sons of Israel *did so*." They could not be said to have done all in the order until they had actually brought their father and their families to Egypt. But such phraseology is common to express the purpose of an action, or series of actions, afterwards performed.

The brothers were sent back with generous gifts, as evidence of the royal bounty of Pharaoh and of Joseph. This is the way our LORD takes care of repentant sinners, too. He showers us with "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:3ff) and with spiritual gifts and provisions included in His great bounty (Eph. 4:7-12).

#### Joseph's Provisions And Address To His Brothers (verses 21b-24)

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- 21b** and Joseph gave them wagons according to the command of Pharaoh, and gave them provisions for the journey.
- 22** To each of them he gave changes of garments, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred *pieces of silver* and five changes of garments.
- 

Joseph proceeded, in accord with Pharaoh's command, to equip his brothers with wagons and provisions for the journey. In verses 22 and 23, Joseph lavishes his brothers with gifts, expressive of his very great love for them. These gifts not only speak of love and reconciliation, but draws us also back to the inception of the hostility between Joseph and his brothers.

The brothers needed new garments since they had torn the ones they had (cf. Gen. 44:13). Each of his brothers received a gift of new clothes which probably were in the nature of festive robes, made of fine Egyptian linen. The Hebrew word *חַלְיָהּ/halipāh* is specifically employed for a gift of clothing, as a valued prize or as a token of affection or honor (Judg. 14:12f., 19; 2 Kgs. 5:5, 22f.). The consistent use of the plural form may signify a set of clothing comprising more than one article. Since an article of apparel had featured prominently in the Narrative of hostility between Joseph and his brothers, it is only fitting that their reconciliation should be marked by a gift of apparel. Practically speaking, Joseph did not desire that those who were to be the honored guests of the king of Egypt should lack appropriate garments!

The motif concerning clothing has appeared at several strategic points in the Narrative. There is, of course, the cloak (כֶּתֶן עֲשִׂים/*ketōnet passîm*; Gen. 37:3) that was the token of Jacob's special love for Joseph and the

Its meaning is suggested by the context and by its Aramaic usage. Then they were to bring their father and their families to Egypt. Pharaoh added the promise that they would be given the "best" area in the land of Egypt to establish their residence and they would be given the "best" products of the land.

The theme of "the good" is threaded throughout this segment by the repetition of forms of the Hebrew root טוב (*tôb*; cf. וַיִּיטֵב/*wayyîtb*, "pleased," v. 16; טוֹב/*tûb*, "best," vv. 18, 20, 23). Twice in his advice on the move he declared that "the good (*tûb*) of the land" would be theirs (vv. 18 and 20).

Furthermore, Pharaoh promised Joseph's family not only the "best" that Egypt had to offer, but also they would eat the "fat" of the land. "The fat of the land" which occurs nowhere else, seems to mean the choicest products of the soil (Num. 18:12, 29; Ps. 147:14) or the most fertile farm land.

Here was a man, Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, who was no doubt grateful to Joseph and to Joseph's God, who was blessing the seed of Abraham and in return would enjoy God's blessing on his land.

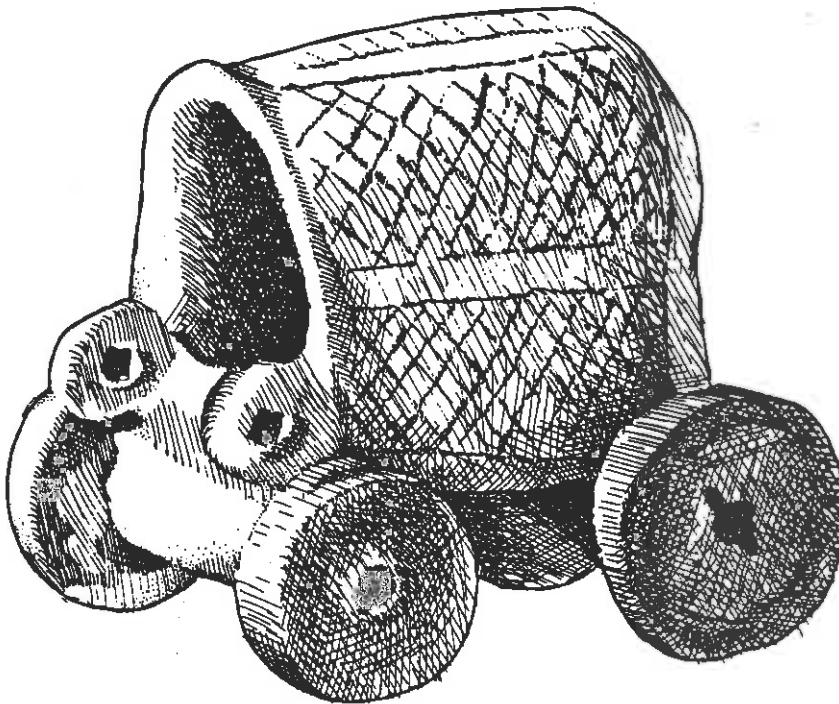
As Pharaoh rejoiced over Joseph's reunion with his family, so will there be joy and gladness among the other nations of the earth, the gentiles, when Israel receives her Messiah in truth and submission. Numerous prophecies, such as those found in Isaiah 60:1-3, Micah 4:1-2 and Psalm 67, speak of this event. It will take place after the initial judgments at the close of the tribulation, and at the beginning of the Millennial reign of Messiah Jesus.

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- 19 "Now you are ordered, 'Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father and come.
- 20 And do not concern yourselves with your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.'
- 21a Then the sons of Israel did so;
- 

Knowing that Joseph would do nothing for personal advantage, Pharaoh *orders* him to provide his family with wagons to facilitate the transporting of the women and children as well as the aged tribal father. It befits a king not only to pay the travel expenses for invited guests, but also to order a splendid and honorable reception. That the father is mentioned last signifies



that the wagons are sent in his honor; indeed, the father will be carried like the Ark of the Covenant will be in the ensuing years (cf. Num. 7:9). These "wagons" were essentially carts, usually on two wooden wheels, drawn by oxen or horses. This is the first mention of wagons in the Scriptures and suggests that they were essentially unique to Egypt at that time.



A terra-cotta model wagon (see Gen. 45:19) found at Tepe Gawra and dated in the third millennium B.C.

This order is given to Joseph to relay to his brothers. The previous instructions could be carried out with no outside assistance. This one, however, requires official authorization, the effect of which is to accord Jacob's family the special status of ward of the king.

Finally, Pharaoh generously offered that they should not be concerned about transporting their household belongings from Canaan since the "best" of Egypt would be placed at their disposal. He would give them all the utensils and miscellaneous household items they would need, when they reached

catalysis for the brothers' hatred. The same cloak also is the instrument of the deceit (Gen. 37:31-33) used by the brothers to convince Jacob of Joseph's tragic demise. Again, Joseph's outer garment becomes evident against him when abandoned in the hands of Potiphar's wife (בגד/ *beḡed*; Gen. 39:12, 15-16, 18). It should not be overlooked that in the Judah and Tamar episode, items worn or carried by their owner stood as tokens of identity (Gen. 38:18, 25).

Joseph's sudden rise from prison to the pinnacle of power in Egypt is marked by a change of clothing (וַיַּחַלְקֵם וַיְהַלְלֵם שִׁמְלֹתַי / *way·ḥallēp simlōt*; Gen. 41:14,, 42). Now, "festal garments" (הַלְּפָאָה / *ḥalipāh*) are given by Joseph to his brothers--five for Benjamin--as he sends them home, knowing who he is, to return with their father and families. While the specific terms are different, each use of apparel marks a key transition in the Joseph Narrative. Now Joseph treats his brothers to such a distinction and, so as to say, raises them to equal rank with himself. It is a present to mark the reconciliation.

In sending provisions home, it is interesting to note that Joseph again bestowed a special mark of honor on Benjamin--far more than the others. The same honoring of a friend is seen in Jonathan's giving his garments and weapons to David (1 Sam. 18:4; cf. also 2 Kgs. 5:5, 22, 23). Benjamin was, after all, his full brother, and the brother that he had subjected to danger during the testing. When Benjamin receives five festal robes and 300 silver pieces in addition, Joseph trusts that the other brothers will perceive this predilection.

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**23** And to his father he sent as follows: ten donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and sustenance for his father on the journey.

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Joseph also sends presents for his father to testify to his love for him as well as a sign of his joy that he is now in a position to bestow benevolence on his aged father. With the provisions he sent a gift to his father--ten donkeys loaded with the good things (*tûb*) of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with food.

The provisions sent to Jacob were for their immediate needs and for the trip to Egypt. Presumably these were additional to those that each brother was taking back on his own donkey and were intended for Jacob himself as Joseph's own gift to his father, and additional provisions for the journey to Egypt.

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**24** So he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, "Do not quarrel on the journey."

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Verse 24 contains the summary of the activity. Joseph sent them off, and as he did so, added what seems to be inconsistent with what has happened. Yet it must be remembered that none are so vulnerable to err from the way of truth as those newly set thereon. Joseph warned them not only about becoming embroiled in arguments among themselves over their recent experiences, but also not to let the marked preference of Benjamin be a point of division with them. They were to remember that they had work to do and that they should do it without disputes.

The Hebrew stem *רגז*/rgz which means "trembling" (translated as "quarrel" in the NASB) carries overtones of agitation, deep concern, or rage. Hence, some understand the text to mean: Have no fear for your safety on the journey to Canaan and back. The present context, however, lends the text to mean: Do not engage in mutual recrimination, which would include the following: blaming each other for past actions, interpretation of Joseph's handling of them, and their response to favoritism to Benjamin.

We can understand this timely warning. Joseph knew that his brothers would travel home with mixed emotions. Their callous past treatment of Joseph and of their father Jacob would inevitably come to light for all to see. How the accusations and recriminations might have flashed back and forth as they recalled their earlier misdeeds! But the brothers had before them Joseph's own sterling example to follow. He had so very generously forgiven them. And if he had forgiven them all, it was highly reasonable that they should forgive one another. Joseph therefore was a peace-maker, both by command and example.

Joseph knows his brothers and human nature. Even though they have just repented and feel close to one another, he also knows that sudden wealth can do terrible things to a family. And he also knows the awful power of jealousy firsthand.

This was not a time for accusations and recriminations, which could easily have come to blows. Joseph had no doubt detected that there were signs of his brothers accusing each other regarding their past sins (cf. Gen. 42:22). It would have been easy for them to express bitterness toward each other after the intense emotional strain they had been under. However, it was a time for joyful

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reunion. Joseph knew what lay ahead of them--a full disclosure and explanation to their father of what really had happened twenty-two years ago.

**Brothers Reveal That Joseph Is Alive (verses 25-28)**

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**25** Then they went up from Egypt, and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob.

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Verses 25-28 bring to a close the section that began in Genesis 43:1 with the father's request to the brothers to go to Egypt a second time. The return journey, interrupted in Genesis 44:6, now continues; but everything has changed. Only verse 25 speaks of the return, corresponding to an itinerary (cf. Gen. 42:29).

The brothers depart finally with special provisions for their father. In a single verse the distance between Egypt and Canaan is traversed, and in a very few verses the greater distance this symbolizes, the distance in knowledge, is overcome as well.

The last four verses of this chapter report both the brothers' arrival with the news and Jacob's response. On their first return (cf. Gen. 42:29) our narrator reported "they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan," for at that time their main concern was how their father would react to the vizier's demand to see Benjamin. This time "from Egypt" precedes, and "to the land of Canaan" follows it, as if to suggest their concern that soon they may exchange their homeland Canaan for Egypt.

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**26a** And they told him, saying, "Joseph is still alive, and indeed he is ruler over all the land of Egypt . . . "

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Joseph had emphatically enjoined them (cf. vv. 9ff) to speak: "Thus says your son Joseph, 'God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. And you shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children and your flocks and your herds and all that you have. There I will also provide for you, for there are still five years of famine *to come*, lest you and your household and all that you have be impoverished.'"

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Instead of repeating verbatim Joseph's carefully worded message, they simply say "Joseph is still alive . . . ."

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**26b But he was stunned, for he did not believe them.**

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How could he have believed them! The "ruler" of whom they speak is obviously the same "lord of the land" of whom they had reported that he suspected them of espionage (cf. Gen. 42:30), who had kept Simeon as a hostage (cf. Gen. 42:33) to compel the appearance of Benjamin before him (cf. Gen. 42:34) whose existence he had pumped out from them (cf. Gen. 43:7). How can this man who so cruelly insisted that Benjamin part from his old father, be his Joseph? The brothers' words only reopen his old wound.

Just as the brothers were unable at first to grasp that Joseph was "the man" (v. 3), so too the father cannot believe it as the brothers make their report. The language is stronger here: "he was stunned, for he did not believe them." The narrator wants to allude to Genesis 37:31-36 and for a moment it seems that the old estrangement might return. After all the years of deceit, his sons' hidden guilt was suddenly exposed. It was too much. But the brothers now deliver Joseph's formal message.

When the brothers notice their father's stupor, they sense their mistake. They have given their father too much information too fast. So they back up and begin again, this time carefully delivering accurately Joseph's message and bringing forth every proof they can think of to support their fantastic claims.

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**27 When they told him all the words of Joseph that he had spoken to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived.**

**28 Then Israel said, "It is enough; my son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die."**

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As soon as Joseph's own words, "Thus says your son Joseph, 'God has made me . . .'" come from their lips, they touch the father's deepest chords. Each word, each phrase and their sequence enrapture him because they authenticate the speaker. They prompt him to raise his eyes, and the sight of

the Egyptian wagons resolves the conflict between his reasoning that the "ruler" cannot be Joseph and the certainty that these are Joseph's own words: Joseph must be the vizier, for none but Pharaoh or he can authorize the use of these wagons abroad.

At first Jacob was numb (unable to move) from astonishment, but upon the arrival of the provisions his spirit revived (וַיִּחַי רוּחֵי יַעֲקֹב/*watt'hi rūah*). He then realized that Joseph was alive and resolved to go see his son before he died. This scene shows how Israel recognized that the report of the mysterious happenings was true and resolved to go to Egypt.

Jacob's response to the news of Joseph plays a key role in connecting the Joseph Narrative to the message of the Pentateuch as a whole. Throughout the Pentateuch there is a focus on the response of God's people to the work of God. At important moments in the Narrative, this response is interpreted as either one of "faith" (וַיִּאֱמֵן/*he'mîn*; Gen. 15:6; Ex. 4:31; 14:31; 19:9) or "no faith" (וַיִּלֹּד'*he'mîn*, Gen. 45:26; cf. Num. 14:11; 20:12).

Jacob's response falls in with these other examples. Here, however, the writer gives a deeper insight into the nature of his faith. At first, when Jacob heard the news that Joseph was alive, "his heart grew numb" (v. 26; NIV, "Jacob was stunned") and "he did not believe." But when he heard the words of Joseph and saw all that he had sent to take him back to Egypt, "the spirit . . . of Jacob revived" (v. 27), and he set out to go to him (v. 28).

The faith of Jacob bore the same marks as that of the other occurrences of faith throughout the Pentateuch, but in this text alone a different dimension is stressed. That new dimension in Jacob's faith is the contrast between his "numbed heart" and his "revived spirit." Jacob's lack of faith is identified with his "numbed heart." When his spirit was renewed, however, he believed. The viewpoint expressed here is very similar to that of the later prophetic literature where faith and the "new heart" are synonymous (cf. Jer. 31:33-34; Ezek. 36:26) and where lack of faith (Hab. 1:4; NIV, "the law is paralyzed"). All these texts seem to be summed up in the words of David in Ps. 51: "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (v. 10).

It is noteworthy that, as this change in attitude came over Jacob, the Narrative, which had been calling him by his old name, "Jacob" (vv. 25, 26, 27), suddenly begins calling him "Israel" again (v. 28). When the news concerning Joseph was first given to him, he found it impossible to accept because

of all the hardships of his life; he had said "All things are against me!" (Gen. 42:36). But the presence of Simeon and Benjamin, the carts and the provisions, as well as their changed attitude, finally convinced him. As the full realization of all he was hearing flooded in on him, his joy was beyond measure. Verse 27c shows that as "the spirit of their father Jacob revived," he became "Israel" again (v. 28a). But this sentence means much more than this resurgence, after regaining his attentiveness. *It expresses an upsurge of revelatory insight* and "It is enough!: My son Joseph is still alive" should be understood accordingly. This was his declaration of his joy and blessing, which powerfully overshadowed his trials.

The changing of "Jacob" to "Israel" is striking in this context and should not be overlooked, for it is a thematic key which has been woven into the fiber of the Joseph Narrative. It is inconceivable that our narrator lets one name immediately follow the other without specific intention. Even up to now the name "Israel" had been used only when speaking of the unity of the brothers (Gen. 37:3, 13; 43:6, 8, 11, etc.). At the terrible news of Joseph's disappearance, the father had again become "Jacob" and had torn his clothes (Gen. 37:34); the good news that he is still alive revives Jacob to his former like and makes him once more "Israel." Israel is the name for the father of the brothers who had been reconciled and united by Joseph. The change of "Jacob" to "Israel" is not only the destiny of the father, but also of the children, for it is in this Narrative that they first become known as "the children of Israel" (Gen. 46:8; 47:27).

In regard to their report that Joseph was indeed alive, it is highly probable that immediately afterward the whole story of what they had done to Joseph was also revealed to Jacob. It was necessary for them to tell their father so that his suffering in some measure might be eased. But, until Genesis 50:17-19, there is no indication of such confession, the point of the narrative being only that Joseph was alive for the preservation of the family, and therefore the confession is passed over in total silence.

The royal invitation to the old patriarch near the end of his hope and to the ten brothers burdened with guilt was a turning point in their lives and a fulfillment of the prophecy to Abram (Gen. 15:13-16) that they would go into a strange land for a period of time. But that prophecy also forewarned of opposition in that foreign land.

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The impact on Israel of all those developments should be stressed in this scene. Everything seems to build to the final announcement that Joseph was yet alive (v. 26). Jacob's sons want his to exhume a hope he had buried in his mind years ago. "Joseph . . . alive?" Jacob remembers the bloody coat and feels the weight of all the years of missing and mourning his precious son. "Joseph, alive? No, it is impossible!"

With the hope he had buried long ago now resurrected, Israel catches his breath and tells his anxious sons, "It is enough; my son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die" (v. 28). Jacob not only speaks as a father, but also as the voice of the whole family of promise. He has been waiting all this time in grief. Now, he speaks as one assured that the promise is intact, that the future is assured to a new generation. Jacob is as moved and passionate in his reception of good news as he has been in grief (cf. Gen. 37:32-35; 42:36-38; 44:31-32). Jacob, who had lamented that in mourning and grief for Joseph he will go down to Sheol exclaims: "I will go and see him before I die."

The word רַב/*rab* ("enough," NASB) could be rendered "sufficient" or "abundant" and is his most telling word. It signals a profound change in Jacob. It states his acceptance of all that has befallen him and all that he has brought about, and it is a signal that excessive outpourings of emotion will no longer govern him. Brevity, reserve, and clarity here are counterpoints to the rush and tumble of emotion and words in earlier scenes (Gen. 37:33-35; 42:36; 43:14). From this point on, in fact, this father becomes the dignified patriarch as well.

"Enough"! What a word to end on! Ironically (and telionic), Jacob has been a tragic victim of deathly deception. But toward the end of his life he has this crowning moment: Abundance! He has not yet seen and touched. But he knows. Jacob's joy lets this powerful scene of disclosure end as a doxology--the future is now open.

It would now be so clear that God had worked in a marvelous, yet strange way to bring Jacob and his family to this hour. Now that God's hand on Joseph could be so clearly seen, Joseph's instructions must be followed. God was obviously using His chosen and wise leader to lead others.



The breaking of the news to Jacob by his sons has a chiasmic structure of the sort that characterizes closure. The chiasmus gives closure to chapters 43--45. The chiasmus coexists, however, with a strophic organization (based on speaker alternation).

SONS:     A     *and they went up* from Egypt  
                   *and they entered* the land of Canaan to Jacob their father  
                   B     and they declared to him saying,  
                        *"Joseph is yet alive*  
                        and he is ruler in all the land of Egypt"  
 JACOB:         C     and *went numb his heart* for he did not believe  
                        them  
 SONS:             D     and they spoke to him all the *words of*  
                        *Joseph* which he had spoken to them  
 JACOB:            D'    and he saw carts that *Joseph* had sent  
                        to carry  
                        C'    and it *revived the spirit of Jacob their father*  
                        B'    and he said, "Enough! *Joseph is still alive*  
 A'    *Let me go down.* And I will see before I die."

### APPLICATION

The application of this passage must capture the theology, for it is applicable in any age. Far from being a piece of speculative theology, it is very practical for averting retaliation and recrimination: **RECONCILIATION COMES THROUGH FORGIVENESS, AND FORGIVENESS THROUGH THE RECOGNITION OF GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY.** When the one who has been wronged can see things as God sees them, can perceive them as God planned them, and can communicate that understanding as the basis for compassion and forgiveness, then reconciliation is possible. But anyone who bears a grudge or hopes to retaliate has not come to appreciate the meaning of the sovereignty of God. And without the forgiveness that comes with such an appreciation, there can be no reconciliation.

True greatness is revealed, not in vast miraculous actions, but in daily attitudes that have been shaped according to God's perspective and compassion.

No one has ever been greatly offended by more people than God. Yet no one exercises forgiveness more readily and thoroughly than He. The

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psalmist David wrote, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us" (Ps. 103:12). This same LORD expects His servants to exercise forgiveness toward others. When they are offended, He desires that they harbor no grudge or seek any sort of retaliation. And when they are the offenders, He wants them to make amends and seek reconciliation. Granted, many times this is a difficult instruction to obey. But as we shall see, to do less will eventually lead to a torturous existence filled with bitterness, anger, and guilt.

Joseph's testimony of forgiveness which he extended toward his brothers is the testimony of one who has walked long with God, and learned well in that walk. How blessed it is to be able to look on the misfortunes of our lives, and realize that they are all part of God's plan! As Romans 8:28 states: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God to them who are called according to His purpose." How true this is! In fact, we are to view all history, whether it be our own personal history, or that of nations or peoples, as a working out of the plan of the LORD. God overrules every trial and disaster, making each serve His own purposes. There are no accidents with the One Who is omnipotent and omniscient.

## FORGIVENESS IN OUTLINE

### I. A FIRST-CENTURY ACCOUNT OF FORGIVENESS

#### A. Exhortation to discipline (1 Corinthians 5)

The Apostle Paul strongly chastised the Corinthian Christians for failing to punish a fellow believer who was actively engaged in an incestuous relationship. Indeed, the Christians in Corinth not only knew of this heinous sin but apparently boasted about their broad-mindedness in their acceptance of this believer's immoral behavior (vv. 1-2, 6). Paul called on them to severely discipline this Christian for his own benefit--even to remove him from their midst (vv. 3-7, 11-13).

#### B. Call to forgive (2 Corinthians 2:4-11)

Anywhere from six to twelve months after 1 Corinthians was composed, Paul wrote and sent the letter known to us as 2 Corinthians. In this correspondence, Paul told the Christians in Corinth that the

punishment they had inflicted on the immoral believer was sufficient (2:6). It seems that they had followed too well Paul's exhortation to discipline him, for they were in danger of overwhelming him with "excessive sorrow" (v. 7b). So Paul called on them to "forgive and comfort" this person and to give reassurance of their love for him (vv. 7-8). To this the apostle added a strong warning: forgiveness should be exercised "in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan" (v. 11a). When we fail to administer forgiveness adequately, we leave the door open for Satan to come into our lives and use our unforgiving spirit against us.

### C. Need to repent (2 Corinthians 7:8-12)

The road to forgiving another person should be paved with an attitude of repentance. This is true not only for the offender but also for the offended party. In the Corinthian situation Paul called on the church to stop disciplining the person who had committed incest and to begin concretely demonstrating their forgiveness of him. This exhortation made the church body "sorrowful to the point of repentance . . . according to the will of God" (v. 9). In other words, they admitted they had carried disciplinary measures too far and sought to redress the wrong done. In so doing, they opened the way for genuine forgiveness and restoration to take place.

## II. GOD'S FORGIVENESS OF US

The practical side of forgiveness just illustrated is made possible by the theological foundation which undergirds it--specifically, God's forgiveness of us through the substitutionary death of His Son, Jesus Christ. Because we have willfully violated God's perfect standard of righteousness, we have come under His just wrath. Our sin against God has produced a moral debt that we could not possibly repay by our own efforts. But through God's grace, repayment was met by Christ's sacrificial death on a cross. With this He made it possible for God to cancel our debt (Colossians 2:13-14). However, the only way we can receive the benefits of beginning with a fresh ledger is to place our trust in the sufficiency of Christ's death to repay our debt. Then, and only then, will we receive God's unfailing and complete forgiveness. Moreover, when we become beneficiaries of God's abundant grace, we, in turn, have the necessary foundation and motivation to forgive others of their offenses against us.

### III. OUR FORGIVENESS OF ONE ANOTHER

On the vertical side, forgiveness flows only from God to man. Horizontally, forgiveness should occur between man and man. On this level we see ourselves in two positions regarding forgiveness: (1) as the offender and (2) as the offended. We will look at a couple of passages that address our responsibilities as forgiving servants in a very practical way.

#### A. When we are the offender (Matthew 5:23-24)

This text from Jesus' well-known Sermon on the Mount succinctly gives the procedure we should follow when we have offended another person. It reads:

If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

The procedure Jesus offers here is clear. It has four distinct steps:

**Stop.** Under the Mosaic Law, a worshiper brought animals as a sacrifice to be slain on an altar before God. The blood of the animal provided him with a cleansing of sin and a way of open access to God. During this age, we too approach God by a sacrifice: Jesus Christ. With the sacrificial death of Christ, however, the payment for sins has been made once for all. Now Christians can come to the LORD in prayer without bringing any other sacrifice for their sins. Jesus' point is that when we come to our Father in worship and suddenly remember that we have offended another person, then we are to stop worshiping. We have other business we must attend to first.

**Go.** The second step is to seek out the person we have wronged.

**Reconcile.** When we find the person we have hurt, we need to be reconciled to him or her. That is, we who offend are commanded to initiate a process that will result in a positive change in the relationship between ourselves and the one we have wounded. This requires that we confess wrong, express our grief, and seek forgiveness from that individual. A reason why we do not do this is because of our selfish pride.

**Return.** When the first three steps have been accomplished, we are then free to return to God in worship.

This process may raise the following questions that need to be answered. For our benefit, let us personalize them.

1. "What if he or she refuses to forgive me?" If this occurs, recall these words of wisdom from Proverbs: "When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him" (16:7). You are responsible to do what is right in a humble, loving way. It may take time, but God will honor your efforts.
2. "What if the situation only gets worse?" The person you have offended may have built up a great deal of bitterness toward you. So when you go to that individual and try to make amends, you may dissolve some bitterness as well as expose some guilt. This can easily lead to worse feelings and an even less favorable situation. But do not allow this possibility to deter you from seeking reconciliation. God can work in a circumstance like this. However, many times it does take longer for the healing process to occur. So go prepared for the worst, but do not fail to go!
3. "What if I confess my offense to God only?" Then you would be contradicting Jesus' command to go first to the person you offended, then second to the Source of forgiveness, our gracious LORD.
4. "What if the person I offended died before I could seek reconciliation?" Since you cannot contact a dead person, find another individual whom you can trust and honestly tell them about your offense against the now deceased person. Then pray with this friend for the forgiveness you need from our all-good LORD.

**B. When we are the offended (Matthew 18:21-35)**

Just as there will be times when we have hurt someone else, so there will be occasions when someone will wrong us. In this section of Matthew's Gospel, Christ instructs us regarding our responsibility when we are offended.

1. Boundless forgiveness: The answer (vv. 21-22). One of the disciples, Peter, came to Jesus and asked Him if he should forgive sevenfold a person who sinned against him. Jesus answered Peter, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven." In other words, when we are wronged, we are to forgive our offender an unlimited number of times. Just as God's forgiveness toward us has no boundaries, so our forgiveness of each other should be boundless.
2. Boundless forgiveness: An illustration (vv. 23-34). Jesus graphically portrayed His teaching through the parable revealed in these verses. He spoke of a wealthy king "who wished to settle accounts with his slaves" (v. 23b). One of his slaves owed him ten thousand talents. Since a talent was probably worth a measure of gold between fifty-eight and eighty pounds, we can see that the slave was indebted to the king for several million dollars. But because the slave could not repay the debt, the king commanded that he and his wife, children, and possessions all be sold in order to recover as much of the debt as possible. The slave humbled himself before his king and begged to be granted more time to repay the money owed. The slave's entreaty moved the king to compassion, so he released him and "forgave him the debt" (v. 27). Later, however, this slave encountered a second slave who owed him one hundred denarii, which is about sixteen to twenty dollars in today's currency and in Jesus' day equaled an average day's wages. This slave was also unable to repay his debt and begged for more time to come up with the deficit funds. But the slave who had been forgiven of such a huge debt refused to forgive this fellow slave for his much smaller one. Indeed, he threw the second slave in jail "until he should pay back what was owed" (v. 30). When the king learned what had transpired, he summoned his slave, rebuked him, and gave him over to the torturers.
3. Boundless forgiveness: Some reasons. The story Jesus told conveys two reasons for forgiving others. First, *the refusal to forgive is hypocritical*. Just as our divine King has demonstrated maximum compassion toward us, even when we were still rebelling against Him, so we need to do the same toward others. To do otherwise makes us hypocrites. Second, *the refusal to forgive inflicts inner torment on the unforgiving*. At the end of the parable, the king handed the slave over to the *torturers*. This word

in the Greek biblical text refers to individuals who plague or torment others. Elsewhere in Scripture it is used in its verb form to speak of a person suffering "great pain" (Matthew 8:6) and to describe the misery of a man pleading for relief in hell (Luke 16:23-24). The use of this word in the last line of the parable makes its closing message quite clear: *When we refuse to forgive those who offend us, we will suffer the consequences of tormenting thoughts, feelings of misery, and agonizing unrest within.*

4. Boundless forgiveness: The application (v. 35). Negatively speaking, our failure to be genuinely merciful toward others will result in God's allowing our own bitterness and resentment to poison us inside. However, since every negative presupposes a positive, when we do completely forgive those who wrong us, God will free us from our feelings of torment, misery, and unrest. The choice is ours. Remember: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

Other New Testament references to forgiveness are: Romans 15:7; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12-13.

There are few who have known more about forgiveness than Joseph, an obscure slave who rose to the pinnacle of respect. He was hated by his brothers, sold into slavery, falsely accused of attempted rape, unjustly imprisoned, and forgotten by a friend who had promised to help. He had every reason to sever ties with his family, vent hatred on humanity, and slam the door on God . . . but he did not. Even though Joseph was tossed into the blackest of pits, he emerged with an unbelievably positive attitude toward those who had done him harm.

I do not know what this says to you today. I do not know where you are right now, and I do not know the skin in which you live or the memories that surround you. But I do know humanity well enough to know that most of you, at some time in your life, were ripped off badly by someone, so you are faced with a similar conflict . . . and your perspective is cloudy. You remember the manipulation. You remember the wrong. You remember the unfair treatment. You remember the pain, the hurt, and the rejection. You remember that you were dropped off like a bad habit when you truly deserved the opposite treatment! You had given and given and given and you were cast away. Evil was done to you . . . and it was meant to be evil! Reflecting on his

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brothers' actions, Joseph says in Genesis 50:20: "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good."

Bad memories need not defeat us. Now I know it is one thing to say that, but I want you to know I am living it. I have some bad memories, exactly as you do. Some of them I was responsible for; some of them someone else was responsible for. But they need not defeat anyone. You may need the help of a friend or a wise biblical counselor in order to turn old wounds into stingless scars. I plead with you: please get rid of the sting and make room for ministry. It is the wound that qualifies you to counsel and help others.

I long to hear exhortations on the attitude of the Christian. How seldom they are said. We go through the Sunday motions and the religious exercises. We pack a Bible under our arm, but we keep a list of those people who have wronged us. And you just wait. In our own way we will get back--and it may even appear to be a little religious.

If God had waited for us to repent and ask His forgiveness, we would still be lost. Forgiveness is a gift, and thus does not need to be earned by the one who has wronged us. And if you wait for another to confess first and seek your forgiveness, you disobey God. God wants us to take the initiative, no matter who needs forgiveness. He does not even want you to worship if there is a relationship you have not tried to make right (cf. Matt. 5:23-24). How many people would show up for church this Sunday if they followed their LORD's instruction?

I believe Thomas Jefferson was right in saying, "When the heart is right, the feet are swift." Part of the reason we are so sluggish in carrying out the application of God's truth is that our heart is not right. It is not right toward that person who never did fully pay back what he owed me. The heart is not right toward the person who divorced me . . . "I mean, he's got a debt to pay"; "She did me wrong." The heart is not right toward a God who took my wife or husband . . . or a child who took advantage of me . . . or a parent who abused me . . . or a spouse who spurned your love and involved themselves in an adulterous situation. That is why the feet are not swift, because the heart is not right. Only God can transform the heart and make it right. That is the beauty of Joseph's life. When I have a wrong attitude, I look at life humanly. When I have a right attitude, I look at life from the divine perspective.

Is your heart right? Check your feet. Are your feet swift? Do you move away from people or are you moving toward them? Are you engaged in



the business of healing or hurting? Are you adding pressure or relieving it? Bringing joy or squelching it? Are you becoming bitter, cranky old man or woman even though you are not that old? Greatness is tied up in being related to the right Person who is in the business of changing hearts. I invite you to the only way out of the pit, the only relief from yourself, the only solution to bitterness: Jesus Christ, God's Son, who demonstrated to us for all time what grace and forgiveness are all about.

LORD God, the fog of the flesh blocks out our ability to see Your plan, and our selfishness pushes away Your hand because we want our way. And so our location and our situation become irksome assignments of life. And our Decembers become barren, cold, lifeless. Show us through the life of Joseph and Your Word, that the only way to find happiness in the grind of life is by allowing You to control our attitudes toward people, toward circumstances, toward ourselves. Make our feet swift to do what is right. In the authority of Jesus' Name, amen.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Meditate on the theological implications of Joseph's revelation. What Gospel in the New Testament exhibits Jesus' own self-disclosure as being the I AM? What are the implications of Jesus' self-disclosure?
2. How does the theological idea of preservation fit the theology of Genesis?
3. What do you learn about faith in relation to God's sovereignty in this passage?
4. After reading the genealogy in Matthew 1:1ff, in what way does Joseph participate in the preservation of the Messianic line?
5. Literarily, why does our narrator record when Joseph weeps within the Joseph Narrative?
6. Write a few descriptive paragraphs about the scene when Joseph first embraces Benjamin and weeps and then kissed all his brothers and wept on them (vv. 14-15). Try to depict the emotions which they all must have felt during this time.
7. Why does Jacob respond to his sons' news about Joseph as he does? Why does our narrator record that "Israel said, 'It is enough; my son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die'" (v. 28)?



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## Genesis 46:1-30

# The Moving of Israel to Egypt

### THE ULTIMATE FAMILY REUNION

This episode extends the reconciliation theme (which began in chapter 45) to its completion with the family's move to Egypt. The resolution is relatively brief, but carefully paced. The conclusion, the working out of the many implications of the revelatory and resolving speech of Joseph, takes some time and assumes an added layer of complexity as Jacob comes back into the Narrative, not only as a father reunited and reconciled with his sons, but as the patriarch and bearer of the name of the nation and people of Israel.

The modern reader may find the conclusion drawn out, being accustomed to a rapid wind-up once the climactic resolution of a story is reached. Here we are allowed to savor the reconciliation of Joseph with his brothers, of the father with his sons, and especially the reunion of Joseph and Jacob after so many years.

In response to the invitation of Joseph, Jacob journeys to Egypt. It was there, in a fertile valley in the land of the Nile, that God's chosen would become a great nation. In order to achieve this historic development in the unfolding of God's redemptive plan, Joseph had been sent into Egypt, had been promoted to his high position of power and authority, and had prepared the way for the family of Jacob to become ideally situated in a favored location in Egypt. As long as Joseph was alive, and even for some years after he died, the family of Jacob was safe from attack and repression. This allowed them enough time and freedom to develop into a formidable national group.

One suspects that something magnificent is occurring that is larger than the Joseph Narrative: this family on the road to reunion and reconciliation is also the family of promise, the seed of Abraham and of Isaac, the roots of the nation that will emerge from slaves freed in time from bondage in Egypt.

The rejoining of father and the lost son is presented in comparatively simple terms after the years of grief and separation. Initially, the news is too abrupt for Jacob; he cannot believe the impossibility of death become life. But

then he finally believes and Jacob is transformed to new vitality as he grasps the news. For what other word does a father ever want to hear except, "Your son lives"? In Jesus' most moving parable, the angelic hosts celebrates the new life of the dead son (Lk. 15:11-32). It is only by the power of God that Joseph is alive. By God's grace, Jacob's deep sorrow turns now to still deeper joy (cf. Jn. 16:21-22).

### Source Criticism Considerations

Source critics divide the sources ascribing the list of names of Jacob's descendants in Genesis 46:8-27 to one of the latest sections of "P." Some would even give it to a later source which was akin to "P." Admittedly, the list does present certain difficulties, and these will be discussed in the course of the expositional notes. From the ensuing discussion it will become clear that there are no adequate grounds for assigning this material to some other, unknown source.

The remainder of this passage is generally divided between the three usual sources. This division is usually made with the largest section being attributed to "J," namely, Genesis 46:1, 4a; 28-34. A few verses are assigned to "E," namely Genesis 46:2-3, 4b-5. The rest is given to "P," namely Genesis 46:6-7. This intermingling of the various sources is defended on the basis of certain alleged irregularities and repetitions that are pointed out.

It is charged that, according to Genesis 45:28, Jacob was immediately ready to undertake the journey to Egypt, while according to Genesis 46:3 he still had some misgivings about the whole venture.

The matter of parallel accounts is raised relative to verses 1 and 2-4. Verse 1 is attributed to "J" of the descent into Egypt, while verses 2-4 is considered the account of "E." "J" does not resume until verse 28. Yet analysis of verses 1 and 2-4 shows them not to be parallel but having different purposes. The first records the arrival of Jacob at Beer-sheba and his sacrifices there, whereas the second records the vision and colloquy between Jacob and God. Sacrifice is not vision, nor promise of multiplication of descendants. Nor is sacrifice continuation of the journey to Egypt. The first thus describes a journey, the second the giving of a promise.

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Jacob had been promised the land of Canaan, why, then, in "J" does he leave it? Does the inheritance mean so little that he can just go down to Egypt at Joseph's request? Yet "E" offers the answer: Jacob desired to determine the instruction of the LORD in the matter. This is the missing link in the picture and to sever it from "J" destroys the unity of the text as it stands. The instruction from God furnishes the reason for the stop at Beer-sheba, on the edge of the Promised Land, and also the reason why Jacob should leave Canaan. For the sake of a theory, the documentarians have separated cause and effect.

### THEOLOGICAL IDEAS

As an important part of the culmination of the Joseph Narrative, this section explains how Israel (i.e., the patriarch with his clan) found their way to Egypt. Joseph himself had said that God had sent him on before to prepare the way and save them in the time of famine. Here, then, is the report of how that plan started to come to fruition: Joseph, in power in Egypt, brought his family to Egypt, where they could survive.

Within the account of the trek to Egypt is the message of the LORD to Jacob. To some commentators, this theophany is reminiscent of the Patriarchal narratives and so seems a little out of place in the story of Joseph. But this dream probably was intended to connect the move to Egypt with the Patriarchal promises. The message reaffirmed the promises made to Abraham so long ago, in a way that parallels them. Here again God assured His believers of the ultimate fulfillment of the promises, in spite of the Egyptian sojourn.

In fact, God's appearance to Jacob serves as a divine confirmation of Joseph's theological interpretation of his dreams and all that has happened to this family. After all, one of the most distinctive features of the Joseph Narrative is that God *never* appears to Joseph or talks with him; much less does God inform Joseph of his role in the divine plan. Now being at the threshold of leaving Canaan, Jacob receives a nocturnal vision and assures him that he will not go down to Egypt alone: "I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will close your eyes" (Gen. 46:3-4). The voice of the LORD will not be heard again until the advent of Moses.

## STRUCTURE, SYNTHESIS AND TRANSLATION

### Structure

The passage comprises several different types of literature: a theophany with promise, fitted into an itinerary (Gen. 46:1-7), a name list (vv. 8-27), and a concluding narrative report (vv. 28-30). Since the passage has three different types of literature, the analysis of structure needs to be restricted to the individual sections.

In the first section, itinerary reports (Gen. 46:1 and 5-7) bracket the theophany. This revelation to Israel in the night vision follows the pattern of the Patriarchal promises: God's self-revelation, his instruction not to fear, the reiteration of the promise, and the promise of His presence.

The list of names in the second section follows the order of Leah's sons, the sons of Leah's maid, Rachel's sons, and finally the sons of Rachel's maid. The closing section narrates the reunion of Joseph and his father. It bears similarity to the ending of the first narrative section (Gen. 45:28) in that Israel said, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face, that you are still alive" (Gen. 46:30).

The text of verses 1-7 is a literary unit, even though a synthesis of a variety of elements. The unity is demonstrated by the fixed form of the itinerary: Israel sets out and comes to Beersheba (v. 1); he offers sacrifice there (v. 1b), and receives a divine oracle (vv. 2-4); then he and his entire household sets out from Beersheba (v. 5a-7). All of this may be formally set forth in a chiasmic arrangement (Figure 25).

Verses 1 and 5-7 (AA') detail the itinerary: departure . . . arrival with detail of the place . . . stop . . . departure. Part of the Patriarchal itinerary is the act of worship during the stop in Beersheba. This is the only place in Genesis where there is mention of a sacrificial meal (עֵ֫צָה/ʿ*z'bahîm*).

The parallelism between verses 2 and 4c (BB') lies in the cohesion between Genesis 37:2-36 and this passage of Scripture. The dreams of Joseph provincially caused the first separation between Jacob and his beloved-son Joseph, now God leads Jacob through "visions of the night" to the reunion of this same son. Joseph's dreams (Gen. 37:5-7, 9) corresponds to the enigmatic plural "visions" which Jacob now receives in Genesis 46:2. In addition, the

"eyes" by which Jacob sees the visions shall be closed in death by Joseph. This latter promise to Jacob by God guarantees him that he and Joseph shall never be separated again. Furthermore, Jacob's response, "Here I am," echoes Joseph's response to his father in Genesis 37:13.

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#### CHIASTIC ARRANGEMENT OF GENESIS 46:1-7

- A Israel arrives with his possessions [and household] at Beer-sheba (v. 1)
- B God's call to Israel and his response. (2)
  - C Israel is not to be afraid to go down to Egypt (3a-b)
  - D God will make Israel a great nation in Egypt (3c)**
  - C' God will bring Israel back out of Egypt (4a-b)
- B' Joseph will close his father's eyes (4c)
- A' Jacob departs with his household from Beer-sheba (5-7)

Figure 25.

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The reason why Israel is not to be afraid to descend to Egypt is because God Himself shall bring him (the nation) back up (CC'). "Do not be afraid . . .!" can refer to the state of fear caused by the appearance or the situation in which the addressee finds himself. The latter is intended here: ". . . to go down to Egypt." Israel would be seized with fear at the great risk of even a temporary settlement in Egypt with his whole family and the consequent grave potential dangers. This is complemented by the promise in v. 4a-b: "I (Myself) will go down with you to Egypt, and I (Myself) will also surely bring you up again." The orientation is toward the future, extending beyond the patriarch.

The formulation of these promises to Jacob is looking at the growth of the "sons of Israel" in Egypt which leads to the exodus and their becoming a people, as verse 4a-b expressly state (D). The promise to Abraham stands at the turning point from remote antiquity (Gen. 1--11) to the Patriarchal period: "I will make you a great nation (Gen. 12:1-3); so too the promise to Israel stands at the turning point from the Patriarchal period to the period of the exodus, "I will make you a great nation there." This promise to Jacob, therefore, forms the link between the Patriarchal narratives and the narrative of the people in the Pentateuch in general.

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The overall chiasmic structure of chapter 46:1-30 is simplistic, since the literary unit verses 8-27 also forms the chiasmic center for the entire Joseph Narrative (see pages 523 to 546).

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### CHIASMIC ARRANGEMENT FOR CHAPTER 46:1-30

- A God spoke to Israel in night visions at Beer-sheba (1-7)
- B Jacob's genealogical record (8-27)
- A' Joseph appears to Israel in Egypt (28-30)

Figure 26.

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### Synthesis

When the brothers brought news of Joseph's survival and prosperity in Egypt, Israel went to be reunited with his son and to dwell in the land of Egypt, having been encouraged to go by the LORD, Who assured him of the promises in a night vision.

### Translation

- 1 So Israel set out with all that was his, and he came to Beer-sheba, where he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.
- 2 God called to Israel in visions by night: "Jacob! Jacob!" He answered, "Here I am."
- 3 And He said, "I am God, the God of your father. Fear not to go down to Egypt, for I will make you there into a great nation.
- 4 I Myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I Myself will also bring you back; and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes."
- 5 So Jacob set out from Beer-sheba. The sons of Israel put their father Jacob and their children and their wives in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to transport him
- 6 and they took along their livestock and the wealth that they had amassed in the land of Canaan. Thus Jacob and all his offspring with him came to Egypt:
- 7 he brought with him to Egypt his sons and grandsons, his daughters and granddaughters--all his offspring.
- 8 These are the names of the Israelites, Jacob and his descendants, who came to Egypt. Jacob's first-born Reuben;

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- <sup>9</sup> Reuben's sons: Enoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi.
- <sup>10</sup> Simeon's sons: Jemeul, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Saul the son of a Canaanite woman.
- <sup>11</sup> Levi's sons: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.
- <sup>12</sup> Judah's sons: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah--but Er and Onan had died in the land of Canaan; and Perez's sons were Hezron and Hamuel.
- <sup>13</sup> Issachar's sons: Tola, Puvah, Iob, and Shimron.
- <sup>14</sup> Zebulun's sons: Sered, Elon, and Jahleel.
- <sup>15</sup> Those were the sons whom Leah bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, in addition to his daughter Dinah. Persons in all, male and female: thirty-three.
- <sup>16</sup> Gad's sons: Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli.
- <sup>17</sup> Asher's sons: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, and Beriah, and their sister Serah. Beriah's sons: Heber and Malchiel.
- <sup>18</sup> These were the descendants of Zilpah, whom Laban had given to his daughter Leah. These she bore to Jacob--sixteen persons.
- <sup>19</sup> The sons of Jacob's wife Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin.
- <sup>20</sup> To Joseph were born in the land of Egypt Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath daughter of Poti-phera priest of On bore to him.
- <sup>21</sup> Benjamin's sons: Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard.
- <sup>22</sup> These were the descendants of Rachel who were born to Jacob--fourteen persons in all.
- <sup>23</sup> Dan's son: Hushim.
- <sup>24</sup> Naphtali's sons: Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem.
- <sup>25</sup> These were the descendants of Bilhah, whom Laban had given to his daughter Rachel. These she bore to Jacob--seven persons in all.
- <sup>26</sup> All the persons belonging to Jacob who came to Egypt--his own issue, aside from the wives of Jacob's sons--all these persons numbered sixty-six.
- <sup>27</sup> And Joseph's sons who were born to him in Egypt were two in number. Thus the total of Jacob's household who came to Egypt was seventy persons.
- <sup>28</sup> He had sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph, to point the way before him to Goshen. So when they came to the region of Goshen,
- <sup>29</sup> Joseph prepared his chariot and went to Goshen to meet his father Israel; he appeared to him and, embracing him around the neck, he wept on his neck a good while.
- <sup>30</sup> Then Israel said to Joseph, "Now I can die, having seen for myself that you are still alive."



## EXEGETICAL OUTLINE

- I. When Israel stopped on the way to worship at Beersheba, God spoke to him in a night vision, sanctioning his departure, confirming the promises, and assuring him of the LORD's continued presence and blessing on the family (46:1-7).
  - A. Itinerary: Israel journeyed to Beersheba and offered sacrifices to God (1).
  - B. Revelation: God spoke to Israel in a night vision (2-4).
    - 1. He identified himself as the God of his father (2-3a).
    - 2. He encouraged Jacob to go to Egypt and promised to make him into a great nation (3b).
    - 3. He promised His presence would accompany them to Egypt and that they would be delivered from Egypt (4).
  - C. Itinerary: Jacob, with his family and all his possessions, left Beersheba and proceeded to the land of Egypt (5-7).
- II. All the descendants of Israel's household, some seventy in all, settled in the land of Egypt (46:8-27).
  - A. Jacob's descendants are listed according to mother (8-15).
    - 1. Jacob's descendants which were bore by Leah (8-15).
    - 2. Jacob's descendants which were bore by Zilpah (16-18).
    - 3. Jacob's descendants which were bore by Rachel (19-22).
    - 4. Jacob's descendants which were bore by Bilhah (23-25).
  - B. The summation of all the descendants from the house of Jacob (26-27).
- III. Israel came to Egypt, where he was reunited with his exalted son, Joseph (46:28-30).
  - A. The preparation of Jacob and Joseph (28-29a).
  - B. The response of Jacob and Joseph (29b-30).

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## EXPOSITION OF THE PASSAGE

### I. *Believers need the reassurances of God's promises to be with them and ultimately to bring them to their destined place, as they make their decisions in life (46:1-7).*

The entire Narrative (including chapter 38) leads up to the critically important 430-year sojourn of the Patriarchal family into Egypt wherein the Patriarchal period in the history of Israel comes to an end. It was in Egypt, in a fertile valley in the land of the Nile, that God's elected people would become a great nation. Jacob was to spend seventeen happy years there, united again with Joseph and having his family complete once more.

Jacob's descent to Egypt appears at first to be merely a visit (cf. Gen. 45:28b). Yet this visit is presented as being loaded with national significance. It is a summing up of the past as well as a new beginning. Famine drove Abraham to Egypt (cf. Gen. 12:10); now famine impels his grandson in the same direction. Abraham's career opened with a divine revelation; Jacob's closes with a similar experience. Jacob's faith odyssey began at Beersheba (Gen. 28:10ff.); it fittingly concludes with a revelation at the same place. God's voice will not be heard again for 430 years--until the advent of Moses.

Not only did Israel immediately comply with the instructions from Joseph that he now knew was God's plan, he began his pilgrimage to Egypt with worship at the altar in Beersheba. Such faith in God led Israel to comply.

#### **Israel Arrives With His Possessions [and household] at Beer-sheba (verse 1)**

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**1 So Israel set out with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.**

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In response to the invitation of Joseph (Gen. 45:27), Jacob now made plans to move his entire family and all his possessions to Egypt. According to Genesis 35:27 and 37:14, Jacob's last residence had been at Hebron. Since there is no reference to his having moved from there, we may assume that the starting point for their journey was Hebron.

After Israel "set out" and before Israel sojourned to Egypt, the first stop on their migration was made at Beersheba. As Israel stood at the point of

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leaving the Promised Land for an undetermined period of time, he paused to approach God through sacrifices. The fact that God is here described as the God of his father Isaac can be explained by the presence of the altar that was built by Isaac at Beersheba (Gen. 26:25). It is altogether conceivable that this was the altar on which Jacob now offered his sacrifices.

An important north-south road linked Hebron to Beersheba, a distance of about 25 miles. It will be remembered that it was in Beersheba where Jacob had lived with his father Isaac (Gen. 28:10). Beersheba, of course, was near the southern boundary of the land, and would, so to speak, be the "point of no return." There, at Beersheba, he offered sacrifices, thinking especially of his father, Isaac--his pilgrimage of faith--and God's promises to his father. God is described here as the God of his physical father, thus stating that Jacob through him remains bound to his father.

Israel's reasons for stopping at Beersheba in order to worship are not explicitly stated. The arduous and exhausting journey to Egypt, especially for one of such advanced age, would be an understandable cause of great anxiety. But verse 3 shows that Jacob's doubt and hesitation go much deeper. Is the patriarch distressed at having to leave the promised land? Is he afraid of dying on alien soil? Are his fears intensified by the memory that his father had been expressly forbidden by God to go to Egypt (Gen. 26:2)?

It is of considerable significance that Jacob felt the need for communicating with God at the very borders of the land of Canaan before leaving this land that had been promised to him and his fathers. Israel yearned to visit Joseph, and what he expresses with his offerings on Isaac's altar is his prayerful trust that though Isaac was not permitted to go to Egypt during a famine, God would allow it to *him*, to see his son.

At the same time, he knew that Canaan was the land God had promised Abraham and Isaac, for this had been confirmed to him. They had lived for many years in Canaan and now he was uncomfortable at the thought of leaving it. Until now, each time he had made an important move, God had spoken to him directly. When he left his parents to go to Haran, God had appeared to him at Bethel (Gen. 28:13-15); when he had been with Laban long enough, God instructed him to return to Canaan (Gen. 31:3); even when he left Shechem, God had appeared to him (Gen. 35:1, 9-12). Naturally, therefore, he was reluctant to make such a drastic move as this without direct confirmation from God that he should do so. After all, God was quite able to break the

famine and supply their needs right there in Canaan, if it was His will to do so. He had often provided miraculously before.

Whereas no mention is made of an altar, it must be taken for granted that he uses the one that Isaac had once constructed at this place (cf. Gen. 26:25). The sacrifices here are termed זִבְחִים/*z'bahim*, a type mentioned in Genesis only in connection with Jacob (cf. Gen. 31:54). It is distinguished from the "burnt offering" (cf. Gen. 8:20; 22:2) in that only a small portion was actually burned on the altar, while the major part of the slaughtered animal was eaten at a festive family or communal meal. The present passage is the only place where there is mention of a sacrificial meal. Hence, it is probable that this sacrificial rite was either an offering of thanks to God that Joseph was still alive and once again his family is united, or more probable, a sacrifice of petition, for the next verse reports God's response to Jacob's initiation.

They journeyed southwards and came to the last city on the border, Beer-sheba, glorified by the memory of his fathers. There he offered up sacrifices, זִבְחִים. We do not find again that our ancestors offered זִבְחִים. They, like all Noachides only offered עֹלֹת. עֹלָה expresses giving oneself up completely to God. זִבְחָה in itself is a family meal to be eaten by the זִבְחִים, the owners, and consecrates the "family-house" and the family table to a temple and altar. For זִבְחִים which as a rule are שְׁלָמִים express the higher thought that "God comes to us." They are, accordingly, brought from that happy consciousness that where a family circle lives united and faithful to duty, and feels that God is caring for it, בְּרִיךְ אֱלֹהִים there God is present. That is why שְׁלָמִים, "peace-offerings" of family life blessed by God, are so specifically Jewish. . . . The reason that Jacob-Israel brought, not עֹלֹת but זִבְחִים lay in the fact that now for the first time Jacob felt himself happy and joyful and "complete" in his family circle. It was in this consciousness and feelings that he brought a "family-offering," and it was in this feeling that he brought his offering with deep significance, not to אֱלֹהִים in general, but, לְאֵלֵי אָבִיו יִצְחָק.

The writer is careful to remind his readers that all the patriarchs worshiped the same God. Jacob worshiped the God of his father, Isaac. In addressing God as "God of his father" he was acknowledging the family calling, and implicitly seeking leave to move out of Canaan.

It should be underscored that it is more than just Jacob and his immediate family who are pulling up their tent pegs and moving. The whole nation of Israel is packing to follow Jacob. To signify this, Jacob is referred to in Genesis 46:1 by his national title, "Israel," instead of his personal name.

It needs to be underscored that what follows is a divine oracle addressed to Jacob. There is here a deliberate counterpart to the Patriarchal narratives as a whole, as we see from the instruction joined to the promise at the beginning of Abraham's migration in Genesis 12:1-5; and there is the same combination as Jacob prepares to enter a foreign land. This, and other revelations given the Patriarchs Abraham and Isaac, would be the basis later on for Joseph's actions, as seen in Genesis 50:5, 24.

As in the case here and all through the Old Testament, the promises of God contained in the different covenants he made with his ancient peoples, the Jews, would form the foundation of his dealings with them. Not only were these promises found in the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:2--15:18), but also in the Palestinian (Deut. 30:3), Davidic (2 Sam. 7:16ff.), and New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:8). Great is His faithfulness!

The oracle addressed to Jacob consists of the introduction (v. 2), the instruction (v. 3a), and the promise (vv. 3b-4).

### God's Call To Israel And His Response (verse 2)

2 And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am."

The introduction consists of three sentences, each beginning with "and He/he said" (וַיֹּאמֶר/*wayyōmer*). This verb is employed rather than the more appropriate וַיֵּרָא/*wayyar'* "appeared," because the revelation is entirely verbal and without any visual aspect and because, being the last revelation to the patriarchs, the word forges a link with the very first revelation to Abraham (Gen. 12:1).

The Hebrew word for "vision" (מַרְאֵי/*mar'ot*) is curiously in the plural, "visions." The plural does not necessarily mean a number of visions, but plurality in what is seen, expressing grandeur and importance, and thus signifying the intensity of the experience (cf. Ezek. 1:1; 8:3; 40:2; 43:3 and "vision by night" with חִזְיוֹן only in Job 4:13). When one examines the Ezekiel passages one finds a plural with a singular meaning in 8:3 and 40:2: ". . . brought me in visions of God . . .," and a variation of singular and plural in the same sentence in 43:3. That night, once again, God "appeared" to him in a vision, for the eighth and last time (Gen. 28:13; 31:3; 31:11; 32:1; 32:30; 35:1, 9; 46:2).

It is striking that the narrative says that "God spoke to *Israel*," but that He called him "Jacob." Because "Israel" is not a calling name, he is addressed as "Jacob" (see the exposition of verse 5 for further notes concerning the interchange of "Israel" and "Jacob.").

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The LORD spoke Jacob's name twice, expressing the same love and urgency as he had to Abraham at Moriah and eliciting the same response: "Here I am" (cf. Gen. 22:11; Ex. 3:4; 1 Sam. 3:10).

### Israel Is Not To Be Afraid To Go Down To Egypt (verse 3a-b)

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**3** And He said, "I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt . . .

---

There at Beersheba, God set Jacob's mind at ease about descending to Egypt. Identifying Himself as "God," indeed "the God of your father," He also assures Jacob that He (אֱלֹהִים, the strong Creator and Sovereign of all people) would protect him and bless him in Egypt, even as He had in Canaan.

"I am God, *the God of your father*," echoes verse 1. This Divine epithet for God, is distinctively characteristic of the Patriarchal narratives. This designation is particularly appropriate in the Patriarchal narratives since they revolve around the lives of individuals. This designation occurs with "Abraham" or "Isaac" (Gen. 24:12) or both names added in apposition to "father" (Gen. 28:13; 32:10). It is highly significant that it is never used in reference to Abraham's father. This is to be explained by Joshua 24:2, that Terah was an idolator. In some instances, God is further identified as YHWH (Gen. 24:12, 27, 42, 48; 28:13; 32:10). This designation appears once again in Exodus 3:6 in God's self-manifestation to Moses, where it is intended to emphasize continuity. Thereafter in the Hebrew Scriptures the epithet becomes "God of your/their fathers," the plural referring to the entire people of Israel (Ex. 3:15, 16; 4:5)

In this context, the designation affirms God's role as the guarantor of the promises: He is the same One who spoke with Isaac. At the same time, it emphasizes the continuity of the succession from father to son, and it connotes a personal and intimate relationship between God and the individual. Thus God assures Jacob that He is with him as He was with Isaac, who was not allowed to leave Canaan.

The "fear" to which God referred in His statement, "Do not be afraid," is the same reassurance which was given to both Abraham and to Isaac; it will be given to Moses as well (Gen. 15:1; 26:24; Num. 21:34). It is never preceded by a statement revealing inner turmoil. Perhaps this is because one's

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inner anxieties and fears, although unexpressed, are known to God. Or perhaps, this fear is not to be attributed to Jacob personally, but Jacob's concern for the future of the chosen people of God as they departed for Egypt; thus God says, "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt."

### **God Will Make Israel A Great Nation In Egypt (verses 3c)**

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**3c for I will make you a great nation there.**

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The one thing Jacob needed to hear, God says, and more--much more. Israel went to sleep afraid and unsure, but when he awakens the next morning, he is confident and eager to get underway. In the night vision, the LORD first revealed Himself to Israel, "I am God" (v. 3a). Next, He relieved Jacob's fears, "Do not be afraid to go" (v. 3b). Then He promised to make Jacob into a great nation and assured him that He would go with them (vv. 3c-4a). This last statement means that God will protect Jacob both on the journey and in Egypt. The God of the patriarchs knows no territorial limitations. He was with Jacob in Mesopotamia (Gen. 31:13) and in Canaan (Gen. 35:3) and now will display His providence in Egypt.

God's purpose in leading Jacob to Egypt was that He might there of him "a great nation." This promise is another point of contact with the first revelation to the Patriarchs (Gen. 12:2). Although the foundation of the nation had been established in the twelve sons of Israel, especially now that they had become unified in God's will, their own descendants would need the discipline of living for a period in Egypt before they were really ready to assume their role in God's plan.

The orientation of this promise is linking the past with the future, the future being beyond the lifetime of Jacob. Genesis 46:3 differs from the promises to the other patriarchs in that here God gives a further specification that the growth of Jacob's family to a people is to take place "there" in Egypt (cf. Gen. 12:2; 17:20; 18:18; 21:13, 18; 46:3; Ex. 32:10; Num. 14:12). And Exodus 1:7 says that this is precisely what happened. There is an obvious connection here. God intimates that the prerequisite for the growth of his offspring into "a great nation," promised to Abraham, is that they multiply not in Canaan, where their people would be dissolved through mixed marriages, but in relative seclusion in the Egyptian region of Goshen where they could retain their racial identity.

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**God Will Bring Israel Back Out Of Egypt (verse 4a-b)**

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- 4a** I will go down with you to Egypt,  
**b** and I will also surely bring you up again;
- 

The formulation of this promise to Jacob is looking at the growth of the Israelites (= the sons of Israel-Jacob) in Egypt which leads to the exodus and their becoming a people, as verse 4 expressly says. The promise to Abraham stands at the turning point from remote antiquity to the Patriarchal period, "I will make you a great nation" (Gen. 12:1-3); so too the promise to Jacob stands at the turning point from the Patriarchal period to the period of the exodus, "I will make you a great nation there" (Gen. 46:2-4).

Another reason why Israel was to be cloistered in Egypt is for their own deliverance from the sins of the Canaanites. The process of the development of the sins of those people would take some time (cf. Gen. 15:16), necessitating a rather lengthy sojourn of Israel in Egypt, during which time Jacob and his sons would die in Egypt.

Although Egypt was, if anything, even more polytheistic in its religion than Canaan, there was not the danger of assimilation that perpetually confronted them in Canaan. The Egyptians felt themselves racially superior and were reluctant to mix and intermarry with foreigners, especially shepherds (Gen. 43:32; 46:34), a fact which has been clearly confirmed by scholars of Egyptian antiquities. Also, these people were culturally and intellectually the most advanced nation of the world at the time, so there was much of future value the children of Israel could learn in Egypt.

Thus, although they could profit much, both financially and culturally by associating with the Egyptians, they would be forced to dwell apart by themselves, developing their own peculiar culture, and in particular, learning to center their lives around the God of heaven and earth rather than the gods of the nations. All of this would forge them into a distinct and unique people, ready to receive and promulgate the laws of God and the great plan of God.

Next, God promised to bring Jacob's ancestors out of Egypt (v. 4b)--a direct prophecy concerning the exodus Moses would lead four hundred years later. It must be clearly grasped that in verse 4 our writer firmly links Jacob's journey down into Egypt, which concludes the Patriarchal narrative, and



the exodus from Egypt, which begins the history of the "sons of Israel" as a people. It is the same God at work in both movements (cf. Ex. 3). Thus the Patriarchal narratives as a whole and the exodus narrative as a whole are to be viewed as a continuous unit, from conception to end (cf. Gen. 50:24).

At the point of leaving the land that had been promised to them as an eternal inheritance, God reassured him that this promise would stand and would eventually be fulfilled; that this migration would not endanger their inheritance of the land nor would it prevent their return to Canaan. This family migration is thereby transformed into an event of national significance with its preordained play in God's timetable of history.

In light of this fact, there appears to be a remarkable contrast between God's words to Jacob here in this chapter and his words to Isaac earlier in Genesis 26. The LORD had said to Isaac, "Do not go down to Egypt" (Gen. 26:2); but he now said to Jacob, "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt" (v. 3). Such a change in attitude toward the patriarchs' traveling to Egypt indicates that the LORD was following a specific plan with regard to His people.

The LORD's instructions to Isaac in Genesis 26 might have left the impression that He was opposed in principle to the seed of Abraham going into Egypt. That, in turn, might have left the impression that the whole of the Joseph story, which resulted in Jacob's going to Egypt, was running counter to God's purposes. When the LORD speaks to Jacob, however, it becomes clear that a sojourn in Egypt plays a part in God's plan. Such a perspective is consistent with the overall theme of the Joseph Narrative, which is that God was working all things for the good of Jacob and his house (Gen. 50:20).

But how, then, are the words of verse 4, "I will also surely bring **you up again**" (from Egypt), to be understood? For Jacob died in Egypt. This promise, as applied to Jacob personally, was only fulfilled after his death (Gen. 49:29; 50:4-8), but it found its more complete fulfillment in the lives of his descendants, in the days of Moses and Joshua. However, this does not really answer the use of the singular "you." But the last clause of verse 4 does contain the answer.

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4c and Joseph will close your eyes."

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The final promise given to Jacob by God is a very intimate and personal one, "and Joseph will lay his hand on your eyes," i.e., he will close your eyes in death; he will be there when you die. God assured him that he would see Joseph again. But more so, when Jacob's time to die would come, it would be his beloved son, Joseph himself, who would perform the sacred duty of closing his eyes in death for his burial. Such has remained time-honored Jewish practice to the present day. The promise, then, is that Joseph will outlive Jacob and will be present at the moment of his death. The promise was indeed fulfilled, as told in Genesis 49:33 and 50:1.

This concluding clause of the promise is most unusual and moving. It is unusual because it stands in marked contrast to the preceding sentence (v. 4a) which embraced historical perspectives on a broad scale; however, this last promise is intensely personal. In fact, it has no connection whatsoever with the Patriarchal promises. However, it is precisely this lack of continuity which shows a striking parallel to Genesis 15:13-16; there too we have a preview of the sojourn in Egypt and the exodus (vv. 13-14) joined with a personal promise to Abraham announcing to him that he will die in peace!! Both passages link the Patriarchal period with the exodus, and both have a personal promise. These two texts are remarkably close to each other, so close that one assumes it could be the same writer/editor in both cases (to the demise of the Documentary Hypothesis theorists).

God did not promise Jacob, therefore, a personal return in his own lifetime, but the promise of a seed to dwell in the promised land was to be safeguarded by God and ultimately fulfilled. Jacob could not have expected that he would return to Canaan after the days of famine were over. In the light of the afflictions predicted to Abraham, the move still left him with a strong feeling of uncertainty, but God spoke to him, telling him he should not fear to go down to Egypt and assuring him that *this step would not endanger their inheritance of the land nor would it prevent their return to Canaan.*

These last words are also to be understood in the context of Patriarchal culture, which, among other things, included reverent burial by the son. Jacob would be buried by one who had as great an affection for the land as he. In this sense, then, these words form an encouragement to Jacob. Joseph later buried Jacob in Machpelah and thus the LORD brought Jacob up from Egypt (cf. Gen. 50:1, 13-14).

Of special interest is the quick transition from the corporate sense of "you" in the middle phrase, to the quite individual "you" at the end. The thin



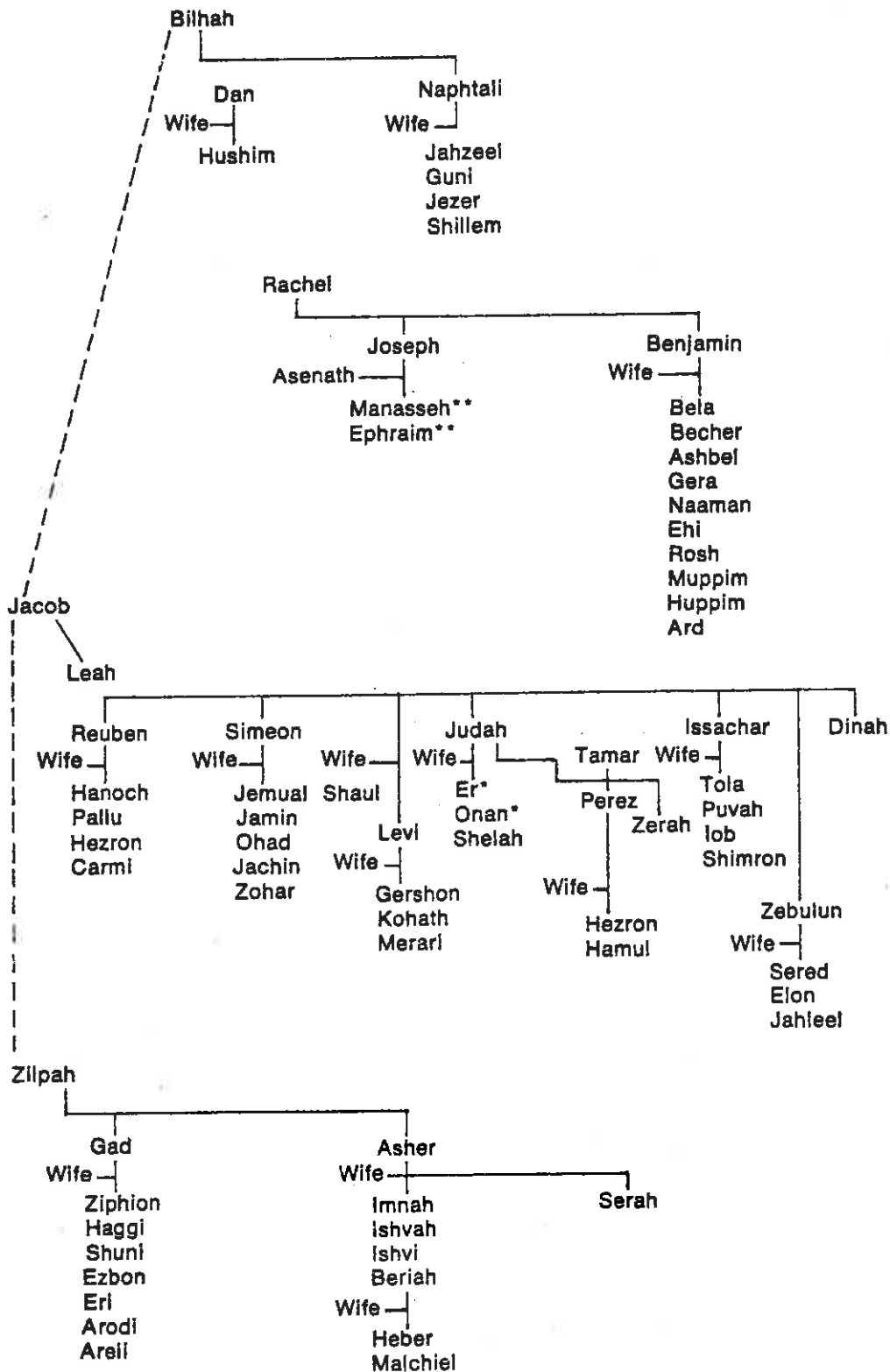
In spite of God's assurances in verses 3-4, our narrator calls the patriarch "Jacob," not "Israel" and that he has to be "lifted" to the wagon evinces his dread that Egypt is to be the land "not theirs," which God had foretold to Abraham (cf. Gen. 15:13), in which his descendants "shall be enslaved and oppressed." It should be noted that in verse 5 "the sons of Israel" connotes for the last time Jacob's sons. In verse 8 the whole clan will be so called, i.e., *Bene Yisrael* (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל), "the Israelites."

Just as Abraham had left Ur of the Chaldeans and journeyed to Canaan (Gen. 12:4-5), so now Jacob left the land of Canaan and journeyed to Egypt (vv. 5-6). Both men were leaving the land of their birth in obedience to the will of God, and the obedience of both men just at this point plays a pivotal role in God's election of the seed of Abraham. Thus vv. 6-7 emphasize by repetition that "all his offspring" (literally, "all his seed") went with Jacob into the land of Egypt. The strong emphasis on the all-inclusive nature of the migration is meant to draw attention, once again, to the national significance of the event. This passage provides a smooth transition to the following section. To graphically demonstrate the importance of this point, the writer now lists the names of "all his offspring" and numbers them at "seventy" (v. 27).

It has been pointed out that verse 7 is the only passage where the daughters of the sons of Jacob are mentioned with the daughters of Jacob. "His daughters" may include not only Dinah but also "the wives of Jacob's sons" (cf. v. 26). "Granddaughters" seems to imply not only Serah (cf. v. 17) but also other unlisted granddaughters. "And all his offspring" may refer to Jacob's great grandsons (cf. vv. 12, 17).

We are told by some interpreters, contrary to what others choose to believe, that not all the tribes came up out of Egypt, because not all the sons went down with Jacob. Verses 6 and 7, however, exempts none. The degrees of relationship are exhausted: his sons, grandsons, daughters (more than Dinah existed), and the daughters of his sons, namely, all his descendants; he brought all these into Egypt. Those who insist that this refers only to the "Leah tribes" must be held to insist that the text be changed. This is not dealing with the text in an objective, factual fashion.

This vision would have encouraged not only Israel the patriarch but also the nation of Israel later when they were preparing to leave the land of Egypt to return to Canaan. The revelation was clear: God was with them, and so the promise would be fulfilled and they would be delivered.



\* Died in Canaan  
 \*\* Born in Egypt

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## THE LITERARY GENIUS OF THE JOSEPH NARRATIVE

The story of Joseph has been praised as a treasure of world literature. Voltaire confessed that it was one of the most precious documents which has been handed down to our own age from antiquity. Neither Egypt nor Babylon can offer anything even remotely comparable. The matchless narrative of the lost son moves old and young alike. As a literary work it is artistic perfection. The literary genius of the Joseph Narrative in its depth and beauty have still not been completely recognized by biblical scholars.

Literary structural notes have been purposely seeded throughout the notes thus far to demonstrate conclusively that this Narrative is structured not in an ad hoc or haphazard manner, but along well-conceived and deliberate lines. It is, by all accounts, the most literarily unified Narrative in Genesis, perhaps in the entire Pentateuch, and indeed in the entire Hebrew Bible. John Skinner called it "the most artistic and most fascinating of Old Testament biographies" (*Genesis*, 1969:438). Nahum Sarna spoke of its "unparalleled continuity of narrative" (*Understanding Genesis*, 1966:211).

After a close study of the Joseph Narrative, the reader is struck by the craft of the Joseph Narrative. Rarely in Western literature has form been woven into content, pattern sewn into meaning, structure forged into theme with greater subtlety or success. The result is a Narrative of profound paradox that first reveals then resolves itself in absolute symmetry. To look closely at the major patterns of paradox is to discover how the literal level of the Narrative fully engenders the meaning and how pattern finally unravels predicament.

The Joseph Narrative is the most intricately composed, complex and relatively long unit in the Old Testament. It is distinct from all previous patriarchal narratives because of its unusual length (446 verses), for it considerably exceeds the length of the longest of the patriarchal narratives. Furthermore, it has not attained this extraordinary length by means of a gradual comprehensive composition of individual narrative units as documentary source critics posit. The Narrative from beginning to end is an organically constructed Narrative, wherein no single segment of which can have existed independently as a separate element of tradition.

The author did not mind, however, breaking this complex Narrative up into manageable episodes. We define an episode as the simplest unit of narrative material displaying a significant level of independence from its context. For instance the Joseph Narrative (Gen. 37:2--50:26) consists of "Beloved Son,

Hated Brother (Gen. 37:2-11), "Strife and Deceit" (Gen. 37:12-36), "To Champion Righteousness: Judah and Tamar" (Gen. 38:1-30), and so forth. These episodes vary in length and complexity, but they form relatively self-contained units.

Each of these episodes have its own exposition which is followed by the action itself, and this action always has a climax and at the end a definite conclusion, which does not detract from the suspense of the Joseph Narrative as a whole. It is only a temporary resting point for the action of the Narrative. This mastery of the material by a clear succession of episodes, this division of the massive and very complex occurrence into individual eventful waves, shows without rival a very superior artistry in narrative representation. Even in the central part of his composition, which is strictly coherent, our narrator has paid the greatest attention to the individual episodes. The grand effect of the Joseph Narrative is due to its parts melting into one continuous whole.

### **The Significance of Chiasmus as a Literary Device**

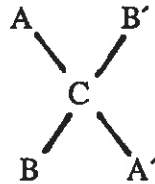
Biblical scholars now recognize that ancient historians and theologians drafted their documents according to carefully predetermined plans. The actual content, phraseology, sequencing of events, and narrated direct speech were all subordinated to an overall literary strategy which itself served the theological purpose of the writer.

For the modern Western reader, such literary structure is foreign, and, therefore not appreciated, and not immediately obvious, although to ancient audiences it must have been. Once we recognize and appreciate the principles of literary composition that governed much of the writing in antiquity, we can attain fresh insight into those works, since our reading of them will correspond both to the method and to the intention of the author.

### ***Definition of Chiasmus***

One important literary form which has come to light in the past century, and especially in the past two decades, is called chiasm (*ki'azəm*), also called chiasmus. Structural analysis of the Old and New Testaments has proven beyond doubt that most if not all writers, relied heavily on chiasmus to produce their literary work.

Chiasm, also called chiasmus, may be defined as a stylistic literary figure which consists of a series of two or more elements followed by a presentation of corresponding elements in reverse order. The individual elements may consist of single words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, or even longer sections of material. Chiasmus produces balanced statements, in direct, inverted, or antithetical parallelism, constructed symmetrically about a central idea. The uniqueness of the chiasmic structure lies in its focus upon a **pivotal theme**, about which the other propositions of the literary unit are developed. It therefore presupposes a center, a "crossing point," illustrated by the Greek letter *chi* (X), which gives us the figure



The image of concentric circles, rather than that of parallel lines, illustrates this characteristic most clearly. Because of this central focus, genuine chiasmus is able to set in relief the central idea or theme the writer tries to express. Therefore it would seem useful, and even necessary, to make a clear distinction between various parallel structures present in the biblical writings, in order to appreciate the rhetorical force of the chiasmic pattern.

### *Significance of Chiasmus*

All too often, however, chiasmic structures are passed off in the scholarly literature as mere literary niceties, a structural tour de force which serves only aesthetic ends. Too little consideration has been given to the possible exegetical significance of such structures in the interpretation of biblical passages. In fact, theological studies which have used chiasm for purposes of exegesis are rare.

Chiasmus as a literary analysis is a positive application of literary conventions. It is a positive, constructive art in that it calls for an attempt to hear the biblical narrator the way it was intended to be heard. All too often the grammatical-syntactic analysis fails in appreciating the *holistic* interpretation of the Joseph Narrative, not to mention the rest of Scripture.



### The Significance of Chiasmus in the Joseph Narrative

The Joseph Narrative contains a number of chiasmic elements building toward a climax, then follows a second series where matching units in reverse order bring the Narrative to resolution and fulfillment. The text, as it stands, exhibits clear unity. This is not only because of the chiasmic structure but because of the organic cohesion of the entire Narrative.

Notably, beginning with Genesis 46:8 and extending to verse 27, the Joseph Narrative is interrupted by a census of the Israelite clans. It is very possible that this genealogical material works as a division marker between two major sections in the Joseph Narrative (Gen. 37:3--46:7 and 46:28--50:26), with the genealogical list, Genesis 46:8-27 (the offspring of Jacob--suspended at Gen. 37:1 and now climatically delineated), functioning as the center of this chiasmic structuring, and not 45:1-15 as almost all commentators note.

A deep study of the Joseph Narrative will yield a symmetry, and this symmetry is dependent on the theme of reversals. The Narrative begins with Joseph on a high level but, despite his wisdom and capability, his fortunes sink step by step. Then, when he is at the very bottom, a series divine acts reverses his fortunes and brings him back to the height of glory.

A few of these reversals will be presented in large brush strokes in order to explain the alternative thematic chiasmic structure. It should be noted that this structure functions beneath the larger structure of the text, with the genealogical record in Genesis 46:8-27 functioning as a division between the two "halves."

Joseph begins as his father's favorite in a richly ornamented robe, but he loses prestige before his father not because of any sin but because of the frank telling of a revelation he received (Gen. 37:1-11). He is sent out by his father to observe his brothers, but because of their treachery he is almost killed and finally enslaved (Gen. 37:12-36).

The story of Judah and Tamar does not directly concern Joseph, but it shows Judah to have been a man of character after what had been a poor showing on his part in the selling of Joseph (Gen. 38:26). Joseph then becomes chief steward of Potiphar's house, but the lust of Potiphar's wife lands Joseph in a dungeon (Gen. 39). He rises to prominence in the Egyptian prison and while there interprets dreams for two of Pharaoh's staff, the cupbearer and baker, but that act seems forgotten (Gen. 40). The very lowest point of Joseph's career is

told in Genesis 40:23: "The chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph but forgot him."

**CHIASTIC STRUCTURE OF THE JOSEPH NARRATIVE  
(37:2--50:21)**

Introduction		37:1-2
A	Hostility of brothers to Joseph	37:3-11
B	Apparent death of Joseph, Jacob mourns	37:12-36
C	Judah and Tamar	38:1-26
D	Unexpected Reversals	38:27--39:23
Da	Perez and Zerah	38:27-30
Db	Potiphar's wife and Joseph	39:1-23
E	Wisdom of Joseph	40:1--41:57
F	Movement to Egypt	42:1--46:7
Fa	Jacob sends brothers, threatened	42:1--43:34
	Jacob sends Benjamin on a second trip	
Fb	Joseph tests brothers, arrested by Egyptian subordinate, Joseph's revelation	44:1--45:28
Fc	Jacob moves to Goshen	46:1-7
	<b>G GENEALOGY</b>	<b>46:8-27</b>
F'	Settlement in Egypt	46:28--47:12
F'a	Jacob arrives in Egypt, but sends Judah ahead	46:28
F'b	Joseph welcomes Jacob, introduces him to Pharaoh	46:29--47:10
F'c	Jacob moves to Rameses	47:11-12
E'	Wisdom of Joseph	47:13-26
D'	Unexpected Reversals	48:1-22
D'a	Jacob favors Joseph	48:1-12
D'b	Ephraim and Manasseh	48:13-22
C'	Jacob's blessing of his sons	49:1-32
B'	Death of Jacob, Joseph buries him	49:33--50:14
A'	Joseph reassures brothers	50:15-21

Figure 27.

At that point, however, the reversal begins. Pharaoh has a dream, and the reader understands that behind that dream is the work of God to release Joseph from prison (Gen. 41). His fall into the dungeon has been reversed. In the next major reversal, God brings the brothers down to Egypt by means of the famine, and they bow to Joseph as the dream had predicted. Joseph deceives them and demands to see their younger brother, just as they had earlier deceived Jacob by saying their younger brother was dead. When they bring Benjamin to Egypt, Joseph frames Benjamin as Potiphar's wife had framed him. Here, too, there is a reversal: Joseph does not imprison his brothers but welcomes them after Judah proves his character at the end (Gen. 44:33), as he had in the story about Tamar.

At last, in a reversal of Jacob's decision to send out Joseph, Jacob himself sets out to join Joseph, and he is given divine assurance as he does so. The Narrative never tells us that Jacob bows to Joseph, as the dream seemed to predict (Gen. 37:10), but God tells him that Joseph's hand will close his eyes (Gen. 46:4). This is not in all points neat and tidy, but it is a subtle and free yet remarkably careful intertwining of all the major strands of the Narrative. This is what one would expect from a master narrator.

The final resolution of Genesis (Gen. 46:28--50:26) describes no threat to the tiny, emerging people. They are secure in the choicest region of Egypt (Gen. 47:11), and are given every courtesy as honored guests. Nevertheless, like the resolutions of Genesis 1-11, the ending does not have an entirely happy resolution. They are still aliens and strangers living in a land that is not their own. The potential of threat, in light of Genesis 15:13, is certainly present. The complete resolution of the problem is to be found in the next grand act of God, the exodus.

To be sure, there are other important parallels between the two major divisions (Gen. 37:3--46:7 and 46:29--50:26) which exhibit reversals. The story of the two brothers Perez and Zerah, in which the one who would be first-born loses his place (Gen. 38:27-30), and the story of the two brothers Ephraim and Manasseh, in which the younger is placed ahead of the elder (Gen. 48:13-22). In addition, the unfair treatment Joseph received at the hands of Potiphar in chapter 39 is contrasted with the "unfair" favorable treatment he receives from his father in being singled out among the twelve for a special blessing in Gen. 48:1-12). Two reversals are thus set against each other (D and D' in the chart). The first is the reversal of the positions of the younger and elder brothers and the second is the unfavorable/favorable treatment received by Joseph.

Genesis 42--45 also to some degree contrasts with Genesis 46:28--47:12. In the former, Jacob sends Joseph's brothers down to Egypt but has to send them a second time with Benjamin after Joseph accuses them of being spies. They are then tricked by Joseph, arrested by his Egyptian subordinate, but saved when he reveals himself to them. Then Jacob himself departs for Egypt.

In the latter, Jacob sends Judah ahead to make arrangements (as he had sent Benjamin in Judah's charge), is welcomed by Joseph (not threatened, as the brothers were) and introduced to the Pharaoh of Egypt, Joseph's superior, instead of being arrested by his Egyptian subordinate. Finally, Jacob moves to the prized district of Rameses, having departed for Egypt at the end of the previous section.

### The Chiastic Structure Analyzed

As with other chiastic structures, the Joseph Narrative builds to a pivot point after which the themes are repeated in reverse order. There are six episodes (A, B, C, D, E, F) leading to the climax of Joseph's revelation of himself (G); then follow six parallel episodes (F', E', D', C', B', A'). The result is a neatly constructed palistrophe in what is already a remarkably unified story.

Everything in A through F has been structured to put Joseph in the position of power whereby he can surface his brothers' guilt by a series of tests and bring them to a repentant state. From F' through A' there is resolution. Jacob's family migrates to Egypt and settles in Goshen, famine continues, yet Joseph sustains the people, Joseph's children receive Jacob's blessing, Jacob breaths his last breath, and Joseph too dies, having lived the fullest of lives as indicated by his 110-year life-span.

Our narrator has not only artfully integrated this extraordinary Narrative into the Book of Genesis, but even the very last words of Genesis, **בְּמִצְרָיִם**/*b<sup>m</sup>ṣrāyim* "in Egypt," is a fitting conclusion to the Joseph Narrative which dovetails and neatly sets the scene for the book of Exodus.

The presentation of this chiastic structure will proceed along the following lines. First, the meatiest part of each episode will be explored, the presentation of each pair of matched units within each cycle, first A and A', then B and B', etc. After a brief discussion of the parallel ideas, motifs, and story lines, theme-words which highlight the relationship between the two units will ensue. Individual theme-words are not ranked in order of importance.

Instead, they are listed in verse order, i.e., the order in which they occur in the text, specifically in the first of the matched units under discussion. I posit, with few exceptions, our author of this Narrative intended the various theme-words to operate collectively. They connect the matched units as a group, not just as single words.

Once matched units has been demonstrated, I next point out the mid-way point (G), coming between F and F', upon which the entire Narrative pivots.

Finally, there is another series of vocabulary items featured in the literary structuring of the Narrative. Not only do theme-words link units A and A', B and B', etc., but other words, called catchwords, link successive units, i.e., A and B, B and C, etc., through E' and F'. These catchwords act as bridges which aid the linear flow of the Narrative from unit to unit.

Since so much of literary structuring is tied to theme-words and catchwords, a brief description of these items is appropriate. They can be of several types. The most obvious are those where the same word is used in matching or successive episodes. Others are different words or, to use more precise grammatical terminology, different inflections, from the same Hebrew stem. Some theme-words and catchwords can be like-sounding words which derive from separate stems, and still others may be merely similar in meaning or share a similar connotation. What links all of these variations is the ability to connect. If our author has achieved his goal, then the different units of the Narrative will successfully form into a composite whole.

### *The Chiastically Matched Units in the Joseph Narrative*

#### **A HOSTILITY OF BROTHERS TO JOSEPH (37:3-11)**

#### **A' JOSEPH REASSURES HIS BROTHERS (50:15-21)**

These two units act as the introduction and conclusion to the Joseph Narrative. In A we meet Joseph for the first time (excluding his birth in Gen. 30:22-24) as a 17-year-old "lad" (נָעַר/*na'ar*). In A' he appears as the trusted adviser to Pharaoh who lives the full life of 110 years. The contrast is striking and illustrates the rise in Joseph's career.

The action of A is repeated in A' in two significant ways. In both sections Joseph is alone with his brothers, their father Jacob is not part of the scene. Also, in A father and son part due to the trumped-up death by the

brothers of the latter, and in A' father and son part due to the actual death of the former.

A whole host of theme-words link the episodes still further:

1. "In the land of Canaan" occurs in 37:1; and "to the land of Canaan" occurs in 50:13.
2. The word "evil" appears frequently in both units (37:2, 20, 33; 50:15, 17, 20).
3. "Their father" is also prominent in both A and A', occurring in 37:2, 4 and in 50:15.
4. In 37:4 we read "his brothers saw"; and in 50:15 we have "Joseph's brothers saw."
5. The Hebrew verbal root דבר/*db'r* "speak" is used in A in 37:4 and commonly in A' in 50:17, 21.
6. In 37:7, 9, 10, the hishtaphel stem of חוה/*ḥwh*, "to do obeisance" or "prostrate," is used in Joseph's dreams to illustrate his brothers' obeisance; this reverberates with "his brothers also came and fell down before him (Joseph), in 50:18.

#### **B APPARENT DEATH OF JOSEPH, JACOB MOURNS (37:12-36)**

#### **B' DEATH OF JACOB, JOSEPH BURIES HIM (49:33--50:14)**

Periodically, it has been demonstrated how attention to chiasmic structuring can help explain many problems raised by liberal critics, especially those concerning supposed secondary accretions to the text. Another example of this is the admittedly peculiar reference to the unnamed stranger (Gen. 37:15-17) who assists Joseph in his search for his brothers. A closer look, however, reveals that it is integral. It is needed to counterbalance the reference to the local Canaanites in Genesis 50:11. In addition, these same liberal critics render the reading in Genesis 50:11 also as secondary, but it is odd that both "secondary" additions are among the points which cement the bond between B and B'.

Several theme-words link the two episodes together:

1. A local man assists Joseph in 37:15-17 and the local Canaanites witness Joseph's and his entourage's mourning for his father in 50:11.
2. The verbal stem נכל/*nkl* in the Hithpael, "plot," is used in 37:18, and the non-related but assonant root כול/*kwl*, "sustain," is used in 50:21.

3. Similarly, the verbal stem נכר/nkr, "recognize," is predicated of Jacob in 37:32-33, and Joseph reports Jacob's use of כָּרִיתִי/kārītī, "I dug," from the non-related but assonant stem כרה/krh in 50:5.
4. The stem אבל/ʾbl, "mourn," is used in connection with Jacob's mourning for Joseph in 37:34-35, and in 50:10-11 in connection with Joseph's mourning for Jacob.

### C INTERLUDE: JUDAH AND TAMAR (38:1-26)

### C' INTERLUDE: THE BLESSING (49:1-28)

It does not take a deep analysis into the Joseph Narrative to realize that B is an episode which does not exhibit clear cohesion and unity in relationship to the general story line. Joseph is nowhere mentioned, and although there are connections between C and B (see below), the Narrative is seemingly complete without Genesis 38:1-30. Indeed, this strange episode of Judah and Tamar does appear to be quite alien to the movement of the Joseph Narrative and something of an interruption. But it is not an alien intrusion. It is rather a digression--an interlude--meant to give background information, which is taken up later in the Narrative.

Although it has been worked into the story a little more directly, B' is also an interlude. It interrupts the Narrative, as a comparison of Genesis 48:21-22 and 49:29 exhibits. Joseph is altogether absent in Genesis 38:1-30 and only nominally present in Genesis 49:1-28; this is unlike D' and A' where he dominates. It will be noticed that Genesis 49:1-27 is clearly an independent poem, a poem of blessing. This is visually detected in the English versions (as well as the Hebrew) in the way our translators have structured the text. The setting for this poem is in Canaan, and in this sense it is a fitting parallel to 38:1-30 which deals with Judah's life in the same country. The Egyptian flavor which characterizes the Joseph Narrative is notably lacking in both units.

An important subplot of Genesis 37--50 is the question of which of Jacob's sons will have the right of the first-born. After all, he did have twelve sons, and the issue of who is to be regarded as first among the twelve is of no small importance. This theme is analyzed in detail by Judah Goldin, and what follows here is to a great extent dependent upon his work ("The Youngest Son or Where Does Genesis 38 Belong," *JBL* 96 [1977]:27-44).

The obvious son to receive the right of the first-born is Reuben, the actual first-born, but Reuben does the unpardonable. In an effort to prove to his brother that he will indeed rule them, he sleeps with Jacob's concubine Bilhah

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(Gen. 35:22). Sleeping with his father's concubine implies that he has supplanted his father. It was not an act of sexual passion (cf. 2 Sam. 16:21-22 and 1 Kgs. 2:20-22). Reuben's plan backfires, as the text cryptically indicates: "but Israel heard about it." From that time forward, Jacob never favors Reuben. This may be not only because of Reuben's detestable act, but also because Reuben is the son of Leah, the wife Jacob never wanted. Instead, Jacob gives every indication that he will bestow the right of the first-born on Joseph (Gen. 37:3), his first son by his beloved Rachel.

Having to submit to the very young Joseph is intolerable for all the brothers, but especially Reuben, who is being displaced. Nevertheless, when the brothers finally vent their hatred on Joseph and plan to kill him (Gen. 37:12-20), Reuben sees it as an opportunity to get back into his father's good graces. He will rescue Joseph and "take him back to his father" (v. 22b). It is important to understand, however, that this is not an act of goodness on Reuben's part but a ploy to insure that he will become first among the brothers.

The ploy fails. Judah persuades the brothers, in Reuben's absence, to sell Joseph to a band of Ishmaelite traders and thus robs Reuben of his chance to look heroic. It is not clear whether Judah detected Reuben's strategy and proposed the sale in order to thwart him, or whether it was simply an act of mercy. Regardless, his words in verses 26-27 do imply feelings of guilt and mercy. If all he had wanted to do was ruin Reuben's plan, he could have rescued and restored Joseph to Jacob himself, or he could have killed Joseph outright.

Reuben's dismay at Joseph's disappearance is complete. When he cries out, "What will I do?" (Gen. 37:30), the implication is that he has lost his opportunity to gain Jacob's favor. Thereafter, Reuben is a pitiful character. He reappears in Genesis 42:22, where he weakly casts an "I told you so" at his brothers. Then, in Genesis 42:37, he tries unsuccessfully to persuade Jacob to allow the brothers to take Benjamin to Egypt on a second journey. His offer, that Jacob may kill his sons (Jacob's grandsons) if he does not return Benjamin safely, is outrageous. Goldin rightly comments that "only a man in desperation uses such language." Jacob ignores the appeal.

Finally, Jacob rebukes Reuben from his deathbed in his "blessing." Reuben was indeed the first-born and should have inherited all the honor that went with it, but his impetuous power-grab in the detestable act of sleeping with his father's concubine could not be overlooked. Reuben is thus rejected (Gen. 49:3-4).



Simeon and Levi are the next two brothers in line after Reuben, but they are already excluded (Gen. 49:5-7) because of their actions in the affair of Genesis 34. Judah is the next in line.

The text gradually moves from a less favorable to a more favorable portrayal of Judah. His role in the selling of Joseph, if not above reproach, does at least show some sense of pity on his part (Gen. 37:26-27). His two sons, Er and Onan, are both so evil that the LORD puts them to death (Gen. 38:7-10), but Judah wrongly ascribes their deaths to Tamar and refuses here the right of raising up children by Judah's third son, Shelah. Yet after Judah himself impregnates Tamar, he admits that she is more righteous than he, and that he and not she was at fault (Gen. 38:26).

An important sideline is that the episode of Onan also concerns the matter of the right of first-born. Onan's sin is not that he engaged in strange sex or practiced a primitive birth-control technique, but that he attempted to seize the right of first-born for himself. After the death of Er, Onan knew that the inheritance was his only if no "son" was born to Er. Although the child by Tamar would biologically be Onan's, the legal fiction that it would be Er's was of enormous significance. The inheritance would bypass Onan and be in Er's name (Gen. 38:9).

After this, Judah begins to emerge as the leader of the brothers. In Genesis 43:3-10, Jacob listens to Judah, after he had ignored Reuben, and allows the brothers to take Benjamin on the second journey. This is not all; Judah willingly risks his status as the one who would receive the right of the first-born in his pledge that he would bear his blame before Jacob all his life should harm befall Benjamin (Gen. 43:9). After Joseph frames Benjamin, Judah pleads for Benjamin's release and offers himself as a substitute (Gen. 44:16-34). Finally, when Jacob himself moves to Egypt, he trusts Judah with the task of going ahead to prepare the way (Gen. 46:28). Judah has assumed the position of first-born.

How does Genesis 38 parallel with that of Genesis 49:1-28? A central development is in the account of the birth of Tamar's twin sons, Perez and Zerah. In the story, Zerah put his hand out first and naturally would have been the first-born. A red thread was tied around his wrist. Yet to the surprise of all, his brother, Perez, was actually born before him and was thus first-born of the two.

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This strange event is a sign of the divine election of Perez to that position. It follows the pattern of Isaac and Jacob, neither of whom were first-born but both of whom obtained that position by God's choice. This phenomenon, divine preference for the younger son, reappears repeatedly in the Bible as in the election of David (1 Sam. 16:11-12).

The significance of the Perez-Zerah episode is implied by its parallel to the story of Jacob and Esau. In both cases, twins are involved and the one who is expected to gain the birthright, but loses it, is associated with the color red (Gen. 25:25; 38:30). Like his grandfather Jacob, Perez rushes ahead and supplants his brother.

The importance of Genesis 38 for the Joseph Narrative, therefore, is that it contributes materially to the story of how Judah achieves the status of first-born. The strange births of Perez and Zerah, following the pattern of special favor on the younger son, is a sign that the miraculous history of the chosen line has now come to Judah alone among the twelve.

This is confirmed both in Jacob's blessing on the sons of Joseph (Gen. 48) and in his blessing on Judah (Gen. 49:8-12). Out of his profound love for Joseph, Jacob desires to pass a special blessing on to him. He knows that this can be accomplished only if the pattern of divine favor going to the younger son is followed. Thus, he crosses his hands in the blessing and confers special favor on the younger Ephraim.

But when Jacob comes to his blessing on each of his twelve sons (Gen. 49:1-28), he cannot go against the sign of divine choice in the unusual births of Perez and Zerah. The true position of first-born is given to Judah. His brothers will praise Judah, they will bow to him, and the scepter will belong to him (Gen. 49:8, 10). A special bounty is promised to Joseph (Gen. 49:22-26), but the right of first-born is not. It is therefore indisputable that both Genesis 38 and 49 are integral to the story of Genesis 37--50. Without these two episodes, a major subplot of the Joseph Narrative is left dangling.

It was earlier remarked that the blessings on all the brothers except Judah (Gen. 49:1-7, 13-28) have no counterparts in the first part of the chiasm. The reason for this is now apparent. Both Genesis 38 and 49:8-12 relate to the story of how Judah obtained the position of first-born. One would not expect parallels to Genesis 38 to appear in Genesis 49:1-7, 13-28.

The Judah and Tamar episode and the Blessing of Jacob might seem too different--beyond their role as interludes and their setting in Canaan--to have themes and theme-words linking them in any meaningful way. But such is not the case, for as the following list indicates, there are surprisingly more such items shared by C and C' than by any other matching units in the Narrative.

Since the only common material in C and C' is that concerning Judah, it is appropriate to begin by looking at Jacob's words to his fourth son in Genesis 49:8-12. These verses are filled with cruxes, but scholars in the last twenty years have begun to solve some of them by reading them as references to the Judah and Tamar episode!

1. The key to seeing the blessing to Judah as a reference to 38:1-30 is the similarity between *שִׁלֹה*/*šilōh*, traditionally rendered "Shiloh," in 49:10, and *שֶׁלָה*/*sēlā*, "Shelah," in 38:5, 11, 14, 26.
2. The "scepter" shall not depart from Judah in 49:10, just as his "staff" was handed to Tamar in 38:18 and used as evidence against him in 38:25.
3. A sexual connotation can certainly be read into "the staff between his legs" in 49:10, and allied to Judah's visiting a prostitute in 38:15-19.
4. *עִירָה*/*ʿirōh*, "his donkey," in 49:11, evokes *עֵר*/*ʿer*, "Er," Judah's first son in 38:3, 6, 7.
5. Similarly, *בְּנֵי אֶתְנֹן*/*bēnî ʾatōnō*, "son of his donkey" in 49:11, brings to mind *אֹנָן*/*ʾonān*, "Onan," Judah's second son in 38:4, 8, 9.
6. *שֹׂרֶקָה*/*sōrēqā*, "vine, stock," in 49:11, alludes to the valley of Soreq, which recalls Timnah in 38:12-13.
7. The verbal stem *סָר*/*sūr* in the Qal, "depart," appears in 49:10; and in the hiphil, "remove," it occurs in 38:14, 19.
8. *יָבֵא*/*yābōʿ*, "he comes," in 49:10, suggests *וַיָּבֵא*/*wayyāb* "he came," in 38:18.
9. *סוּתָה*/*sūtōh* "his robe," in 49:11, although not etymologically related to *כִּסְתָה*/*kissṯā*, "she covered," in 38:15, but they share three consonants, sound alike, and both convey the idea of clothing.
10. The stem *לָבַשׁ*/*lbs*, "clothe," appears in both 49:11 and 38:19.

The few verses spoken to Judah thus contain ten theme-words which link C' with Judah's history in C. But the blessings to the other sons also contain similar expressions to those in Genesis 38:1-30.

11. בְּכוֹר /*bēkôr*, "firstborn," occurs in 49:3 and 38:6.
12. אוֹנִי /*'ônî*, "my vigor," in 49:3, might also suggest אֹנָן /*'ônān*, "Onan," in 38:4, 8, 9.
13. The word אַז /*'āz* "strong, fierce," is used in 49:3, 7; and in 38:17, 20, we have אִזִּים /*'izzîm*, "goats."
14. אַזְוֵיט /*w'yyāt* is used in 49:15 and in 38:1, 16 meaning "to turn aside."
15. In 49:17 we read אֶלְדֵּי דֶרֶךְ /*'alê derek* "by the road"; and in 38:16 we have אֶל הַדֶּרֶךְ /*'el hadderek*, "by the road."
16. The alliteration גַּד גִּדּוּד גִּדּוּדֵי /*gād g'dûd g'gûdennû* "Gad shall be raided by raiders;" in 49:19, suggests the important גִּדּוּדֵי /*g'dî* "kid," in 38:17, 20, 23.
17. אֶגְדּוּ /*yāgud* "He shall raid," in 49:19, evokes אֶגְדּוּ /*wayyuggad* "it was told," in 38:24.

In total, there are seventeen theme-words which highlight the parallel status of Genesis 38:1-30 and 49:1-28. As a comparison with other matching units in this Narrative or in other narratives will determine, seventeen such parallels is an unusually high number. Perhaps because the Judah and Tamar episode and the Blessings of Jacob are so dissimilar, the need was felt for more shared words and ideas than is customary. That is to say, A and A' and the other matching units of the Joseph Narrative are similar enough in action not to require that many theme-words. C and C' are less homogeneous, however, and thus our narrator has insured their correspondence through a veritable plethora of theme-words. Commentators have usually dismissed these two interludes, but they should be recognized as the balancing second and the penultimate sections in the Joseph Narrative.

#### D UNEXPECTED REVERSALS (38:27--39:23)

Da Perez and Zerah (38:27-30)

Db Potiphar's wife innocent, Joseph guilty (39:1-23)

#### D' UNEXPECTED REVERSALS (48:1-22)

D'a Jacob favors Joseph (48:1-12)

D'b Ephraim and Manasseh (48:13-22)

In the first of these units (D), a reversal of positions finds Joseph, who is innocent, found guilty, and Potiphar's wife, who in actuality is guilty, found innocent. In D', Ephraim, who actually is the second-born, is declared the first-born, and Manasseh, who naturally is the first-born, is reduced to the second-born. In both instances, Joseph's superior is ultimately responsible for the reversals whether it be his master Potiphar or his father Jacob. In each case the action centers around the bed. This is explicit in D' where Jacob lies in bed

(Gen. 47:31) and Joseph is beside him, and implicit in D where Potiphar's wife presumably is in bed or has the bed in mind and Joseph is beside her.

A series of theme-words link these two units together nicely:

1. The verbal stem בִּרַךְ/*brk*, "bless" is important to both units, occurring in 39:5 and in 48:3, 9, 15, 16, 20.
2. וַיִּמָּאֵן וַיֹּאמֶר/*way'mā'en wayyō'mer* "he resisted and said," appears in 39:8; the same words with the subject "his father," interestingly interposed, occur in 48:19.
3. In 39:4 we read וַיִּמְצָא יוֹסֵף חֵן בְּעֵינֵי הַן "Joseph found favor in his eyes"; and in 47:29 we have אִם נָא מְצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ "if I have found favor in your eyes."
4. The word "favor" חֶסֶד/*hesed* is used in both 39:21 and 47:29.
5. The verbal stem "to lie" שָׁכַב/*škb* is prominent in D, occurring four times in 39:7-14, and it reverberates in D' in 47:30.
6. "Hand" יָד/*yād* is extremely common and very important in D, occurring nine times. It is equally important to D' since the reversal results from Jacob's crossed hands and because it is used in Joseph's swearing to Jacob; see 47:29; 48:14, 17.
7. The term for "bread" לֶחֶם/*lehem* is used figuratively for "wife" in 39:6, and לֶחֶם לְבַיִת/*bêt lāhem* "Bethlehem (house of bread)," occurs in 48:7.

Once more recognition of artistic structuring allows us to solve a problem which has plagued scholars. Von Rad, Davidson, Vawter, and Skinner all note that the reference to Rachel's death and burial in Genesis 48:7 is seemingly out of place or poorly related to the general context. A. Dillmann was less concerned about the notice as a whole, stating that "the absence of any apparent motive prevents our regarding the verse as a mere gloss," but he did note that the words "that is, Bethlehem" are out of place in Jacob's mouth, and are a late addition (*Genesis II*, 437-38).

Admittedly this is correct, for one would not expect to see such a gloss in direct speech. But by paying heed to the use of לֶחֶם/*lehem* "bread"/"wife" in D in Genesis 39:6, where it is pregnant with meaning, we are able to uncover our author's reason for including לֶחֶם לְבַיִת/*bêt lāhem* in D' in Genesis 48:7. The two act as theme-words which serve to cement the relationship between the two units.

## E WISDOM OF JOSEPH (40:1--41:57)

## E' WISDOM OF JOSEPH (47:13-26)

Twice during the Joseph Narrative we have episodes which describe how Joseph saves Egypt from famine and becomes the national hero. It is clear that these units, one relatively long and one relatively short, are parallel. The following theme-words highlight the correspondence.

1. The word "famine" רָעָב/*rā'ab* occurs ubiquitously in E and in E' in 47:13, 20.
2. The word "bread" לֶחֶם/*lehem* is used twice in E in 41:54-55, and commonly in E'.
3. "He hung/will hang" תָּלָה/*tālāh* occurs in 40:19, 22, and "languished" תָּלָה/*tēlah* in 47:13; thus a perfect assonance is formed, since both words have the same consonants.
4. The verbal stem for "buy/sell grain" שָׁבַר/*šbr* is used in 41:56-57 and in 47:14.
5. The word "stalk" קָנָה/*qāneh* appears in 41:5, 22, and the verbal stem to "buy" קָנָה/*qnh* occurs in 47:19, 22, 23.
6. "Cities" אָרָמִים/*ārīm* is used both in 41:48 and 47:21.
7. "The land of Egypt" אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם/*hā'ereš mišrayim* or simply "the land" are exceedingly common in E and E'; the latter also uses אֲדָמָה/*adāmāh* "land", and various forms.
8. The Hebrew stem חָמַשׁ/*hmš* in the sense of dividing the land into fifths occurs in 41:34 and 47:24, 26.

The similarity between Genesis 40:1--41:57 with that of 47:13-26 is obvious and these shared theme-words only heighten the correspondence. Moreover, attention to the structure of the Joseph Narrative obviates the difficulty sensed by Redford that the story of the agrarian reforms in Genesis 47:13-26 is extraneous to the Narrative (*A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*, 1970:180). However, once the structure has been determined, we find that Genesis 47:13-26 is absolutely necessary to counterbalance the episode of Genesis 40:1--41:57 where Joseph first appears as the hero of Egypt.

The fourteen verses of Genesis 47:13-26 are generally assigned to "J" by those who divide the sources. A few of these scholars go as far as to posit that this section has been misplaced and should have followed Genesis 41:56, but this position has been strongly opposed by other scholars and lacks substantial support.

**F MOVEMENT TO EGYPT (42:1--46:7)****F' SETTLEMENT IN EGYPT (46:28--47:12)**

As the Joseph Narrative progresses there follows the account of the brothers' two trips to Egypt. In the first trip they go merely to acquire food and in the second trip they return with Benjamin in order to free Simeon. Parallel to the two journeys are two reports of how Jacob's family migrates to Egypt and settles in Goshen. The first account is comprised mainly of a genealogical list and the second describes the presentation of Jacob and his sons before Pharaoh.

Various items link these two units together:

1. In 42:1-2 "go down"  $\text{רָדוּ}/r\ddot{a}d\ddot{u}$  and "Egypt"  $\text{מִצְרַיִם}/miṣrayim$  are collocated; in 46:3 we read "from going down to Egypt"  $\text{מֵרְדָה מִצְרַיִמָה}/m\ddot{e}rd\ddot{a}h miṣray\ddot{a}m\ddot{a}h$ .
2. The brothers present themselves as "your servants" to Joseph in 42:10, 11, 13, and use the same term when speaking to Pharaoh in 46:34, 47:3, 4.
3. Judah has a prominent role in 43:3-10, and he appears in 46:28 as well.
4. The verbal stem  $\text{שָׁלַח}/šlḥ$  "send" is used in connection with Jacob sending his sons led by Judah to Egypt in 43:4-5, and in 46:28 when he sends Judah ahead to pave the way.
5. "You shall not see my face" are Joseph's words quoted to Jacob in 43:5; and "I have seen your face" are Jacob's words to Joseph in 46:30.
6. Similarly, "is your father still alive?" are Joseph's words quoted to Jacob in 43:7; and "that you are still alive" are Jacob's words to Joseph in 46:30.
7. "Mouth of"  $\text{פִּי}/p\ddot{i}$  occurs in the sense of the mouth of the bag in 44:1, 2, 8 and in the sense of a human mouth in 45:21.
8. Benjamin is essential to F, mentioned specifically in 44:12 and alluded to as the youngest brother throughout Judah's speech in 44:18-34; he is also notable in F' in 45:22.

Again we are able to alleviate a potential problem sensed by critical scholars by paying careful attention to chiasmic structuring. Some critics have opined that Genesis 46:1-27 is secondary to the Narrative: "With the beginning of chapter 46 the reader has momentarily taken leave of the Joseph Story . . . . It is clear, then, that these verses do not belong to the Joseph Story" (*A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*, 1970:18-22).

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But since there are *two* journeys which the brothers make in F, there need to be *two* descriptions of the final migration to Egypt in F'. Since there was only one actual migration by Jacob's family, our writer could only give one account (Gen. 46:28--47:12). But in order to balance the two actual journeys of Genesis 42:1--43:34, our writer incorporated a brief theophany at the time of the descent followed by a long genealogy describing the extent of the family which settle in Egypt. That we indeed have two accounts of the one migration may be clearly seen by comparing Genesis 46:6, "they came to Egypt" (see also Gen. 46:8, 27) with 46:28, "they came to the land of Goshen."

### G GENEALOGY (46:8-27)

The pivot point of the Joseph Narrative stands precisely in the center of the Narrative, Genesis 46:8-27, where the belated genealogical record of Jacob is cited. Because we have now arrived at the pivotal point in the Joseph Narrative, it will prove prudent to consider at length the overall structure of the Joseph Narrative before preceeding to the balance of the Narrative in order to grasp the significance of the latter half, balancing with that of the first. Confirming that Genesis 46:8-27 is the chiasmic pivotal point is by noting where the actual climax of each of the two major divisions occurs.

In Genesis 36:1--46:8, the Joseph Narrative, the climax clearly comes at the breaking of the extreme tension of Genesis 42:1--44:34 (the visits of the brothers) in the self-revelation of Joseph to his brothers (Gen. 45:1-15). The departure of Jacob for Egypt with divine assurance of safety (Gen. 46:1-7) serves as an anticlimax to return the narrative to a zero-tension level. Genealogical data then forms a boundary to indicate the termination of the drama.

In Genesis 46:28--50:26, the dominant feature of the narrative is the blessings of Jacob on his sons (Gen. 48--49). The Israelites have settled in Egypt for a prolonged stay, and the aged patriarch of the small band is soon to die. What does the future hold for this little band of outsiders? Do they have a future at all? The blessings of Jacob serve to resolve these questions, end the story of the patriarchs, and look ahead to the story of the nation.



What is of particular significance is to observe the parallelism of how the tension develops and is finally resolved in these two major sections.

Jacob absent (Canaan; 37:1, 43:2)	Jacob absent (dead; 49:33)
Brothers do obeisance (44:14)	Admission of guilt (50:17a-c)
Joseph's slaves (44:9, 16)	Joseph weeps (50:17d)
Admission of guilt (44:18-34)	Brothers do obeisance (50:18a)
Joseph weeps (45:1-2)	Joseph's slaves (50:18b)
Joseph's insight (45:5-8)	Joseph's insight (50:20)
Brotherly talk (45:15)	Brotherly talk (50:21)
Jacob comes to Egypt (45:16--46:7)	Family remains in Egypt (50:22)

Another important aspect determining that the genealogical record of Genesis 46:8-27 marks a transition is by placing it in the overall structure of Genesis. It will be observed in the following chart that genealogies have been set between each of the major narratives of Genesis. The primeval history serves as the prologue, the three Patriarchal narratives (Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph) make up the heart of Genesis, and the story of Israel in Egypt after the arrival of Jacob is the conclusion.

### THE GENEALOGICAL STRUCTURE OF GENESIS

Prologue	Primeval History	1:1--11:26
<b>Transition</b>	<b>Genealogy</b>	<b>11:27-32</b>
Threat	Abraham Narrative	12:1--25:11
<b>Transition</b>	<b>Genealogy</b>	<b>25:12-18</b>
Threat	Jacob Narrative	25:19--35:22b
<b>Transition</b>	<b>Genealogy</b>	<b>35:22c--36:40</b>
Threat	Joseph Narrative	37:1--46:7
<b>Transition</b>	<b>Genealogy</b>	<b>46:8-27</b>
Resolution	Settlement in Egypt	46:28--50:26

Figure 28.

The Prologue, Genesis 1--11, serves as a guide and pattern to the larger narrative. It shows how the God who brought humanity through their difficult early days would do the same for the fathers of the special covenant people. But Genesis is primarily concerned with the issue of how the nation (Israel) was threatened even before it really began, and this comes out in the three major narratives of the Book.

The three major figures of the narrative often stand alone in hostile lands with little hope of having or preserving offspring. Only the protection of the covenant God enables them to survive, prosper, and see their children. Abraham is commanded to sojourn in the strange land of the Canaanites, but it is precisely that land which God promises Abraham's offspring will fill. Jacob flees to the treacherous Laban, but it is there, because of Laban's schemes, that Jacob becomes the prosperous father of the twelve. Joseph is sold into slavery by his own brothers and ultimately, through no fault of his own, finds himself abandoned and forgotten in an Egyptian dungeon. Yet it is precisely from there that he is able to rise to a position beside Pharaoh himself and provide deliverance for his family when its survival is threatened by famine.

### Catchwords Linking the Chiastic Episodes

As with other chiasmic structures, there are catchwords or nexuses which link successive units. These are most prominent between B and C and between C and D, the result of C's role as a strange interlude in the Joseph Narrative. That is to say, because C is not directly related to the main Narrative, it was important for the writer to include as many bridges as possible in order to link the Judah and Tamar episode with the overall Joseph Narrative.

1. The most illustrative of the nexuses between B and C is found in 37:32-33 and 38:25-26:
 

37:32-33 "We found this; please *examine* (נכר/*nkr*). . . then he *examined* (נכר/*nkr*) . . ."

38:25-26 "Please *examine* (נכר/*nkr*) and see . . . and Judah *recognized* (נכר/*nkr*) . . ."
2. The pair above has a further similarity, in that the twofold use of "recognize" נכר/*nkr* is preceded by the stem שלח/*slh* "send" in 37:32 and 38:25.
3. The term "comfort" נחם/*nḥm* is used in 37:35 and 38:12.
4. "Goat" (or more literally, "buck of the goats") שׁעִיר/*š'ir* occurs in 37:31 and "kid" (or more literally, "kid of the goats") גְּדִי עִזִּים/*g'dī 'izzīm*.
5. Joseph's dreams in A reflect the reversal of the rule of primogeniture; the outcome of the Judah and Tamar episode includes the same motif.
6. Jacob is deceived specifically by a piece of clothing in B, as is Judah in C.

7. It is Judah who suggests selling Joseph which leads to the deception of Jacob; thus it is only fitting that it is Judah who is duped as the Narrative progresses.
8. A striking contrast reveals Jacob mourning deeply over the imagined loss of Joseph, with no response whatsoever from Judah over the actual deaths of Er and Onan.

Links between C and D are fewer in number but no less important.

1. The stem ירד/*yrđ*, "descend," occurs at the start of each unit, in 38:1 and 39:1.
2. We should contrast the faithful sexual intercourse of Tamar in C with the faithless activity of Potiphar's wife in D.
3. The fourfold use of "(his) hand in 38:28-30 reverberates with the ubiquitous appearance of "hand" in its various Hebrew forms in 39:1-23.

Ties between B and C and between C and D are important because they bring the Judah and Tamar story into the mainstream of the Narrative. But actually all the units of the Joseph Narrative have catchwords pointing to the next unit, thus further solidifying the skillful unity of these chapters. D and E are linked by the following:

1. "Prison-house" בַּיִת הַסֵּהָר /*bât hassōhar* occurs six times in 39:20-23 and twice in 40:3, 5.
2. "Chief steward" שָׂר הַטַּבָּחִים /*sar haṭṭabbāḥîm* appears in 39:1 and 40:3, 4.
3. "Officer(s) of Pharaoh" סָרִיס פַּרְעֹה /*s'ris par'ōh* is used in 39:1 and 40:7.
4. "His master's house" is used in 39:2 and 40:7.

E and F are both concerned with the famine in Egypt and Canaan and thus share three related catchwords:

1. The word "famine" dominates E and occurs in F in 42:5 and 43:1.
2. The stem שָׁבַר /*sbr* "buy grain" appears frequently in F and is anticipated by E in 41:56-57.
3. "Food" occurs in 41:35, 36, 48 and in 42:7, 10; 43:2, 4, 20, 22.

What is noticable in G and onward is what is lacking:

1. The theme-word "sack" אֲמָתָהּ / *'amtaḥat* is now dropped.
2. The theme-word "silver" כֶּסֶף / *keseḥ* is no longer used in relation to Joseph and his brothers.

As the story further develops, F and F' are linked by the following catchwords:

1. "You shall dwell in the land of Gosehn" appears in 45:10; and "dwell in the land of Goshen" occurs in 47:6.
2. "Your sons and your grandson" is used in 45:10; and "his sons and his grandsons" is used in 46:7.
3. "Your flocks and your herds" is used in 45:10; "their flocks and their herds" is used in 46:32 and 47:1.
4. "Upon his neck" occurs in 45:14 and 46:29.
5. The verbal stem כּוּל / *kûl* "sustain" is predicated of Joseph in 45:11 and 47:12.

Connecting F' and E' are the following links:

1. The word "bread" is used in 47:12 and 47:13.
2. In F' Joseph sustains his family and in E' he provides for all of Egypt.

E' and D' have one key catchphrase linking them:

1. In 47:27 we read "Israel dwelled in the land of Egypt"; and in 47:28 we have "Jacob lived in the land of Egypt."

D' and C' have the following catchwords to bridge the two units:

1. "First-born" הַבְּכוֹר / *habb'kôr* occurs in 48:14, 18; and "my first-born" occurs in 49:3.
2. "My thigh" appears in 47:29; and "his flank" יָרְכָתוֹ / *yarkâtô* is used in 49:13
3. "Shechem" שֶׁכֶם / *s'kem* in 48:22 reverberates with "his shoulder" שֵׁכְמוֹ / *š'ikmô* in 49:15.

And finally, C' and B' are linked with one catchword: The verbal stem  $\eta\text{D}\aleph$ /'sp "gather" appears in 49:1 and 49:29, 33.

At the outset of this analysis we noted that the Joseph Narrative follows a well-planned structure. This conclusion has been proven thoroughly, highlighted through theme-words shared by matching units in the chiasmic structure and catchwords linking successive units.

Recognition of the theme-words, catchwords, and pivot point, placed on top of what is already a masterly constructed Narrative filled with emotion and suspense, permits us to reaffirm what earlier readers have already discovered: that the Joseph Narrative is truly the most beautiful of narratives.

Once we have recognized the chiasmic structure of the Joseph Narrative and its central theme about which our author has developed other related elements in concentric symmetry, we are on the correct path in understanding the purpose for the Narrative. By failing to observe and appreciate that symmetry, we tend to misread the "conceptual center" and consequently distort the author's message. But we also miss the sense of balance and intensity that chiasm provides.

While one of the aims of the study of the chiasmic structure of the Joseph Narrative was to demonstrate the well-conceived and deliberate lines by which our author wrote, we would be lessening its importance if we did not discuss the implications or the significance of this highly structural Narrative.

The most important implication of chiasmic structuring of a Narrative is its bearing on *source criticism*. Source criticism tends to view the text through a microscope, breaking it apart into tiny pieces, which are then assigned customarily to J, E, or P. The literary approach pulls back the lens, and the wide-angle view results in a greater appreciation of how the literary creation works as a whole. These contrasting approaches and the reasons why literary criticism renders the usual approach to source criticism untenable, are the subject of Appendix A.

It will be sufficient to say now that chiasmus does provide a good foundation for arguing that a particular subsection of a larger text is not a later addition, and it also argues against a documentary source-critical approach to a text that radically cuts across the chiasm. That is, if there is no plausible explanation of how a group of hypothetical sources were combined into an evident chiasm, the hypothetical source documents probably never existed.

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**II. *Believers must respond to God's leading in anticipation of the fulfillment of the promises, because out of their number God will build His covenant community (46:8-30).***

The predominant part of this section is the listing of seventy names of the family in Egypt, from which the nation of Israel would grow. The list of names in these verses appears to have been selected so that the total numbers "seventy" (v. 27). It can hardly be coincidental that the number of nations in Genesis 10 is also "seventy." Just as the "seventy nations" represent all the descendants of Adam, so now the "seventy sons" represent all the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the sons of Israel.

What we see here in narrative form is a demonstration of the theme in Deuteronomy 32:8, that God apportioned the boundaries of the nations (Genesis 10) according to the number of the sons of Israel. Thus the writer has gone to great lengths to portray the new nation of Israel as a new humanity and Abraham as a second Adam. The blessing that is to come through Abraham and his offspring is a restoration of the original blessing of Adam, a blessing that was lost in the Fall.

As a full family unit, Israel settled in Egypt. There they would become the great nation that God had promised. He had brought them to Egypt through supernaturally controlled circumstances and by wise actions of spiritual leaders who understood the meaning of the circumstances. The family entered Egypt convinced that was where God wanted them and that the fulfillment of the promises would follow.

The picture of God that emerges from these pages is not merely of a God who works with His own chosen people for their good alone but Who works with the nations to bring about His plan of salvation and blessing. The picture is very similar to that of Isaiah 45, where the rise of the kingdom of Persia is portrayed as the handiwork of God, all for the sake of the universal salvation and blessing that God intended through His chosen seed.

In Deuteronomy 10:22 the number "seventy" is seen as a very small number in comparison to the fulfillment of God's promise of making the descendants of Abraham outnumber the stars of the heavens. Thus, in preparation for the idea of God's faithfulness to His promise to the patriarchs, we are reminded of the relatively few descendants of Israel who went into the land of Egypt. Exodus 1:5 returns to this same theme by reminding the reader of the

"seventy" descendants of Jacob who went into Egypt and of their great increase during their sojourn there: "the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly might, so that the land was filled with them" (Ex. 1:7)—a clear allusion to the promised blessing (cf. Gen. 1:28).

### The Genealogy Of Jacob (verses 8-27)

The Joseph Narrative is interrupted by the genealogical record of Jacob which spells out in detail those mentioned in general in verse 7. Those included are listed according to the matriarch with whom they are associated (as in Gen. 29--30; 35:23-26; 36:9-14): vv. 8b-15 the sons of Leah (numbering 33); vv. 16-18 the sons of Zilpah (numbering 16); vv. 19-22 the sons of Rachel (numbering 14); vv. 23-25 the sons of Bilhah (numbering 7).

Each of the four groupings concludes with a formula that contains the initial statement, "These are the sons/descendants of . . .," the name of the matriarch, and a numerical summation (vv. 15, 18, 22, 25). What is significant in this arrangement is the great importance that it gives to women as mothers in this early period. The order is: Leah and her maidservant Zilpah, Rachel and her maidservant Bilhah. Coincidentally, this parallels the descending order of the number of progeny.

The genealogical lists bristle with difficulties that derive from apparent inconsistencies contained within the information given and from a comparison with parallel lists found elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures. Many of these issues will be examined as we proceed.

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**8** Now these are the names of the sons of Israel, Jacob [1] and his sons, who went to Egypt: Reuben [2], Jacob's first-born.

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In this verse *Bene Yisrael* should no longer be translated "sons of Israel," but "the Israelites" or "the descendants of Israel," the former being preferred. The children of the patriarch Israel have imperceptibly become "the Israelites," a national entity. Jacob heads their listing. He is the first of the thirty-three (cf. v. 15). In verse 27 he will be included in the seventy.

Reuben was the first-born (cf. Gen. 29:32; 35:23) in regard to genealogy. However, on one occasion Reuben has sexual intercourse with Bil-

hah. She was Rachel's maid, whom she had given to her husband as a co-wife and who had borne him Dan and Naphtali. The Hebrew narrative account of Reuben's incest is succinct to the point of obscurity (cf. Gen. 35:22).

This incident is directly linked to the foregoing narrative because it is Rachel's death that presents the occasion for Reuben's act. By violating Bilhah, Reuben makes sure that she cannot supplant or even rival his mother's position of chief wife now that Rachel is dead. It is interesting that Reuben had earlier been involved in the attempt to get his father to restore the conjugal rights of his mother (Gen. 30:14-16). As a result of Reuben's cohabitation with Bilhah, she would thereby acquire the tragic status of "living widowhood," as happened to David's concubines whom he left behind when he fled Jerusalem and who were possessed by his son Absalom, as recounted in 2 Samuel 15:16, 16:22, and 20:3.

Why did Reuben choose to accomplish his purpose by the particular means narrated in Genesis 35:22? There was a widespread practice of the eldest son inheriting the wives of his father along with the estate which existed in contemporary Canaanite society in Jacob's time. As the first-born son, Reuben, in effect, prematurely lays claim to an inheritance that he would have expected to be his eventually. Later, the Mosaic Law legislates against such a practice which forbids a sexual relationship between a son and the wife of his father (Lev. 18:8; 20:11, reinforced by the curse of Deut. 27:20).

This leads to a third consideration that is crucial to the understanding of the Reuben-Bilhah episode in Genesis 35. It is apparent from several biblical narratives and from ancient Near Eastern tests that in matters of leadership, possession of the concubine(s) of one's father or of one's vanquished enemy on the part of the aspirant or usurper bestowed legitimacy on the assumption of heirship and validated the succession. That is why Ish-Bosheth, son of Saul, was so alarmed when Abner lay with his father's concubine and why the accused had to defend his loyalty (2 Sam. 3:7-8). This same principle explains why Nathan's censure of David when he took Bathsheba included this sentence: "Thus said the LORD, the God of Israel: 'It was I who anointed you king over Israel and it was I who rescued you from the hand of Saul. I have you your master's house and possession of your master's wives . . .'" (2 Sam. 12:7-8). The same explains Absalom's actions in the passages cited above, and that is why King Solomon, in 1 Kings 2:13-25, could interpret the request of Adonijah for Abishag as proof of treasonable intentions.



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All this leads to the conclusion that Reuben's bid to promote his mother's rights is at the same time a calculated challenge to his father's authority. His move is more political than lustful. The summary account in Genesis 35:22 hides an attempt to usurp the leadership of the Israelite tribes. Its failure is reflected in Jacob's rebuke of Genesis 49:3-4, in which he removes Reuben from hegemony over the tribes. In 1 Chronicles 5:1 the text explicitly relates that Reuben was "the first-born of Israel, but when he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph." It is not unlikely that the involvement of Reubenites in the wilderness rebellion against Moses, recorded in Numbers 16, also is in some way connected with that tribe's loss of status.

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- 9     **And the sons of Reuben: Hanoch [3] and Pallu [4] and Hezron [5] and Carmi [6].**
- 10    **And the sons of Simeon [7]: Jemuel [8] and Jamin [9] and Ohad [10] and Jachin [11] and Zohar [12] and Shaul [13] the son of a Canaanite woman.**
- 11    **And the sons of Levi [14]: Gershon [15], Kohath [16], and Merari [17].**
- 12    **And the sons of Judah [18]: Er and Onan, and Shelah [19] and Perez [20] and Zerah [21] (but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan). And the sons of Perez were Hezron [22] and Hamul [23].**
- 13    **And the sons of Issachar [24]: Tola [25] and Puvvah [26] and Iob [27] and Shimron [28].**
- 14    **And the sons of Zebulun [29]: Sered [30] and Elon [31] and Jahleel [32].**
- 15    **These are the sons of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, with his daughter Dinah [33]; all his sons and his daughters numbered thirty-three.**
- 

The sum total of the progeny of Leah listed is thirty-three (excluding Er and Onan, v. 12) The six sons of Leah are listed and the sum total of thirty-three is given at the end. That it is a mere list is shown by the simple enumeration of the names: "the sons of Reuben: A, B, C, D"; interruption is rare, as at the end of verse 10, "Shaul the son of a Canaanite woman," a reference to a well-known figure. A note is added to the sons of Judah, "Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan" (v. 12). This is the only place in vv. 9-15 where two grandsons, sons of Perez, are named. Among all the sons, one daughter is listed, Dinah, whose unique contribution to Israel's history (cf. Genesis 34) warrants her name being given.

It is also noted that Simeon's son Shaul was the "son of a Canaanite woman" (v. 10; So Ex. 6:15 but not in Num. 26:13 or 1 Chron. 4:24). The exceptional notice reflects the disfavor in which tribal intermarriage with Canaanites was held (cf. Gen. 24:3). This suggests that the wives of Jacob's other sons were not women of the Canaanites (including Tamar). Probably the other sons of Israel had married women who were descendants of Ishmael or Esau, or possibly of Keturah.

Only a few comments are needed to explain the apparent inconsistencies between this list and other lists found in the Hebrew Scriptures. The four sons of Reuben listed in verse 9 are identical to those recorded in the parallel genealogies of Exodus 6:14, Numbers 26:5-6, and 1 Chronicles 5:3. However, this would seem to conflict with Genesis 42:37. The earlier passage indicates that a year before, when the brothers returned from their first journey to Egypt, Reuben had only two sons. However, it is possible that two more were born to him from his wife or wives in the period between their first trip to Egypt and their final removal thereto.

The name "Jemuel" in verse 10 is found elsewhere in Exodus 6:15. However, in Numbers 26:12 and 1 Chronicles 4:24, the name is listed as Nemuel. The difference may be a matter of dialect. The name "Ohad" (v. 10) is missing from Numbers 26:12 and 1 Chronicles 4:24, perhaps due to the fact that the clan disappeared in later times. "Zohar" (v. 10) is also found in Exodus 6:15. However, in Numbers 26:13 and 1 Chronicles 4:24 it is replaced by Zerah. Both names mean "shining, brightness." Only Perez's sons are named (v. 12) because his was the most important of the clans: David was his descendant (Ruth 4:18-22).

All commentators surveyed, both conservative and liberal, have a chronological difficulty concerning the mention of Judah's grandsons in Genesis 46:12 (which incidentally presupposes a knowledge of chapter 38). Obviously Judah's sons Perez and Zerah were quite young, perhaps just a few months old, when they traveled to Egypt. Therefore it would have been impossible for Perez to have fathered Hezron and Hamul, his two sons mentioned in Genesis 46:12, before the journey into Egypt.

A close look, however, at Genesis 46:12 reveals a variation in the mention of Hezron and Hamul. The end of the verse reads: "And the sons of Perez were (וְהָיָה) Hezron and Hamul." Yet throughout Genesis 46, the listing of descendants was done without the use of a verbal form. For example, verse

12a reads, "And the sons of Judah: Er and Onan and Shelah and Perez and Zerah."

Cassuto comments on the "special phraseology" employed in the mention of Hezron and Hamul: "This external variation creates the impression that the Bible wished to give us here some special information that was different from what it desired to impart relative to the other descendants of Israel" (Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies*, 34). Cassuto then explains the intention behind this special phraseology:

It intended to inform us thereby that the sons of Perez were not among those who went down to Egypt, but are mentioned here for some other reason. This is corroborated by the fact that Joseph's sons were also not of those who immigrated into Egypt, and they, too, are mentioned by a different formula (p. 35).

While the author considered it necessary to mention Hezron and Hamul in the list of Jacob's family, it was done in such a way as to distinguish them from the descendants who actually migrated to Egypt with Jacob.

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- 16 **And the sons of Gad [1]: Ziphion [2] and Haggi [3], Shuni [4] and Ezbon [5], Eri [6] and Arodi [7] and Areli [8].**
- 17 **And the sons of Asher [9]: Imnah [10] and Ishvah [11] and Ishvi [12] and Beriah [13] and their sister Serah [14]. And the sons of Beriah: Heber [15] and Malchiel [16].**
- 18 **These are the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to his daughter Leah; and she bore to Jacob these sixteen persons.**
- 

The sixteen descendants of Zilpah consist of two sons, eleven grandsons, one granddaughter, and two great-grandsons. The two great-grandsons (Heber and Malchiel, v. 17) are presumably included in the list because they were the only great-grandsons of Zilpah that had been born prior to the move into Egypt.

The sixteen grandsons of Zilpah, stemming from Gad and Asher, are listed without interruption or additions; here also two grandchildren are named, two sons of Beriah (v. 17b). The note "whom Laban gave to his daughter Leah" presupposes a knowledge of the Jacob-Esau narrative.

Only a few distinctive items need to be mentioned. Gad is seventh in the list of sons; the numerical value of the letters of his name is seven, and he has seven descendants. Elsewhere in other genealogical lists, Ziphion appears as Zephon (Num. 26:15). Ozni in Numbers 26:16 is the fourth son instead of Ezbon. Ishvah is also listed in 1 Chronicles 7:30. He is omitted, however, from the list in Numbers 26:44. Serah is also specified in Numbers 26:46 and 1 Chronicles 7:30. It is inconceivable that Jacob's twelve sons should have had fifty-three sons in all and only one daughter. Verse 15 specifically refers to the daughters of Leah, for instance, without giving their names. In light of the general biblical tendency to omit women from the genealogies, there must be some extraordinary reason for mentioning her in this particular one, although not a hint of it is given in the text. We have a similar case in "Iscah" in Genesis 11:29, the daughter of Haran (see also Gen. 4:22 and 36:22; cf. 28:9; 33:3).

It has been pointed out that two grandsons of Asher are listed (v. 17: Heber and Malchiel). This would not be impossible, however, since Asher could have married some years before Judah did. If we check back in the record, Jacob was married at the age of 84 (cf. Gen. 29:20, 27) and was now 130 years old (Gen. 47:9). Asher could thus have been about 40 by this time and it would have been possible for him to have grandchildren. There is, admittedly, no evidence that Asher married at an early age.

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- 19    **The sons of Jacob's wife Rachel: Joseph [1] and Benjamin [2].**  
 20    **Now to Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh [3] and Ephraim [4], whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him.**  
 21    **And the sons of Benjamin: Bela [5] and Becher [6] and Ashbel [7], Gera [8] and Naaman [9], Ehi [10] and Rosh [11], Muppim [12] and Huppim [13] and Ard [14].**  
 22    **These are the sons of Rachel, who were born to Jacob; *there were* fourteen persons in all.**
- 

Of the four mothers, only Rachel is called "wife." This is because she is listed after a concubine. The title thus affirms Rachel's superior status (cf. see notes on v. 8).

The genealogy of Benjamin presents special problems. Ten sons are listed here, whereas Numbers 26:38-40 records five sons (and two grandsons), 1 Chronicles 7:6 has three sons, and 1 Chronicles 8:1ff. has five sons. Moreover, the names and the order of seniority differ in the various lists.

Some further particulars to be noted are: Becher is not mentioned in Numbers 26:38-40 or in 1 Chronicles 8:1. According to Numbers 26:35, the clan of Becherites was associated with Ephraim. The name appears as that of a Benjaminite in 2 Samuel 20:1. Ashbel is the second son in Numbers 26:38 and in 1 Chronicles 8:1. Gera appears neither in Numbers 26 nor in 1 Chronicles 7. According to the Septuagint here and to 1 Chronicles 8:3, he was the son of Bela. All other bearers of the name Gera are Benjaminites (Judg. 3:15; 2 Sam. 16:5; 19:17). Naaman does not appear in 1 Chronicles 7, but the Septuagint in this passage, in Numbers 26:40, and in 1 Chronicles 8:4 makes him Bela's son. Ehi, though omitted in 1 Chronicles 7, he is probably to be identified with Ahiram, Benjamin's third son according to Numbers 26:38. In 1 Chronicles 8:1 Aharah occupies this place. Rosh is Bela's son in the Septuagint list but appears in none of the parallel lists. Muppim is Bela's son in the Septuagint. This form of the name occurs nowhere else. In Numbers 26:39 Shephupham is Benjamin's fourth son, and Shephuphan is the eighth son of Bela in 1 Chronicles 8:5. The Septuagint omits Huppim. In Numbers 26:39 Benjamin's fifth son is called Hupham. In the Septuagint Ard is the son of Gera, while in Numbers 26:40 he is listed as Bela's son. Addar is a son of Bela in 1 Chronicles 8:3.

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- 23    **And the sons of Dan [1]: Hushim [2].**  
 24    **And the sons of Naphtali [3]: Jahzeel [4] and Guni [5] and Jezer [6] and Shillem [7].**  
 25    **These are the sons of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to his daughter Rachel, and she bore these to Jacob; *there were seven persons in all.***
- 

Curiously, in verse 23 the Hebrew reads "sons" (בָּנָי/*bēnē*), and the incongruity of a plural with a single name has been variously explained. An early tradition--in Jubilees 44:28--gives Dan originally five sons; four died and their names were omitted from the list. This explanation is accepted by some Rabbinic scholars (Ibn Ezra and Hizkuni). However, the most convincing suggestion is that the plural simply follows the stereotyped formulaic pattern. This is supported by the analogy of Numbers 26:8, 42f., and 1 Chronicles 1:41 and 2:8.

In Numbers 26:42 Hushim (חֻשִׁים/*husim*) is call Shuham (שׁוּחָם/*shuhām*), an inversion of the consonants. The list of names in verse 24 is the same as given in Numbers 26:48 and 1 Chronicles 7:13, except that in 1 Chronicles 7:13 Jahzeel appears as Jahziel and Shillem as Shallum.

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- 26** All the persons belonging to Jacob, who came to Egypt, his direct descendants, not including the wives of Jacob's sons, were sixty-six persons in all,  
**27** and the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt were two; all the persons of the house of Jacob, who came to Egypt, were seventy.
- 

"His direct descendants" is literally, "that came out of his loin" (cf. Ex. 1:5; Judg. 8:30). While the loins are the seat of procreative power in the Hebrew Scriptures, it is possible that the word in the singular here is an euphemism for the reproductive organ (see further notes on Gen. 47:29).

A question immediately arises: How is the number "seventy" to be understood (see also Ex. 1:5 and Deut. 10:22)? The section itself demands a literal understanding of the number, since thirty-three (Gen. 46:15) plus sixteen (Gen. 46:18) plus fourteen (Gen. 46:22) plus seven (Gen. 46:25) equals seventy. And then how does the "seventy" of Genesis 46:27 relate to the "sixty-six" of 46:26?

Leah's children and grandchildren (v. 15)	33
Zilpah's children and grandchildren (v. 18)	16
Rachel's children and grandchildren (v. 22)	14
Bilhah's children and grandchildren (v. 25)	7
	70
Dinah (v. 15)	+ 1
	71
Er and Onan (who died in Canaan; v. 12); Joseph and his two sons, already in Egypt (v. 20)	-5
Those who went to Egypt with Jacob (v. 26)	66
Joseph, Manasseh, Ephraim, Jacob (v. 27)+ 4	70
Jacob and his progeny in Egypt (v. 27)	70

The narrative is clear that the total number of the descendants were "seventy," verse 27. However, within the passage itself that number is arrived at in two different ways. First, there is a general list of the family of Jacob with subtotals: "thirty-three" (v. 15), "sixteen" (v. 18), "fourteen" (v. 22), and "seven" (v. 25), which totals seventy. This list includes Jacob himself (notice the addition of "Jacob and his descendants" to "These are the names of the Israelites," v. 8) and includes Joseph (v. 19) and his two sons born in Egypt (v. 20) but not Er and Onan (v. 12)

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who died in Canaan before the journey to Egypt. The subtotals in the list also include Dinah (v. 15). The difficulty with this way of reading the list is the addition of "sons and daughters of his," which appears to exclude Jacob, but verse 8 has dealt with that.

Second, a further subtotal is given in verses 26-27: all those of the house of Jacob who came to Egypt equaled sixty-six (v. 26). Since that number is said to include only "those who were [Jacob's] direct descendants" (v. 26) and to exclude [Jacob's] sons' wives," Jacob, Dinah, and Serah are also not in the number. Some have suggested that Shaul, the son of a Canaanite (v. 10), is also to be excluded, which gives sixty-six. Others suggest that Joseph was not included in the sixty-six, but verse 27 gives no grounds for this assumption. It appears certain that only Joseph's two sons were to be added to the subtotal of sixty-six. When Dinah and Serah and the two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, are added, the total is seventy. The final number of seventy is consistent with Exodus 1:5 and Deuteronomy 10:22, both of which list seventy as the number of the descendants of Israel who went down into Egypt.

The Septuagint lists five more names at the end of verse 20. The names are derived from Numbers 26:29-36. Since the Septuagint also gives the number as seventy-five in Exodus 1:5, the extra names appear to be intentional. Recently, Hebrew copies of Exodus 1:5 have been found that also contain the number seventy-five (4QExoda). This was apparently the tradition followed by Stephen in Acts 7:14b. On *textual grounds* alone the Septuagint represents the better text in that the Hebrew Text (MT) appears to be a harmonization to Deuteronomy 10:22. However, the compositional interest of the Pentateuch in the number seventy weighs in favor of the Hebrew Text. It is not without importance that Hebrew texts from Qumran and the Septuagint vary considerably from the MT of Deuteronomy 32:8, where there is a thematic statement of the significance of the correspondence in number between the seventy nations in Genesis 10 and the "members of Jacob's family." The Qumran texts and the Septuagint read "the number of the sons of God." On the other hand, in Genesis 10 the tradition that lies behind the Septuagint may have included the four kingdoms of Nimrod (Gen. 10:10) and the Philistines (Gen. 14), thus making the total number of the table of nations equal seventy-five.

The genealogical list of names in these verses is given so that ample evidence shall be provided to demonstrate that growth into an innumerable people was eminently feasible, just as the LORD had promised! The listing by names is provided so that at the exodus it may be believed that those who came

out of Egypt were indeed the descendants of those who went down with Jacob and were the legitimate heirs of the land of Canaan.

### Joseph Appears To Israel In Egypt (verses 28-30)

The account of the journey of Jacob to Egypt is resumed in verse 28, continuing from verse 7 which was interrupted by the genealogy (vv. 8-26).

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- 28 Now he sent Judah before him to Joseph, to point out *the way* before him to Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen.
- 29 And Joseph prepared his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel; as soon as he appeared before him, he fell on his neck and wept on his neck a long time.
- 30 Then Israel said to Joseph, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face, that you are still alive."
- 

Notes on Genesis 45:10 explained the intent of Joseph in the second sentence of his message to his father: "You will live in the region of Goshen." That is why Jacob would not go any further when arriving in Goshen.

After the family had arrived in Goshen, Joseph came out in his chariot to greet "Israel," his father (v. 29). It is possible that "Israel" is used here since "Israel" had sent him on his mission of reconciliation those many years ago (cf. Gen. 37:13).

The text literally says that "Joseph hitched his chariot," himself, as Abraham also of high status (cf. Gen. 23:6) "saddled his donkey" himself (Gen. 22:2ff.). By stating that Joseph did the action and not one of his agents heightens the impression of Joseph excitedly rushing forth to Goshen to greet his father. Despite his exalted position, he does not wait for his father to come to him; but instead now, Joseph's retinue, about to accompany the vizier, watches Joseph himself harness the horses to his splendidly arrayed chariot to show honor to his father, the patriarch.

Verse 29 tells us that Joseph "appeared" to Jacob as God had "appeared" to Abraham (cf. Gen. 12:7; 17:1; 18:1) to Isaac (cf. Gen. 26:2, 24) and to himself (cf. Gen. 35:9). Jacob gazes up at his son, who stands on the chariot. No other human being "appears" in Scriptures. In this manner, Joseph is highly exalted.



The reunion of father and son, cruelly separated for more than twenty-two years, is described by gesture alone. Joseph dismounts, and falls upon his father's neck and weeps. The intensity of the scene is underscored by "a long time" (Ruth 1:14; Ps. 84:5). No words are initially exchanged--how can they be--for none can be adequate. Only the sounds of Joseph's weeping pervade the silence.

When he could finally manage to speak, Israel could merely sob that he was now able to die happy and in peace. His beloved son was still alive, and he had seen his face!

Joseph's "appearing," rekindled the spirit of "Jacob" (see notes on vv. 2, 5) to become "Israel" again. "Now," having seen Joseph alive, the patriarch had nothing else to live for, having attained the greatest joy in life.

The concluding report in verses 28-30 is interesting from two perspectives: first, Judah seemed again to come to the fore in the Patriarchal commission. Curiously, it was Judah, not Joseph, who led the sons of Israel into the land of Goshen. Once again it appears as though the writer has singled out Judah for special attention over against Joseph.

Although in the Joseph Narrative as a whole it was Joseph who was responsible for the preservation of the sons in Egypt, here, within the detail of the passage, it was Judah who "pointed out the way" (לְהוֹרֹת *lehôrôt*; NIV, "to get directions," v. 28) to the land of Goshen. It is only fitting that Judah, who bore responsibility for separating Joseph from Jacob (Gen. 37:26-27). Such a special focus on Judah is part of an overall strategy of the writer to highlight the crucial role of Judah in God's plan to bring about Israel's deliverance. The prominence of Judah is seen most clearly in Jacob's words of blessing to his twelve sons (Gen. 49:8-12).

The second reason why this concluding report is interesting, is because of the motifs of life and death--so common in Joseph's experiences--were reiterated in the expression of the patriarch. Israel could die in peace because Joseph was alive; when he had thought that Joseph was dead, he could have no rest.

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## FINAL REMARKS ABOUT GENEALOGIES

We do not normally read the genealogies in the biblical texts. The names are difficult to pronounce and the repetition boring. We struggle to know how to read the genealogies, how we should understand them. Sometimes we find tension between different genealogical lists. For example, the names found in Genesis 4:17-26 appear also in Genesis 5:1-32, but in different order and with slight variations on some of the names. Usually we do not read the genealogies closely enough to notice such variations.

In our culture we record genealogies to tell exactly who is related to whom by blood and marriage. We develop elaborately branched genealogies with complex relationships between their various segments. We seldom find such elaborately segmented genealogies in the Scriptures. The function of genealogy in ancient Israel was less to record data than to record groupings. Genealogies were lists that grouped and ordered different aspects of Israel's domestic, political and religious life.

Perhaps we can learn to ask different questions as we read biblical genealogies. Suppose we begin by asking why each genealogy appears in its particular place. Often we find such a list at the end or sometimes the beginning of a narrative section. Positioned there, the genealogy may function to bring a narrative to a close or serve as a transition to the next narrative (e.g., Gen. 36). The list may group some persons together, distinguishing them from other persons that have been or will be important in the narrative (e.g., Gen. 25:12-18). Or the genealogy may function to tie a person or group to its roots: family, religious, or political roots.

Second, we need to look inside the genealogy to see what stands out as important in the flow of the list. Even in the most repetitious genealogy, we can search for variations and pay close attention to those. Not always, but often those variations signal important elements in the genealogy as it comes to us.

Third, we need to look closely at the genealogy to find out why this list was passed on. For example, Genesis 4:17-22 served to group together various occupations, and Genesis 10 organized different national groups.

Genealogies may never become favorite texts. However, as we learn how to read them, we can find different kinds of information than simply who gave birth to whom.

## APPLICATION

The message of the move concerns the fulfillment of God's Word in prophecy and in dream, confirming the promises and thereby encouraging people in their faith. Through Joseph, God brought about the unity of the family and their move to Egypt according to His predetermined plan. Central to this account is the dream of Jacob, for in it God explained to the patriarch what he was doing and affirmed that the promises would yet be fulfilled. Such words of comfort and clarification in times of confusion and perplexity serve to strengthen the faith of God's people.

After twenty-three years, Joseph and Jacob were thus reunited. Jacob rejoiced to see Joseph alive, for this was the son whom he had designated as the heir and whom God had chosen to rule over the family. The gathering was more than a family reunion; it was proof that God's previously revealed plans had never been set aside.

In all ages God's people are constantly learning--and being amazed at--how God works to bring about His promises, at the same time developing faith in His people. ***BELIEVERS MUST RESPOND TO GOD'S SUPERNATURAL DEALINGS IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF LIFE BY MAKING THEIR DECISIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE WISDOM OF DIVINELY GUIDED LEADERS, IN ASSURANCE OF THE FULFILLMENT OF THE PROMISES, AND IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THE FUTURE OF THE COVENANT WILL BE DEVELOPED FROM THEM.***

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of Jacob receiving another vision? Compare this vision with the others which he had received in past times.
2. How do you reconcile the number of the people going to Egypt?
3. Why are the names important here?
4. Reconstruct Jacob's thinking when he heard the news that Joseph was actually alive.
5. Why was it necessary for Jacob's family to remain distinct from their neighbors?
6. Explain the significance of our narrator placing Jacob's genealogy in the chiasmic center of the Joseph Narrative.
7. What is the significance of Joseph "appearing" to Jacob?



## Genesis 46:31--47:27

### By Wisdom Kings Reign

#### ISRAEL'S ARRIVAL IN EGYPT

With the family now settled in Egypt under the rule of Joseph, a major phase in God's program was completed--yet the program would continue. Joseph had to ensure that his family would be taken care of and that the land of Egypt would prosper so that they could live there and flourish until God delivered them. Moreover, because Pharaoh treated Joseph's family with great kindness, Joseph would work to ensure that Pharaoh would prosper. All of these tasks by God's theocratic administrator required wisdom from above.

The present section may be divided into two spheres of Joseph's work: the presentation of the family to Pharaoh and the rule over the land. The first part accounts for Joseph's care for the family. As Westermann notes, all that was needed in the story was the short note in Genesis 47:11-12; but instead, a detailed presentation before Pharaoh was recorded, showing "the narrator's concern to base the settlement of Jacob's family and the provision made during the famine expressly on the Pharaoh's guarantee" (*Genesis*, 1986, III:167). The second part of the passage seems to be an independent tradition about the administration of Joseph (Coats calls it a tax etiology [*Genesis*, 1976:298]). It has been recorded in this context because it carries forward the motifs of the preceding section and balances structurally with Genesis 40:1--41:57 (see Figure 27): in the first place, Pharaoh provided land and food for Jacob's family; in the second place, Joseph provided food for the people in exchange for their land and livestock. Both provisions are attributable to Joseph's wisdom.

Throughout the Joseph Narrative our writer has been careful to allow the key events to be recounted twice. The events of Genesis 46 and 47 are no exception. Joseph has recounted his plan to his brothers in chapter 46 and now, in chapter 47, the writer recounts the outcome of the events of the plan. The point is to show that Joseph's plan was successful and thereby reinforce a central theme of the Narrative: "The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered" (Gen. 39:2). Joseph's wisdom resulted in the Israelites dwelling safely in the land of Goshen while there was severe famine in the land of Canaan (Gen. 47:1-4). Pharaoh's response (vv. 5-6) was even more generous than the

previous episode would have suggested. Not only did he grant their wish and allow Joseph's brothers to settle in Goshen, he also put the brothers in charge of his own livestock as well, a result curiously reminiscent of Joseph's own rise to power in the house of Pharaoh (cf. Gen. 41:41) and significantly linked to his "beloved-son" status (Gen. 37:2). Thus the Narrative shows that Joseph's fortune was duplicated in the fortune of his brothers.

### Source Criticism Considerations

This passage of Scripture is generally divided between two sources. This division is usually made with the largest section being ascribed to "J," namely Genesis 46:28--47:4, 5a, 6b, 12. The rest is given to "P," namely, Genesis 47:5b, 6a, 7-11. This intermingling of the various sources is defended on the basis of certain alleged irregularities and repetitions.

It is claimed that two different audiences with Pharaoh are recorded. Allegedly five of Joseph's brothers made their appearance before the king as it is recorded in Genesis 47:2-4, while Jacob made a separate appearance according to Genesis 47:7-10. With respect to the place where Joseph's family settled in Egypt, Genesis 47:6 mentions the land of Goshen, while Genesis 47:11 speaks of the land of Rameses. We will not enter into these matters at this time. As we proceed with the expositional notes, however, it will become clear that there are no essential conflicts or repetitions here, and consequently there is no substantial basis for the arbitrary assignment of the material to multiple sources.

### THEOLOGICAL IDEAS

In Proverbs 8:15, wisdom declares, "By me kings reign, and rulers decree justice." Joseph's administration of the affairs of Egypt during the famine exemplifies this perception of wisdom's importance. His purpose was to deliver his family, and the world as well, from the severe famine. He accomplished this deliverance through a wisdom given to him from above to discern the times and know the future.

The wisdom that Joseph exemplified, and Solomon after him, was not merely human wisdom, or quick and clever decisions at the appropriate times. Rather, this quality was extraordinary perception and insight by a faithful servant of the LORD who was living in harmony with the revealed will of God. That will had been made clear to the patriarchs for generations: God will

bless this family and make them into a great nation. Through his wisdom Israel was able to prosper under Pharaoh's kindness, and because Pharaoh favored the need of Abraham, he also grew wealthy.

In connection with the preceding thought, we might ask what is the strategy of our writer in asserting the account of Joseph and his brothers (Gen. 42--46) in the midst of the narratives dealing with Joseph's rise to power in Egypt (Gen. 39--41, 47). The answer may lie in the way in which this final narrative resembles the story of Joseph and his brothers. Throughout those narratives the theme was repeatedly expressed that Joseph's wisdom and administrative skills saved the life of his brothers and father. Thus at the beginning of the Narrative, Jacob had told his sons to go down to Egypt to buy grain "so that we may live and not die" (Gen. 42:2). Then during the second year of the famine (Gen. 45:6), Judah told his father to let them return to Egypt "that we may live and not die" (Gen. 43:8). Finally, when he revealed himself to them, Joseph told his brothers that God had sent him to Egypt "to preserve life" (Gen. 45:5, 7, 8).

In keeping with that emphasis, the section underscores this theme with the statement of the Egyptians to Joseph as they seek to buy grain from him: "Why should we die in your presence?" (Gen. 47:15). Then it continues with the account of their return to Joseph "the next year" (Gen. 47:18), when they again said, "Why should we die before your eyes" (Gen. 47:19) and then again in the same verse, "that we may live and not die." Such repetitions in the surface structure of the Narrative suggest that a thematic strategy is at work. First with his brothers and then with the Egyptians, Joseph's wisdom is seen as the source of life for everyone in the land.

A further evidence of a distinct thematic strategy behind the present narrative in Genesis 47 can be seen in the ironic twist given the earlier narratives by the outcome of this chapter. The Joseph Narrative began with Joseph (יֹסֵף/*yôsēp*) being sold (וַיִּמְכְּרוּ/*wayyimkrû*; Gen. 37:27, 28) into slavery (עֶבֶד/*'ebed*; Gen. 39:17) for twenty pieces of silver (כֶּסֶף/*kesep*; Gen. 37:28). Now, at the conclusion, Joseph is shown selling (מָכַר/*mākrû*; Gen. 47:20) the whole of the land of Egypt into slavery (עֲבָדִים/*'abādîm*; Gen. 47:19, 25) and taking their silver (הַכֶּסֶף/*hakkeseṣ*; v. 18). In the end, because of the wisdom of Joseph, the offspring of Abraham became "fruitful" (v. 27), "increased greatly in number," and were dwelling safely and prosperously in the "region" (אֶרֶץ/*'eres*) of Goshen. Such a picture appears to be an obvious replication of the intended blessing of the early chapters of Genesis: "Be fruitful (פָּרָו/*p'rû*) and increase in number (וַיִּרְבּוּ/*ûrbû*); fill the earth (הָאָרֶץ/*hā'āreṣ*).

## STRUCTURE, SYNTHESIS AND TRANSLATION

### Structure

Each part of this section of the story provides a concluding note to the Joseph story: Genesis 47:11-12 expresses the completion of the family's move to Goshen under Joseph's provision and protection, just as Pharaoh had guaranteed; and Genesis 47:27 also concludes that the family was prosperous in the land of Goshen. These two concluding notes unite the two sections at the end of the Joseph Narrative. The Narrative next returns to Jacob's activities in Egypt.

The first section (Gen. 46:31--47:12) records the presentation before Pharaoh. It traces the preparation for the presentation (Gen. 46:31-34), the brothers' audience with Pharaoh (Gen. 47:1-6), and Jacob's audience (vv. 7-10). The climax of these audiences, and the climax of the episode, comes in Jacob's blessing before Pharaoh (vv. 7 and 10).

The second section relates Joseph's administrative activities in Egypt (Gen. 47:13-27). The emphasis here is on Pharaoh's prosperity through Joseph as the people sold their land, their livestock, and themselves to Pharaoh for food.

### Chiastic Structure

- A Joseph prepares his family to receive Pharaoh's favor (46:31-34)  
 A' Israel (as a people) prospered and multiplied greatly in Egypt (47:27)

The conclusion of this episode (Gen. 47:27; A') is separated from Genesis 46:31-34 (A) by the insertion of the brothers' audience before Pharaoh (Gen. 47:1-6), Jacob's audience (Gen. 47:7-10), Joseph settling his family in Egypt, and his administrative activities in Egypt (Gen. 47:13-26).

- B Joseph chooses five brothers to present before Pharaoh (1-2)  
 B' Joseph collects one-fifth from all the people (except priests; 20-26)

Almost by a parenthetical remark, it is reported that Joseph brought only five of his brothers with him, representative of all the brothers (B). This is a curious detail--why only five?--to the exclusion of the six! Our narrator does not give us the reason. The counterbalance of B' (vv. 20-26) reflects also

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**CHIASTIC ARRANGEMENT OF GENESIS 46:31--47:27**

- A Joseph prepares his family to receive Pharaoh's favor (46:31-34)
- B Joseph chooses five brothers to present before Pharaoh (47:1-2)
- C Brothers' reason for being in Egypt: the famine is severe (3-4)
- D Pharaoh's decree that Joseph's family may settle in Egypt (5-6)
- E **JACOB BLESSES PHARAOH (7-10)**
- D' Joseph settles his family in Egypt (11-12)
- C' Joseph's reason for collecting money: the famine is severe (13-19)
- B' Joseph collects one-fifth from all the people (except priests) (20-26)
- A' Israel (as a people) prospered and multiplied greatly in Egypt (27)

Figure 29.

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a numeration: the Egyptians must hand over to the Pharaoh one-fifth of the produce that comes from the seed which Joseph gave to the people--except for the priests. The priests, paralleling the six brothers that were not included in Pharaoh's audience, are excluded from Joseph's edict. Furthermore, it should not be passed over that

- C Brothers' reason for being in Egypt: the famine is severe (3-4)
- C' Joseph's reason for collecting money: the famine is severe (13-19)

There are echoes of the famine motif in the brothers' request at they stand before Pharaoh and the Egyptians as they bow before Joseph; this motif binds these two parts together.

In verses 3-4 (C) The Pharaoh addresses the brothers with a question about their occupation. They answer as Joseph had instructed them (cf. Gen. 46:33f). They explain that even if they were permitted to purchase further grain in Egypt, their herds and flocks would perish, because Canaan has ceased to provide grain, which they would find in Goshen. Verses 13-19 (C') underscore the severity of the famine, not only in Canaan, but in Egypt as well (vv. 13, 14, 15a). Whereas in C Joseph's brothers have an audience before Pharaoh, in C' the people of the land have an audience before Joseph: both audiences are precipitated by the severity of the famine.



- D Pharaoh's decree that Joseph's family may settle in Egypt (5-6)  
 D' Joseph settles his family in Egypt (11-12)

The Pharaoh's approval, given in verses 5-6 (D), is spelled out in detail in verses 11-12 (D'). In verse 6b Pharaoh commands Joseph's family to settle (הוֹשֵׁב/*hōšēb*) in Egypt; this corresponds to verse 11a where Joseph settles (וַיֹּשֶׁב/*wayyōšēb*) his family in Egypt; this is as "Pharaoh had ordered" (v. 11e). Likewise the Pharaoh's order for Joseph's family to settle in the "best of the land" (בְּמֵטֵב הָאָרֶץ/*b'mētab hā'āreṣ*; v. 6b) recurs in verse 11c. One further note about DD', verse 11 is a synthesis of verse 6, for a note about the place should follow immediately on "so Joseph settled his father and his brothers" (v. 11a; corresponding again to v. 6); instead, a new sentence is inserted, "and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt . . . in the land of Rameses."

- E Jacob blesses Pharaoh (7-10)

The importance of the action transacting in this scene is artfully structured, with Jacob's blessing upon Pharaoh (b, b') being the only action repeated exactly:

- a Jacob Presented to Pharaoh (v. 7a)
- b Jacob Blesses Pharaoh (אֶת פְּרָעֹה יִצְחָק בֵּרַךְ; v. 7b)
- c Pharaoh's Question (v. 8).
- c' Jacob's Answer (v. 9).
- b' Jacob Blesses Pharaoh (אֶת פְּרָעֹה יִצְחָק בֵּרַךְ; v. 10a)
- a' Jacob Leaves Pharaoh (v. 10b)

## Synthesis

Joseph acted wisely in presenting his family to Pharaoh so that they received the best of the land from Pharaoh, whom Jacob blessed in return; and then by wisdom Joseph bought almost all the lands of Egypt for Pharaoh while saving the lives of the Egyptians and preserving Israel's prosperity in Goshen.

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**Translation****GENESIS 46:31-34**

- 31 Then Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, "I will go up and tell the news to Pharaoh, and say to him, 'My brothers and my father's household, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me.
- 32 The men are shepherds; they have always been breeders of livestock, and they have brought with them their flocks and herds and all that is theirs.'
- 33 So when Pharaoh summons you and asks, 'What is your occupation?'
- 34 you shall answer, 'Your servants have been breeders of livestock from the start until now, both we and our fathers'--so that you may stay in the region of Goshen. For all shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians."

**GENESIS 47:1-27**

- 1 Then Joseph came and reported to Pharaoh, saying, "My father and my brothers, with their flocks and herds and all that is theirs, have come from the land of Canaan and are now in the region of Goshen."
- 2 And he selected five from among his brothers, and presented them to Pharaoh.
- 3 Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?" They answered Pharaoh, "We your servants are shepherds, as were also our fathers.
- 4 We have come," they told Pharaoh, "to sojourn in this land, for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks, the famine being severe in the land of Canaan. Pray, then, let your servants stay in the region of Goshen."
- 5 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "As regards your father and your brothers who have come to you,
- 6 the land of Egypt is open before you: settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land; let them stay in the region of Goshen. And if you know any capable men among them, put them in charge of my livestock."
- 7 Joseph then brought his father Jacob and presented him to Pharaoh; and Jacob greeted Pharaoh.
- 8 Pharaoh asked Jacob, "How many are the years of your life?"
- 9 And Jacob answered Pharaoh, "The years of my sojourn [on earth] are one hundred and thirty. Few and hard have been the years of my life, nor do they come up to the life spans of my fathers during their sojourns."
- 10 Then Jacob bade Pharaoh farewell, and left Pharaoh's presence.
- 11 So Joseph settled his fathers and his brothers, giving them holdings in the choicest part of the land of Egypt, in the region of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded.

- 12 Joseph sustained his father, and his brothers, and all his father's household with bread, down to the little ones.
- 13 Now there was no bread in all the world, for the famine was very severe; both the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine.
- 14 Joseph gathered in all the money that was to be found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, as payment for the rations that were being procured, and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's place.
- 15 And when the money gave out in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, "Give us bread, lest we die before your very eyes; for the money is gone!"
- 16 And Joseph said, "Bring your livestock, and I will sell to you against your livestock, if the money is gone."
- 17 So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them bread in exchange for the horses, for the stocks of sheep and cattle, and the asses; thus he provided them with bread that year in exchange for all their livestock.
- 18 And when that year was ended, they came to him the next year and said to him, "We cannot hide from my lord that, with all the money and animal stocks consigned to my lord, nothing is left at my lord's disposal save our persons and our farmland.
- 19 Let us not perish before your eyes, both we and our land. Take us and our land in exchange for bread, and we with our land will be serifs to Pharaoh; provide the seed, that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become a waste."
- 20 So Joseph gained possession of all the farm land of Egypt for Pharaoh, every Egyptian having sold his field because the famine was too much for them; thus the land passed over to Pharaoh.
- 21 And he removed the population town by town, from one end of Egypt's border to the other.
- 22 Only the land of the priests he did not take over, for the priests had an allotment from Pharaoh, and they lived off the allotment which Pharaoh had made to them; therefore they did not sell their land.
- 23 Then Joseph said to the people, "Whereas I have this day acquired you and your land for Pharaoh, here is seed for you to sow the land.
- 24 And when harvest comes, you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh, and four-fifths shall be yours as seed for the fields and as food for you and those in your households, and as nourishment for your children."
- 25 And they said, "You have saved our lives! We are grateful to my lord, and we shall be serifs to Pharaoh."

- 26 And Joseph made it into a land law in Egypt, which is still valid, that a fifth should be Pharaoh's; only the land of the priests did not become Pharaoh's.
- 27 Thus Israel settled in the country of Egypt, in the region of Goshen; they acquired holdings in it, and were fertile and increased greatly.

### EXEGETICAL OUTLINE

- I. Through Joseph's wise planning, Pharaoh provided land and food for Jacob's family in Egypt in the midst of a famine (46:31--47:12).
- A. Joseph prepared his family for their audience with Pharaoh (46:31-34).
1. Joseph said that he would tell Pharaoh that his family had come from Canaan with all their possessions and that the men were herdsmen (31-32).
  2. Joseph instructed them to tell Pharaoh that they were herdsmen so that he would let them live in the land of Goshen (33-34).
- B. He presented his brothers to Pharaoh, who questioned them about their occupation and granted their request to live in the land of Goshen (47:1-6).
1. Joseph told Pharaoh that his family had come to the land of Goshen from Canaan (1).
  2. Joseph presented his brothers to Pharaoh (2).
  3. Joseph's brothers told Pharaoh that they were shepherds (3).
  4. Joseph's brothers explained that they had come to Egypt because of the severity of the famine and requested permission to live in the land of Goshen (4).
  5. Pharaoh offered Joseph the best of the land, granting the brothers' request for Goshen, and requested that Joseph put any capable men among them in charge of the royal livestock (5-6).
- C. He presented Jacob to Pharaoh, and Jacob responded with a blessing (47:1-7).
1. When Joseph presented Jacob to Pharaoh, the patriarch blessed him (7-8).
  2. When Pharaoh asked the old man how long he had lived, he explained that his days had been few and unpleasant, shorter than those of his fathers (9).
  3. Jacob blessed Pharaoh and left his presence (10).
- D. He settled Jacob and his family in the land of Rameses and provided them with food (47:11-12).

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- II. Joseph ruled wisely when he saved the lives of the Egyptians by providing food for them in exchange for their money, livestock, land, and lives, thus acquiring almost all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh (47:13-27):
- A. Joseph sold grain to the Egyptians, gathering vast sums of money from Egypt and Canaan into Pharaoh's household (13-14).
  - B. He gave the Egyptians food for one year in exchange for their livestock (25-17).
  - C. The following year the Egyptians offered to become Pharaoh's slaves in exchange for food and seed so that they might live and cultivate the land (18-19).
  - D. He bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh except for property belonging to the priests, and he enslaved the people to Pharaoh, requiring a fifth of all the harvests (20-26).
    1. The land became Pharaoh's because Joseph bought the fields (20).
    2. Joseph enslaved the people of Egypt (21).
    3. Joseph did not buy the priests' lands because they lived off an allotment from Pharaoh (22).
    4. Joseph required a fifth of the harvest for Pharaoh (23-24).
    5. The Egyptians gratefully acknowledged that Joseph had saved their lives, and they requested that they might become Pharaoh's slaves (25).
    6. Joseph made a statute that Pharaoh should have a fifth of the land (26).
  - E. Israel lived in the land of Goshen, prospering materially and numerically (27).
- III. Near the end of his life, Jacob by faith made Joseph swear to bury him in the cave of Machpelah and not in Egypt (28-31).

### EXPOSITION OF THE PASSAGE

- I. *Through wisdom God's people can ensure that successive generations of believers can enjoy the blessings of God (46:31-47:12).*

Joseph had told his brothers that they could settle in the land of Goshen (cf. Gen. 45:10). The family evidently made this their destination upon their arrival in Egypt. Even so, before they actually proceeded to settle there,

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Joseph deemed it advisable to gain the approval of Pharaoh for this arrangement. He therefore told his family that he would inform Pharaoh about their arrival, stressing the fact that they were shepherds and that they had brought their flocks and herds with them. Since the land of Goshen was especially suitable for grazing livestock, Joseph advised them as to what they should say to Pharaoh when they appeared before the king. They were to declare that both they and their fathers had been shepherds.

Earlier, Joseph had designated Goshen as the proposed dwelling of the family (Gen. 45:10), but Pharaoh, in confirming the invitation to settle in Egypt, has left the place unspecified (Gen. 45:17-20). Joseph must now obtain clear and unambiguous royal authorization for Israelite settlement in Goshen. He therefore shrewdly prepares his brothers for an audience with Pharaoh and rehearses the speeches and answers to be given on that occasion so as to elicit the desired result.

#### **Joseph Prepares His Family To Receive Pharaoh's Favor (verses 31-34)**

Joseph's plan was simply to tell the Pharaoh that they were shepherds. As our narrator informs us, the Egyptians hated shepherds and thus would allow the Israelites to dwell off by themselves in the land of Goshen. In the Genesis 47, Joseph's plan succeeded, and the people were given the land of Goshen. In two juxtaposed scenes (Gen. 46:28-30 and 46:31-34), Joseph and Judah are placed in marked contrast. Judah led the brothers to the land of Goshen, but it was Joseph's wise plan that resulted in their being able to live there. This plan is another step in Joseph's affirmation of his Hebrew identity, as well as a clear manifestation of the blessing that accrues to the family of Jacob, who now enjoys "the fat of the land" (Gen. 45:18; cf. 27:28).

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- 31     **And Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, "I will go up and tell Pharaoh, and will say to him, 'My brothers and my father's household, who *were* in the land of Canaan, have come to me;**
- 32     **and the men are shepherds, for they have been keepers of livestock; and they have brought their flocks and their herds and all that they have.'"**
- 

The presentation before Pharaoh was designed to ensure that the family received a good land for their dwelling so that they might not only sur-

vive but flourish under God's blessing. To Jacob himself Joseph does not speak about this matter, for the patriarch is to be relieved from all tension. Joseph not only briefs his brothers on how to speak to Pharaoh but also wants all other members of the household to confirm the brothers' words if questioned.

It is with great difficulty why certain critical commentators do not understand the sequence of this passage in relation to what has preceded. For example, von Rad (*Genesis*, 1972:399) writes, "If one reads vv. 31-34 impartially, one gets the impression that the Pharaoh is here (in contrast to Gen. 45:16ff.) to be informed for the first time about the coming of Joseph's relatives," and why Speiser (*Genesis*, 1980:340), following von Rad, writes, "The news of Jacob's arrival comes as a surprise to Pharaoh." There is no puzzle at all: Pharaoh had explicitly told Joseph to invite his father's households (Gen. 45:17ff.), and Joseph simply plans now to inform the king that they have arrived!

The preparation by Joseph was a cautious one: he prepared them for their audience by instructing them to say that they were herdsmen (אֲנִשֵׁי מִקְנֵה רֹעִים / *ansê miqneh*), because a shepherd (רֹעֵה / *rō'eh*) was an abomination in Egypt. The Hebrew term for "herdsmen" occurs only here and in verse 34 and nowhere else in biblical literature. Furthermore, the brothers do not mention it in response to Pharaoh's question (Gen. 47:3). *Rō'eh* means both herdsman and shepherd. Shepherds may be their own herdsmen; yet they can also be "keepers of livestock," as the fathers were, with herdsmen as their servants (Gen. 13:7, 8; 26:16; 32:17ff.).

Joseph sought to circumvent the tension by a carefully worded answer. Joseph feared that the Egyptians would think of his family as unsettled nomads. He wanted, as Kidner says, "to ensure that Pharaoh's good-will would be to the family's real benefit, not to their detriment by drawing them into an alien way of life at the capital" (*Genesis*, 1967:210).

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- 33 "And it shall come about when Pharaoh calls you and says, 'What is your occupation?'
- 34a that you shall say, 'Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our fathers.'"
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With this parenthesis Joseph instructs them not to call themselves "shepherds" but "keepers of livestock," as they actually have been, because it sounds more honorific. In fact, Pharaoh himself owns livestock (Gen. 47:6).

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After these parenthetical verses, 33 and 34a, Joseph now explains why Pharaoh should learn that they are "shepherds":

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**34b "That you may live in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is loathsome to the Egyptians."**

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The reason why the Egyptians had an aversion to herdsman was because their occupation made them neglect the high Egyptian standards of cleanliness and refinement in care of their bodies. In addition, it seems possible that they refrained from contact with herdsmen simply because the shepherds would eat the animals which the Egyptians worshipped (cf. Gen. 43:32).

Joseph's strategy is simple: Pharaoh knew that Joseph's family was coming (Gen. 45:17-20), and because Pharaoh evidently had not made a formal commitment as to geographical location, Joseph emphasizes his family's long and honorable tradition of being shepherds so that Pharaoh, who had an aversion to shepherds, would more or less segregate Joseph's family from the Egyptians. Otherwise, there might be many--perhaps even Pharaoh himself--who would prefer to see the Israelites mix with the Egyptians, which in the end would encourage intermarriage and eventual assimilation, and thus drawing the Israelites into an alien way of life.

Some scholars have suggested that this claim by Joseph's family was not altogether accurate and, therefore, was intended to mislead Pharaoh. It is true that the patriarchal family had also engaged in tilling the soil in Canaan (Gen. 26:12; 27:28). Even so, their primary occupation was herding livestock (Gen. 12:16; 13:2, 7; 20:14; 26:14; 30:43; 32:5; 37:2, 13). One of the factors that Joseph considered to be important in influencing Pharaoh was the dislike that the Egyptians traditionally had for shepherds.

In view of this it was Joseph's conjecture that Pharaoh would agree to have them settle in Goshen, which was separated from the main centers of Egyptian life. This aversion to shepherds that is mentioned here is mentioned nowhere else. A disdain for cattle raisers is described vividly in Egyptian literature, and is also evident in artwork and monuments of various kinds. So too those who herded swine were held in low regard by the Egyptians. Although we find no similar references with respect to shepherds, this cannot justifiably be used to call the authenticity of verse 34 into question.



The Egyptians' abhorrence of shepherds has sometimes been ascribed to their bitter memories of the Hyksos rulers, after their expulsion, as "shepherd kings." But this interpretation of their name seems to have been the misunderstanding of a later age, and Joseph's period probably fell within their reign (although an increasing number of historians are favoring a revision of this chronology which would place the Hyksos considerably later than Joseph's time). The Hyksos ("Chiefs of Foreign Lands") people were Semitic invaders who dominated Egypt from about 1720 B.C. to 1580 B.C. After their expulsion, until the founding of the Nineteenth Dynasty, the Pharaohs ruled chiefly from Thebes, some 100 miles to the south.

#### **Joseph Chooses Five Brothers To Present Before Pharaoh (47:1-2)**

When Joseph presented some of his brothers to Pharaoh, they said that they were shepherds from a long line of shepherds. Their straightforward answer, although slightly different from Joseph's advice, was intended to achieve what Joseph's advice wanted to achieve--a separate life in the land of Goshen.

The point of this brief section is to affirm that Egypt's ruler gave the best land to Israel, in spite of any feelings he might have had about shepherds. The name Goshen has not yet been attested in Egyptian lists; Genesis 47:11 gives its later name, the district of Rameses (which could have been an earlier name after the name of the sun god). It was probably in the eastern delta.

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### **CHAPTER 47**

**1** Then Joseph went in and told Pharaoh, and said, "My father and my brothers and their flocks and their herds and all that they have, have come out of the land of Canaan; and behold, they are in the land of Goshen."

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The narrative moves immediately into the next segment with only a change in time and place. The events follow closely what was spoken by Joseph at the conclusion of the preceding narrative. Again the words of the central character provide the outline of the events to follow.

Joseph carries out his previously stated intention (Gen. 46:31). He must personally inform the king of his family's arrival because Pharaoh had originally extended the invitation to them through him (cf. Gen. 45:16-20).

Although Joseph was second in power in the kingdom, he could not make a decision to assign a large area of fertile land to a foreign tribe without the specific approval of Pharaoh. In addition, even a man of Joseph's stature ran the risk of jealousy from other officials, or criticism of his actions, especially in a time when food supplies were beginning to run dangerously low. It was very important therefore to have Pharaoh designate the Israelites' dwelling place.

Having settle them down in Goshen tentatively at least, Joseph returned from Goshen to announce to Pharaoh that his family had arrived. He took along five of his brothers. His father had an audience with Pharaoh on a separate occasion (see notes on v. 7). The brothers entered Pharaoh's hall together with Joseph, remaining first in the background.

Joseph first made a formal announcement to Pharaoh that his family and their possessions, calling special attention to their flocks and herds (not only by delineation, but also by the Hebrew word order), had come to Egypt, as Pharaoh had invited them to do. He also said they were, for the time being, in the land of Goshen, awaiting Pharaoh's decision.

Joseph had selected the land of Goshen to be the residency of his family while they were "exiles and aliens" in a foreign country (cf. Gen. 45:10; 46:34). By the "power of suggestion," Joseph now artfully implants the name into Pharaoh's mind so as to prepare him for the brothers' formal request (v. 4) and to predispose him in its favor.

Instead of saying, "have come to me" and "the men are shepherds" (cf. Gen. 46:31ff), Joseph changes and condenses what he originally had intended to say.

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**2 And he took five men from among his brothers, and presented them to Pharaoh.**

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The first clause is literally "and from the extremity of his brothers he took five men" (וּמִקְצֵה אָחָיו לָקַח חֲמִשָּׁה אָנָשִׁים) *ûmiqṣēh 'ehāyw lāqaḥ ḥamiššâ*

*'anāššim*), that is "from the totality," implying random selection (Judg. 18:2; 1 Kings 12:31; 13:33; Ezek. 33:2). Joseph choosing randomly suggests that Joseph was an honest man and wished Pharaoh to form no other opinion concerning his brothers than what he would see and they support.

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### Brothers' Reason For Being In Egypt: The Famine Is Severe (verses 3-4)

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**3** Then Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?" So they said to Pharaoh, "Your servants are shepherds, both we and our fathers."

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When Joseph presented his brothers to Pharaoh, he naturally asked their business, to see how they might best fit into the Egyptian economy. It is apparent that Pharaoh had not yet been told anything about the brothers, so his question is not surprising and was anticipated by Joseph (Gen. 46:33). Having overheard that Joseph tactfully refrained from calling them "shepherds," they now say it themselves, just as Joseph had instructed them. They announced boldly, though respectfully, that they and their fathers had always been shepherds.

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**4** And they said to Pharaoh, "We have come to sojourn in the land, for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now, therefore, please let your servants live in the land of Goshen."

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The brothers' answer to Pharaoh's question concluded with verse 3. They paused, hoping perhaps that the Pharaoh would offer them Goshen in which to settle, but in vain (they find themselves in the same situation as depicted in Num. 32:2, 5). Whenever two or more "And he/they said" (*וַיֹּאמְרוּ*/*wayyō'mer*) follow each other in this way, it indicates that the speaker scrutinizes the effect of his words before continuing (cf. Gen. 9:25ff.; 15:2ff.; 16:9ff.; 19:9f.; 20:9f.; 30:27f.; 41:38f., 44; 2 Sam. 16:10f.; 17:7f.; 2 Kgs. 6:27f.). This is why they had to continue to talk to Pharaoh and to be more explicit.

Thus they continued: "and they said [further] to Pharaoh . . . ." They now say something further on their own initiative, namely, why they have

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come and what they request of Pharaoh. They explain to him that they have come because of a severe famine (cf. Gen. 43:1) which has threatened the lives of their families and their herds. At the same time they explain that they want temporary residence only, for they have "come to sojourn in the land," and so without the full rights of land owners. It is only then that they put forward their request, introduced by "now" (עַתָּה/וְעַתָּה/attāh), that they be allowed to settle in the land of Goshen.

It is here that the purpose of the audience becomes clear. Joseph had not instructed his brothers to say this: it is due to their own initiative. Pharaoh is to hear from the brothers themselves that they have no desire to rise above their present occupation and that they want to settle where they can exercise it.

The use of the Hebrew term "sojourn" (לָגַוּ/lāgûr) connects the migration to Egypt with the divine prophecy made to Abraham: "Know well that your offspring shall be strangers (גֵּר/gēr) in a land not theirs" (Gen. 15:13). This term also suggests that the brothers had no intention of laying permanent claim to any of Egypt. Since Goshen had good pasture land for their flocks, they requested permission to live there.

The awareness of their status as strangers in Egypt left a deep imprint on the Israelite consciousness that found expression in repeated injunctions when Moses delivered the Law: "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Ex. 22:20); "You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt" (Ex. 23:9); "The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Lev. 19:34); "You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 10:19).

The brothers explain that even if they were permitted to purchase further rations in Egypt, their herds and flocks would perish, because Canaan has ceased to provide feed, which they would find in Goshen.

It should be noted that it was through Joseph's wise advice in Gen. 46:33f. that his brothers knew what they wanted and made no secret of what they were; the interview is a good model of straightforward, peaceable dealings between a pilgrim people and the temporal power (1 Pet. 2:11-17).

In addition, although their brother was in a very exalted position, they did not envy him, or wish to share in his grandeur. But as the narration indicates, they readily complied with his advice, by telling the king what had been their former occupation.

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#### Pharaoh's Decree That Joseph's Family May Settle In Egypt (verses 5-6)

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- 5** Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you.
- 6** The land of Egypt is at your disposal; settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land, let them live in the land of Goshen; and if you know any capable men among them, then put them in charge of my livestock."
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It is interesting that Pharaoh did not speak directly to Joseph's brothers but rather addressed Joseph, his vizier, and order him to make the necessary arrangements for carrying out these plans. This causes some to see "sources" and accept the Septuagint text instead of the Hebrew text (see below).

Nowhere else in the entire Narrative does our writer introduce the Pharaoh's speech with the word "saying" (לֵאמֹר / *le'mor*). Understandably in this context, it stresses the grandure of the moment: "Your father and your brothers have come to you." In addition, the family is given a new land by no less a personage than Pharaoh himself. And ironically, they are given a land outside of Canaan, while the only possession they have in Canaan is a burial plot which had to be bought.

What is the significance of Pharaoh addressing Joseph and not his brothers, and Pharaoh's particular announcement that his family has come to Joseph? The answer to these questions seems to be that Pharaoh was taken by surprise when Joseph informed him that his brothers were not farmers, as he had assumed (Gen. 45:18), and that he was startled when they told him that they were "shepherds," "abhorrent to Egyptians" (Gen. 46:34). Pharaoh wanted to fulfill Joseph's desire. But was not Goshen--the long narrow valley, leading straight from the heart of the Delta to a break in the chains of the Bitter Lakes--a "weak spot," a "restricted area," not to be settled by foreigners? How then could he offer it to these foreign shepherds? Even a Pharaoh, particularly in a time of national emergency, has to consider public opinion. This is why it took Pharaoh some time to find a way to grant the petition.

In this way the word *lē'mōr* is meant to underscore the last word, "to you" (אֵלַיךָ/ʾēleykā)! Originally it was Joseph who wanted to say that they "have come to me" (Gen. 46:21). Yet he suppressed it, lest he appear presumptuous; for it was by Pharaoh's command that they came (Gen. 45:17-20). Now it is Pharaoh who replaces his original "come to me" (Gen. 45:18) by they "have come to you." These owners of livestock from Canaan must not be considered rank-and-file "foreigners." They are the very kinsmen of the vizier, who understandably desires them to live close to his residence; and since they have livestock, the most natural thing is to offer them a place in the region of Goshen. As Joseph had anticipated, this was the best solution from Pharaoh's point of view also.

Graciously Pharaoh offered to let Joseph's family dwell anywhere in Egypt Joseph might choose. "At your disposal" (v. 6; cf. Gen. 13:9; 20:15; 34:10) is literally, "before you." That is, the status of Joseph's people was such that nothing could be withheld from them. This suggests that the brothers' request was readily granted, then, more specifically, he indicated his approval of Goshen. The land of Goshen is called the "best part of the land" (בְּמֵטֵב אֶרֶץ/b<sup>m</sup>ētab hā'āres), which perhaps is a word play on the "good" (טוֹב/tōb) that God intended in all of these recorded events (cf. Gen. 50:20).

The king's unusually favor to Joseph's family was another indication of the high regard he had for his high official. It was precisely for this reason that they were given this preferential treatment and were permitted to select the choice area of Egypt as their place of residence. And also, perhaps, because Pharaoh trusted Joseph, he could trust those whom Joseph trusted. This explains why Pharaoh adds the following interesting statement. Since Joseph's brothers were skilled in animal husbandry, Joseph was to choose the ablest of them and place them in charge of the royal herds, which conceivably were also kept in the grazing lands of Goshen.

"Charge of livestock" is literally "officers of cattle" (שָׂרֵי מִקְנֵה/sarē miqneh), that is superintendents of the royal cattle. This position is undoubtedly the one assigned to Doeg in 1 Samuel 21:7. The office is mentioned frequently in Egyptian inscriptions since the king possessed vast herds of cattle. Ramses III is said to have employed 3,264 men, mostly foreigners, to take care of his herds. The appointment of some of Joseph's brothers to supervise the king's cattle means that they are to be officers of the crown and thus will enjoy legal protection not usually accorded to aliens. This is reminiscent of Joseph's own rise to power in the house of Pharaoh (cf. Gen. 41:41). This augments and supports that Joseph's fortune was duplicated in the fortune of his brothers.

As noted above, verses 5 and 6 have occasioned difficulty because Pharaoh addresses Joseph, not the brother. They argue that when Pharaoh addressed Joseph with the words, "Your father and your brothers have come to you," this was in no sense a reply to the brothers' petition, and because he appears to be informing Joseph of the arrival of the family when Joseph has already so informed him and has even introduced his brothers!

Many scholars have therefore decided to follow the order of the Septuagint text (and so the *The New Jerusalem Bible*), which arranged this material differently and also inserted another statement at this point. The Septuagint text reads:

The Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Let them live in the land of Goshen. And if you know of any among them with special ability, put them in charge of my own livestock." Then Jacob and his sons came to Joseph in Egypt and Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, heard about it. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. The land of Egypt is before you. Let your father and your brothers live in the best section of the land."

It is obvious that the above reading cannot be the original text. This presentation gives the impression that Jacob and his family were just arriving in Egypt, while Genesis 46:28ff clearly indicates that they were already there. Those who give preference to this order of the text, based on the Septuagint, hold that sources "J" and "P" are in even greater conflict at this point than the Hebrew text is. This would imply that even at the time when the Septuagint translation was made the various alleged sources had not yet been fully coordinated in the text. This, of course, is unthinkable.

If one does accept the Septuagint additions, then they must also ignore entirely Joseph's extreme concern not to create conflict with Egyptian sensibilities, as noted above, as well as the fact that in Goshen the Israelites would be insulated from the idolatry of the Egyptians.

Actually, there is no real need to question Pharaoh's opening remark to Joseph. His intent obviously was to base his gracious attitude toward Jacob and his sons on the fact that they were Joseph's family (hence, "they came to you"). In addition, Pharaoh's announcement of Joseph's family is his way of acknowledging, and thus legitimating the Israelite presence on Egyptian soil. It was only logical, therefore, that the king should begin his remarks by some reference to their arrival and this in no way indicates the time of their arrival!

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If he does not reply to the brothers directly, it is because he grants the desired permission only as a special favor to Joseph. By addressing himself to Joseph, he implicitly authorizes him to be responsible for implementing the royal decree of verse 11. This authorization is phrased in laconic, almost staccato, tones that suggest the superior aloofness and absolute authority.

**Jacob Blesses Pharaoh (verses 7-10)**

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**7 Then Joseph brought his father Jacob and presented him to Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.**

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Pharaoh also gave an audience to the patriarch, Jacob himself. The reason for the separate audience, after that of his brothers, is probably that Joseph felt it would not be dignified for the aged patriarch to appear in the role of a supplicant. Also by recording this incident, our writer underscores the importance of Joseph's family to meet Pharaoh, first his brothers then with his father, as though to emphasize the incident.

Joseph was not ashamed of his brothers, or of their occupations, and less ashamed to call Jacob his father. To be the son of this great patriarch, he accounted a greater honor than to be the vizier of Pharaoh, and desired his own children to participate in the promise, than with the posterity of Potiphara, priest of On, though doubtless one of the greatest families of Egypt.

This is not a duplication of verses 2-6 and, therefore, does not indicate a separate documentary source. This is clearly a separate audience with Pharaoh. We probably should think of the sequence of events as follows: the first audience, which was more of a business nature, took place soon after the family arrived in Egypt. This cleared the way for the family to settle in the land of Goshen. When the family had actually settled there, then the old father was given a separate audience with Pharaoh. This would have allowed some time for the patriarch to rest from his long journey from Canaan. In this visit the Pharaoh wanted to show honor to Joseph's father and thus also to Joseph himself.

An appropriate greeting would be a prostration or some equivalent form of obeisance on the part of Jacob. Instead it is simply recorded, "and Jacob blessed Pharaoh" (vv. 7, 10). Commentators are divided as to whether a "mere" greeting or an act of blessing is meant. But the word "bless" (ברך/*brk*)



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does not allow this. It can, to be sure, mean a simple greeting (e.g., 1 Sam. 13:10; 2 Kgs. 4:29); but the meaning "bless" always resonates. In certain circumstances, determined on each occasion by the context, the meaning "blessing" prevails. This is the case especially on the occasion of a farewell when the one who remains blesses the one who is departing (before a journey) or vice versa (before death). The meaning of the blessing must emerge from the context. As part of the audience it is of course also a greeting; but in this particular situation it has the force of a blessing. Jacob now blesses the great potentate before whom he stands. It is this incongruity that gives this blessing its peculiar character, dignity, and power.

Verses 7-10 offer a dynamic meeting between the *lord of Egypt* and the *father of promise*. The posture of the two men is sharply contrasted. Pharaoh has land; he is settled, safe, and prosperous. Jacob has none; but he is sovereign old age personified. He believes God's promise far beyond any Egyptian realities. As a result, the land of Pharaoh is at the disposal of Jacob (vv. 11-12). The promise is at work for this family, in Egypt as in Canaan.

The continuity of this meeting between Pharaoh and Jacob (vv. 7-10) with what immediately precedes (Gen. 46:31-34) and follows (Gen. 47:13-27) is understood in the context of Joseph's ingenious ploy whereby his family gains "a possession in the land of Egypt" apart from the Egyptians (Gen. 47:11) where "they acquired property in it and were fruitful and became very numerous" (Gen. 47:27). Of course, the blessing extends to the Egyptians, who will also "live and not die" (Gen. 47:19), an extension beautifully symbolized in this scene where Jacob pronounces a blessing on Pharaoh, his host. He who first sent his sons to beg now comes to bless. And Joseph, through his capable management, greatly enriches Pharaoh (Gen. 47:13-27). This theme is not isolated to this chapter; Genesis 39:3 had already noted that God prospered Potiphar for promoting Joseph to a high position in his house. So this scene further develops this theme, that of divine favor on those who favor the patriarchs.

Significantly, the central concern of this scene is to show that Jacob "blessed Pharaoh" (vv. 7, 10) when he was brought before him. Its importance can be seen from the fact that it was mentioned twice. Lying behind such an emphasis in the narrative is God's promise to Abraham that he would bless those who blessed the offspring of Abraham (Gen. 12:3), and is echoed later in Exodus 12:32, where the Pharaoh asks, "And also bless me." The passage shows that in Joseph and Jacob, the promise to Abraham was being fulfilled with the nations round about them.

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Previously Jacob has either received blessings, or failing that, stolen them. Never before has Jacob given a blessing.

Though Pharaoh was the more wealthy and powerful, Jacob clearly was the superior, for he "blessed Pharaoh." Melchizedek had blessed Abraham (Gen. 14:19), thus showing his superiority to Abraham, for "the less is blessed of the better" (Heb. 7:7). That Jacob was an old man, the patriarch of the clan, automatically gave more power to his blessing. Since he was the recipient of the promised blessings, his words here were more than a wish; he spoke for God in granting the blessing to Pharaoh, one that began shortly through the wise administration of Joseph.

Our narrator does not preserve the content of Jacob's blessing, but widespread custom in the ancient Near Eastern world dictated wishing the king long life as in 2 Samuel 16:16 and 1 Kings 1:31. This perhaps what prompts Pharaoh now to ask Jacob concerning his age.

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- 8** And Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many years have you lived?"  
**9** So Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty; few and unpleasant have been the years of my life, nor have they attained the years that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning."
- 

It is interesting that the only item of discussion preserved by our narrator is Pharaoh's question concerning Jacob's advanced age and Jacob's response. Pharaoh's question is not a matter of mere curiosity; it binds together momentarily the Pharaoh as a person with this foreign person. It is a question of what they have in common. Perhaps Pharaoh wondered whether Jacob exceeded the ideal Egyptian life span of 110 years (on this point, see notes on Gen. 50:22). In any case, Jacob's response constitutes the longest and most important speech of this scene (v. 9).

Jacob replied to Pharaoh's inquiry by paraphrasing "life" for "sojourning," giving it the elegiac flavor that for him life on earth is but a sojourn (cf. Ps. 39:13; 119:54; 1 Chron. 29:15). It also reflects Jacob's acceptance of God's will that they are to live in Canaan as "the land of sojourning" (cf. Gen. 17:8; 28:4; 36:7; 37:1). before their offspring will inherit it as their "permanent possession" (cf. Gen. 17:8).

It is interesting in the Hebrew text that Jacob places "thirty" before "a hundred," which is unusual for biblical Hebrew. Knowing that he looks older than 100, he tells Pharaoh how many years older than 100 he actually is. Lest Pharaoh considers such an age, to him unheard of, as the reward of an exemplary life, Jacob adds: "few and unpleasant (literally, "evil") have been the years of my life, nor have they attained the years that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning" (9b).

These words of Jacob in verse 9 sound unusual in the way they contrast with the two accounts of his blessing of Pharaoh (vv. 7, 10). What do Jacob's words mean? They appear to be a deliberate contrast to the later promise in Deuteronomy that one who honors his father and mother should "live long and that it may go well with you in the land" (Deut. 5:16). Jacob, who deceived his father and thereby gained the blessing, must not only die outside the Promised Land, but also we learn here that his years were few and difficult.

From his own words, then, we can see a final recompense for Jacob's actions earlier in Genesis. Abraham obeyed God and lived for 175 years and died in Canaan (Gen. 26:5) and of Isaac, "an old man of ripe age" of 180 years who also died in the land (Gen. 35:29). Jacob will receive no such epitaph, for "few and unpleasant have been the years of my life." Although he did live another seventeen years (Gen. 47:28), he realized he could never hope to live as long as his father or his grandfather. In spite of such a final verdict on the life of Jacob, the narrative goes on to show that he lived out his remaining years "in the good [NIV, 'the best part'] of the land" (v. 11), though not the Promised Land; and Joseph, his son, provided for him and his household.

Jacob's confession that his days had been "few and evil" (emphasizing the calamitous times he had experienced) must have been sobering for the family. But the description is appropriate for what Jacob had been through in his lifetime--much of it of his own doing. Here was the dilemma with Jacob: he was the channel of divine blessing to the world, but his days were few and filled with trouble. Many since Jacob have had to confess the same.

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## 10 And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from his presence.

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As noted above, verse 10 closes the embedded chiasmic structure which began in verse 7. As he greeted the king with a blessing, so now he bids him farewell with a blessing (cf. 1 Kgs. 8:66). He "went out from his

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presence" refers to walking backwards, facing the king (see notes on Gen. 41:46). Possibly he never saw him again.

Though we are generations away from the Exodus, we are conscious of the fact that the meeting of Pharaoh and Jacob is only a few pages away from the Exodus. Any Israelite who hears of Jacob blessing Pharaoh will not be unaware of the cruel realities of oppression which are soon to come.

#### **Joseph Settles His Family In Egypt (verses 11-12)**

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- 11    **So Joseph settled his father and his brothers, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had ordered.**
- 12    **And Joseph provided his father and his brothers and all his father's household with food, according to their little ones.**
- 

These two verses serve as a summary and transition to the following narrative (vv. 13-27). Joseph's role as provider for his family reminds the reader that the famine is still in progress.

This passage closes with a statement about the family's possession of the best (מֵטֵב/*mâṭab*) of the land of Egypt. There Joseph provided all their needs, just as Pharaoh had commanded.

This entire incident provides a pattern that was worked out again and again in Israel's history: the people of God preferred the blessings to others who had authority over the stations of this life, and in exchange they were afforded the good land. They did not always experience such blessing, but still they were responsible to act wisely and magnanimously before others as they extended the blessing of God.

It is worthy of note that the area where the Israelites were permitted to settle is here called "the district of Rameses," rather than "the land of Goshen." It has been argued that the use of the name "Rameses" is evidence for a separate source for this section; but it should be noted that this is the only place where we read about the "land of Rameses." There are a few references to a city by that name in Exodus 1:11; 12:37; Numbers 33:3, 5, and this makes it difficult to offer any clear information about the "land" of Rameses.

It is possible that Rameses was simply another name for Goshen. Ramses II, in the thirteenth century B.C., enlarged the city of Tanis and made it his capital. Thereafter, this royal name was attached to it. It is very possible that the use of the name here in Joseph's time is anachronistic. Most interpreters have accepted this possibility or, at least, that Rameses was a part of the land of Goshen.

A few scholars have held that Rameses refers to another area in Egypt altogether. If this were the case, we would have to accept the fact that there are two distinct traditions among the Jewish people as to where the Israelites lived in Egypt, and this would be very difficult to accept.

It has also been argued that there is a distinction here between "the sons of Israel," in the broader sense, and "Jacob and his sons" as an immediate family. This is not tenable, however, since in verses 6 and 11 we read of Joseph's father and brothers living, on the one hand in Goshen, and on the other hand in Rameses. Since both of these names refer to the same area, then, one use of the name "Rameses" offers no substantial basis for a separate source for part of this material. It is possible that the term "the district of Rameses" was an expression that was used for the area surrounding the city of Rameses, which was later built there (see Ex. 1:11). This would then be the same usage regarding Beersheba in Genesis 21:14. This fits with the data that Tanis is not suitable for agriculture, let alone the herding of cattle, while the lands of Rameses are praised exceedingly.

Verse 12 continues the theme that Joseph is the provider for his entire family. No doubt because of Joseph's status, he was paid well, out of which he practiced liberality to a great extent. It is clear from the Narrative thus far, that he exercised no more freedom than he was expressly warranted. This action of "sustaining" his family through famine will make Jacob later to confer the blessing upon him as "Shepherd and Stone of Israel" (Gen. 49:24).

The extent to which Joseph's generosity reached is signified in the last clause: "And Joseph provided . . . food, *according to their little ones.*" This is a unique Hebrew idiom (הַטָּאֵם לְפִי הַטָּאֵם / *hattāp*; literally, "to the mouth of the little ones"), which probably means "as much as children can eat," that is, "liberally." It may also simply mean that Joseph provided food according to the size of the different households of the clan (all according as he had announced and all according to his dreams twenty-two years ago!; cf. Ex. 12:3). The imagery denotes that Joseph acted the part of a nursing-father to Jacob's house.

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It is later said of David in the Psalms: "So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them with his skillful hands" (Ps. 78:72)

The mention of food in verse 12 leads now to the report of provision of food for the Egyptians.

**II. *Through wise leaders God will ensure that His people survive and that many share in the blessings (47:13-27).***

The writer goes into great detail to show the final steps by which Joseph extended his authority and the authority of the Pharaoh over every region of Egypt. The narrative returns to the story line of Genesis 41:57 with an account of the affairs of Joseph in Egypt and his work on behalf of the Pharaoh. The brothers are no longer the center of attention. The writer, at least temporarily, leaves them behind to focus on Joseph and his sons. The Narrative returns to the theme of the brothers in Genesis 49, but there it is not Joseph and his brothers; rather it is Jacob and his sons--with Joseph simply being one of the brothers. It is only in the end, at Genesis 50:15, that we return to the theme of Joseph and his brothers.

Joseph's wise rule over the land of Egypt not only ensured the peace and prosperity of his family but also saved the people of Egypt from starvation and prospered Pharaoh abundantly. In selling food to the people, Joseph accepted first money and livestock as payment, and then finally their lands as well. Once the land belonged to Pharaoh, Joseph instructed the people to plant seed, his only requirement being that Pharaoh was to receive one-fifth of the produce. In short, the people survived, but they were in bondage to Pharaoh. Only the priests were exempt--probably due to the sanctity of the priesthood and the temple holdings over which Pharaoh had little control (see further notes on 47:22).

This entire situation informs the means of Exodus 1:8-11, which states that a new king came to power who did not know Joseph. Consequently (and ironically) that king began to enslave the Israelites to work in his projects. Had he remembered Joseph, he would have realized how loyal and faithful Israel could be in their sojourn in the land. Because this Pharaoh treated Israel well, they flourished, and he became powerful and wealthy; but because that new king treated Israel harshly, he would have none of the blessing of God, nor would he be able to hinder the prosperity of the people of God. From the

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beginning to the end of the Egyptian sojourn, prosperity and growth came from God's blessing. Those who acknowledged it shared in it.

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**Joseph's Reason For Collecting Money: The Famine Is Severe (verses 13-19)**

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**13** Now there was no food in all the land, because the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine.

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This verse recapitulates Genesis 41:53-57, and thus, a few scholars hold that this section has been misplaced and should have followed Genesis 41:56, but this position has been strongly opposed by other scholars and lacks substantial support. In addition, as the chiasmic structure as presented in Figure 27 on page 527 of the notes suggests, the placement of this section is absolutely necessary in order to balance Genesis 40:1--42:57!

The passage begins by describing the severity and the extent of the famine. We are told that there was no food in the entire country and that Egypt and Canaan wasted away because of the drought. When the text states "there was no food in all the land," it is meant there was comparatively none. The scarcity of food is underscored by the text stating that the famine was "very severe," with the results "that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan *languished*."

The Hebrew word for "languished" appears nowhere else in all biblical Hebrew. It is very probable that the stem  $\text{לָהָה} // lhh$  is a variant of  $\text{לָאָה} // l'h$ , "to be weary, helpless" (for the stem  $\text{לָאָה} // l'h$ , see Gen.19:11; Ex. 7:18). This term graphically portrays the fury and effect which the famine had on the people.

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**14** And Joseph gathered all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan for the grain which they bought, and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house.

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This verse sums up what happened during the first five years of the famine. We know this because verse 19 will make it clear that the events reported in verses 15 and 16 occurred in the sixth year of the famine. As the

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famine continued and became more and more severe, the Egyptians finally used up all their money to buy the grain that Joseph had stored up during the years of abundance. All of the available money gradually came into Joseph's hands and he deposited it in Pharaoh's bulging treasury.

"All the money that was found" includes what the crown had paid for grain during the years of abundance (see notes on Gen. 41:35). "Into Pharaoh's house" means the royal treasury. Notice that "all" the money that was found was put into the royal treasury--Joseph took nothing for himself! Whereas Joseph could have compromised his integrity and rationalized that he deserved some of it, the text states that he put it all into the treasury.

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**15** And when the money was all spent in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, "Give us food, for why should we die in your presence? For *our* money is gone."

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Three times it has been mentioned in verses 13-15 that the famine was also severe in the land of Canaan. Why? Perhaps it serves to remind us that if Jacob and his family had not migrated to Egypt they would have starved to death; but because of Joseph's gratuitous character, this threat has been thwarted.

It was only a matter of time until the people had spent all their savings on food. Therefore, progressively the Egyptians became bankrupt. Now they come and clamor at the storehouse doors without money.

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**16** Then Joseph said, "Give up your livestock, and I will give you *food* for your livestock, since *your* money is gone."

**17** So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them food in exchange for the horses and the flocks and the herds and the donkeys; and he fed them with food in exchange for all their livestock that year.

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When the people's money supply was exhausted and asked for food to feed their families, Joseph agreed to accept their livestock in exchange for food.



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The reason for exchanging their livestock for food instead of killing off their animals as a means of feeding themselves may be sought in the existing animal taboo. If the livestock was confiscated and not merely branded as crown property, it is possible that some of Joseph's brothers were indeed appointed as chiefs over their herdsmen (see notes on Gen. 47:6). This arrangement actually benefited both the people and the animals, since they would have been unable to continue to keep the animals alive during the famine.

It is interesting to note that mention is made of sheep and goats, cattle and donkeys, but there is also a reference to horses. This is the first time the Bible mentions this animal, which had become widespread throughout the Near East by the middle of the sixteenth century B.C. Its place at the head of the list indicates its high value. In the Bible horses are mentioned in particular in connection with Egypt (Deut. 17:16; 1 Kgs. 10:28; Song of Sol. 1:9).

By this measure of exchanging their livestock for food Joseph was able to take the people through another year of the famine.

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**18** And when that year was ended, they came to him the next year and said to him, "We will not hide from my lord that our money is all spent, and the cattle are my lord's. There is nothing left for my lord except our bodies and our lands."

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This barter system kept the people going another year, but finally all their animals were gone too. Both the money and animals became the property of Pharaoh.

"The next year" is literally, "the second year." We are not told explicitly to what this refers; hence the present translation in the NASB. The indefiniteness has given rise to various interpretations: (1) the second year of the famine; (2) two years after the arrival of Jacob; (3) the second of the remaining five years of famine; (4) the seventh year of the famine. This last seeks to explain why the people ask for seed; the predicted end of the famine is at hand, and it is time to prepare for next year's harvest. It is a mistake to think that farmers do not sow their fields in years of famine (cf. Gen. 45:6).

The same people who had demanded Joseph to give them food in verse 15 now address him as "my lord" three times. They have nothing left which might be marketable except their own lands and their own labor.

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- 19 "Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for food, and we and our land will be slaves to Pharaoh. So give us seed, that we may live and not die, and that the land may not be desolate."
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The suggestion to barter livestock for food had come from Joseph. Now the Egyptians initiate the proposal to surrender their land and become serfs of the crown.

The people therefore desire to dedicate themselves and their land for service to Pharaoh in return for food on a regular basis, as well as seed with which to sow their lands. "Give seed" indicates their awareness that the land has regained its fertility, and "that the land may not be desolate," that the weeds are already sprouting, and unless tilling is resumed, their fields become uncultivable. Thus, though they know that they need food for one more year, they are so downcast ("languished," v. 13) that without inquiring how much of their land would be confiscated in return for food, they not only offer it all but are willing to become Pharaoh's slaves to till it for him!

#### **Joseph Collects One-Fifth From All The People (Except Priests) (vv. 20-26)**

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- 20 So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh, for every Egyptian sold his field, because the famine was severe upon them. Thus the land became Pharaoh's.
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Joseph accepted this offer and consequently the entire land of Egypt became the possession of the Pharaoh. It is notable that the text says that the land became Pharaoh's, not the people.

The Egyptian theory of government gave the Pharaoh the supreme right of ownership of the land by virtue of his divine status. However, it was not until the time of Joseph that most of all the land in Egypt became in fact what it had always been in theory: the personal property of the Pharaoh.

In practice, private property existed in all periods of Egyptian history, but after the expulsion of the Hyksos in the middle of the sixteenth century B.C. the major part of the land became the actual property of the state.

- 21 And as for the people, he removed them to the cities from one end of Egypt's border to the other.**
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The exact meaning of this verse is uncertain. But it is generally understood as referring to a population transfer on a large scale. Probably the Egyptian people were ordered by Joseph to move nearer into the various cities temporarily where the storehouses were situated until seed for planting could be efficiently distributed to them. Also this would expedite distribution of grain and seed, and to best utilize the labor purchased. This system certainly left something to be desired in terms of human freedom; but a centralized bureaucracy is preferable to mass starvation and anarchy, especially when the bureaucracy is administered intelligently and unselfishly, as it was by Joseph.

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- 22 Only the land of the priests he did not buy, for the priests had an allotment from Pharaoh, and they lived off the allotment which Pharaoh gave them. Therefore, they did not sell their land.**
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There was one noteworthy exception to these arrangements, however. The priests who administered the Egyptians religious system had extensive land holdings of their own, and they did not turn any of these over to Pharaoh. In effect, Egypt had an official state religion, and the members of its hierarchy were essentially state employees. Thus, they received an ample allocation of grain for their own needs in return for their services, and it was unnecessary for them to sell their lands.

The text lays stress that this exception came about on orders of Pharaoh himself. Their portion of grain was that "allotment from Pharaoh." This suggests that Joseph did not agree with this exception, but was overruled by Pharaoh. He knew well that the religious system was false and harmful and that, in the long run, the concentration of greater power and wealth in the hands of the priests would be inimical to the best interests of the Egyptian people. Pharaoh, however, was somehow persuaded that the government had to support its religious leaders.

In regards to Israel's priests, it is stated in Deuteronomy 10:9 that the LORD is their portion--that is, they received no territorial share among the other tribes (cf. Num. 18:21-24).

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Only the priests of Egypt and Jacob's family were exempt from these pressures. Israel dwelt in Egypt and prospered as royal pensioners, as did also the priests to whom Joseph was personally related by marriage. In contrast to the Egyptians, who successively lost their money, their livestock, their lands, and their liberty in exchange for food, the descendants of Israel "acquired property in it and were fruitful and became very numerous" (v. 27). Were the seeds of future ethnic jealousy sown right here (cf. Ex. 1:7-10)?

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- 23** Then Joseph said to the people, "Behold, I have today bought you and your land for Pharaoh; now, *here* is seed for you, and you may sow the land.
- 24** And at the harvest you shall give a fifth to Pharaoh, and four-fifths shall be your own for seed of the field and for your food and for those of your households and as food for your little ones."
- 

As far as the rest of the people were concerned, Joseph fulfilled his part of the contract with them, providing seed for their lands and food for their households. Since the title to the lands now belonged to Pharaoh, it was agreed that the people would continue to work their own lands, using seed furnished by the government. He no doubt also made their beasts of burden available to them for working the fields.

The literal translation, "Herewith I have acquired of today you and your fields for Pharaoh" (v. 23a), defines in legal terminology their new status: "I have acquired you"--as the sequence shows--does not imply that they have become Pharaoh's bondsmen, as they had offered to do (v. 19), but feudal tenants. This pronouncement, accompanied by the distribution of the seed for just that one year (cf. v. 24), was issued after the completion for the resettlement.

When the harvest came in, they were to give one-fifth of it to Pharaoh and keep four-fifths for themselves and their households. This was simply an extension of a practice that had already begun in an initial way during the seven years of abundance (cf. Gen. 41:34). The difference was that during the abundant years the people had continued to own their own land, while now all the land belonged to the Pharaoh by legal status. It would seem obvious that these measures were introduced when the land again began to yield crops and the famine was over.

This practice amounted to a tax of 20 percent of the harvest in return for the privilege and for the seed allotment. Such an interest rate was not considered excessive in the ancient Near East. During the reign of Hammurabi, for instance, the state's share of the harvest from administered fields varied between two-thirds and one-half after the deduction of production expenses. An interest rate of 20 percent on money loans were quite common in Babylon, while the rate for loans of produce was usually 33.3 percent.

"Your little ones" (v. 24b) seems superfluous, unless it assures the panic-stricken people that in future years of poor harvests their own needs, including the children's will have priority before turning in the rent-produce.

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**25    So they said, "You have saved our lives! Let us find favor in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's slaves."**

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What originally had been their proposition, that is, to become Pharaoh's slaves for obtaining food during the last year of famine (v. 19), becomes now their petition. But again Joseph refuses to make them Pharaoh's slaves, except that he dispossessed them of their fields and made them feudal tenants.

The reason for their persistence and petition seems to be that the fear of famine had such a traumatic effect upon them that they hankered after "freedom from starvation," preferring serfdom, so that their need for food in future famines would be taken care of by their lord. Joseph's diplomacy made him refrain from an outright refusal of what would have made Pharaoh the owner of the entire population, except for the priests.

It is interesting to note that the people of Egypt proclaimed Joseph as their savior—which is what God had prepared him to do (cf. Gen. 45:7). So grateful were they that they willingly became the slaves of Pharaoh. Such gratitude is a model of devotion and loyalty by those saved from certain death.

They praise him as their savior, who has accomplished the gigantic task of preserving the life of every Egyptian throughout the terrible years of famine. This historical achievement condemns the future Pharaoh "who did not know Joseph" (cf. Ex. 1:8).

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It only now becomes clear why Scripture devotes fourteen verses on what apparently is of merely Egyptological interest: Approaching and introducing the Book of Exodus from "the house of bondage" (cf. Ex. 20:2), our text desires Israel to cherish freedom as the highest good, as did Joseph (see notes on Gen. 50:18), the first of them who suffered enslavement. Though Joseph's abolition of private land-ownership for the benefit of the crown and the introduction of feudal tenancy in the interest of the population at large may have tragically contributed to making Egypt "the house of bondage," neither does our passage hold him responsible for it, nor should the modern moralist do so.

From the secular writings, which have been unearthed in and about Egypt, it has become clear that the measures that Joseph took during the famine were consonant with conditions and practices in ancient Egypt. We do not want to go so far, however, as to say that the events concerning Joseph, as recorded in Genesis, are also described in these secular accounts. For instance, the Amarna Tablets refer to a certain "Janchamu" who exercised Egyptian authority over grain warehouses in the Nile Delta from which he supplied the needs of certain Syrian cities, but we cannot identify this man with Joseph or claim that the biblical narrative was based on this secular source. The differences between the two accounts are far too great and the similarities far too meager to justify such identification.

There is also a passage in an Egyptian Papyrus, dated approximately 1200 B.C., in which mention is made of "a certain Syrian" who became commander of Egypt during a time of scarce food supplies and managed to make "the whole land tributary to himself" and "plundered all the possessions of the Egyptians." In this case, also, the differences between this "Syrian" and Joseph, as he is presented in Scripture, are so marked that the two cannot be identified.

Even so, there is considerable evidence in such writings that conditions in Egypt could readily have taken the turn that is described for us in the Genesis account. Such eventualities as having the Pharaoh, together with the priests, take over all the land of the Egyptians or to have all their possessions appropriated by the Pharaoh, the priests, and the military leaders, are not out of keeping with Egyptian history. Although we cannot relate such events directly to Joseph's regulatory measure during the famine, they do indicate that such measures are wholly conceivable for ancient Egypt.

The question has been asked whether Joseph's measures can be considered to be ethical. The answer to this question depends on whether we

accept this narrative as historical or whether we look on it as a saga that is intended to be descriptive of conditions in Egypt in general at that time. There are some interpreters who view this part of the Narrative as no more than a product of the national vanity of the Israelites. This, in turn, has spawned a certain anti-Semitism that charges that a people who would exalt the kind of treatment Joseph foisted on the Egyptians can hardly be considered to be honorable people.

We, on the other hand, believe that what is here recorded in Scripture is historical fact. To be sure, the governmental policies that resulted from Joseph's regulatory measures can hardly be considered ideal when they are compared with the social and political implications of the Mosaic Law. We may not forget, however, that we do not know what the political situation was in Egypt prior to Joseph's administration. It could well be that Joseph's apparently stern measures were a great improvement over conditions that prevailed prior to his ascendancy.

From an ethical point of view, the most questionable aspect of Joseph's administration would appear to be that the grain that he first requisitioned from the people for Pharaoh (Gen. 41:34-48) was later sold back to the people, during the time of the famine, at the cost of all their possessions and even their freedom as they became tenants of the land.

It is true that Joseph's administration created what amounted to a feudalistic economy, but the alternative, that of placing everyone on a dole system, would have destroyed personal and national morale, would have bankrupted the government, and probably would have culminated in social anarchy. The stores of food would soon have been depleted and mass starvation would have followed.

Moreover, the narrative makes a point of stressing the fact that the Egyptians themselves were happy with Joseph's administrative procedures and hailed him as the savior of the people during the bitter famine that swept across the land. They recognized that they were treated fairly and generously and that there could really be no other plan which would work as well under the circumstance. They only desired to continue to "find favor" in the eyes of Joseph, so that the arrangement would remain in operation.

Another question that has been asked is why these regulatory measures of Joseph are recorded in such detail here in the biblical narrative. We have already observed that we cannot accept the theory that this was a saga

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intended to describe conditions in Egypt. Likewise, we cannot accept the position held by some Jewish scholars that the writer of Genesis is trying to lay the groundwork for the use of the term "house of bondage" which is ascribed to Egypt in later books of the Pentateuch. It is argued that although the Israelites were a freedom-loving people, Egyptians were content to live as slaves, as long as they were provided with food. Thus, it is claimed, Egypt was, by the very nature of its people, a "house of bondage." In reply to this it must be obvious that the reason for Egypt being called "house of bondage" in the Old Testament was simply that this was where the Israelites lived as slaves for some 400 years!

It seems that the reason for giving these details regarding Joseph's regulatory measures was to graphically describe the severity of the famine in the land and how his wisdom was able to solve the eminent threat of starvation, not only that of the Egyptians, but also of his own family.

The reference to Canaan, in verses 13-15, was not an irrelevant insertion. It is brought into this context precisely to confirm the fact that Israel could not have survived if they had stayed in Canaan. The people of Canaan could buy food in Egypt as long as they had money to exchange for food, but when their money ran out there was no other source of food for them. Joseph could not use the same measures with people from other nations that he used with the Egyptians. Since the Egyptians were willing to submit to such stringent measures in order to stay alive, it becomes abundantly clear what conditions would be in Canaan where there was no supply of food stored away. Thus this description of Joseph's regulatory measures in Egypt must be seen in direct relationship to the main point of this entire Narrative in these chapters of Genesis, namely, the resettlement of God's chosen people from the land of promise to the land of Egypt. Moreover, it must be clearly seen that this resettlement was the direct consequence of the famine that God in His sovereign plan brought upon that part of the world. Jacob's family was destined to go into Egypt because it was there that God would make them a great nation. God literally compelled Israel to move to Egypt by force of circumstances in His sovereign control. But first, He provided a deliverer, Joseph.

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- 26 And Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt *valid to this day*, that Pharaoh should have the fifth; only the land of the priests did not become Pharaoh's.



Joseph's plan worked so well, that it continued to remain in force "valid to this day"-- that is, until at least the time of Moses. Here, as in 1 Samuel 30:25, the words "made it a statute" is used in a legal context in which the narrator bears witness to the fact that the ancient laws described in verses 22 and 24 were still operative in his day.

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**Israel (As a People) Prospered And Multiplied Greatly In Egypt (verse 27)**

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**27 Now Israel lived in the land of Egypt, in Goshen, and they acquired property in it and were fruitful and became very numerous.**

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Verse 27 gives somewhat of a conclusion to what had been described in Genesis 46:1 to 47:12, regarding the resettlement of the patriarchal family: in the land of Goshen the people of Israel prospered and multiplied greatly, for God was blessing them according to the promises made to Abraham and reiterated to Jacob as he migrated to Egypt (Gen. 46:3).

The patriarchs were to live in Canaan only as "sojourners," but God had promised to give it to their descendants as "property forever" (cf. Gen. 17:8). Besides the field which Jacob bought (cf. Gen. 33:19f), the patriarchs' only "property" was the field which Abraham had bought for the grave of Sarah (cf. Gen. 23:4). It was in Egypt, however, that Pharaoh gave Jacob's family title to land property (cf. v. 11), and verse 27 reports that before Jacob died, they "acquired property" in Goshen.

They were beginning to grow into a great nation. The text states that they were fruitful (וַיִּפְרֹא/wayyiprû) and multiplied exceedingly (וַיִּרְבּוּ/wayyirbû *me'ôd*); these verbs recall the plan of the Creator (Gen. 1:28) and anticipate the greater fulfillment in Exodus 1:7. Here, then, the predominant theme of blessing moves from promise to fulfillment. God blessed the seed of Abraham, and God blessed Pharaoh and his land for the sake of His people, all in accord with the promise.

It is interesting to note that the accompanying verb after "Israel" ("lived"; וַיֵּשֶׁב/wayyēšeb) is in the singular form, whereas the succeeding three verbs are plural ("acquired property," וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲזַק/wayyē'āhazû; "were fruitful," וַיִּפְרֹא/wayyiprû; "became numerous," וַיִּרְבּוּ/wayyirbû). The inconsistency is deliberate and the ambiguity intentional: Israel the individual merges with the

national entity. The phenomenon has already been noted in Genesis 46:3f., 8. It will appear again in Genesis 48:20.

A technical note follows concerning the division of the Hebrew text at this point. According to the MT, verse 27 concludes the third *Sidrah* of the Narrative, as Genesis 40:23 and 44:17 conclude the first and second, respectively. What puzzles the editor of the MT is that it does not place the usual gap in the text to mark the beginning of the fourth and last *Sidrah*. The reason may be that verses 28-31 not only introduce the fourth *Sidrah* but also are meant to be the colophon of verse 27, inasmuch as Jacob may have feared that the purchase of new land by his sons might cause them to lose their faithful adherence to the promise, of considering no land but Canaan their "homeland." Verses 28-31 therefore describe what Jacob does to make his offspring resist the temptation to assimilate with the Egyptians. Our text in verse 27, as pointed out above however, with the plural verb form calls the brothers "Israel" for the first time and thereby seems to assure us that they actually were determined to retain their distinct identity and not to Egyptianize.

## APPLICATION

***THE WISE LEADER DISCERNS THAT PROSPERITY COMES FROM GOD ALONE AND SO MUST MAKE DECISIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE WILL OF GOD--THAT IS, WHAT GOD HAS REVEALED ABOUT HIS PLAN OF BLESSING IN FULFILLMENT OF THE PROMISE.*** Joseph exemplifies this wisdom by his faith in God's plan and by his skill in administering it. He knew that God sovereignly controlled the economics of the land in accord with His will. Joseph thus becomes the model for kings and administrators of God's people. Wisdom is essential to any ruler, but wisdom from above is required for theocratic administrators.

Also in the New Testament we learn that spiritual leaders need wisdom to guide the people of God into the place of blessing in fulfillment of the promises. Leadership cannot be oblivious to God's dealings in the past, for in them they see the outworking of God's program of blessing. Nor can leadership ignore the world around God's people, for God's people must flourish first in this world and, in so doing, bring blessing to a lost world.

**STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. Why is there a problem with the Israelites being shepherds while trying to sojourn in Egypt?
2. What is the significance of Pharaoh addressing Joseph and not his brothers, and Pharaoh's particular announcement that his family has come to Joseph?
3. Comment on the significance of Jacob's words to Pharaoh in relationship to the developments in his life.
4. What is the significance of Jacob blessing Pharaoh?
5. What is significant about buying the land for Pharaoh?
6. Relate the ideas of Genesis 47:27 with the covenantal promises. How did the events of this episode enable such fulfillment?
7. How does this episode continue the theme that Joseph is the provider for his entire family? How does this theme tie in with Genesis 37:2?



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## Genesis 47:28--48:22

### Faith and the Ways of God

#### PASSING ON THE TORCH OF FAITH

Out of Jacob's long career, the writer of Hebrews selects the incident in this episode as his greatest act of faith (Heb. 11:21), namely, his reaching out to the future of the promise in the face of death as he blessed the younger over the older. There is irony in the fact that this incident is comparable to the situation in which he had received the blessing over his older brother (Gen. 27:18-41). Once more the blessing was given to the younger, but this time there was no deception or bitterness. This time the blessing was given openly, in accord with God's plan.

A study of this passage of Scripture must take these circumstances into consideration. Here was the man of God at the brink of death, passing on the blessing, a hope for the future. But there is also Jacob's recognition that the elder would serve the younger, and so he crossed his hands in the blessing (Gen. 48:14, 19). Believers learn throughout life to accept God's crossing up of the normal conventions, for God's ways are not the ways of humankind. Death itself is part of the mysterious plan of God, for one enters the promise through death, after which God's power over death is demonstrated in the resurrection. And many of the teachings of Jesus with their apparent paradoxes exemplify this principle and call for a faith that looks beyond the grave.

This section begins a series of narratives about the death and burial of Jacob, drawing the "generations" (cf. Gen. 37:2) of Jacob to a close. The death of Jacob was anticipated throughout the Joseph Narrative (Gen. 37:35; 42:38; 43:27-28; 44:22, 29-31; 45:9, 13, 28; 46:30). With so many references, the reader expects the section to close with Jacob's death. But these references raised the question of the circumstances of his death. Would matters be resolved? Would he die in peace? In the way that things worked out, the death of Jacob thus provided the culmination of the patriarchal narratives; it was a death that fit harmoniously within God's program for the blessing. The material in these last chapters includes the adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh, the last blessing on the sons, and the death and burial of the patriarch. All the events bring an age to a close and, at the same time, announce the future.

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## Source Criticism Considerations

In this chapter those who divide the sources find all three sources, which are usually designated, represented. Verses 3-6 are assigned to "P." The rest of the chapter is usually divided between the other two sources as follows: 2b, 9b, 10a, 13, 14, 17-20 are ascribed to "J," while verses 1, 2a, 8, 9a, 10b-12, 15, 16, 21, 22 are given to "E."

Here it should be noted that this division does not include verse 7. This verse has at one time or another been ascribed to every conceivable source and has even been described as impossible to classify. It is apparent that this verse stands by itself. The reference to Rachel's death and burial can be related to Jacob's original wish that he might be buried beside his beloved Rachel. However, when we consider Genesis 47:30 and 49:29-32, it seems obvious that this wish was not realized. There is actually no reason why this verse must be considered as an unrelated fragment or must be moved to another position in the text, as some have done, by placing it after verse 10. It is wholly understandable that as Jacob was emotionally dwelling on his relationship to Joseph's sons his mind should recall their grandmother; his beloved and beautiful Rachel. For a moment the old man was painfully reminded of her untimely death and the continuing grief he felt as he remembered her burial there along the way, near Ephrath. Thus this verse can be logically accepted as a proper part of the text in its present position.

The assignment of verses 3-6 to "P" has been argued on the basis of a previous assignment of Genesis 35:6a, 9-13 to this source and the establishing of a certain connection with that passage. However, when we considered the passage in Genesis 35 we observed that there is some real question about that assignment. Thus the basis for assigning our present passage to the same source falls away.

The assignment of the rest of the chapter to two separate sources is based on the following alleged conflicts or repetitions:

1. It is argued that in verse 1 we are told that Joseph learned his father was sick, while in Genesis 47:29-31 we are told that preparations were already made for his burial. But this presents no real conflict. We observed with respect to Genesis 47:28ff. that there is no call to look upon that incident as a deathbed scene. The old man felt his strength slowly waning and realized that he was no long for this life and therefore wanted to make some provisions for his eventual

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burial. Here in Genesis 48:1 his condition is presented as far more critical. He is now described as sick, and this sickness led to his death. It is also significant that in the incident in Genesis 47 Jacob specifically called for Joseph. In this case Joseph learns of Jacob's serious illness and takes the initiative to go to his father's bedside. There is no evidence of conflict here in any way.

2. It is pointed out that according to verse 10a Jacob was no longer able to see. But in verses 8 and 11 we are told that he "saw" Joseph's sons. There is no real conflict here, either. As will be shown in the expositional notes, verse 10 does not indicate that Jacob was blind, but merely that his eyesight was failing.
3. It is claimed that we are told twice, in verses 10 and 13, that Joseph brought his sons to Jacob and that this is repetition. But, as the expositional notes will point out, it is apparent from the narrative that Joseph actually did bring his sons close to their grandfather twice in the course of the incident.
4. It has been argued that verses 15 and 16 break the connection between 14 and 17. Joseph's attempt to correct Jacob with respect to which child should receive the greater blessing, it is claimed, comes too late since the blessing has already been spoken. Thus it is suggested that verses 15 and 16 actually anticipate verse 20, but this is a nitpicking argument and overlooks the chiasmic structure of the passage. Furthermore, there was nothing in the words of Jacob, recorded in verses 15 and 16, that would indicate that Ephraim was being given a preferential blessing over his brother, Manasseh. There was no need for Joseph to panic and immediately jump into action as soon as the old man placed his hands on the heads of his sons. The entire scene is a very natural and tender one. When Jacob began to speak, Joseph gradually came to the realization that his father may have mistaken the elder for the younger of the two boys. So he interrupted his father and tried to correct the situation, but Jacob gently insisted that he knew what he was doing and thus the incident proceeded in a very natural way.

In the light of all of this it becomes clear that this chapter need not be broken up into little bits and pieces. It is a complete unit and graphically describes a tender, emotional scene in a very natural way. Even some of the scholars who insist on dividing the material between various sources have

observed that the blending of this material into one coherent narrative is most effective in this chapter.

### THEOLOGICAL IDEAS

Various aspects of faith form the background of the words of Jacob in this passage. As he approached death, notably Jacob's *only* request was that he not be buried in the land of Egypt (vv. 29-31). The manner of the request suggests that it is intended as an allusion back to the sending of Abraham's servant for a bride for Isaac: "Place now your hand under my thigh and deal with me in kindness and faithfulness" (v. 29; cf. Gen. 24:2). The similarities between the two requests are transparent. As he approached death (Gen. 24:1), Abraham did not want his son to take a wife from among the people in the land where he was then dwelling but rather take a wife from among his own family (Gen. 24:3-4). In the same way, as he approached death (v. 29), Jacob did not want to be buried among the Egyptians but with his fathers (v. 30) in his own land. The same theological theme is taken up in Genesis 50 where Joseph makes his sons swear that they will carry his bones back to the Promised Land, a request carried out by the sons of Israel in Joshua 24:32.

What theology lies behind such requests? Do they give expression to any central theological themes in the Book of Genesis? The answer is a resounding yes! A central element of the promise to Abraham was the promise of the land. The request of the patriarchs to be buried in the land "with their fathers" brings to the fore their trust in the faithfulness of God to His word. Henceforth a key symbol of Israel's faith in the promises of God is the bones of the faithful offspring that lie buried in the Promised Land.

One other chapter of the Bible pays specific attention to this symbol, Ezekiel 37, the prophecy of the "dry bones." There the hope embedded in the symbol is given full expression when the LORD says, "Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel . . . and you will come to life (Ezek. 37:12-14). It is no wonder then that in this same chapter Ezekiel returns directly to one of the central underlying theological issues of the Joseph Narrative, namely, the rivalry between Joseph and Judah!

As early as the rivalry between Leah, Judah's mother, and Rachel, Joseph's mother (Gen. 30), the question of the preeminence of one of the brothers over the other has occupied a central role in the narratives. In Genesis

48 (the blessing of Joseph) and 49 (the blessing of Judah) the issue comes to a final resolution in the choice of one from the tribe of Judah who will reign over the rest of the brothers (Gen. 49:8-10). So also in Ezekiel 37, the prophet returns to the theme of the Joseph Narrative and the rivalry between the brothers. Here, as in Genesis, the brothers are reunited under the king from the tribe of Judah, David:

The word of the LORD came again to me saying, "and you, son of man, take for yourself one stick and write on it, '**For Judah** and for the sons of Israel, his companions'; then take another stick and write on it, '**For Joseph**, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, his companions.' Then join them for yourself one to another into one stick, that **they may become one in your hand**. And when the sons of your people speak to you saying, 'Will you not declare to us what you mean by these?,' say to them, 'Thus says the LORD God, "Behold, I will take **the stick of Joseph**, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will put them with it, **with the stick of Judah**, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand.' And the stocks on which you write will be in your hand before their eyes. And say to them, 'Thus says the LORD God, "Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and **one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations, and they will no longer be divided into two kingdoms**. And they will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God. **And My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd**; and they will walk in My ordinances, and keep My statutes, and observe them. **And they shall live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant**, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons, and their sons' sons, forever; and **David My servant shall be their prince forever**. And I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever'" (Ezek. 37:15-28).



We can see that the writer of Genesis has much the same concern underlying his narratives (Abraham, Jacob and Joseph) as the prophecies of Ezekiel. The concern is the fulfillment of God's promises to Jacob. Those whose faith is like that of Jacob's are those who look for the time when the "dry bones" will again be given life in the reign of the one from the tribe of Judah.

Of further interest is the fact that Ezekiel's prophecy leads from this theological theme directly into his vision of the defeat of Gog and Magog (Ezekiel 38). In the same way the Book of Revelation weaves together the defeat of Gog and Magog (Ezek. 38--39) with the victory of the "Lion of the tribe of Judah" (cf. Gen. 49:8-12; cf. Num. 24:7; Rev. 5:5; 19:11-16).

Another significant theological theme in this section of the Joseph Narrative is Jacob's discernment of the will of God in blessing the younger over the elder, a concept that had taken him a lifetime to learn. Also notable is the sense of certainty that the promise will find its fulfillment in the land of Canaan. In harmony with this confidence Jacob obtained the promise from Joseph to bury him there and, in anticipation of it, gave the double portion to Joseph. The passage is fully about the faith of the patriarch who was about to die without receiving the promises but who had learned in his lifetime about the ways of God.

## STRUCTURE AND SYNTHESIS

### Structure

After the brothers' reconciliation in Genesis 45 and the reunion of the beloved-son with his father in chapter 46, there follows in Genesis 46:31--47:28 Joseph's provision for the family and its settlement in Egypt. Now in Genesis 47:29-31 something else befalls: the reclining years of Jacob and his death and burial, introduced in Genesis 47:29 by "When the time drew near when Israel was to die." With this begins the account of the death of the great patriarch Jacob. Joseph promises his father to inter him in Canaan (Gen. 47:29-31), and fulfills the promise, mentioned expressly in Genesis 50:5 in the midst of the episode in Genesis 50:1-14. The entire complex of Genesis 47:29--50:14 is thus clamped together.

This episode has several parts that contribute to the deathbed scene, parts that are not always easily harmonized, as a check of the more critical com-

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mentaries will show. The first part of the deathbed scene is the oath dialogue between Jacob and Joseph (Gen. 47:28-31). Then follows the adoption of Manasseh and Ephraim in a speech by Jacob (Gen. 48:1-7). The third part records the blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh (vv. 8-20), and the last two verses, Jacob's farewell speech. Most of the passage is the words of Jacob--instructing, adopting, blessing, and promising for the future.

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### CHIASTIC ARRANGEMENT OF GENESIS 47:28--48:22

- A Joseph promises to carry Israel back to Canaan (47:28-31)
- B Joseph brings Manasseh and Ephraim for Israel's blessing (48:1-12)
- C Israel crosses his hands to bless the children (13-14)
- D ISRAEL BLESSES JOSEPH (15-16)
- C' Joseph's protest of Israel's crossing of his hands (17-18)
- B' Israel blesses Ephraim and Manasseh (19-20)
- A' Israel's promise that God will bring the people back to Canaan (21-22)

Figure 30.

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### Synthesis

Israel believed that God's promises to him were certain, even after death, and so he worshiped God, proving his faith by demanding to be buried in the Land of Promise; Israel also believed that God sovereignly gave His blessing contrary to human expectations, proving his faith by blessing the younger Ephraim over the older Manasseh.

### Translation

#### *GENESIS 47:28-31*

- 28 Jacob lived seventeen years in the land of Egypt, so that the span of Jacob's life came to one hundred and forty-seven years.
- 29 And when the time approached for Israel to die, he summoned his son Joseph and said to him, "Do me this favor, place your hand under my thigh as a pledge of your steadfast loyalty: please do not bury me in Egypt
- 30 When I lie down with my fathers, take me up from Egypt and bury me in their burial-place." He replied, "I will do as you have spoken."

- 31 And he said, "Swear to me." And he swore to him. Then Israel bowed at the head of the bed.

**GENESIS 48:1-22**

- 1 Some time afterward, Joseph was told, "Your father is ill." So he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.
- 2 When Jacob was told, "Your son Joseph has come to see you," Israel summoned his strength and sat up in bed.
- 3 And Jacob said to Joseph, "El Shaddai appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and He blessed me,
- 4 and said to me, 'I will make you fertile and numerous, making of you a community of peoples; and I will assign this land to your offspring to come for an everlasting possession.'
- 5 Now, your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, shall be mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine no less than Reuben and Simeon.
- 6 But progeny born to you after them shall be yours; they shall be recorded instead of their brothers in their inheritance.
- 7 I [do this because], when I was returning from Paddan, Rachel died, to my sorrow, while I was journeying in the land of Canaan, when still some distance short of Ephrath; and I buried her there on the road to Ephrath"--now Bethlehem.
- 8 Noticing Joseph's sons, Israel asked, "Who are these?"
- 9 And Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." "Bring them up to me," he said, "that I may bless them."
- 10 Now Israel's eyes were dim with age; he could not see. So [Joseph] brought them close to him, and he kissed them and embraced them.
- 11 And Israel said to Joseph, "I never expected to see you again, and here God has let me see your children as well."
- 12 Joseph then removed them from his knees, and bowed low with his face to the ground.
- 13 Joseph took the two of them, Ephraim with his right hand--to Israel's left--and Manasseh with his left hand--to Israel's right--and brought them close to him.
- 14 But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head--thus crossing his hands--although Manasseh was the first-born.
- 15 And he blessed Joseph, saying, "The God in whose ways my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd from my birth to this day--

- 16 The Angel who has redeemed me from all harm--Bless the lads. In them may my name be recalled, and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they be teeming multitudes upon the earth.
- 17 When Joseph saw that his father was placing his right hand on Ephraim's head, he thought it wrong; so he took hold of his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's.
- 18 "Not so, Father," Joseph said to his father, "for the other is the first-born; place your right hand on his head."
- 19 But his father objected, saying, "I know, my son, I know. He too shall become a people, and he too shall be great. Yet his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall be plentiful enough for nations."
- 20 So he blessed them that day, saying, "By you shall Israel invoke blessings, saying: God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh." Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh.
- 21 Then Israel said to Joseph, "I am about to die; but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers.
- 22 And now, I assign to you one portion more than to your brothers, which I wrested from the Amorites with my sword and bow."

### EXEGETICAL OUTLINE

- I. Near the end of his life, Israel by faith made Joseph swear to bury him in the cave of Machpelah and not in Egypt (28-31).
- II. On his deathbed, Israel gave the birthright to Joseph by raising Manasseh and Ephraim to the status of first born sons (48:1-7).
  - A. Joseph prepared to receive Jacob's blessing by bringing his two sons to his father (1).
  - B. Israel recounted God's promise of the blessing of a numerous people and the everlasting possession of the land (2-4).
  - C. Israel gave the birthright to Joseph with his two sons (5-6).
  - D. This birthright reversal was consolation for Rachel's having few sons because of her early death (7).
- III. In confirming the birthright through the blessing, Israel by faith exalted the younger Ephraim over the older Manasseh (48:8-20).
  - A. Joseph reverently presented his two sons, with Manasseh in the favored position, to the nearly blind Israel for the blessing (8-13).
    1. Joseph brought his two sons in for a blessing (8-11).
    2. He revered his father (12).
    3. He presented his sons to his father, with Manasseh in the favored position (13).

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- B. Israel blessed the sons, exalting the younger Ephraim over the older Manasseh (14-20).
1. Israel crossed his hands, putting his right hand on Ephraim the younger (14).
  2. Israel pronounced the blessing: The God of his fathers, his Shepherd and Redeemer, would bless the lads with the Abrahamic blessings that they might be a multitude in the land (15-16).
  3. In response to Joseph's protest, Israel maintained that the order of the blessing was correct, for the younger would be greater than the elder (17-19).
  4. Israel reiterated the blessing of both sons but put Ephraim first (20).
- IV. Believing that God would bring them back to the land, Israel stated that he had just given the double portion of the birthright to Joseph (48:21-22).

### EXPOSITION OF THE PASSAGE

#### I. *A mature faith does not lose sight of the promise (47:28-31).*

Four verses were devoted to the passing of Abraham (Gen. 25:7-10); two to the death of Isaac (Gen. 35:28f.). In each case the numerical summation of the years of life immediately preceded the report of death. Here, in Genesis 47:28--50:14, the demise of Jacob is told in extraordinary detail, and several scenes come between the account of his lifespan and his death (Gen. 47:28; 49:33).

The explanation for this exceptional treatment of Jacob's preparation for death and the death itself lies in the special circumstances surrounding his situation. He alone, of the patriarchs, dies on alien soil--outside of Canaan. He is therefore particularly concerned about interment in his ancestral grave, and burial in accordance with his wishes involves considerable effort and elaborate arrangements, all of which are described. Furthermore, from the time that Jacob settled down in Canaan after returning from Haran, his life had been wholly intertwined with that of Joseph. Just as the beginning of the period in Canaan was marked by a chronological note involving seventeen years (Gen. 37:2), so its close is similarly indicated (Gen. 47:28). It is this literary framework that has influenced our master narrator to place the numerical sum-

mation here, rather than with the actual announcement of death, therefore underscoring an artistic literary masterpiece before us.

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**Joseph Promises To Carry Israel Back To Canaan (verses 47:28--31)**

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**28 And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; so the length of Jacob's life was one hundred and forty-seven years.**

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The term "lived" is an apt description of the years Jacob spent reunited with his beloved son, for something had died within him when Joseph disappeared, and his "spirit revived" with the knowledge that he was alive and well in Egypt. Jacob had thought this would be a brief happiness, the final experience of his life. Instead, he has enjoyed many more years.

The expression "lived" (יָחַי/*way<sup>h</sup>i*) may sound natural enough in English, but is most unusual in Hebrew where one would expect "dwelt, sojourned" (יָשַׁב/*yšb*, see *e.g.* Gen. 37:1). The word should therefore be understood in the light of Genesis 45:27 which says that when he heard that Joseph was still alive and the material evidences thereof, then "the spirit of their father Jacob revived (literally, "lived"--same verb as in Gen. 47:28). "To live" means here (as in Gen. 12:13) and also in 2 Kings 13:21, Job 42:16 (and a host of other cases) to lead not an ordinary life but a full and joyous one.

As noted above, "seventeen years" is precisely as many years as Joseph had lived with his father in Canaan (Gen. 37:2). There is a similar pattern recorded for Abraham, who lived exactly as many years in his father's home (Gen. 12:4) as in the lifetime of his son Isaac (Gen. 21:5; 25:7).

Israel's total lifespan is given in this verse as "one hundred forty-seven years." It is interesting that the life spans of the three patriarchs lend themselves to factorization according to the following pattern:

Abraham 175 years = 5 x 5 x 7

Isaac 180 years = 6 x 6 x 5

Jacob 147 years = 7 x 7 x 3.

In this series, the squared number increases by one each time while the coefficient decreases by two. Furthermore, in each case the sum of the factors is 17! Through their factorial patterns, the patriarchal chronologies constitute a

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rhetorical device expressing the profound biblical conviction that Israel's formative age was not a concatenation of haphazard incidents but a series of events ordered according to God's grand design.

Almost all English translations of verse 28 say that Jacob "*lived . . . in the land of Egypt.*" However, the Hebrew simply has "Now Jacob *was in the land of Egypt.*" In Hebrew "living in a land" requires a verb different from the one used here which connotes "to keep on living." The point of the verb in this context is that not only did Jacob continue to live, but, whereas his whole previous life had been one of suffering, in Egypt he lived happily and in tranquility.

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**29** When the time for Israel to die drew near, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "Please, if I have found favor in your sight, place now your hand under my thigh and deal with me in kindness and faithfulness. Please do not bury me in Egypt."

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One incident is singled out from these closing years of Jacob's life. As he began to feel his strength slipping from him and death approaching, he called his son Joseph to his side. Near the end of his life, Jacob asked Joseph to swear that he would bury him in the cave that was purchased by Abraham. Here is another indication of the hope of the patriarch, for he knew that the fulfillment of the promise was in Canaan, not in Egypt. Moreover, Jacob did not want to be buried in a foreign land but to be laid to rest in the family plot with his fathers.

At great or crucial moments of his life, Jacob's patriarchhood is reinstated by the name "Israel" (see notes on Gen. 37:3, 13; 43:6, 11a; 45:28; 46:1, 30). This time, though Jacob was not ill, not only his presentiment of his approaching death but perhaps also the news that his sons had acquired further land-holdings alarmed him and made him feel deeply his responsibility as the patriarch (cf. Gen. 48:27). He feared that they might want to stay in Egypt for good, not as "sojourners." He desired all the more to be buried in Canaan so that his burial place at the side of his children's other ancestors would remind them that Canaan, not Egypt, must remain their "homeland," the Promise Land. He summons Joseph not only because he is to become the chieftain after his death, but also because only Joseph has the authority to fulfill his father's desire.

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Jacob asked Joseph to promise him that he would bury him back in Canaan, where his parents and grandparents were buried. The solemnity of Jacob's request was stressed by his insistence that Joseph place his hand "under my thigh" while making this promise. The act of placing the hand under the thigh has caused a great deal of discussion among Bible scholars. Some Jewish scholars, as well as some modern exegetes, are convinced that this no more than a discreet way of referring to the male penis, and thus "under my thigh" would be an euphemism. The Jews seek to relate this in a symbolic way to circumcision. Holding the circumcised membrum, called the "sign of the covenant" in Genesis 17:11, may invoke the presence and power of God as the guarantor of the oath. But such symbolism would be valid only if it were recognized by both sides. Modern scholars generally try to relate it to the powers of reproduction. The gesture would then involve posterity in the implementation of the instructions. Thus the oath would then involve the descendants of the parties involved who were, as it were, called to witness and to maintain the sacredness of what was sworn to in the oath.

It is apparent that we are dealing with an ancient custom, which its unusual nature leaves any explanation uncertain. It is hardly justified, then, to draw any firm and definitive conclusions from a practice about which we know little. Similar ceremonies have been discovered among some Arabian tribes and even among some of the native people of Australia. The one point we want to make in this connection is that there is no basis for ascribing the practice of phallicism to Abraham on the basis of this method of taking an oath. This practice was later found among the Greeks.

Jacob asked Joseph to deal with him in "kindness and faithfulness." The first of these two terms means "loyalty" (*hesed*) as in Genesis 24:27, where is used of God's loyalty to His covenant with Abraham. The second term, "faithfulness" (*emet*) refers to reliability or dependability, as in Genesis 32:10. The two terms are so arranged in the Hebrew text so that the second modifies the first, yielding a translation of "dependable loyalty." Jacob requested Joseph to exercise loyalty that he could count on, loyalty to God's promise to bring Jacob's descendants back to the land of Canaan. This loyalty would be expressed by burying Jacob in Canaan. Jacob knows the extraordinary importance of funeral arrangements for the Egyptians, so that it would indeed require exceptional "dependable loyalty" to break with their mores by not burying the patriarch in Egypt.

The significance of the oath is the same as the one in Genesis 24:2 and 9 where Abraham had made his servant swear when he sent him out to find



a bride for Isaac. There as well as here, it denotes how important it was that the line of the promised Seed possess the promised land. It stressed the solemnity of the matter and guaranteed the request. When Joseph's promise was sealed with the oath, Jacob no longer was concerned over its fulfillment.

In like manner, Joseph later abjures his brothers to rebury him in the land of Canaan (Gen. 50:25). Both Jacob and Joseph's deathbed requests are bound up with the divine promise of redemption and nationhood in the Land of Israel (cf Gen. 48:21; 50:24f.). Thus for both, they wanted even their burial to be a testimony to their faith in God's promises.

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- 30 **But when I lie down with my fathers, you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place." And he said, "I will do as you have said."**
- 31 **And he said, "Swear to me." So he swore to him. Then Israel bowed *in worship* at the head of the bed.**
- 

"When I lie down with my fathers" is an idiomatic expression for death (cf. Deut. 31:16; 1 Kgs. 2:10), as does "being gathered to one's fathers" (Gen. 25:8). Since, as here, it most often precedes the notice of burial (1 Kgs. 11:43 and 2 Kgs. 8:24), and because it is used of Moses (Deut. 31:16), David (1 Kgs. 2:10), Ahaz (2 Chron. 28:27), and Manasseh (2 Kgs. 21:18), none of whom was actually buried in the ancestral grave, the phrase clearly refers to death and not to interment. The sepulcher of the three great patriarchs is to become the great magnet for the children of Israel toward the Promised Land, their "Eternal Possession."

Jacob then exacts this solemn oath, "swear to me," in addition to the promise in order to strengthen Joseph's hand when he will request the royal authorization needed to fulfill the difficult assignment. Indeed, Pharaoh later refers to the oath in granting permission (cf. Gen. 50:6). In diligently securing Joseph's pledge, Jacob challenged the next generation to view Canaan as their home, and to keep believing God's promise.

Being an invalid, the aged patriarch can only make some bodily gesture symbolic of prostration. Israel then bowed himself (וַיִּשְׁתָּחֲוֶה/wayyishṭahû) on the head of the bed (cf. 1 Kgs. 1:47). He was now assured of his burial in Canaan. Many commentators conclude that this was a reverent act of thanksgiving by the patriarch.

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There has been considerable discussion about the expression that Jacob bowed down at the "head of his bed." Some modern critics have tried to read into this that Jacob had some type of teraphim on the head piece of his bed and that he worshiped by means of this idol. This would be in conflict with Genesis 35:2-4, and even so there is no basis for it in the text.

Our English translations have rendered this statement as "on the top of his staff," basing this reading on the Septuagint. This same translation is used in Hebrews 11:21. Although arguments can be offered for either reading, there really is no serious issue involved. If we think of an old man needing something on which to lean to support himself, it really is quite inconsequential whether he leaned on the head of the bed or leaned on his staff. It may be that Jacob supported himself by both his staff and the bed's headboard, as he was very old and feeble by this time.

## II. *A mature faith knows how to develop confidence for the future from past blessings (48:1-7).*

Even after Jacob had discussed his forthcoming burial with Joseph, he still continued to live for a time. Joseph, in the meantime, had to go about his regular duties and responsibilities. The other sons, likewise, with their increasing numbers and activities, were very busy. Jacob no longer could be active as head of the clan and was bedridden. Nevertheless, his mind and heart were still active. Alone on his bed, he must frequently have reminisced, recalling the marvelous events of his long walk with the LORD.

Many of his thoughts, no doubt, were directed toward Joseph and his two sons. Joseph's influence would continue to be strong among the Israelites. His strength of character, his spiritual convictions and discernment, and his qualities of leadership would be inherited by his descendants through many generations.

The phrase "some time later" (v. 1) suggests an important break in the narrative and separates this passage from the events that have preceded. Chapter 48 forms a fitting conclusion to the Joseph Narrative. As in the earlier patriarchal narratives, the blessing of the father is passed along to the next generation. Two themes of this passage stand out. First, as with the earlier instances of the patriarchal blessings, it was the younger son, Ephraim, who was blessed as the first-born rather than the older, Manasseh (v. 19). In this

respect the passage continues the well-worn theme that the blessing did not follow the lines of natural descent or natural right. The blessing was a gift bestowed on those who could not claim it as a right. Second, the blessing recorded in this chapter is largely subordinated and superseded by the blessing of Jacob that follows in Genesis 49.

It has been a curious feature of the whole of the Joseph Narrative that Judah, rather than Joseph, ultimately prevailed in gaining the position of preeminence among his brothers. As important as Joseph is in the structure of the Genesis narratives, his role is subordinate to that of Judah in the long run. Consequently the blessings of the sons of Joseph recorded in this passage do not play an important role in the later biblical story. Rather, it is the blessing of Judah in chapter 49 that plays the dominant role in the continuing story of the promise and the blessing. From Judah comes the house of David, and from David comes the Messiah--that is the focus of the biblical narrative that follows. The two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, play an important role in the texts dealing with the divided northern kingdom; but the biblical writer's attention to that kingdom, which ultimately was exiled and lost in the Dispersion, pales quickly in the light of the Rising Star of David--the Messiah.

#### **Joseph Brings Manasseh And Ephraim For Israel's Blessing (verses 48:1-12)**

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### **CHAPTER 48**

**1** Now it came about after these things that Joseph was told, "Behold, your father is sick." So he took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim with him.

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Some time after Joseph had visited his father (Gen. 47:29-31), he was informed that Jacob was ill. Because of Jacob's advanced age, this news was genuine cause for alarm. Therefore, Joseph hurried to his father's side and took his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, with him. It was natural for Joseph to take his sons with him to see the ailing patriarch (also their grandfather) who might soon die and, perhaps, to receive his blessing. Incidentally, this is the first reference to illness in the Hebrew Scriptures.

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- 2     **When it was told to Jacob, "Behold, your son Joseph has come to you," Israel collected his strength and sat up in the bed.**
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When Jacob heard that Joseph came to visit him in his sickbed, he strengthened himself to receive him and he rallied his waning strength to the extent that he "sat up in the bed." Perhaps out of deep respect for the office that Joseph represented, the text adds this clause. Although the text emphasizes Jacob's failing health, it is in this old age that we see his faith strong and vital.

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- 3     **Then Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me,**  
 4     **and He said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and numerous, and I will make you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your descendants after you for an everlasting possession.'**
- 

Jacob now paraphrases those divine promises (cf. Gen. 35:11-12) in order to establish the legal basis for his subsequent actions. As heir to the blessings, Jacob has the right to decide who is to be included in the "community of peoples" that will be known as Israel. Because only he who receives the divine blessing directly can impart it, Joseph, who never received a divine "appearance," cannot endow his sons with tribal territory.

"Luz" was the original name for Bethel, according to Genesis 28:19. At this site Jacob received a momentous revelation after he had returned from Paddan-aram, recounted in chapter 35. His name was changed to Israel, and the promises made to Abraham and Isaac were reiterated.

Now Jacob rehearsed from his bed how the Almighty God had blessed (וַיְבָרֶכְתִּי/*waybārek*) him with the promise of a multitude of people in the land of their everlasting possession. The words of the promise had provided the patriarch with hope through all his pilgrimage, just as they would preserve the hope of the nation. It was the sure Word of God. A correct understanding of the Joseph Narrative must stress the centrality of the blessing through these passages, for the deathbed scenes recapture this main theme of the patriarchal narratives. Jacob's report of how God blessed him included God's promise to him to make him fruitful, to multiply him, and to make him a multitude of people. The expressions not only recall the Abrahamic covenant but also reflect the original commandments at creation to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28).

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These words are repeated in Exodus 1:7 to report how the nation had flourished in their Egyptian sojourn.

Jacob's recollection of the LORD's promise to him at Bethel is significant. He repeated the LORD's words almost verbatim; but in the minor alterations we can see not only Jacob's assessment of the promise but also the writer's reason for including this material. As he had acknowledged in Genesis 35:9, so now Jacob recalled that God had "blessed him" (v. 3). When he recounted what God had said, Jacob brought out a nuance to God's words that helps clarify the reader's understanding of the LORD's promised blessing.

In Genesis 35:11 the LORD had said, using the imperative mood, "Be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from your body." The use of the imperative in blessings is not unusual and should be understood, not as a command, but as a form of "well-wishing." The LORD was saying, "May you be fruitful and increase," just as in Genesis 1:28. But as Jacob retold the story to Joseph in this chapter, he did not use the imperative but rather changed the verbal forms to stress that God was the One Who would bring about all that had been promised: "I will make you fruitful and numerous, and I will make you a company of peoples, and I will give this land to your descendants after you for an everlasting possession."

As he reflected back on the blessing and recounted it to his son, Jacob brought out just that aspect of the blessing that has been the central theme of the Joseph Narrative: God ultimately will bring about all that he has promised. All that had happened to the house of Jacob had been in God's plan and was intended by Him "for good" (Gen. 50:20).

Jacob now understands that God is the One Who is working out the covenant as He had promised, but not after he had seen all possible hope diminish. For example, after God had commanded him to be fruitful and multiply, Rachel died (Gen. 35:16-19). The apparent means by which to fulfill God's command was thus suddenly removed. Then Joseph was taken from Jacob. Benjamin's life, too, was threatened. Humanly speaking, these events do not lend themselves to the outworking of a sovereign God's promise to bless him. But as time passed, God in His outworking of His plan, Jacob began to witness God's ability to bring good from evil, life from death. He restored Joseph to him. Benjamin remained safe. Eventually the family became reconciled and fruitful in Egypt. As Jacob reminisce on this unexpected working out of God's promise to him, he could truly affirm that God was superintending it all.

A second nuance is noticeable in Jacob's recounting of the promise. When he recounted God's promise of the land, he again did so verbatim: "I will give this land . . . to your descendants after you" (cf. Gen. 35:11). But there is a significant addition to Jacob's retelling of the blessing which is not recorded in chapter 35. He has added "as an everlasting possession" (אָהֻזְזַת עוֹלָם / *'ahuzzat 'ôlām*; v. 4), which stands in a subtle contrast to Genesis 47:11 (אָהֻזְזָה / *'ahuzzāh*; cf. Gen. 47:27), thereby emphasizing that the only true and inalienable "possession" of territory is the Land of Israel. Only God can give an "everlasting possession." Pharaoh's gift of the land of Goshen is transitory.

Only one other time in Genesis is the promise of the land called an "everlasting possession" (Gen. 17:8). There too when the promise was given to Abraham, the form of the blessing was not the imperative ("Be fruitful and increase") but the form of the verb denoting God as the subject of the action!! The LORD says, "I . . . will greatly increase your numbers" (Gen. 17:2) and "I will make you very fruitful" (Gen. 17:6).

It may also be significant that Jacob omitted one of the key elements of the promise that the LORD had made to him in chapter 35. The LORD had said, "Kings will come from your body" (Gen. 35:11; cf. 17:6, 16), but in the present chapter no mention of that part of the promise is made. Why is this part omitted in Genesis 48? Likely the stress on the role of Judah with regard to the kingship in Genesis 49 has precluded any mention of the promise of kings in reference to Joseph.

### *Israel Adopts Joseph's Sons (verses 5-12)*

Jacob, now confident of the LORD's promise, formally adopts his two grandchildren and were to be treated as his own (v. 5). The significance of this adoption would thereby pass the double blessing of the birthright on to Joseph by elevating Ephraim and Manasseh to the rank of heirs. The recognition of them along with Reuben and Simeon would alter the partitioning of the Land of Promise. They both would have a share in the Promised Land, because they, along with the other sons of Jacob, would inherit the promise of Abraham (v. 6). Of course, the granting of the double portion to them was done in full confidence that they would have something to inherit, that is, that the tribes would return to the Land of Promise. This expectation is not unlike Jeremiah's purchase of the field at the time of the captivity--he was convinced that they were coming back.

Henceforth the families of Ephraim and Manasseh were counted among the sons of Jacob and later became two of the most important of the tribes of Israel. In later biblical texts these two names became synonymous with the northern kingdom of Israel, which stood in bitter opposition to the kingdom of Judah.

The language and narration are noteworthy for their legal precision. The adopter is invariably called Israel (cf. Gen. 35:10); there is a declaration of intent comprising the careful, unambiguous designation of the persons involved and those excluded (vv. 5-6); the true identity of the boys present is established through interrogation of the father (vv. 8f.); certain physical acts reinforce the oral declaration (vv. 10-12).

Intra-family adoptions are well attested in the ancient Near East. In the Bible it is possible to construe the episodes dealing with Naomi and her grandson Obed (Ruth 4:16f.) and with Mordecai and Esther (Esther 2:7) as examples of this practice. A striking analogy to the present narrative is provided by an Akkadian legal document from Ugarit recording the adoption of a grandson by a grandfather who then makes him his heir (cf. Gen. 50:23).

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**5** "And now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are."

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Verse 5 begins with "And now" (אֵתְּנָה/w<sup>c</sup>'attāh) which always introduces a step in consequence of a situation just expounded (Gen. 37:20; 41:33; 44:30, 33; 45:5, 8; 47:4; 50:5, 17, 21). This implies that it was through Joseph that the fulfillment of Isaac's prayer about "a company of peoples" became possible. By making him the father of two tribe-heads, as Jacob is the father of eleven, Joseph is now on a par with the patriarch himself, a fourth "Father." At the same time, the bestowal of a double portion of the father's inheritance (see Deut. 21:17) makes Joseph the first-born (cf. 1 Chron. 5:1). This aggrandizement, on the other hand, compensates him beforehand for Judah's unique destiny (see notes on Gen. 49:8ff.). Consequently, his progeny will be called "the House of Joseph" (cf. Jos. 18:5; Judg. 1:22, 35).

The fact that Ephraim is mentioned before Manasseh by Jacob is in anticipation of what was to follow. Through this adoption, Ephraim and Manasseh will attain equal rights with Reuben and Simeon. The parallel drawn

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between the two sons of Joseph and the two eldest sons of Jacob exemplifies the new legal status of the former.

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**6 "But your offspring that have been born after them shall be yours; they shall be called by the names of their brothers in their inheritance."**

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Verse 6 mentions other sons which Joseph had borne, but are not part of the biblical record. The past meaning of the Hebrew verb הוֹלַדְתָּ/*hōladtā*, literally, "you have begotten," is confirmed by the preceding Hebrew participle הַנּוֹלָדִים/*hannōlādīm*, "who were born" (v. 5). This interpretation finds much support among traditional Hebrew exegetes such as Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Ramban, and Radak. Another view, that of the Targums, Saadiah, and Rashi, is that the verb expresses a future possibility. Still other interpreters, such as the *Lekah Tov* and *Ḥizkuni*, believe that the reference is to Joseph's grandsons.

These other sons of Joseph would be "called by the names of their brothers in their inheritance." This peculiar phrase occurs also in Ezra 2:61, where an individual took the name of his father-in-law after marrying. The idea here in Genesis 48:7 seems to be that Ephraim and Manasseh's younger brothers (not named here) would assume Ephraim and Manasseh's names insofar as being counted among their tribes. They would not form additional tribes of their own. Hence, in later history Ephraim and Manasseh were two of the twelve tribes of Israel, but none of the other sons of Joseph became a tribe.

Although Joseph's other sons would be included in the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, they would not receive territorial allotments as independent tribes. Jacob's stipulation seems merely to assure Joseph's brothers that the adoption of Joseph's sons does not favor them over their sons, but signifies Joseph as "first-born." Jacob knows that since God Himself has so manifestly elevated Joseph, his brother will no longer resent his decision. And Reuben resigns himself to having lost the blessing.

As in the case of Esau and Jacob, it was customary that the oldest son receive a double portion of the inheritance; but the father, as head of the family, could change this arrangement if the situation, in his opinion, warranted such a change. Jacob, therefore, was perfectly within his rights to transfer this birthright from Reuben (who had clearly shown through both his incestuous



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relation with Bilhah and general weakness of character, that he was not really fit for such a responsibility) to Joseph, who would have been the first-born and who had shown beyond question that he was indeed fit for the responsibility.

There is no doubt that Jacob desired that Joseph be recognized in a special way, partly because of all he had done for the family and his godly character, but probably primarily because he was the first-born son of his beloved wife, Rachel. Jacob had fully intended, the beginning, that Rachel be his only wife; in that case, Joseph would indeed have been the first-born. It had been by Laban's deception, not by Jacob's choice, that things had developed differently. It was appropriate, therefore, that Joseph be regarded as, in a peculiar sense, Jacob's first-born.

The reader should not underestimate Jacob's act of faith in the LORD's promises by adopting both Ephraim and Manasseh. Jacob believed that God would eventually bring the family back to Canaan, the Land of Promise, where Ephraim and Manasseh's descendants could enjoy what was now being declared as theirs. In addition, Jacob's act of adoption also challenged Joseph's descendants (and, indirectly, all of Jacob's family) to walk by the promises God had made to the patriarchs. No doubt Joseph's sons had a secure future in Egypt as sons of a great ruler. Jacob's declaration, however, challenged them to forsake whatever riches and prestige their future held for them in Egypt, and turn their attention to pursuing the land that God had promised. As heirs of Jacob, they had to plan for the future on the basis of God's promise.

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**7 "Now as for me, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died, to my sorrow, in the land of Canaan on the journey, when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried here there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)."**

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By way of further explanation as to what some might have seen as favoritism, Jacob recalls his great love for Rachel and how she had died prematurely in giving birth to Benjamin, near Ephrath, which is later called Bethlehem. But why the mention of Rachel at this point in the Narrative? It should be underscored that this is the only time that Scripture records Jacob's deep sorrow over Rachel's death; and why the mention of her burial site?

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Jacob's adoption of Joseph's sons seems to have been influenced in part by the patriarch's recollection of his beloved Rachel, who died in the land of Canaan. With Joseph present, Jacob remembered what must have been a moving event in his experience, the burial of Rachel, especially since now he was thinking of his own burial. Thus, it is quite natural that, on his deathbed, Jacob should recall his beloved wife who had died so young and for whom he had endured so much.

If we relate verse 7 to what precedes, then the mention of Rachel here could be prompted by the fact that just as she had borne Jacob "two sons" (Gen. 44:27, Joseph and Benjamin) at a time when he was about to enter the land, so also Joseph gave Jacob "two sons" (v. 5) just at the time when he was about to enter Egypt. Such symmetry suggests that Ephraim and Manasseh are seen as replacements of Joseph and Benjamin, which serves to further the sense of divine providence behind the events of Jacob's life. Perhaps, it is only now that Jacob can utter these deep felt and inexpressible memories in such a context, because now he has honored Rachel's memory by making her the grand matriarch of a two tribe-head. In some ways, it is as though he wanted to lead Joseph to his mother's grave, and there to give him or receive from him a promise.

Furthermore, Jacob's recollection is virtually verbatim to that of the account of Rachel's death in Genesis 35:16-19. In both passages the stress is laid on the site of "Ephrath," which the writer identifies in both passages as Bethlehem. The mention of Ephrath may constitute a covert verbal allusion to Ephraim, who is soon to be the focus of Jacob's attention. Moreover, it was probably because she had been deprived of the opportunity to bear more children that here two grandchildren are adopted by Jacob as a substitute for those whom her death had robbed of the possibility of further sons.

As in the earlier cases of the concern for the burial of the patriarchs in the Promised Land, Jacob's mention of Rachel's burial is tied to the promise that the land would be an "eternal possession" of the seed of Abraham. Rachel's burial place, like that of Abraham and Sarah's and Jacob's own impending burial site (Gen. 47:29-30), serves as a reminder of the faithfulness of God to His covenant promise.

It is noted that traditional commentators have by and large understood this verse to be an apologia by Jacob for troubling his son with the arduous task of burying him in the Cave of Machpelah when he himself had not done the same for Rachel, who had died but a short distance from the site.

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However, this interpretation does not explain the intrusiveness of the verse in its present position. It would more appropriately belong with Genesis 47:29-31 or 49:29-32, both of which deal with Jacob's instructions regarding his burial.

In conclusion, what then was Jacob's motive in inserting this reference to Rachel's death in this specific context? It is because there is a causal connection between Rachel's untimely death and Jacob's special provision for Joseph's two sons. Jacob decided to honor his beloved Rachel by adopting her two grandsons as his own sons and in that way increasing the number of her sons, for which she longed so desperately. This reference to her death would then present the motive for the special position that he now gave to Ephraim and Manasseh. The Latin Vulgate translation pointed in this direction by using a causal conjunction between the two statements.

It can be noted that Jacob referred to the country where he had gained his wives and his family with the shortened form of "Paddan" rather than the usual full place-name "Paddan-aram, as in Genesis 25:20 and 35:9.

It goes without saying that the addition of the statement "that is, Bethlehem," when speaking of Ephrath, came from the hand of our writer and was not part of Jacob's actual words. Thus our translators have correctly placed this as a parenthesis.

We also find a similar insertion in Genesis 35:19. Many have called this editorial note into question. They think of it as a marginal note which was improperly brought into the text. The basis for this position is allegedly found in two other references that supposedly locate the grave of Rachel farther to the north. These references are 1 Samuel 10:2 and Jeremiah 31:15. The latter passage pictures how the weeping of Rachel for her children, who were then in captivity, was heard in Ramah. This indicates, it is claimed, that the grave of Rachel was near Ramah, but if we read the passage in Jeremiah with care we will note that there is no reference of any kind to the grave of Rachel.

The other passage, 1 Samuel 10:2, does make mention of Rachel's grave. It is located on the borders of the tribal inheritance that was occupied by the tribe of Benjamin. This does present some difficulty, since Bethlehem lies a few hours to the south of that location. It should be remembered, however, that Rachel's death and burial did not occur at Ephrath itself. We are specifically told that it was on the way to Ephrath. As Genesis 35:16 indicates, we do not know how far they were from Ephrath at the time. Add to this the fact that the location mentioned in 1 Samuel 10:2 can well indicate a general area near the

borders of Benjamin's inheritance. Thus, we are left with no substantial basis for the alleged conflict between these two passages of Scripture.

**III. *A mature faith recognizes that God's ways are not man's ways and therefore must learn to submit to God's ways (48:8-22).***

The rest of the chapter is concerned with Jacob's choice in blessing Joseph's younger son first. The last two verses reiterate the theme of the double blessing to Joseph.

The blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh is recounted in great detail. In the account of Jacob's blessing his sons (Gen. 49), these two sons are not mentioned. The overall function of the present account then is to augment the blessings of chapter 49 with an account of the blessing of the two sons who have taken their place in the house of Jacob along with the other sons (vv. 5-6). Great care is taken to emphasize that in the blessing of these two sons, Ephraim, the younger brother, was given the blessing of the first-born over Manasseh (v. 20b). As has been the case throughout the patriarchal narratives, it was the younger son who was chosen to carry the line of blessing.

Israel's blessing of Joseph's sons contains elements which are striking in the way they parallel and contrasts with the account of Isaac's blessing of Jacob (Gen. 27:1-27):

Genesis 27	Genesis 48
Isaac's eyes dim (1)	Israel bedridden (2)
Isaac asks, "Who are you?" (18)	Israel says, "Who are these?" (8)
Isaac bedridden (19)	Israel says, "Bring them to me" (9)
Isaac requests, "Come close" (21)	Israel's eyes dim (10)
Jacob kissed Isaac (27)	Israel kissed his grandsons (10)
Deception and blessing (27-35)	No Deception and blessing (17-20)

It seems that our writer wishes to contrast between these two times in Jacob's life. Whereas in Genesis 27 Jacob had schemed to obtain God's blessing, in chapter 48 he calmly aligns himself with God's way of working out His promises (vv. 17-19). As Genesis 27 demonstrates Isaac's blessing of Jacob in the outworking of Jacob's life, a patriarchal blessing was a prophetic oracle. Jacob knew that his father's blessing would genuinely affect his future, and therefore, schemed for the blessing.

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- 8 When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, "Who are these?"  
 9 And Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." So he said, "Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them."
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Jacob's question seem to suggest that he does not know his grandsons seventeen years after arriving in Egypt! Traditional commentators have attempted to overcome this anomaly by connecting this verse with verse 10, which records the patriarch's poor vision. They suggest that he could dimly discern the presence of two human forms but could not recognize them. Modern scholars generally regard the scene as belonging to a different strand of tradition inserted haphazardly here.

Actually, we have here the second stage of the *legal* adoptive process, namely, the establishment of the true identity of the candidates for adoption by formal interrogation of the natural father (cf. Gen. 27:18). Therefore "Israel said" (לַיִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּשְׂאָר/wayyar' yisrā'el), not "asked," who are these?" Had Jacob thought they were strangers, he certainly would not have them witness his message (vv. 3-5).

Now, he, as "Israel," wants them to approach. "Israel" rather than Jacob, is used hereafter until the end of the chapter in order to reflect the change of name (cf. Gen. 35:10) upon which this episode is dependent. Further, the name "Israel" is more appropriate since the Narrative concludes with family history.

Joseph's words in verse 9 indicate his gratitude for God's providential guidance and blessing in the foreign country. It is noteworthy that while Israel mentioned "Ephraim and Manasseh" instead of naming the older one first, Joseph refrains from "correcting" him and merely says "my sons."

"Take them" indicates that Joseph should lead them by the hand as described in verse 13, so that they will know their father's intention to have the older at the patriarch's right hand.

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- 10 Now the eyes of Israel were so dim from age *that* he could not see. Then Joseph brought them close to him, and he kissed them and embraced them.

**11 And Israel said to Joseph, "I never expected to see your face, and behold, God has let me see your children as well."**

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The parenthetical, "Now the eyes of Israel were so dim from age," forms a break in the narrative and explains Joseph's reaction in the following scene. He will attribute his father's unusual act to his impaired vision.

However, we should not lose sight why our writer has inserted it here in juxtaposition with verse 11. After declaring that Israel could not see, the narrative continues by recording Israel's despair of ever seeing Joseph again. The juxtaposition of the two verbs for "see" is a rhetorical device that makes a significant point. Although Jacob's eyes were bad, this was not the reason he never expected to see Joseph again. He never expected to see Joseph because he believed Joseph was dead. Here is a subtle reference to the time in Jacob's life when circumstances were against him and he had lost sight of God's promise (Gen. 42:36). In contrast to that time, God has now allowed him to see not only Joseph but also his sons. God's faithfulness had not failed Jacob when, in his estimation, all was against him. Here the narrator reminds the reader that God delivered Jacob, and that his promise still holds true. Joseph recognized God's faithfulness in Jacob's testimony, and so bowed in gratitude to God (v. 12).

After Joseph's two sons drew near, Israel kissed and embraced both. These two verbs appear together again in the Hebrew Scriptures only in Genesis 29:13 and 33:4, where the embrace precedes the kiss. Here these acts, in reverse order, express not simply a show of affection but the reinforcement of the oral declarations through symbolic physical gestures that have significance in the adoptive process. Also the reversed action is a way in which Israel can keep them in his arms.

The old patriarch then spoke warmly about the amazing miracle that, whereas he had expected never to see his beloved Joseph again, now God had given him the grace to see Joseph's two sons.

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**12 Then Joseph took them from his knees, and bowed with his face to the ground.**

To some commentators, this verse presents some difficulty. First of all it could be asked whose knees are intended here. This can be readily answered because the context makes it clear that this refers to Jacob's knees and this is the way it has generally been accepted. Moving from one person to another in the course of a narrative without indicating this is in keeping with Hebrew narrative style.

The next question is just what the significance is of this reference to Jacob's knees. Some have held that Jacob took the two young men and placed them on his knees as a symbol of adopting them as his sons. But this will hardly do since these sons of Joseph, born before the time of the famine (Gen. 41:50), were full-grown young men by this time. The Hebrew text, it should be noted, does not say that Joseph took his sons "off" his father's knees but rather that he took them "away from" his father's knees. This reference to Jacob's knees, "from" or between which the two boys had been placed, is another symbolic gesture that betokens acceptance and legitimation as son and heir.

We probably should picture this scene as follows: The feeble old man was sitting on the edge of the bed (v. 2). In order to embrace these two young men they had to stand close to him, pressing against his knees. Then, because of Israel's gratitude toward God, Joseph took them from his knees and expressed his gratitude for his father's gracious adoption of these two sons as his own. Of course, all of this had to be done in conformity with proper ancient, Eastern custom. In order that Joseph might properly perform his obeisance, it would have been necessary for his sons to step aside. It is noteworthy that Joseph, even in his exalted position as second ruler in the kingdom of Egypt, still found it appropriate to bow down before his father! There is no doubt that Joseph clearly recognizes the pre-eminence of his father.

#### **Israel Crosses His Hands To Bless The Children (verses 13-14)**

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**13 And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel's left, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel's right, and brought them close to him.**

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Joseph stations the lads before their grandfather, the great patriarch, in such a way as to ensure that Jacob's right hand, the symbol of power, will naturally rest on Manasseh, the first-born. The high importance that this has for

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Joseph is conveyed by the precision of the language, the repeated use of "right" and "left" seven times in combination (vv. 13f., 17).

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**14 But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, crossing his hands, although Manasseh was the first-born.**

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As the notes on Genesis 48:17ff. will show, it is at this moment that Joseph protests of his father crossing his hands, but it was to no avail.

The placing of the hand upon the head establishes physical contact between the parties to the blessing, heightening the sense of intimacy and communication between the donor and the recipient. The Hebrew verb used here (*וַיַּשֵּׁת*/*wayyāšet*) is not the same as that employed for the ceremony of the "laying on of the hands" used in the case of sacrificial offerings and ordination (Ex. 29:10; Num. 27:18, 23).

When Jacob pronounced the blessing on the sons, he wittingly guided his hands (*אֶת יְדָיו סִכַּל*/*sikkēl 'et-yādāyw*) so that his right hand was on Ephraim's head, and his left on Manasseh's, even though Manasseh was the first-born. This was Israel's decision, in spite of Joseph's displeasure. Joseph, and many others like him, expected God to work in a certain way but found that He chose to work in a different and unconventional way. Joseph had brought his two sons before Jacob so that Manasseh would receive the first blessing (v. 13), but Jacob crossed his hands. It had taken Jacob a lifetime of discipline to learn this truth about God. In his early years he had deceived his blind father for the blessing, but in his duty now of passing on the blessing, he performed in the way that God desired, blessing the younger over the elder (see the oracle in Gen. 25:23). He would not attempt to bless the wrong one, as his father had attempted to do; nor would he handle the blessing dishonestly.

#### Israel Blesses Joseph (verses 15-16)

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**15 And he blessed Joseph, and said,  
"The God  
before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,  
The God  
who has been my shepherd all my life to this day,"**



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16     **The Angel**  
           **who has redeemed me from all evil,**  
**Bless the lads;**  
           **And may my name live on in them,**  
           **And the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac;**  
           **And may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the**  
           **earth."**

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We read that "he blessed Joseph." This is surprising since the blessing is wholly directed to the two grandsons. This does not mean, as some Jewish scholars have claimed, that Jacob pronounced a special blessing on Joseph that is not recorded here. It indicates, rather, that Joseph was blessed in the blessing pronounced on his sons. Perhaps Joseph is said to be "blessed" because a father is the vicarious recipient of blessings bestowed on his children. That is to say, Joseph was blessed in the blessing pronounced on his sons. The Septuagint and the Vulgate try to improve on the text here by rendering this "He blessed them" or "He blessed Joseph's sons." But there is no support for these readings in the Hebrew text.

In his blessing Israel uses a threefold invocation of God. These remarkable descriptions reveal Jacob's faith, one that had matured through the years and had learned to trust the LORD in the difficulties of life. First, He is described as the God whom "my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked" (a fact that steadied Jacob's faith at times (Gen. 28:13; 31:5, 42; 32:9; 46:3), which for himself Jacob does not claim such merit, perhaps out of modesty.

This phrase, "walk before," is used also in 1 Samuel 12:2, where Samuel says that he had walked before the people from his youth. He then sets forth his integrity in verse 3. The concept being, that Samuel lived exposed to the examination of the people. When the phrase is used of walking before God, it signifies living life under the examination or scrutiny of God. It implies that one's life pleases God because of God's scrutiny. Thus, Jacob affirms the righteous lives of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac.

Next, Israel called upon the God Who shepherded (הַרְעִיָה/hārō'eh) him all the way. This is a fitting comparison since Jacob had cared for Laban's flocks and knew intimately the job of a shepherd. As Jacob had nourished (Gen. 30:36-38) and overseen the increase of Laban's flocks (Gen. 30:41-43), God had nourished him (Gen. 28:20) and overseen his increase (Gen. 46:3; 47:27). God also protected him (Gen. 28:20-21) and guided him (Gen. 31:13)

as a shepherd protects and guides his flock. By describing God as his Shepherd, Jacob acknowledges the tender care that the LORD has shown to him over the years. Even though Abraham and Isaac walked pleasingly before God, Jacob was still the recipient of the gracious shepherding of the LORD in spite of his personal failures.

The image for the deity as a shepherd is common throughout ancient Near Eastern literature and appears frequently in the Scriptures (Ps. 23:1; 28:9; 80:2; Isa. 40:11; Jer. 31:9). This is the first occurrence in the Bible to God as our Shepherd. It expresses the idea of God as provider, protector, and guide.

Finally, Israel invokes the Angel who delivered (לְאִלֹּהִים/*haggō'el*) him out of trouble (עָרָא', "evil"). The capitalization reflects the fact that the parallel structure of verses 15-16 strongly suggests that "angel" is here an epithet of God. No one in the Bible ever invokes an angel in prayer, nor in Jacob's several encounters with angels is there any mention of one who delivers him from harm. When the patriarch feels himself to be in mortal danger, he prays directly to God, as in Genesis 32:10-13, and it is He who again and again is Jacob's guardian and protector (Gen. 28:15, 20; 31:3; 35:3).

It is then clear that the word "angel" does not here refer to a created angel, or a guardian angel. It refers, rather, to the Angel of the LORD who Himself is God (see Gen. 16:7-12; 21:17; 22:15-18; 24:40; 31:11; 32:24ff.), as an agent of divine revelation and protection.

This Angel had "redeemed" Israel "from all evil." The verb "redeem" is used of the protection that family member gives to another family member. In Leviticus 25:25 it is used of a relative who buys back property that a fellow-relative was forced to sell. In Leviticus 25:47-49 it is used of a relative who buys back a relative from slavery. In Deuteronomy 19:4-6 it is used of one who avenges a killing. In Ruth 4:8, 10 it is used of one who marries a widowed relative to maintain the name of her deceased husband. The verb thus describes one who protects the property, liberty, life, or posterity of a relative. Jacob affirms that God has protected him. Perhaps he thought of God's deliverance of him from Esau's anger (Gen. 27:41; 33:4), his protection of him from Laban's anger (Gen. 31:7, 24, 29), and his sparing of his life at Peniel (Gen. 32:30).

Israel then asks God Whom he has thus described to "bless the lads." The term "bless" (בָּרַךְ/*y'barek*) is used of enrichment through such things as greater numbers (Gen. 1:22), the right to subdue the earth and rule

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over the animal realm (Gen. 1:28), and material possessions (Gen. 26:12-13). The term is also used of a wish for enrichment (Gen. 24:60) or for a prediction of enrichment (Gen. 35:9). The gift of divine blessing included the empowerment to achieve what was promised. God was therefore always the ultimate source of the blessing, even when it is communicated by an individual such as a patriarch.

Israel continued his blessing, specifically that "my name live on in them." By this he entreats God to aid the lads to become worthy of their paternal ancestors, that their way of life exemplify the Fathers. Thus, the blessing would ask God that they ever be part of the Israelite tribal confederation identifying themselves with the history, traditions, and values of their patriarchs. Also, there is a usage similar in Ruth 4:14, which has been translated "become famous." In this case, the implication would be that Jacob's name would become famous or great. In this way it would conform to the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:2.

Israel specifically predicted in his blessing that these two young men would be called by his name and by the name of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac. He then announced that they would increase in the earth as "fish" (a unique verb apparently formed from *אף/dag*, "fish," a symbol of proliferation and multiplicity; Num. 11:22). The figure of multiplying "like fish" is parallel to the earlier figures of "like the stars of the heavens" (Gen. 15:5; 22:17; 26:4), "like the dust of the earth" (Gen. 13:16), or "like the sand of the seashore" (Gen. 22:17).

The two censuses taken in the course of the wilderness wanderings show the populousness of the Joseph tribes. At the beginning of the period, Ephraim and Manasseh jointly numbered 72,700 male adults (Num. 1:32-35). Forty years later, the figure was 85,200 (Num. 26:28-37), exceeding the combined population of Reuben and Simeon. Moses' Farewell Address in Deuteronomy 33:17 refers to "the myriads of Ephraim" and "the thousands of Manasseh," and the huge population posed a special problem for Joshua in the allotment of tribal territories recounted in Joshua 17:14-18.

Israel's blessing in verses 15-16 is a store house of key thematic terms that direct the reader's attention to several major themes at work in the Book as a whole. God is identified as the "God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked" (v. 15). Not only does the mention of Abraham and Isaac connect Jacob's faith in God to his immediate forefathers, but it also helps tie together the faith of the earliest patriarchs in Genesis with that of

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Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. At two earlier points in the Book, the faith of the primeval patriarchs is described as those who "walked with God" (Gen. 5:22, 24; 6:9). The faith of the early fathers was at one with that of the patriarchs--they walked with God.

At the same time this description of God also serves to link the faith of the fathers with that of the later generations of God's covenant people. As Moses said in Deuteronomy 30:16, the essence of the covenant relationship was that God's people were to love God and "walk in His ways"; and as the prophets were later to say, "What does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

Jacob's short catechism of faith, then, provides a theological link connecting and identifying the faith throughout all the ages. God is also described in Jacob's blessing as the "God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day" (v. 15) and as the "Angel who has delivered me from all evil" (v. 16). It is unusual that God Himself should be described as "the Angel," since earlier in Genesis it is said that God sent "His angel" (Gen. 24:7) or simply that one of the patriarchs was visited by "the Angel of the LORD" (Gen. 22:11).

The blessing of the two sons picks up the theme of the promise to Abraham. They are to be called by Jacob's "name" and the "name" of Abraham and Isaac, just as God had promised Abraham: "I will make your name great" (Gen. 12:2). They were to "increase greatly" (v. 16), just as God had promised Abraham, "I will make you into a great nation" (Gen. 12:2).

### **Joseph's Protest Of Israel's Crossing Of His Hands (verses 17-18)**

The central concern of this section is to underscore the fact that Ephraim, the younger son, was given preeminence over Manasseh, the elder. There is an interesting reversal of the scene in which Jacob received the blessing from his father, Isaac, in Genesis 27. Isaac, who was nearly blind, was deceived into blessing the younger son rather than the older. Though nearly blind himself (v. 10), Jacob appeared to be making the same mistake. When Joseph attempted to correct him, however, he stated his intentions clearly: "His younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations" (v. 19). The writer reinforces his words by stating further that "he put Ephraim before Manasseh" (v. 20).

We may well ask why there is so much concern over whether Ephraim or Manasseh was put first, especially in light of the fact that in the next

chapter it was Judah and neither Joseph nor his two sons who received the preeminent place. The answer is that the issue of preeminence in these texts is meant to address the larger question of who stands in a position to receive God's blessing. Over and over in these patriarchal narratives, the answer to that question has been the same. Receiving the blessing that God offers does not rest with one's natural status in the world. On the contrary, the blessing of God is based solely on God's grace. The one to whom the blessing did not belong has become heir of the promise.

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- 17 When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on Ephraim's head, it displeased him; and he grasped his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head.
- 18 And Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father, for this one is the first-born. Place your right hand on his head."
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Joseph was displeased (וַיִּזְעַזַּע/*wayyēraʿ*) when he saw that his father was blessing the younger first and so held up his father's hand. His words, "Not so, my father, for this one is the first-born (וְהַבְּכֹרִית/*habbēkōr*)," would have brought back to Jacob's memory the struggles for the rights of the first-born.

It should be noted that וַיִּשֵׂא/*yāšit*, is future tense and should not be translated "laid (his right hand)" but "was about to lay." This clearly indicates that verses 17-19a are a parenthesis, relating what happened before Jacob pronounced his first blessing: To make sure that no error would again occur, Joseph had rearranged the lads' position. As he noticed his father's obvious insistence to again give preference to the younger by "crossing his hands" (cf. v. 14) Joseph finally said something. As mentioned in the notes on verses 14, our writer has purposely postponed relating this incident because "the father refused" to obey Joseph's words. And his reason for not even replying to Joseph is that his first blessing would evenly apply to both grandsons.

#### Israel Blesses Ephraim And Manasseh (verses 19-20)

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- 19 But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know; he also shall become a people and he also shall be great. However, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations."

Only as Israel is about to give preference to the younger does he reply, saying "my son" to express his affection for Joseph, irrespective of his seemingly presumptuous "not so, father!" Israel's response was thus to persist in the order of blessing he had chosen and thereby to silence his son Joseph. His "I know, my son, I know" expresses the full confidence of faith. He knew that God's blessing was not to follow ordinary convention. He also knew that God's plan had to be initiated by faith.

By prophetic inspiration Israel had learned that the younger son would be greater than his older brother and that it was from the younger son, Ephraim, that a group of nations would spring.

As the history of the children of Israel unfolded this greater position of Ephraim was not always evident. In Numbers 2 the tribe of Ephraim included 40,500 fighting men (v. 19) while the tribe of Manasseh numbered 32,200 men (v. 21). However, in Numbers 26 this was reversed and Ephraim numbered 32,500 men (v. 37) while Manasseh had 52,700 men (v. 34). Later, however, the superiority of Ephraim became clearly evident. When the kingdom was divided, it was the tribe of Ephraim that became the leading force in the northern kingdom of the ten tribes. So strong was this dominance of Ephraim that the northern kingdom was actually called "Ephraim" (see 2 Chron. 25:7; Isa. 7:5ff; 11:13; 28:3ff; Jer. 31:9, 20; Ezek. 37:19; Hosea 4:17; 5:9ff.; 6:4, 10; 7:8, 11; 8:9, 11; 9:3, 8, 13; 10:6, 11; 11:3, 8; 12:1ff.; 13:1; 14:8; Zech. 9:10; 10:7).

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**20**    **And he blessed them that day, saying,**  
           **"By you Israel shall pronounce blessing, saying,**  
           **'May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh!'"**  
**Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh.**

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Israel's blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh (v. 16), interrupted by Joseph, is now resumed. There can be no greater blessing for the two grandsons than that their names be invoked by future generations in Israel as paradigms of a glorious destiny. The full meaning of the benediction is clear from a similar formula used by Jeremiah, though to negative effect: "And the whole community of Judah in Babylonia shall use a curse derived from their fate: 'May God make you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon consigned to the flames!' --because they did vile things in Israel" (Jer. 29:22f.). That the citation of ancient worthies in the conferring of blessings must have

been more widespread in Israel than is indicated by the literature is illustrated in Ruth 4:11-12: "All the people at the gate and the elders answered, . . . My the LORD make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built up the House of Israel . . . . And may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah . . . ." Thus, the prosperity of Ephraim and Manasseh would become proverbial.

The name "Israel" is here again used as designating the nation of Israel, in anticipation of what would later occur. Jacob declared that when anyone would pronounce a blessing on Israel it would be pronounced on Ephraim or on Manasseh. In this blessing the two sons were put on an equal level. Even so, Ephraim was given the higher position by being mentioned first.

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**Israel's Promise God Will Bring The People Back To Canaan (vv. 21-22)**

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- 21     **Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you, and bring you back to the land of your fathers.**
- 22     **And I give you one portion more than your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow."**
- 

Finally, Israel had a personal word for Joseph. He realized that his death was near and that he would not return to Canaan before he died. But God would bless his descendants and would eventually bring them back to the Land of Promise. In anticipation when God would restore the family to the Land of Promise, Israel now gave Joseph a strip of land (cf. Jn. 4:5), as a special inheritance, above that of his brothers. The striking fact about this particular strip, or ridge, of land is that Jacob said that he captured it from the Amorites with his sword and bow.

These last two verses are difficult to understand, not only in the immediate context, but also within the context of the entire picture of Jacob that emerges from the Genesis narrative. Throughout the Book of Genesis Jacob has been pictured, not as a man of "sword and . . . bow," but as "a quiet man, staying among the tents" (Gen. 25:27). Elsewhere Jacob has said of the inhabitants of the land of Canaan, "If they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed" (Gen. 34:30). Now, suddenly, on his deathbed, Jacob revealed another picture of himself as he bequeathed to Joseph the portion of land he had taken by force.

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This is the only place where we read of Jacob waging war. For this reason some interpreters have tried to give this a different reading. Some think that it refers to a later conquest by Jacob's descendants. Others hold that it designates a piece of land that he purchased from the sons of Hamor (Gen. 33:19). But the text implies that Jacob was referring to a literal, historical military conquest. This need not surprise us. We also read of Abraham that he ventured forth on a military conquest (Gen. 14). It is true that there is no record of Jacob's military venture against the Amorites but this does not prove that it did not happen.

Some have suggested that Jacob referred to the conquest of Shechem that is described in Genesis 34. They even argue that there is a similarity between the Hebrew word for "ridge" used here and the word "Shechem," but tying this statement of Jacob to the ignominious plunder of Shechem by his sons is unthinkable.

There is some reason to believe that this may have been the piece of land that Jacob purchased from the sons of Hamor (Gen. 33:19). It should be noted that when Israel left Egypt they took Joseph's bones along for burial in Canaan (Gen. 50:25; Ex. 13:19). It would be logical to assume that Joseph's remains would be buried on his won inherited piece of land. In Joshua 24:32 we read of the burial of Joseph's bones and there we are told that this burial was in the tract of land that Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor. It is striking that the same words are used in both passages, Genesis 33:19 and Joshua 24:32. Therefore, the only conclusion we can reach is that this piece of land had later been taken from Jacob by the Amorites and then he, in turn, recaptured it with his sword and his bow.

Though Israel spoke to Joseph, his use of the plural pronouns ("with you," v. 21) shows that he was addressing a larger audience. In light of the fact that he spoke of a time when they would again return to the land of their fathers, that larger audience appears to be the house of Joseph that was to be represented in the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.

There is a word play in verse 22 with the word "portion" (שָׂכָם/*šakem*) also referring to Shechem, the place where Joseph would be buried as a sign of the possession of his bequest. The allusion in the verse to the taking of the land from the Amorite with the bow and sword is unclear but may refer to some skirmish that took place there.



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## FURTHER REMARKS ABOUT BLESSING AND CURSING IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS

A study of the word "to bless, enrich" (בֵּרַךְ/*brk*) in Genesis shows that the giving of a blessing bestowed prosperity with respect to fertility of land and fertility of life. The gift of divine blessing included the empowerment to achieve what was promised. God was therefore always the ultimate source of the blessing, even when it was communicated by an individual.

The blessing in Genesis enriched that which was good. In Genesis 1:1--2:3, for example, God blessed animal life, human life, and the seventh day--all part of the creation that He had pronounced good. Everything in creation was good, but that which was blessed was enriched beyond its normal quality. God's blessing on the patriarchs granted unusual provision from above, so that the family could multiply and prosper phenomenally and enjoy a special status above the rest of the race. Since this blessing was from God, it came with the requirements of faith and obedience. Participation in the blessing of God was not for unbelievers who turned aside to evil.

The antithetical idea of cursing is normally expressed with the verb "curse" (אָרַךְ) which means to impose a ban or a barrier, a paralysis on movement or other capabilities. The curse in Genesis involved separation or alienation from the place of blessing, or even from those who were blessed. For example, Cain was cursed and as a result had to flee from the fertile soil and the presence of the LORD.

A curse was occasioned by some evil act that destroyed life or disrupted God's established order or institutions. In Genesis the curse is prominent in the first eleven chapters, for that part of the Book traces the spread of sin once humans came to know "good and evil." The emphasis on the curse is replaced in the patriarchal narratives by the prominence of the blessing, except for the warning of a curse for those who oppose God's program and God's people (Gen. 12:1-3).

In this way we may trace the message of the Book through the motifs (principle theme[s]) of God's blessing and cursing at the founding of the theocracy. When evil spoiled God's blessed creation and drew the divine curse, God set about to establish His program to restore blessing to the world through promises to His chosen seed, promises that looked beyond the narratives of Genesis to the establishment of the promised theocracy.

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There is another side to this tension between blessing and cursing, a conflict that works out on the human level and corresponds to the blessing and cursing. The motifs of good and evil characterize the human activities and circumstances in this struggle. That which is good is harmonious with the divine will; that which is evil conflicts with the divine will. "Good" describes obedient activities and pleasing circumstances meant to benefit and enhance life; "evil" depicts sinful activities and unpleasant circumstances that interrupt and hinder life, causing pain and suffering. God blesses the good but curses the evil; God's blessing in turn brings about good things, but His cursing ultimately destroys life.

In the beginning all God's creation is called "good" (Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31)--in fact, the creation of human life is "very good." But in the garden the humans were tempted with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:9, 17; 3:5, 22), and thinking that they would gain divine power over life, to alter it for better, they fell into sin and succeeded only in bringing evil into the human experience. Here began the conflict between good and evil. And so in the very first setting God instructed Cain to do good (Gen. 4:7), for if he did not, sin would overwhelm him. With the experience of evil, however, early men and women were prone to disobey God and stray from His blessing.

The motif of evil thus appears throughout the narratives of Genesis, reminding us of the sinful nature of the race and its unhappy circumstances. The basic use of this motif describes the evil acts of humans. Prior to the flood the human nature became very evil, so that evil multiplied (Gen. 6:5). The judgment of the flood was the only recourse for such wickedness. But even after the judgment there was the recognition that the human heart is evil from childhood (Gen. 8:21). During the early sojourn of Abram we encounter the spread of evil again in civilization (Gen. 13:13), painfully reminding us of the need for God's blessing. But even in the chosen family evil surfaced (Gen. 37:2) in the activities of Joseph's brothers. The bright spot was Joseph's refusal to do that which was evil before the LORD (Gen. 39:9).

The words for evil also describe the painful deeds done to God's people. When Lot eventually took a stand for the LORD, the wicked sinners threatened to *deal worse* with him (Gen. 19:9). Tensions of this fort were so common that treaties had to be made to keep people from doing *harm* to each other (Gen. 26:29 and 31:52). But God ultimately protected His servant from evil: He did not allow Laban to say anything good or evil (Gen. 24:50) or do good or evil (Gen. 31:24, 29). Jacob was confident that God had not allowed Laban to harm him (Genesis 31:7), and so later praised the angel who delivered

him from evil (Gen. 48:16). "Evil" also describes the treachery of Joseph's brothers as they sold him into slavery (Gen. 50:20) and blamed his disappearance on an evil beast (Gen. 37:20, 33). In the process of time when Joseph tested his brothers, he accused them of repaying evil for good (Gen. 44:4). Only at the end of the Book do the brothers express how evil they had been, when they appealed to Joseph for forgiveness (Gen. 50:17).

Evil actions bring evil results, and Genesis emphasizes this as well. The treachery of the brothers brought nothing but misery to Jacob (Gen. 44:29, 34), so that before Pharaoh he had to admit that his days had been few and evil (Gen. 47:9). But even before this, the evil in the race had brought great judgment from God, first at the flood, and then at the destruction of Sodom. But God used such calamities to advance His cause of blessing; for example, in the days of Joseph the bad cows (Gen. 41:19-21, 27) signified the bad years of the famine--the occasion for the elevation of Joseph as deliverer of his people.

The text of Genesis also occasionally indicates the divine and human perception of evil. In addition to the passage that records how God saw that the race was evil (Gen. 6:5), we read how the thing that Judah's sons did was evil in the eyes of the LORD (Gen. 38:10), and so swift judgment followed. And on the human side we read how Esau's wives were evil to Isaac (Gen. 28:8). In the final analysis the human and the divine perception of evil come together in the wisdom of Joseph, who explained that what his brothers did for him was intended for *evil* but that evil was actually part of God's plan for *good*. Here we see how God's persistent plan to bless can actually triumph over evil and turn it back into good, as it had at the beginning of creation.

Juxtaposed with the motif of evil throughout the Book is the motif of good--from the beginning tension between good and evil to the final triumph of good over evil in God's plan to restore the blessing. Beginning with the creation we see that *good* describes God's blessed provision for the race. All creation was good (Gen. 1), as was the food (Gen. 2:9), the gold (v. 12), and life itself, whether a newborn child (Gen. 30:20) or a long life of peace with God (Gen. 15:15; 25:8). The bounty of the earth was also good, as evidenced by the seven good years that God would send to Egypt (Gen. 41:5, 22, 24, 26, 35) before the bad years--an interpretation that was good in the eyes of Pharaoh (Gen. 41:37). At the heart of God's goodness to His people was the promise of the blessing, for when that promise was reiterated, good things were included (Gen. 32:10, 12). Accordingly, other rulers gave to God's people good land (Gen. 20:15; 45:18, 20; 47:6, 11) and good gifts (Gen. 45:23 [26:29?]), all because God's plan was intended for *good* (Gen. 50:20).

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It is fitting, then, that people who wished to share in God's blessing should treat others well. Certainly Abram was concerned that things go well with him in Egypt (Gen. 12:13)—and they did, in a way (v. 16), but not as he had planned. Later, Joseph too hoped that things would go well with him (Gen. 40:14), and in time they did because he was faithful. God's advice to Cain, that if he did well he would find acceptance (Gen. 4:7), fell on deaf ears not only in that story but in the subsequent accounts as well. In fact, many of the acts of evil were perverted perceptions of good. For example, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful and took all they wanted (Gen. 6:2). This good appearance of women (Gen. 24:16; 26:7) made them vulnerable to such advances.

Another example occurs in the story of Lot; when Lot tried to protect the angels from the evil men of the city, he willingly surrendered his daughters so that the men could do what seemed good in their eyes (Gen. 19:9; see also 34:18). Here too Joseph's testing and instruction of his brothers brought the correct perception, for he accused them of repaying his good with their evil (Gen. 44:4) and then explained that their evil was actually a part of God's good plan (Gen. 50:20).

It will be clear in the exposition of Genesis that the motifs of blessing and cursing and good and evil appear repeatedly, tracing the theological message of the Book. They vividly portray why and how God set about to establish His plan through the seed of Abraham. The conflict between good and evil rises up again and again in the narratives, sometimes with the motifs clearly expressed and sometimes implied. At each stage in the development of God's theocratic program, as evil threatened to jeopardize the blessing, the LORD either prevented it or overcame it. For those who persisted in opposing the LORD and His blessing, certain judgment was guaranteed; but for those who, by faith, submitted to Him and obeyed His Word, then blessing was assured.

In conclusion, Genesis begins with God energizing creation through blessing: blessing on humanity, animals, and the seventh day (Gen. 1:22, 28; 2:3). Genesis closes with the testamentary activities of Joseph and the Salvation Oracle of Jacob. Blessing winds its way through the Genesis narratives, sometimes surfacing as a crucial element in the episode, for example, the story of Jacob and Esau. At other times the motif of blessing is hidden or absent. But the great narratives of Genesis never put aside for long the motif of blessing.

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## APPLICATION

There is little wonder that the writer to the Hebrews would select this event as the epitome of Jacob's faith, for it presents one of the finest samples in Scripture of a mature faith (Gen. 11:21). ***BELIEVERS WHO HAVE MATURED IN THE FAITH THROUGH A LIFETIME OF EXPERIENCES IN WHICH THE COVENANT GOD HAS SHEPHERDED AND DELIVERED THEM (NO MATTER HOW DIFFICULT THE MATURING PROCESS MAY HAVE BEEN) CAN DISCERN WITH CONFIDENCE THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF GOD FOR THE FUTURE.*** This statement does not say that the believer will have the ability to predict; it merely says that the mature believer is familiar with God's ways, knows God's plans, and can prepare for the future with a certain expectation.

The epitome of Jacob's faith in this passage comes with his crossing of his hands in the blessing. Dods offers this homily:

We meet with these crossed hands of blessing frequently in Scripture; the younger son blessed above the elder--as was needful, lest grace should become confounded with nature, and the belief gradually grow up in men's minds that natural effects could never be overcome by grace, and that in every respect grace waited upon nature. And these crossed hands we meet still; for how often does God quite reverse *our* order, and bless most that about which we had less concern, and seem to put a slight on that which has engrossed our best affection. It is so, often in precisely the way in which Joseph found it so; the son whose youth is most anxiously cared for, to whom the interests of the younger members of the family are sacrificed, and who is commended to God continually to receive His right hand blessing, this son seems neither to receive nor to dispense much blessing; but the younger, less thought of, left to work his own way, is favoured by God, and becomes the comfort and support of his parents when the elder has failed of his duty. And in the case of much that we hold dear, the same rule is seen; a pursuit we wish to be successful in we can make little of, and are thrown back from continually, while something else into which we have thrown ourselves almost accidentally prospers in our hand and blesses us. Again and again, for years together, we put forward some cherished desire to God's right hand, and are displeased, like Joseph, that still the hand of greater blessing should pass to some other thing. Does God not know what is oldest with us, what has been longest at our hearts, and is dearest to us. Certainly He does: "I knew it, My son, I know it," He answers to all

our expostulations. It is not because He does not understand or regard your predilections, your natural and excusable preferences, that He sometimes refuses to gratify your whole desire, and pours upon you blessings of a kind somewhat different from those you most earnestly covet. He will give you the whole that Christ hath merited; but for the application and distribution of that grace and blessing you must be content to trust Him. You may be at a loss to know why He does no more to deliver you from some sin, or why He does not make you more successful in your efforts to aid others, or why, while He so liberally prospers you in one part of your condition, you get so much less in another that is far nearer your heart; but God does what He will with His own, and if you do not find in one point the whole blessing and prosperity you think should flow from such a Mediator as you have, you may only conclude that what is lacking there will elsewhere be found more wisely bestowed. And is it not a perpetual encouragement to us that God does not merely crown what nature has successfully begun, that it is not the likely and the naturally good that are most blessed, but that God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the world and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are? (*Book of Genesis*, n.d.:423-25).

The blessing of the patriarch extends from one generation to the next and creates continuity between them. It acquires an increased importance in the transition from the patriarchal period to the exodus. The patriarchal period ends with the death of Jacob; the sojourn in Egypt introduces the period of the exodus and the settlement in Canaan.

**STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. Why was it important for Jacob to be buried in Canaan? What is its significance in the prophecy of Ezekiel 37?
2. Trace the motifs of the patriarchal blessings in Genesis.
3. What is significant about Israel blessing Joseph as the chiasmic center of this episode?
4. What is the significance of Israel crossing his hands in the blessing of Manasseh and Ephraim?
5. What do the terms "bless" and "curse" mean within the context of Genesis. Be sure to include this episode in your answer
6. What portion of land did Israel give Joseph? What New Testament reference may serve as a cross reference to this one?
7. List and explain two new concepts you have learned from your study of Genesis 47:28--48:22.



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## Genesis 49:1-33

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### The Shaping of Destiny

#### BLESSINGS, CURSES, JUDGMENTS AND PROMISES

Anticipating his death, Jacob summons all his sons to his bedside to hear his farewell words, addressing each son individually through a series of aphorisms in poetic form. It is a fundamental principle in God's economy that the actions of individuals will affect the lives of their descendants. This pattern is clear in the patriarchal narratives, for the deeds and dispositions of the patriarchs were passed on in one way or another to their children.

In some respects Jacob's blessing is like the prophecy of Noah concerning his three sons (Gen. 9:24-27), stemming from the actual behavior and character of his sons and yet also outlining the general future of the three streams of nations of which they were to become forebears. Both in terms of genetic theory and of the course of history, it is true that each distinctive population group--nation, tribe, and so on--tends to manifest a particular character of its own (industrious or slothful, puritanical or licentious, peaceful or aggressive, philosophical or mechanical), and that this character is the product of its history and, ultimately, of its original founders. Such general characteristics, of course, do not preclude many individual exceptions in the particular population, but it does usually seem possible to define in general terms at least the dominant nature of such a group.

Because of the tremendous importance of this particular family in God's outworking of His purposes in history, Genesis 49 exemplifies this theme with Jacob's deathbed oracle of blessing--a profound prophetic glimpse of their future. Jacob, by faith and under divine inspiration, looked forward to the conquest and the settlement of Israel in the land of Canaan and then beyond to a more glorious age, as he distributed blessings to his sons. It is fitting that Genesis, which opened with the creative power of the divine word, closes with the effective power of the inspired predictive word of the patriarch.

Moreover, to those sons who needed correction, the awesome nature of his words would have served as sober warning and, hopefully, as encouragement to correction. Also, of course, the fulfillment of his prophecies in the



centuries and millennia that followed would serve as strong proof of the divine origin of the nation and of the Scriptures which came through them.

Jacob and his sons have been united and lived now together in Egypt with Joseph for seventeen years. The prophecy of Genesis 15:13 has begun to unfold. Jacob and his family knew that four hundred years separated their descendants and the Promise Land. Jacob knows that God's promises will not be fulfilled in a one generation span. With his blessing, his task now is not only to bind the generations together, but also to bind the generations to the promise. The promise is more powerful and enduring than any generation; for many generations will live and die before the fulfillment of the promise. Thus it is not enough that the generations be bound and loyal to Jacob. The role of this parent and every parent in this family is to keep the promise visible and articulate for the younger subsequent generations. This promise is not a fuzzy, optimistic feeling about the future. It is a concrete assurance about being heirs to a land yet to be given. Thus far, the family has had hints and foretastes of blessing. But God's full blessing in the Land of Promise is yet to come.

What does the future hold for their descendants? Chapter 48 has answered that question for Joseph and his sons. They will receive the birthright along with a position of preeminence. What will be the destiny of the remaining sons' descendants? Joseph was tried and tested and was found worthy of his position; but the other sons had failed on several occasions to live according to God's revealed ways. What would be the consequences of their actions for their descendants? To be sure, the other sons have learned that consequences accompany one's actions. To a large degree, Genesis 49 answers these questions, but only in a general way. The urgency of finding out such answers has increased with the announcement of Jacob's impending death. As the agent of divine blessing, he holds the key to the answers the sons seek. Jacob, in his few remaining moments of life, calls to his sons so that he can declare to them how destiny will be shaped by their descendants in the days to come.

The oracle evaluates the twelve sons of Jacob, announcing the participation of each in the blessing of God. There are two different types of sayings used in the chapter: short epigrammatic statements that offer a brief characterization of a tribe in the form of an aphorism, and the more extensive oracles about the power and influence of a tribe. The more extensive oracles treat Reuben, Simeon and Levi, Judah, and Joseph, the tribes that seem to command the most attention in the order of things.

## The Literary Composition of Jacob's Oracle

Genesis 49:2-27 by far is the longest poem in Genesis. Although the composition of these verses conforms to general patterns that characterize Hebrew poetry, uncertainty of meaning, extreme allusiveness due to numerous rare words and unusual grammatical constructions, and considerable double entendre exists. Such factors make it the most difficult chapter in Genesis to interpret. In broad outline, however, its message and purpose are clear.

### The Purpose of the Poem

Succinctly stated, the purpose of this poem is to assure all the sons of Jacob that their descendants will receive their divinely authorized portion in the Abrahamic covenant promises. To a large degree, their divinely authorized portion is notably based on their ancestral past actions, thereby prompting Jacob's sons to live lives of purity.

<sup>renowned</sup> Because of the mixed content of Jacob's blessing, several scholars, such as the renowned Rabbinic scholar, Ibn Ezra, wish to entitle the chapter "The Last Words of Jacob" or "The Testament of Jacob," instead of the more familiar, "The Blessing of Jacob." They argue that this latter designation is not strictly accurate because the poem contains material of a very mixed nature: blessings and curses, censure and praise, geographical and historical observations--all of which are included.

One Jewish commentator has suggested that the "blessing" mentioned in the last half of verse 28 actually does not refer to the material in verses 3 to 27. He claims that these statements are no more than a prediction of the future and that the actual blessings that the patriarch bestowed on his sons followed but are not recorded here. This would require a different translation of verse 28 that, of course, would be possible. Even so, this position does present some other difficulties when we consider the passage as a whole.

The proposal that this poem is indeed a blessing can be supported from the passage itself. Besides the explicit mention that it is a "blessing" in verse 28, the use of the stem בֵּרַךְ/*brk* as used in the blessing in verses 25-26 is also attested. Much of the animal imagery throughout the poem reflects the conditions which accompany blessing. It should be recalled that blessing is ultimately from God and comes in the form of gifts whether they be tangible such as produce, flocks and herds, riches, prosperity, or descendants, or intangible such as peace, security, rest, bestowal of abilities, and eternal life.

Judah is cast in the likeness of a lion. The intention is clearly to convey the sense of security and protection. The blessing itself is given in the form of the ability to protect oneself. The same can be argued for Issachar, the strong donkey, Dan, the serpent, and Benjamin the ravenous wolf. The imagery of produce functions in a similar way; Judah will be blessed with bountiful vineyards, Asher will receive premium food from his crops, and Joseph will acquire the produce from the mountains and the hills. Thus, blessing is the major theme of the poem.

Also, the oracles concerning Reuben, Simeon and Levi do not nullify the theme of blessing, even though some of the statements do include little that is favorable and almost have the nature of being a curse rather than a blessing. Though both oracles are cast in a malevolent mood, neither negates the fact that all three of these tribal heads will benefit from the future fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises. It should also be noted that in the statement regarding Simeon and Levi (vv. 5-7) we have the striking use of the first person, as though it was actually God speaking and announcing what He would do.

A proper understanding of אָרַר / אָרַר ("curse") in this section of the poem must take this fact into account and that it is a matter of semantics. The meaning is that the descendants of Simeon and Levi will be "banned" from independent tribal status--and nothing more! We find the same usage in connection with Noah's pronouncements to his sons. There the so-called "curse of Canaan" is included. So also with Isaac's pronouncement with respect to Esau. The censure on Reuben is simply that he lost his status as first-born and its accompanying privileges (to Joseph; cf Gen. 48:22). None are disqualified from the general blessings of the Abrahamic promises of becoming a part of the nation and living in the Promised Land.

Within the argument of Genesis, then, the purpose of Jacob's blessing is to assure subsequent generations their place in the Abrahamic line of blessing. Their imminent arrival in the Promise Land is thus explained with this background in mind. Their response should be a life of faith and purity before God.

#### Narrative/Poetic Seams in the Pentateuch

The poetic discourse of Genesis 49 plays a key role in the overall strategy of the patriarchal narratives as well as the strategy of Genesis as a whole. We will briefly set the importance of Genesis 49 in its context of the entire Pentateuch.

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At three junctures in the Pentateuch, the author has spliced a major poetic discourse onto the end of a large unit of narrative (Gen. 49; Num. 24; Deut. 31). A close look at the material lying between and connecting the narrative and poetic sections reveals the presence of a tightly homogeneous compositional stratum. It is most noticeably marked by the recurrence of the same terminology and narrative motifs.

In each of the three segments, the central narrative figure (Jacob, Balaam, Moses) **calls an audience together** (imperative: "Gather around," Gen. 49:1; "Come," Num. 24:14; "Assemble," Deut. 31:28) and **proclaims** (hortative: "so I can tell you," Gen. 49:1; "let me warn you," Num. 24:14; "so that I can speak," Deut. 31:28) **what will happen** (Gen. 49:1; "will do," Num. 24:14; "will fall," Deut. 31:29) in "**days to come**" (Gen. 49:1; Num. 24:14; Deut. 31:29).

The brief narrative prologue to the poetic text in Genesis 49 tells us that the central figure, Jacob, had called together his sons to announce to them "what will happen to you in days to come" (Gen. 49:1). Thus, however we may want to translate the terminology he used in this seam introducing the poetic discourse of Jacob, the author has provided the reader with an indispensable clue to its meaning. Jacob's poetic discourse was about "what will happen in days to come."

In an identical structural position within the seam connecting the poetic text of Deuteronomy 32 with the whole preceding narrative of the Pentateuch, we find another narrative prologue with the same terminology and motif. The central figure, Moses, had called together the elders of the tribes to announce to them the "disaster" (v. 29) that "will fall upon you in the end of days" (literal translation). Again the reader is afforded an all-important clue to the meaning of the poetic text. It was about "what will happen" ("will fall," NIV) in the "days to come." In the seams connecting both poetic texts, Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 32, to the preceding narrative segments, and using the same terminology, the author has inserted an identical message to the reader as a clue that the poetic discourses are to be read "eschatologically."

At one other crucial juncture connecting the large units of poetic and narrative text in the Pentateuch (Num. 24:14), the same terminology ("in days to come") occurs. Here, in the narrative prologue to the last words of Balaam, the author again provides the reader with the necessary hermeneutical clue to the meaning of the poetic texts. Again it has to do with the "days to come." As in

the other two passages, the events that lie ahead in the future days are revealed in the last words of the central narrative figure, Balaam.

Such convergence of literary structure, narrative motifs, and terminology among these three strategically important parts of the Pentateuch can hardly be accidental. The fact that "in days to come" (בְּאַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים/*b<sup>e</sup>'aḥarīt hayyāmīm*) occurs only one other time in the Pentateuch, and that also within a literary structural seam (Deut. 4), argues strongly for taking these connecting segments to be the work of one individual with a purposeful outline in mind. As such they are also a clear indication of the hermeneutic of Moses. Not only does he show throughout his work an intense interest in events of the past. The further fact that he repeatedly and strategically returns to the notion of the "days to come" in giving his work its final shape reveals that his interest lies in the future as well as in the past.

To state it clearly, these connecting segments reveal the work of one author, spanning from Genesis to Deuteronomy, to which both Old and New Testaments attribute only to Moses (Jos. 1:7, 8; 8:31, 32, 34; 23:6; 1 Kgs. 2:3; 2 Kgs. 14:6; 23:25; 1 Chron. 22:13; 2 Chron. 5:10; 23:18; 25:4; 30:16; 33:8; 34:14; 35:12; Ezra 3:2; 6:18; 7:6; Neh. 1:7, 8; 8:1, 14; 9:14; 10:29; 13:1; Dan. 9:11, 13; Mal. 4:4; and in the New Testament, Mk. 12:19; Lk. 2:22; 20:28; Jn. 1:17, 45; 8:5; 9:29; Acts 3:22; 6:14; 13:39; 15:1, 21; 26:22; 28:23; Rom. 10:5; 1 Cor. 9:9; 2 Cor. 3:15; Heb. 9:19; Rev. 15:3). Indeed, on several occasions Jesus spoke of the Pentateuch was written by Moses: Mark 7:10; 10:3-5; 12:26; Luke 5:14; 16:29-31; 24:27, 44; John 7:19, 23. Notice especially John 5:45-47: "Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"

To summarize what appears to be the overall strategy of the author in these three segments, we might say that one of the central concerns lying behind the final shape of the Pentateuch is an attempt to uncover an inherent relationship between the past and the future. That which happened to God's people in the past portends of events that still lie in the future ("in days to come"). Or to say it another way, the past is seen as a lesson of the future. For our purposes these observations lead to the following conclusion. A consideration of the literary structural strategy lying behind the final shape of the Pentateuch suggests the author worked within a clearly defined hermeneutic. Because of the terminology he uses (i.e., "in the days to come"), we could call it an eschatological reading of his historical narratives. The narrative texts of

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past events are presented as pointers to events that are yet future. Past events foreshadow the future. Thus we can see that such a hermeneutic leads to a form of "narrative typology." We should, then, look for signs of such a typology in the composition of the smaller units of narrative in the Pentateuch and the Book of Genesis.

### Nature of the Poem

The imagery contained in the poem suggests an eschatologically "Israel" which portrays them as a people in a land. For example, Judah is depicted as victorious over his enemies. This did not occur while they sojourned in Egypt, or even the overthrow of the Egyptians at the Red Sea, for the nation did not lift a hand in the battle with Pharaoh, rather God "fought for" Israel. Furthermore, Judah is also portrayed as the theocratic ruler over the nation. This presupposes settlement in the Promised Land. Lastly, bountiful produce as well as livestock is accorded to Judah picturing a fertile land.

The same general descriptions of most of the other tribes further support this view. Zebulun will experience commercial prosperity due to its proximity to Phoenicia, the land of the great seafaring peoples. Issachar is resting in a land of peace and pleasantness. Dan will have the authority to judge as one with the status of a tribe. Dan is also depicted protecting himself from the enemies, which is also true of Judah. Gad is cast in the same light as Joseph and Benjamin. Asher's premium quality food necessitates a productive land. When the imagery of the land is coupled with the imagery of military skirmishes, the next four hundred years in Egypt can be disqualified as the intended location. While the nation develops in Egypt and experiences limited blessing there (cf. Gen. 47:11, 27; Ex. 1:7), they were not in a position of self theocratic rule with enemies on their borders (nor were they near Phoenicia). The land pictured here is the Promised Land of Canaan.

Further support for the prophetic nature of this poem comes from the use of the phrase "in the days to come" which was discussed above. The phrase is not to be understood as a technical term for the "age of the Messiah." Rather, it is a temporal phrase denoting events that will transpire in the future. Its specific nuance must be defined by its use in the various contexts in which it occurs. In Deuteronomy 31:29, Moses states that in the "days to come" the Israelites will turn aside from the way he had commanded them through God's law and will be severely punished. The context defines the time intended as the period after Moses' death. Does Moses here intend the Messianic age within the context? To be sure the prepositional phrase may refer to the Messianic age

as in Isaiah 2:2 (= Micah 4:1), but its force comes from the broader context of these prophetic oracles.

The expression itself is theologically neutral. The phrase can have the force of signifying an important turning point in history as in Genesis 49:1. Jacob was cognizant that a four hundred year interval between the former and future possession of the land had just been inaugurated. He also knew that it would be God who brought the nation out of Egypt (cf. Gen. 46:4). Thus, the imagery in the poem depicts a new stage in the development of the work of God among His people, one that laid beyond the present course of development. For Jacob, the exact details of this stage are not given (at least not in the poem). The thrust is clearly future and characteristic of a further stage in God's plan to fulfill His promise to Abraham. Therefore, the time of the fulfillment of these promises lies beyond the next four hundred years. Essentially, this leaves the Book of Genesis open-ended, with the patriarchal promises unfulfilled, leaving it to subsequent revelation to tell how God fulfills His promises to His people.

### Wordplays in the Poem

There are several wordplays employed in Genesis 49 (Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher and Joseph). Typical of the wordplay is that one finds the type, the nature of the tribe, hinted at in its name. The primary purpose for using wordplays is to underscore and emphasize meaning. In the case of this poem, the use of wordplays on the names of the twelve sons adds emphasis to the patriarch's message. These wordplays serve only in the capacity of rhetorical devices. The names were attributed new meanings to fit the purpose of the poem. The fact that Jacob is functioning as God's agent delivering His Word, the use of these wordplays emphasize the divine intervention involved in the originating of the tribes. As rhetorical devices the wordplays on the names of the ancestors of the tribes serve as a mnemonic aid in summarizing the teaching of the oracle to later generations.

When these considerations are added to the fact that poetic language is in essence, intensification and that prophecy is the Divine Word, then the solemnity of this poem is all the more heightened.

### **Source Criticism Considerations**

These pronouncements regarding Jacob's sons are similar to the "blessings" (v. 28) given by Noah in Genesis 9:25-27, by Isaac in Genesis 27:27-29, and by Jacob with respect to the sons of Joseph in Genesis 48:15-20.

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Those who divide the sources have a difficult time with this material. It is generally accepted that we are dealing with some of the oldest records that were incorporated into the "J" source. Some even ascribe this to the so-called "fourth source."

The precise age of this poem is allegedly determined by what scholars call "historical background." Their theory is that these pronouncements are to be dated according to the various events and conditions that are mentioned relative to these tribes when they became historical realities (during the conquest of Joshua).

This theory, of course, rejects the possibility of predictions of future events and conditions. And it is possible to deny the predictive prophetic quality of these blessings and call them *vativinia ex eventu*, that is, pronouncements that were made only *after* the events that are described had actually happened. As such, they must be classed only as apparent predictions, but this is a seriously prejudiced judgment. The pronouncements of the dying patriarch, Jacob, are given precisely as predictions and promises for the future life of his sons and their respective tribes (v. 1). The denial of predictive prophecy, even by divine inspiration, is a position that calls into question the authenticity of large sections of the Holy Scriptures. We who believe in the reality of divine revelation, not only accept the authenticity of predictive prophecy in the Bible as a whole, but also believe that the aged Jacob was given a revelation of what would take place in the lives of his descendants in the future.

One problem that results from applying this theory of "historical background" to these pronouncements, is that not all of them can be placed in the same time frame. In different declarations the circumstances, relationships, and events reflect entirely different historical periods. It cannot be denied, however, that this entire collection of pronouncements displays an obvious stamp of unity and coherence (see notes concerning its chiasmic structure, pages 656 - 658). But the critics have avoided this by alleging that such pronouncements follow a certain fixed pattern. Others have charged that a later redactor (editor) gathered all of these pronouncements from various historical periods and then poured them into a mold that would give them the appearance of unity.

If we, on the other hand, accept these statements as being genuinely inspired predictions of the future, the fact that they find their fulfillment in different historical periods causes no problems and requires no such ingenious explanations. In fact, it would be strange indeed if all the revelations that came to Jacob regarding the future of his sons and their tribes would be fulfilled at



one and the same time in history. It stands to reason that when the future is seen from the perspective of predictive prophecy, the significant events on the horizon of time would be emphasized. To assume that all of these events in the history of all of these tribes would be chronologically identical is historically ridiculous. The details of these predictions will be treated in the expository notes.

A bizarre interpretation has been attempted by a few scholars who hold that the manner in which the twelve tribes are described here is clothed in symbols that are taken from animal life. On this basis they conclude that there is no more than an allusion to the signs of the Zodiac. This is pure fantasy, however, and finds no basis in the biblical text.

Those who divide the sources remove the first part of verse 1, "Then Jacob summoned his sons," and the last part of verse 28, "he blessed them, every one with the blessing appropriate to him," from the actual pronouncements of blessing. These two fragments are then ascribed to another source, "P." It is difficult to understand why the redactor of the Pentateuch, who certainly would want to use an introductory statement for these "blessings," would seek out such statements from an altogether different source from the material he had before him. This would also apply to the conclusion that is used here, in verse 28. That these words are not part of the actual "blessing" is obvious, but can there be any reason why the editor of this section should have taken these words from a completely different source and rather arbitrarily inserted them here?

There is good support for believing that this rather extensive statement of blessing was put into writing at a very early date. It would be difficult to assume that such detailed information could be preserved merely by oral tradition until the time of Moses or even later, and then be put into writing for the first time. Assuming that we are dealing with a written record, we would then also have to look on verse 1 as the introduction with which this ancient record began. Verse 28, however, can be considered in its entirety as a concluding comment added by the hand that actually placed this material in the Pentateuch.

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### THEOLOGICAL IDEAS

Prophecy was given by God to sustain His people through their barren, and sometimes dismal, experiences, to show them that God planned their future. For Jacob's family, the future lay beyond their settlement in Egypt in the Land of Promise. Like their ancestors, the people of Israel would need to hear again and again the promises of their inheritance and of their participation in the continued program, in order to keep the faith. The overall theme of the oracle of Jacob is thus the blessing of the father that would now be handed down to the tribes.

The enjoyment of that blessing and the participation in that future program varied in accordance with the faithfulness of the participants. Accordingly, from the solemnity of his deathbed Jacob evaluated his sons one by one and carried his evaluation forward to their descendants. The theological point that surfaces in this oracle is that the sins of the fathers may be visited on their descendants, meaning that bound up in the tribal ancestors were all the potential strengths and weaknesses of the descendants. The actions and behavior of the ancestors leave an indelible imprint on their descendants, affecting the course of history. Just as the nation of Israel would see itself in Jacob, so could the tribes in the sons of Jacob.

This last theological theme finds further internal unity, in that throughout the chapter, the names "Jacob" and "Israel" each appear five times, the equality of distribution symbolizing the dual character of the patriarch and his sons, now as individual personalities, now as the personifications of the nation with its tribal constituents, as in verse 27.

The thematic promise given to Abraham, and which can be traced through the three distinct patriarchal narratives (Abraham, Jacob, Joseph) converge here, at the end of Genesis. First, the patriarchal period began with the divine promise of nationhood to Abraham (cf. Gen. 12:2), and the fulfillment of that promise is expressed here through "the twelve tribes of Israel" (Gen. 49:28). Second, the Jacob Narrative, too, commenced with God's assurance of numerous offspring (Gen. 28:14), and the scene of the dying patriarch surrounded by his sons and grandsons is its proper conclusion. Finally, the first act of the Joseph Narrative (Gen. 37) was immediately succeeded by the fortunes of Judah (Gen. 38), and throughout the Joseph Narrative the personality of Judah repeatedly injects itself in a point-counterpoint relationship. It is surely no coincidence that these two tribes dominate the poem to the extent

that five verses are devoted to each, together totaling ten (40 percent) of the twenty-four lines of poetry!

## STRUCTURE AND SYNTHESIS AND TRANSLATION

### Structure

This chapter records primarily Jacob's blessing of his sons. After a brief narrative introduction to set the stage and tone of the blessings (vv. 1-2), Jacob addresses each son individually, except for Simeon and Levi. In giving the blessing of the birthright, Jacob passed over the first sons and gave Judah kingship; after all the sons were discussed, Jacob gave the double portion of the blessing to Joseph.

The order in which Jacob addresses them was neither that of their birth (Gen. 29:31--30:24; 35:16-19) nor that of the listing in Genesis 35:23-26. This has led some to believe Jacob's oracle simply as a "collection of tribal sayings," exhibiting no discernible structure (Westermann, *Genesis*, 1986, III:220). Furthermore, each group of sons is presented in a descending order of seniority, except for one notable exception, Issachar and Zebulun.

The birth of Jacob's twelve sons is described in Genesis 29:32--35:18. Other lists of them are found in Genesis 35:22-26; 46:8-25; Exodus 1:2-5; Numbers 1:5-15; 2:3-31; 13:4-15; 26:4-51; 34:19-28; Deuteronomy 27:12-13; 33:6-25; Joshua 13:7ff.; 22:34; Judges 5:12-18; 1 Chronicles 2:1--8:40; 12:24-37; 27:16-22; Ezekiel 48:1-7, 23-28, 31-34; Revelation 7:5-8. These nineteen lists plus the one here in Genesis 49:3-27 exhibit a different arrangement of Jacob's sons in one way or another. Why?

Upon further investigation, however, the literary structure betrays itself as the product of careful artistic design. The six natural sons of Leah are treated first (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar); this could be expected. But what is striking is that the last two are not mentioned in the order of their birth. Zebulun, the younger, is listed before his older brother, Issachar. This reversal will be discussed under verse 13 in the notes. After these the four sons of the two maidservants, whom Jacob took as wives, are listed, and that in a very strange order. First is the oldest son of Rachel's servant Bilhah, Dan. Then come the two sons of Leah's hand-maid, Zilpah, Gad and Asher in the order of their age. After these Bilhah's second son, Naphtali is listed. Finally, Rachel's two natural sons, Joseph and Benjamin are listed.

All sources consulted agreed that there is no apparent reason for this unusual order, although this does confirm that the usual listing of Jacob's sons is not chronological according to age (cf. Gen. 29:21-35). This does not imply that this list here in chapter 49 is chronologically arranged, which is certainly not the case. It does indicate, however, there are other standards used for the order in which Jacob's sons are listed.

Moreover, another striking feature of this poem is that, the poem is encased within a prose framework; Jacob's sons assemble around their dying father (vv. 1-2), who, after the prophetic oracle, says he is about "to be gathered" to his people and then he dies (vv. 29-33). This narrative material which forms a parenthesis around the poem lends external unity and cohesion, and provides the appropriate setting for its placement within the Joseph Narrative. All of which--the prose framework and poem together--yields a deliberate chiasmic arrangement.

#### CHIASMIC ARRANGEMENT OF GENESIS 49

- A Jacob's sons gather to hear his words (1)
- B Prologue to the prophetic oracle (2)
- C Leah's sons are blessed (3-15)  
[Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar]
- D Bilhah's first son is blessed (16-18)  
[Dan]
- E **ZILPAH'S SONS ARE BLESSED (19-20)**  
[Gad, Asher]
- D' Bilhah's second son is blessed (21)  
[Naphtali]
- C' Rachel's sons are blessed (22-27)  
[Joseph, Benjamin]
- B' Epilogue to the prophetic oracle (28)
- A' Jacob is gathered to his people (29-33)

Figure 31.

This tight structure, then implies purpose, and that in turn suggests a central concern or integration point that gives this passage its meaning and direction. If the sons (Gad and Asher) of the least loved wife's (Leah) concubine (Zilpah) are blessed, then surely all the sons will be blessed. In addi-

tion, since these "lesser" sons are the focal point of the chiasmus, and that this chiasmus is built upon a matriarchal alternating pattern (Leah, Bilhah, Zilpah, Bilhah, Rachel), these two sons (and certainly Zilpah) would have received comfort and encouragement.

## Synthesis

In blessing his sons, Jacob foretold what would befall each of them and their descendants in the latter days; he disqualified Reuben for the birthright because of sin and Simeon and Levi because of violence but gave kingship to Judah and extensive blessing to Joseph, while briefly declaring the other sons' fortune in life.

## Translation

- 1 And Jacob called his sons and said, "Come together that I may tell you what is to befall you in days to come.
- 2 Assemble and pay attention, O sons of Jacob; listen to Israel you father:
- 3 Reuben, you are my first-born, my might and first fruit of my vigor, exceeding in rank and exceeding in honor.
- 4 Unstable as water, you shall excel no longer; for when you mounted your father's bed, you brought disgrace--my couch he mounted!
- 5 Simeon and Levi are a pair; their weapons are tools of lawlessness.
- 6 Let not my person be included in their council, let not my being be counted in their assembly. For when angry they slay men, and when pleased they maim oxen.
- 7 Cursed be their anger so fierce, and their wrath so relentless. I will divide them in Jacob, scatter them in Israel.
- 8 You, O Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the nape of your foes; your father's sons shall bow low to you.
- 9 Judah is a lion's whelp; on prey, my son, have you grown. He crouches, lies down like a lion, like the king of beasts--who dare rouse him?
- 10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until Shiloh comes and the homage of peoples be his.
- 11 He tethers his ass to a vine, his ass's foal to a choice vine; he washes his garment in wine, his robe in blood of grapes.
- 12 His eyes are darker than wine; his teeth are whiter than milk.
- 13 Zebulun shall dwell by the seashore; he shall be a haven for ships, and his flank shall rest on Sidon.
- 14 Issachar is a strong-boned ass, crouching among the sheepfolds.

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- 15 When he saw how good was security, and how pleasant was the country, he bent his shoulder to the burden, and became a toiling serf.
- 16 Dan shall govern his people, as one of the tribes of Israel.
- 17 Dan shall be a serpent by the road, a viper by the path, that bites the horse's heels so that his rider is thrown backward.
- 18 I wait for Your deliverance, O LORD!
- 19 Gad shall be raided by raiders, but he shall raid at their heels.
- 20 Asher's bread shall be rich, and he shall yield royal dainties.
- 21 Naphtali is a hind let loose, which yields lovely fawns.
- 22 Joseph is a wild ass, a wild ass by a spring -- wild colts on a hillside.
- 23 Archers bitterly assailed him; they shot at him and harried him.
- 24 Yet his bow stayed taut, and his arms were made firm by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob-- there, the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel--
- 25 The God of your father who helps you, and Shaddai who blesses you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that couches below, blessings of the breast and womb.
- 26 The blessings of your father surpass the blessings of my ancestors, to the utmost bounds of the eternal hills. May they rest on the head of Joseph, on the brow of the elect of his brothers.
- 27 Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he consumes the foe, and in the evening he divides the spoil."
- 28 All these were the tribes of Israel, twelve in number, and this is what their father said to them as he blessed them. He blessed them, every one with the blessing appropriate to him.
- 29 Then he instructed them, saying to them, "I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave which is in the field of Ephron the Hittite,
- 30 the cave which is in the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre, in the land of Canaan, the field that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite for a burial site--
- 31 there Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried; there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried; and there I buried Leah--
- 32 the field and the cave in it, bought from the Hittites."
- 33 When Jacob finished his instructions to his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and, breathing his last, he was gathered to his people.

## EXEGETICAL OUTLINE

**Introduction:** Jacob called all his sons together so that he could tell them what would befall them in the latter days (1).

**Prologue:** Jacob/Israel calls his sons to attention (2)

- I. Reuben lost the birthright because he acted presumptuously in the struggle for succession (3-4).
  - A. Jacob praised Reuben as the beginning of his strength (3).
  - B. Jacob disqualified him because of his sin (4).
- II. Simeon and Levi would be dispersed because of their fierce and unjustified anger (5-7).
  - A. Jacob lamented how cruel and murderous Simeon and Levi were (5-6).
  - B. Jacob cursed them for their wrath, dispersing them among the other heirs of the land (7).
- III. Judah would receive the kingship and anticipate a time of abundance because he would act in a valiant and praiseworthy manner (8-12).
  - A. Jacob gave Judah the authority over his brothers because he would act valiantly and they would praise him (8).
  - B. Using the figure of a lion with its prey, Jacob described the might of Judah (9).
  - C. Jacob predicted that the rulership would remain with Judah until the rightful heir came (10).
  - D. Jacob described the abundance of the time of Judah's reign (11-12).
- IV. Zebulun would dwell by the sea and be a haven for ships (13).
- V. Issachar would prefer ease and luxury to the hard work and freedom for which he was equipped (14-15).
- VI. Dan, although small, would help his brothers against oppression (16-18).
- VII. Gad would be raided by marauding bands but would fight back (19).
- VIII. Asher's land would be so fertile that he could deliver delicacies to royalty (20).
- IX. Naphtali would be a swift messenger with a message of victory (21).
- X. Joseph would prosper abundantly and, when fiercely attacked by his enemies, would be successful because of the help of the God of his father—a blessing that gave Joseph a position above the others (22-26).
  - A. Jacob declared that Joseph would be fruitful (22).
  - B. Jacob predicted that Joseph would be fiercely attacked by his enemies (23).

- C. Jacob explained that the God of the fathers would continue to protect and bless Joseph (24-25).
- D. The blessings that Joseph would receive would be greater than the blessing of others (26).
- XI. Benjamin will be successful and share his substance (27).

Epilogue: This is Jacob's blessing on the twelve tribes (28).

- Conclusion: After giving explicit instructions concerning the place of his burial, Jacob died (29-33).
1. Realizing that he was about to die, Jacob gave specific instructions concerning his burial place (29-32).
  2. Jacob died (33).

## EXPOSITION OF THE PASSAGE

The material in this chapter is rather difficult to develop into expositional and theological counterpoint statements. Of the two types of announcements in the chapter, short aphorisms and elaborate tribal sayings and predictions, the short aphorisms are almost impossible to interpret in an exposition, for little is known about the tribal history of each. Therefore, the notes will concentrate on the major sections (Reuben, Simeon and Levi, Judah, and Joseph) and mention the others only in passing. We may understand the aphorisms but may not be able to make a theological lesson out of them.

### I. *God reveals the future (1-2).*

This scene presupposes the preceding statement: "Behold, I am about to die" (Gen. 48:21), and therefore, ties chapters 48 and 49 together. Furthermore the Hebrew **הִתְאַסְפוּ**/*hē'āspû* "assemble yourselves" is paralleled by **הִקְבְּשׁוּ**/*hiqqābsû* "gather together" in verse 2. The use of these two verbs, which constitute a fixed pair of synonyms in Hebrew poetry (Isa. 11:12; Micah 2:12; Hab. 2:5), is evidence that this introductory prose sentence is an organic part of the entire composition.

The discourse which ensues is no ordinary conversation. It is in poetic form, and thus abounds in imagery. Its very tone and structure manifests that Jacob is in full control of his faculties, even though at the point of death.



He notes many events which had been carried in his memory for many years, and yet speaking in a manner very different from his normal mode of speech, in poetry and symbol and prophecy. The twelve brothers could hardly fail to be soberly and indelibly impressed with the memory and importance of their father's words.

### Jacob's Sons Gather To Hear His Words (verse 1)

1 Then Jacob summoned his sons and said, "Assemble yourselves that I may tell you what shall befall you in the days to come."

Shortly after Joseph's visit to his father's sickbed, as described in Genesis 48, the old patriarch, realizing that the end was near, sent for all his sons so that he could tell (אָגִידָה/ *'aggîdāh*) them what would befall them (אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא אֶתְכֶם/ *'ašer-yiqrā' 'etkem*) in the latter days (בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים/ *b' 'aḥarît hayyāmîm*).

Jacob employs the Hebrew verb אָגִידָה/ *'aggîdāh* "tell" with a nuance which falls within the semantic range of whatever follows it is a declaration of something before not understood or heard (cf. Gen. 41:25; Deut. 5:5; for similar constructions in other blessing contexts, see Gen. 27:4 and 48:9). Beginning with this Hebrew verb, Jacob clearly indicates that his words were deliberately chosen to be a prophetic oracle.

The Hebrew clause "what shall befall you" (אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא אֶתְכֶם/ *'ašer-yiqrā' 'etkem*) does not embrace the idea of mere fate or chance. The use of this particular Hebrew stem throughout Genesis argues against this. For example, in chapter 42 the sons return from Egypt and explain to Jacob what "met" them in Egypt. The thrust of the entire incident was to test the attitude of the other sons who became convinced that God was at work in the event (Gen. 42:21, 22). Two other occurrences of this verb is used when God is the subject, denoting "giving success" (to Abraham's servant in Gen. 24:12 and Jacob, disguising himself as Esau, the successful hunter returned home to be blessed in Gen. 27:20; cf. Deut. 31:29). The significance of the verb in Genesis 49:1 presupposes God's providence, especially as overseer of His people.

The expression "in the latter days" (בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים/ *b' 'aḥarît hayyāmîm*) has been treated extensively under the heading NARRATIVE/POETIC SEAMS IN THE PENTATEUCH, pages 648-651. Jacob's

words look to the future—"in the days to come"—and draw on the past, viz., God's blessing of mankind. It is within that context we are to read and understand Jacob's words in this chapter which become the occasion for a final statement of Genesis' major theme: God's plan to restore the lost blessing through the offspring of Abraham. The key to the writer's understanding of Jacob's last words lies in the narrative framework that surrounds them. In the very first verse we are explicitly told that Jacob was speaking about those things that would happen "in the last days."

This same expression occurs in the Pentateuch as an introduction to two other poetic discourses, the oracles of Balaam (Num. 24:14-24) and the last words of Moses (Deut. 31:29). On all three occasions the subject matter introduced by the phrase "in days to come" is that of God's future deliverance of His chosen people. At the center of that deliverance stands a king (Gen. 49:10; Num. 24:7; Deut. 33:5). In Genesis 49 that king is connected with the house of Judah.

#### Prologue To The Prophetic Oracle (verse 2)

2 "Gather together and hear, O sons of Jacob;  
And listen to Israel your father."

Verse 2 functions as the prologue to Jacob's prophetic oracle. The verb "hear" (שמע/שמעו *šim'û*; translated "hear" and "listen," NASB) is repeated twice to underscore the seriousness of Jacob's words to his sons. The repetition of the same word at the beginning of both parallel clauses, a phenomenon known as anaphora, is a characteristic of biblical Hebrew poetry (Judg. 5:3; Ps. 29:1-2).

It is interesting that this verse, with its stylistic standard formula of employed in wisdom literature (Prov. 1:8; 4:1; 5:7), cleverly weaves the image of a sage addressing his disciples into the father-sons relationship.

While in many passages in the Joseph Narrative the shift between "Jacob" and "Joseph" has always been on the "lips" of our writer, this is the first and only instance where Jacob addresses himself both as "Jacob" and "Israel." The significance of this alternating pattern seems to be as a father (Jacob) who is blessing his sons, but not only as a father, but also as a prophet (Israel) foretelling their future. With the sons as the object of Jacob's blessing,

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the two-fold epithet clearly sets out their natural origins as well as their spiritual heritage.

## II. *Sinful actions may remove people from positions of leadership (3-4).*

Reuben is censured for the flaws in his character and for his moral failing, hinted at in Genesis 35:22. He has proved himself unworthy of inheriting the headship of the tribes upon his father's death and must therefore forfeit the prerogatives that otherwise naturally flow from the first-born status.

### Leah's Sons Are Blessed (verses 3-15)

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- 3**     **"Reuben, you are my first-born;  
My might and the beginning of my strength,  
Preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power.**
- 4**     **Uncontrolled as water, you shall not have preeminence,  
Because you went up to your father's bed;  
Then you defiled it--he went up to my couch.**
- 

Our attention is called to the fact that Jacob addressed his son in this case. This is not true in the case of all his sons. Besides Reuben, we note the same approach in the case of Judah in verse 8 and Joseph in verses 25 and 26. In the other cases, however, the third person is used.

Reuben, Jacob's eldest son and therefore first-born, was naturally to be addressed first, the one who should have been the heir of the promise. Being the first-born he was entitled to leadership and the double inheritance (Deut. 21:15-17). But because he had an ungoverned sexual impulse which by imagery resembles boiling water, he would fail in leadership.

Jacob began by heaping praise on Reuben (v. 3), only to change to blame when he announced that Reuben had defiled his couch. As in the case with any first-born son, Reuben had at one time been the pride and joy of his father. Reuben is first called Jacob's "might," an ellipsis for "the fruit of my might" (Gen. 4:12), that is, "of my virility." This term is often paralleled with "vigor," meaning a man's procreative powers (for the parallelism, cf. Isa.

40:26, 29; Job 40:16). The designation of the first-born as "the first fruit of one's might/vigor" is found elsewhere in both legal and poetic texts, such as Deuteronomy 21:17 and Psalms 78:51 and 105:36.

The rendering "first-born" is literally, "first-fruit" from the Hebrew ראשית/*rē'sīt*, "beginning," and is based on the usage of the term in agricultural contexts (Ex. 23:19; Lev. 23:10; Num. 18:12; Jer. 2:3). The word might also appropriately be translated "choicest product," as in Deuteronomy 33:21, 1 Samuel 2:29, and Amos 6:6.

It is interesting that ראשית/*rē'sīt*, "first-fruit" would be employed here instead of the normal word בכור/*bēkôr*, "first-born." Perhaps it is because of the need for poetic imagery. Also it should be noted that the Hebrew term "to bless" is ברך/*brk*. It is common knowledge that the "first-born" (*bkr*) normally received the "blessing" (*brk*), but because Reuben had defiled his father's couch, the *bkr* ("first-born") would not receive the *brk* ("blessing").

The first-born is often called in Scripture, as Jacob did here, the "beginning of his father's strength" (Deut. 21:17; Ps. 78:51), one who was preeminent in dignity and strength. The idea of dignity (תאזר/*s'e'ēt*) is confirmed by the use of this same word in Job 13:11, Habakkuk 1:7, and Psalm 62:5. The word is to be taken from the root meaning "to honor" (*nāsā'*, cognate to Akkadian *našū*, "to honor"), and may be illustrated from the Hebrew word for prince (*nāsī'*). "Preeminent" (NASB) is literally "excellence." The meaning is: being the first-born, you should have preeminence over your brothers. Jacob also said that Reuben should have had preeminence in rank, literally "exaltation." This attribute is used of both man, as in Habakkuk 1:7 and Psalms 62:5, and God, as in Job 13:11 and 31:23. Thus, as the beginning of Jacob's strength, Reuben should have been preeminent in such dignity and honor.

But because Reuben was "uncontrolled as water," however, he would not excel. The word that the NASB translators have rendered "uncontrolled" has also been translated "turbulent" and "full of presumption." This word presents some real difficulty in interpretation because it appears nowhere else in the Old Testament. There is a verb using the same Hebrew stem in Judges 9:4 and Zephaniah 3:4, which is a reference to "reckless" men; in Jeremiah 23:32 the false prophets are said to have led the people astray with "their reckless" lies. Some light is thrown on the range of meaning by reference to cognate languages: Arabic, "to be haughty, boastful, reckless"; Aramaic and Syriac, "to be wanton, lascivious." In rabbinic Hebrew the verb is used of rising passion. Jacob would thus be censuring Reuben for acting in an

irresponsible, impetuous manner, casting off all moral restraint, even as a torrent of water rushes wildly headlong (for the image of water applied to character, see Isa. 57:20). The expression in this context signifies that Reuben was destructive like water because he disregarded the godly order and acting with pride or presumption. Essentially, Reuben himself destroyed his right to inherit.

Because of this characteristic in Reuben, even though he was the first-born and excelled in other qualities, he would not have the first place and therefore the preeminence among Jacob's sons. The Hebrew has a play on words here. He who "excelled" in honor and power would not "excel" among his brothers. Thus, the word "excel" is a wordplay on the two statements that have preceded it. Though Reuben has excelled, he will no longer excel.

Finally, Jacob mentions the specific incident in which Reuben's "uncontrolled as water" came into expression. The reason given is brief but to the point: "Because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled *it*." This refers to a shameful act Reuben had performed with Bilhah briefly noted in Genesis 35:22: "And it came about while Israel was dwelling in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Israel heard *of it*." The message is terse and to the point. Reuben no longer had the right of the first-born of the household of Jacob because he violated the honor of his father.

The term for "bed" in the plural, is always used in a context of sexual relations, as in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. The phrase is probably elliptical for "the bed of your father's wife."

By having sexual relations with Bilhah, Reuben "defiled" his father's bed. The Hebrew stem ללל/חלל, "to pollute, defile, profane," is used in connection with sexual depravity, as in Leviticus 19:29 and 21:9. The text present text presents a problem in that the verb otherwise invariably takes a direct object. Also, the understanding of the verse is complicated by the abrupt change of person: "he went up!" Mention of the incident in 1 Chronicles 5:1 suggests that "my couch" here is the object of the verb חלל and does double duty as the object of the following verb as well. The rendering would then be: "You defiled my couch--my couch he mounted!" The last clause is an aside addressed to the assembled sons.

Jacob had never fully recovered from the shame his oldest son had brought on him by his conduct with his maidservant Bilhah. Even on his deathbed he cried out, "You defiled my bed!" By Reuben's fornication with

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Jacob's concubine, it possibly could have caused a ban on Jacob from further sexual intercourse with her, resulting in his deep humiliation. This, added to the fact that he was still mourning the death of Rachel, could have crushed Jacob at the time.

Since Reuben defiled his father's bed and did not observe his father's sacred right, his own family would have no chance for the birthright. This fact is clearly attested in 1 Chronicles 5:1-2: "Now the sons of Reuben the first-born of Israel (for he was the first-born, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph the son of Israel; so that he is not enrolled in the genealogy according to the birthright. Though Judah prevailed over his brothers, and from him *came* the leader, yet the birthright belonged to Joseph)." In his reference to the sons of Joseph taking the birthright, the Chronicler was no doubt thinking of Genesis 48:5, where Jacob said "Ephraim and Manasseh [the two sons of Joseph] shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are."

On one level, the demotion of Reuben reflects the ideal of leadership in Israel. Those who hold the responsibility of high office must adhere to God's moral standards. Misconduct that might be disciplined in a lesser way in men of lesser status assumes notoriously magnified proportions when perpetrated by those who rule. The frequent confrontations between kings and prophets in Israel clearly illustrate the application of this principle.

Little need be said about the fulfillment of this prophecy. It is a known fact that the tribe of Reuben never took a leading position among the people of Israel. In the later journeys to the Promised Land, the Reubenites were the first tribe to ask for a place to settle, not waiting to cross the Jordan with the others (Num. 32). They participated in the erection of an unauthorized place of worship (Jos. 22:10-34). During the later wars with the Canaanites, in the days of Deborah and Barak, the tribe of Reuben failed to answer the call to arms (Judg. 5:15-16).

It has been observed that this tribe produced no one of any great importance in Israel--no judge, no king, and no prophet. Jacob's prophecy concerning Reuben has continued to be fulfilled ever since. Never has Reuben excelled in anything.

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### III. *Anarchy and violence are incompatible with spiritual leadership (5-7).*

Simeon and Levi These two brothers are strongly censured for acts of violence and cruelty. Since all the others are individually addressed, the linkage of these two most likely refers to their combined attack on the city of Shechem, which is described in Genesis 34. No other instance of joint activity is recorded anywhere. Jacob's initial response to the atrocity was fear for the safety of his family (Gen. 34:30). Now, with the passage of time, the patriarch renders a moral verdict on the act. With Reuben disqualified, Simeon was next in line of seniority to inherit the mantle of leadership; after him came Levi. The following words of Jacob explain why neither of them did.

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- 5 "Simeon and Levi are brothers;  
Their swords are implements of violence.
- 6 Let my soul not enter into their council;  
Let not my glory be united with their assembly;  
Because in their anger they slew men,  
And in their self-will they lamed oxen.
- 7 Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce;  
And their wrath, for it is cruel.  
I will disperse them in Jacob,  
And scatter them in Israel."
- 

The next two oldest sons were Simeon and Levi. As Reuben had manifested uncontrolled sexual actions, these two had manifested anger and cruelty. As in the case of Reuben, Jacob's blessing turned into a curse for Simeon and Levi. These hot-tempered men had caused great embarrassment, as well as danger, to the whole family when they had slain all the Shechemites because of the rape of the sister Dinah by one of them. Apparently this was not the only example of their violent natures, though it was the most extreme.

It is significant that regarding Simeon and Levi we are told first of all that they were "brothers." This does not refer to their family relationship because that would be superfluous, for all the sons were brothers; but rather refers to the similarity of their natures. The term "brother" (אָחִי/אָחָה) is commonly used in this metaphorical sense in Hebrew. Other examples of this usage are found in Job 30:29, "a brother of jackals," and in Proverbs 18:9, "brother to one who destroys." There is no reason why the term brothers as it is used

here must be used in its natural sense. Some scholars have insisted on this, however, and have then argued that Simeon and Levi were the only full brothers of Dinah. This would then explain, according to these scholars, their actions recorded in Genesis 34:25.

Simeon and Levi then, are grouped together because they were the instigators of the bloodshed against the city of Shechem (Gen. 34:25). At that time Jacob protested vehemently against the two sons and their attack on the defenseless city (Gen. 34:30). Here Jacob gave his final verdict on their action: the two tribes of Levi and Simeon would not have their own portion in the inheritance of the land (cf. v. 7).

The word our translators have rendered "swords" (מַכְרֵהָ/*m<sup>o</sup>kērāh*; "weapons," NRSV) appears nowhere else in the Old Testament. Others have rendered it "axes," but the exact meaning of the term is not known. Some claim that it seems to refer to a tool that was used for peaceful work but which could also be used, by an aroused person, as a lethal weapon. Simeon and Levi are here pictured as impetuous character, who could readily be stirred up to fight. At the slightest pretense they would be apt to take a tool that they were using for their regular work and turn it into a vicious weapon against another person.

It can not be objected that Genesis 34:25 states that they used "the sword" against Shechem, since Jacob does not refer to that incident at this point. This comes later. Here we have only a description of the nature of these two men. They were the type of people who were quickly aroused from comparative peacefulness to acts of extreme violence.

Another very good possibility how to translate the word "swords" is "wares," based on the Hebrew stem *mkr* (מכר), "to sell." This is particularly attractive in that it becomes an ironic comment on the response of the two brothers to the offer of the Shechemites, as reported in Genesis 34:10. One other translation is offered: this term may be from the Hebrew stem *krt*, "knives." The rendering finds support in the use of the verb *kārat* in Exodus 4:25 for circumcision, providing a direct link to the incident in Genesis 34. The line would then read, "Their circumcision knives are instruments of violence."

Jacob had strong words of judgment for this quality in these two sons (v. 6). He wanted nothing to do with such activities, and he disclaims all association with such attitudes and inclinations. It is striking the way Jacob



speaks about himself in this connection. What he literally says, in Hebrews, is, "Let not my soul enter into their council, and let my honor not join their assembly." The use of the word "soul" must not be understood as we generally use it. This usage of the word "soul" with the personal pronoun such as "my soul" or "your soul," is no more than an emphatic way of saying "I personally" or "you personally." And this is the way it is also used here.

"My honor" is the term signifying the God-endowed quality that distinguishes humans from other forms of life, as it is expressed in Psalms 8:6. This term expresses the essence of being and as such is found in parallel with such terms as "person" (*nefesh*), "life" (*hayyim*), as here and in Psalms 7:6, and "heart" (*leb*), in Psalms 57:8f. and 108:2. In poetic expressions the words "my honor" can be used as simply designating "my person." An example of this usage is found in Psalm 16:9, where there is a similar use of "heart" and "honor," side by side. It is correct to translate both of these expressions with the simple pronoun "me."

It is only following this that the specific incident that brought this volatile quality in these two brothers to light is mentioned. This was their attack on Shechem, recorded in Genesis 34:25-29. In this connection it has been charged that there is a conflict between Jacob's description of that incident, as it is given here, and the original narrative in Genesis 34. Here mention is made of "lamed" oxen (to cripple a beast by severing the tendons of its hind legs; cf. Jos. 11:6; 2 Sam. 8:4), while in the earlier narrative we are told that the cattle were all taken as booty. Some have suggested that the term "to lame oxen" was a poetic description of the cruel way the people of Shechem were killed, but it is not necessary to conclude that there is a conflict between these two records.

Although Genesis 34 does not mention this "lamed" oxen, it is altogether possible that some of this occurred as Simeon and Levi moved through Shechem in their blood bath of revenge. Even though we can accept that this was part of their bloody conquest, this does not mean that they butchered all of the oxen of Shechem. After their initial terrorist attack, they could have decided that it would be better to save the rest of the cattle and take them as plunder for their own use. Thus Jacob here in Genesis 49:6 is alluding to a related incident subsequent to the plunder in which Simeon and Levi resorted to the wasteless move of making much of their plunder useless.

Thereupon, Jacob pronounced his curse on this outburst of violence. Perhaps both Simeon and Levi may have tried to justify their slaughter of the

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Shechemites on the basis of righteous retribution, but Israel "banned" their cruel anger and fierce wrath. He spelled out the judgment that would fall on Simeon and Levi and their descendants.

It is very remarkable that this curse is directed toward Simeon and Levi in the first person, "I will disperse them in Jacob, and I will scatter them in Israel"! This signifies that the spokesman would also be the one who would carry out this curse--thus it is actually God who was speaking through Jacob and announcing what He would do.

The use of "in Jacob" and "in Israel" are not anachronisms, as some have charged since the old patriarch was fully aware of the fact that a great nation would spring from him.

The specific nature of the curse ("ban") was that these two tribes would not acquire a portion of the Promised Land as their won but would be scattered throughout the land. It would, in fact, be for their own good that they would not be allowed to band together, but rather would be dispersed. This, of course, immediately raises the question of how this was fulfilled.

In the case of Levi the fulfillment of this curse is completely obvious. The tribe of Levi did not receive its own, independent territory among the twelve tribes of Israel. This fact, however, raises the question whether this peculiar position of Levi among the people of Israel can rightly be considered a curse. The reason for their not receiving their own inheritance in Canaan was that they were entrusted with the service of the sanctuary. It is argued that this task should be seen as a distinction rather than a punishment. It should be noted, however, that this special task, assigned to the Levites, is not mentioned until much later (Ex. 38:21). In that passage we have a discussion about the amount of equipment and material needed for the service of the tabernacle. It was in that connection that Moses commanded Ithamar, the son of Aaron the priest, to employ the service of the Levites for this responsibility. This would imply that the Levites were assigned, in essence, a servant's position, to serve the priests in the work and care of the tabernacle and its equipment.

A second passage in which there is special mention of the Levites is Leviticus 25:32-33. There we have a special directive with respect to their inheritance. We need not discuss all the details of this directive because this would lead us on a tangent with respect to other difficulties in that passage. At this point, it is sufficient to say that this passage indicates that the Levites were

given a special position among the Israelites. However, the exact nature of that position is not fully described until still later, in Numbers 1:49-53.

In this latter passage we are told that their assignment was to take care of the equipment and provisions involved in the tabernacle and the tabernacle worship, and to carry all of this equipment when they moved from place to place. This, then, must have been the "position" referred to in the earlier passage as well. From this it becomes evident that this special task of the Levites was an honorable role. Some authorities are convinced that this honorable position was assigned to the Levites as a reward for their conduct during the incident with the golden calf (Ex. 32:26-29). In Deuteronomy 10:8 Moses specifically states that it was "at that time" that the Levites were set apart from their special task of caring for the tabernacle and carrying the ark. Thus it can be understood that the scattering of which Jacob spoke was a condition to which the Levites were subjected prior to that time. It is striking that when Moses blessed the people (Deut. 33:8ff) he spoke of the Levites only with honor. Because of their attitude at the scene of the golden calf, their curse was removed and turned into a blessing.

This brings us to a consideration of the application of this curse to the tribe of Simeon. Let us begin by observing that when the people of Israel were counted, two years after the Exodus at Mt. Sinai (Num. 1 and 2), the tribe of Simeon took its place among the other tribes in a very normal way. In the four groups of three tribes each, into which Israel was divided, Simeon had its place in the second group, along with Reuben and Gad. At that time it was numerically one of the larger tribes, surpassed only by Judah and Dan. At that time, then, there was no evidence of the curse that Jacob pronounced on Simeon and his descendants.

But as we move on in the history of Israel, we see that the situation began to change. A second census was taken after the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. This was when Israel was camped in the Plain of Moab, at the Jordan, across the river from the location of Jericho (Num. 26:2ff.), and at that point we can observe that a striking change had taken place in the tribe of Simeon. It can be expected that the number of people in each tribe would vary from time to time. For various reasons some would increase and others would decrease, but the change that took place in the tribe of Simeon during this period was so striking that it calls for special attention.

At the first census the tribe numbered 59,300 fighting men; but by the time of the second census this number had declined to 22,200. Thus the

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tribe had been reduced by more than one half and Simeon had now become the smallest tribe, with nearly 10,000 fighting men less than the next larger tribe. It is obvious that such a radical change cannot be explained by normal factors. Although the factor involved is not specifically mentioned, something had caused the decline of this tribe at an abnormal rate. This then would be the first evidence of the fulfillment of Jacob's curse on Simeon.

At this point, however, Simeon still held a place among the tribes of Israel. Even in Deuteronomy 27:11-13 it was still numbered among the tribes. This does not mean too much, however, because Levi is also mentioned there and Levi did not receive an inheritance in Canaan. But then comes the striking omission of Simeon from the tribes of Israel when Moses pronounced his blessing on Israel in Deuteronomy 33.

After the land of Canaan was conquered and the country divided among the tribes of Israel, each receiving a portion with definite boundaries, we come upon the amazing discovery that the one tribe, besides Levi, which did not receive a specifically demarked portion of the Promised Land was the tribe of Simeon. According to Joshua 19:1-8, the tribe of Simeon was allotted only a number of cities that were situated within the boundaries of the area assigned to the tribe of Judah. Thus Simeon did not receive a separately designate area of the Promised Land.

Carrying this still further, we read in 1 Chronicles 4:24-31, where the descendants of Simeon are listed, that "their entire clan did not become as numerous as the people of Judah" (v. 27). This would indicate that the limited growth of the tribe of Simeon was a recognized fact within Israel. Then, when we are given the list of cities that were allotted to Simeon, the same that are mentioned in Joshua 19:2-7, we find the further qualifying statement (v. 31), "These were their towns until the reign of David." This seems to imply that at that time there was a change in the rights of the Simeonites to these cities. Some early Jewish scholars hold that when David became king over all Israel, Judah drove the Simeonites out of the cities they had occupied within Judah's borders. This forced the tribe of Simeon to search for other places to live.

From a still later time, during the reign of Hezekiah, there is mention of a settlement of Simeonites (1 Chron. 4:34-41). Some of them had settled in "Gerar." The Hebrew text has "Gedar," but this is probably a scribal error. The Septuagint probably is correct in rendering this "Gerar." In verses 42 and 43 of this passage in 1 Chronicles 4, there is another reference, obviously from a still later time, which sees the Simeonites moving to the

mountains of Seir. Thus the scattering of the tribe of Simeon, which Jacob predicted, and carried out by God, became an ongoing reality.

#### **IV. *God entrusts leadership to those who are praiseworthy and responsible (8-12).***

In striking contrast to the preceding "blessings" upon Reuben, Simeon and Levi, Judah is lavishly praised and blessed by Jacob. The blessing on Judah rivals Joseph's in length (vv. 22-26). The poem itself, constitutes 25 verses (N.B. 25 = 5 x 5), of which five refer to Judah and five to Joseph (40 percent of the total). By actual word count in the Hebrew text, however, Judah receives 55 words, while Joseph's blessing contains 61 words. Judah and Joseph would father the most powerful tribes in Israel (Judah in the south, Joseph in the north) and would compete for leadership in later generations, a fact reflected in such passages as 1 Chronicles 5:1-2 and Ezekiel 37:15-28.

The Judah oracle opens with four statements concerning the exaltation of Judah among the tribes of Israel: (1) Judah will be praised by the other tribes; (2) Judah will be victorious over his enemies; (3) the other tribes would recognize the leadership of Judah; and (4) like a lion, Judah will strike fear into the hearts of those round about (vv. 8-9). Thus, Judah's preeminence is to be acknowledged by his brothers; Judah will have a fierce dominance over his brothers, who will praise him and he possesses (or will possess) lion-like strength. His hegemony is to be long lasting; and his territory is extraordinarily fertile. These verses provide a miniature preview of the kingship of Judah that would span the years until Messiah should come.

The slow, almost imperceptible, rise of Judah has already been subtly integrated into the Joseph Narrative. Here it receives formal recognition and confirmation.

#### ***JUDAH'S LEADERSHIP (verse 8)***

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- 8a "Judah, your brothers shall praise you;  
 b Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;  
 c Your father's sons shall bow down to you."

Having eliminated the older brothers as rightful heirs of the blessing, Jacob foretold a future for the tribe of Judah that pictured him as the preeminent son. We have seen that the author of the Book of Chronicles did not read Jacob's words to mean that Judah was given the right of the first-born, Judah had been chosen over all the others as the royal tribe. According to the Book of Chronicles, Judah "prevailed" (גָּבַר/*gābar*; "was the strongest," NIV) over his brothers and thus became heir to the throne. As the writer of Psalm 78 later put it, "[The LORD] also rejected the tent of Joseph, and did not choose the tribe of Ephraim, but chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved" (vv. 67-68). As is suggested in both of these later biblical texts, the words of Jacob regarding Judah in Genesis 49 anticipated in general the future rise of David to Israel's throne.

Like with Reuben, our attention is directed again to the fact that Jacob addresses Judah directly (cf. v. 3). Unlike with Reuben though, there are no curses or rebukes. The personal pronoun, "you" (אַתָּה/*'attāh*) is placed in a position of emphasis in the Hebrew line (cola) by placing it directly after Judah's name (not translated in the EVV) and then repeating it with the verb "praise." This emphasis places Judah apart from and in contrast to the three brothers already mentioned, underscoring particularly the object of the verb "praise," yielding a translation of "Judah, you . . . to you alone . . . ."

Unlike the imagery used of the other sons, the words of Jacob regarding Judah are quite transparent, though they are, of course, made up of poetic images. Judah is described as a victorious warrior who returns home from battle and is greeted by the shouts of praise from his brothers.

There is a significant play on words here in the Hebrew, in the use of the word "praise" (יָדָה/*ydh*). The name "Judah" (יְהוּדָה/*yehūdāh*) means "let him be praised" or "he will be praised." In the naming narrative (cf. Gen. 29:35), Judah's mother chose this name and explained her reason with the word play, "I will praise (אֲדַהֵא/*'ōdeh*) the LORD." But here Jacob turns the significance of the name with the play, "Your brothers shall praise you (יְדַדְּוּ/*yōdūkū*)." Thus the son whose name meant "praise" would be "praised" by his brothers. Although its use here serves for a word play on the name "Judah," its fullest expression and fulfillment will be directed toward the Messiah, who will come forth from the tribe of Judah.

With rare exception (Pss. 45:18; 49:19; Job 40:14), the verb "praise" is reserved for praise directed to God. This verb especially is employed in conjunction where God is praised for His faithful goodness. So

here: Judah's brothers shall praise the LORD for what He shall bring to pass through him. The reason for the brothers' praise is immediately stated: in history of this tribe it shall be particularly evident that the LORD achieves victories through him (cf. 8b).

A further word play on Judah's name is found in the New Testament: "But if you bear the name 'Jew,' and rely upon the Law, and boast in God" (Rom. 2:17). The word "Jew" is a contracted form of "Judah," who are to "boast," or more literally, "praise" God. But in the context, they are not praising God, but instead bringing dishonor to God (vv. 23-24).

But the word play does not stop with the etymological connection between the name "Judah" and the verb "to praise." The sounds in the name are further echoed in the next clause: "Your hand (יָדְךָ/*yādka*) shall be on the neck of your enemies." The oracle thus finds reinforcement in the name, as if to say that Judah would experience what his name meant. The text makes it clear that Judah will earn his right by powerful heroic deeds over his enemies and will therefore be looked to for leadership and be praised for it.

There is some difference of opinion among scholars as to the exact meaning of "Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies." Some hold that the statement should read as rendered here in the NASB. This would imply that their enemies would be subject to them. Other scholars use a stronger expression and read, "your hand will seize your enemies by the throat" (NJB). A comparison with Job 16:12 suggests that this stronger reading is probably more correct. The image is of the enemies turning their backs in flight but being seized by the nape before they can escape (cf. Ex. 23:27; 2 Sam. 22:41; Job 16:12). This would point to decisive victory in actual combat.

The parallelism of verse 8 is extended by the statement "Your father's sons shall bow down (יִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ/*yishtahûû*) to you." The most significant instance appears in 2 Samuel 5:1-3, where all the tribes of Israel are compelled to admit Judah's superiority in David.

It is difficult not to see in this an intentional allusion to the dream of Joseph (cf. Gen. 37:10) in which his father's sons would come to bow down before him. In other words, what was to happen to Joseph--and did, in fact, happen in the course of the Narrative (cf. Gen. 42:6)--has been picked up by way of this image and transferred to the future of the house of Judah. What had happened to Joseph is portrayed as a picture (a "type") of what would happen to Judah "in days to come" (cf. Gen. 49:1). This implies that they would ack-

knowledge his superiority. Because of the brothers' bowing to Joseph in Egypt, the oracle is probably speaking not of the brothers in the immediate family but of the future tribes.

Ironically, the end result for Judah will be domination over his enemies, with his brothers **bowing down** before him, precisely the role he may have been aiming at by getting rid of Joseph in Genesis 37:26-27.

The term "your father's sons" indicates that Judah would be acknowledged as superior, not only by his full brothers, the other sons of Leah, but by all the sons of Jacob by all his wives. The contrast with Isaac's blessing in Genesis 27:29, "your mother's sons," is explained by the fact that Isaac was monogamous, whereas Jacob had four wives and wished to indicate that all the tribes would acknowledge Judah's hegemony. Possibly, the blessing is meant to offset the note of Genesis 38:1, which reported that Judah "went down from" his brothers.

It is evident that the three cola of verse 8 are logically related: results (brothers' praise; 8a) which finds its cause in Judah's triumph over their enemies (8b), finally resulting in his brothers' bowing down before him (8c).

#### ***JUDAH WILL BE MIGHTY (verse 9)***

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- 9a    **"Judah is a lion's whelp**  
 b    **From the prey, my son, you have gone up.**  
 c    **He couches, he lies down as a lion,**  
 d    **And as a lion, who dares rouse him up?"**
- 

Verse 9 further expands Judah's future domination began in verse 8b. It should be noted that there is a free interchange between the second person and the third person in this passage, as if the prophecy is shifting and fluctuating between personages: first, Judah, then someone else.

Through graphic imagery, this verse of Scripture employs the metaphor of a young lion to portray Judah as powerful, and thereby his glory. The metaphor is one of strength, daring, and assailability. Three steps are present in the figure: seizing the prey, bringing it back to the den, and reclining over it. Thus the imagery pictures Judah as mighty in battle and kingly in repose.



Judah is labelled a "lion's whelp," which here certainly does not mean a young cub but a young lion in the freshness of his just matured strength. He is pictured at the point where he has captured and eaten his prey.

The symbol of the lion as a picture of strength, especially military prowess, is a favorite one in Scripture, so much so that it is referred to by six different names! In Moses' blessing it is used of both Gad (Deut. 33:20) and Dan (Deut. 33:22). In the proverbs of Balaam (Num. 23:24; 24:9) it is used of Israel as a whole. In Jeremiah 4:7; 5:6; 25:38, it is used to describe the Chaldeans coming down from the north (see also Jer. 49:19 and 50:44). In Nahum 2:11-12, it refers to Nineveh. Other references that has the image of Judah (or Israel) as a lion are Micah 5:8 and Ezekiel 19:1-7. The figure of the lion is used for the monarchy in other cultures as well. It is certainly a very descriptive analogy, and the figure of the lion is still commonly used in our day in describing great and awesome strength in a person.

In Revelation 5:5, Jesus is called "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" in demonstration of His conquering majesty. In the very next verse He is called the "Lamb" in demonstration of His meekness and His willingness to be sacrificed for the sins of the world (cf. Jn. 1:29, 36).

There has been considerable discussion about the use of identically the same term, in the same words, by Balaam in Numbers 24:9. Some have claimed that this indicates that Balaam was acquainted with this blessing of Jacob and borrowed it to try to impress Balak with the abiding certainty of this blessing. This is probably accurate. In Numbers 24:9 applies the imagery to the future king from the house of Jacob (the plurals in the NIV of Numbers 24:9 are not in the Hebrew text). Thus within the Pentateuch Jacob's vision of the future is carried further along and developed. Balaam also links Genesis 49:8-12 with the promise to Abraham in the statement, "May those who bless you be blessed and those who curse you be cursed!" which is an allusion to Genesis 12:3.

Another question that has been raised involves the statement that the NASB translators have rendered "my son, you have gone up." Literally this reads "from the prey, my son, you climb up" (מִתְּרֵף בְּנִי עָלִיתָ/*mitterep b'ni 'alita*). On the basis of the Septuagint and the Peshitta, some have read this "grow up," as applied to a lion's cub. The figure would then be that a lion's cub grows up as a result of eating the prey. Reference is made to Ezekiel 19:3, which some have translated, "She brought up one of her cubs." However, since that translation is also open to question, it can carry no weight in our present

consideration. . The most natural reading of the expression would seem to be that after killing and feeding on her prey, the lioness "goes up" into the hills to her lair where she can rest.

There may be still another level of interpretation embedded in the somewhat ambiguous syntax, allowing one to read מִטֶּרֶף בְּנִי (*mitterep b'ni*) "from the prey of my son." By word play, this possibility suggests an allusion to Genesis 37:33 and 44:28: "Joseph was torn (תָּרַף תָּרַף/*tārôf tōrap*) by a wild beast." Jacob had assumed it was a wild beast that had killed his son, and here he refers to Judah as a lion's whelp that had gone up from the prey. Is the father identifying the guilty son? A further ambiguity appears when Israel says, "From the prey, my son, you have gone up." Is he referring to Joseph or to Judah when he says "my son"?

When he comes to his den, "he crouches" with that peculiar grace characteristic of the strong beast; then he "lies down" in that bold security equally characteristic of the bold lion or, for that matter, of the still bolder and fiercer "lioness" who has cubs to guard.

The rhetorical question at the end of verse 9 speaks for itself: "Who dares rouse him up?" The imagery is a clear allusion of Judah tribe's enablement to protect themselves from their enemies, and more than that, also to be victorious over his foes. He would be the leader among the tribes; he would defeat their enemies and would become, as the lion is king of beasts, the one before whom all his family would bow down. All this furnishes a bold, clear picture of Judah's lion-like courage and strength. By these words a foundation is laid for great achievements yet to follow. Verses 8 and 9 create a sense of expectation, for they ascribe to Judah acknowledged pre-eminence, courage and strength.

As Joseph was to receive the double inheritance of the first-born, so Judah would receive the patriarchal dominion and responsibility of the first-born, both of which become integrated into one Person, the coming Messiah (cf. Ezek. 37:15-28). The next verse of the poem explains the nature of Judah's preeminence.

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**OUT OF JUDAH WILL COME THE MESSIAH (verse 10)**

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- 10a** "The scepter shall not depart from Judah,  
**b** Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,  
**c** Until Shiloh comes,  
**d** And to him *shall be* the obedience of the peoples."
- 

Genesis 49:10 is undoubtedly the most well-known and best-loved verse in the Blessing of Jacob. Jewish and Christian interpreters alike have seen in it a prediction of the coming Messiah. To this point God had indicated that the Savior would be one born of woman (Gen. 3:15); that He would be divine and would dwell in the tents of Shem (Gen. 9:26); that He would come from the line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Gen. 17:6, 16; 35:11). In the present prophecy the channel of blessing further narrows to one particular tribe: the tribe of Judah.

Normally in Patriarchal times the eldest son would receive special consideration at the time of inheritance. Such, however, was not the case among the descendants of Abraham. Isaac was not Abraham's first-born and Esau was by some minutes older than his twin brother Jacob. Under divine direction Jacob makes clear that his three oldest sons would lose their rank. Reuben (because of his incest), Levi and Simeon (because of cruelty) are here downgraded. Primacy in the history of salvation and leadership among the tribes would belong to Judah.

This verse moves into promise for the eschatological future, looking beyond the normal period of Israel's history to the dawn of the Messianic Age. Verse 8 indicates that Judah would have superiority over his brothers and also over his enemies, and this is further developed in the image of the lion in verse 9. The first part of verse 10 obviously refers to this same general superiority on Judah's part. As such, there is no specific reference in these verses to the kingship of the future Davidic dynasty that was to rise out of Judah. Although we can interpret the rise of David's kingship as growing out of the general superiority that is here ascribed to Judah, there is no specific reference to it in this passage.

The superiority that is predicted for Judah, in the first part of the verse (10a-b), would continue "until Shiloh comes." It is in the third colon of this verse that the real difficulties seem to surface. Concerning the coming of

Shiloh four particulars must be discussed: (1) the time of His coming, (2) His ancestry, (3) the meaning of His name, and (4) His rule.

### A. *The Time of Shiloh's Coming*

Judah, who was described by imagery as being a young warrior, is further filled out with imagery as being a king. He is the one who holds the "scepter" and the "ruler's staff." The word is paralleled with "ruler's staff" to strengthen the idea that the theocratic administration would remain with Judah.

If we examine the use of the term "scepter" (טִבֵּט/šēbet) in the Hebrew Scriptures, we find it usually translated "tribe." About forty times, however, as in this case, the word means "scepter." The LXX and other Greek versions and the Aramaic Targums render טִבֵּט/šēbet by words suggesting scepter or royal power. The "scepter" (mentioned here for the first time in Scripture) was the symbol of kingship, an emblem of authority and sovereignty. The scepter is a figure of kingly honor (Num. 24:17; Psa. 45:7; Isa. 14:5; Ezek. 19:11, 14; Amos 1:5, 8; Zech. 10:11; however, see Judg. 5:14). The qualities mentioned in verses 8 and 9 result in this, that rule over the tribes of Israel will sooner or later be conceded to Judah.

The term in Hebrew for "the ruler's staff" (מַחֲזֵקֶת/məḥōqēq; mentioned here for the first time in Scripture) has this same meaning in Numbers 21:18 and Psalms 60:9 and 108:9, and it provides a perfect parallel to "scepter." The term may also be translated "leader, ruler," as in Deuteronomy 33:21, Judges 5:14, and Isaiah 33:22. Consequently, "law-giver" (AV) as such is not wrong. But the ensuing phrase causes difficulty, for "from between his feet" can only with difficulty be understood of descent unless it is meant as a figure of speech. In which case the preceding "scepter" would be an instance of metonymy, the substitution of an attribute for the name of the thing intended, namely, the one who wields the scepter. This understanding of the prepositional phrase agrees very well with the following phrase, because the long ruler's staff would be placed between the feet as the ruler sat on his throne and would then either rest against his shoulder or be held in the hand. The phrase "from between his feet" (מִבֵּיַן רַגְלָיו/mibbēn raglān) taken literally, conjures up the image of a ruler holding the staff of office between his legs when seated in formal session, with its foot resting on the floor and braced against his feet.

Verse 10a-b confirms that Judah has now been chosen by God from whom the promise of a king, which had been promised to Abraham (Gen. 17:6, 16) and again to Jacob, will be realized (Gen. 35:11).

The scepter and the ruler's staff should not be restricted to royal power. The royal dignity resided in Judah until 587 B.C. when Zedekiah was captured and deported to Babylon and the kingdom of Judah ceased to exist. In the Post-exilic community, however, from 538 to at least 516 B.C. Judah was governed by Zerubbabel of the tribe of Judah. During the intertestamental period the entire land was called Judea after the name of this tribe. The political power of Judah came to an end when Judea was made a Roman province in A.D. 6. The political demise of Judah coincided with the physical growth of Jesus of Nazareth!

The verb "depart" (יָסַר/*yāsûr*) is active, where we should have expected a passive (KS 97). Jacob probably uses the active to emphasize that no one shall remove Judah's scepter, or Judah's dominion will not be taken away from him until a certain climax is achieved, which is here stated in double form: first "until Shiloh comes"; secondly, this climax will be overtopped by a second, "and to him *shall be* the obedience of the peoples.

A point of literary symmetry may be seen here by pointing out that the "scepter" shall not depart from Judah just as his "staff" was handed and left in Tamar's care in Genesis 38:18 and used as evidence against him in Genesis 38:25. In addition, a sexual connotation can certainly be read into "the staff between his feet," which is chiasmatically aligned with Judah's visiting a "prostitute" in Genesis 38:15-19.

### *B. The Ancestry of Shiloh*

First of all, we have a compound preposition that sets the time and seemingly fixes a termination point. Formerly some scholars held that this could be read, "as long as," or "until" (NASB), implying that Judah's tribal dominion and political influence were to extend *only* until the appearance of Messiah. However, the Hebrew אֲדָכִי/ *'ad kî* is very rare and is always used only in narrative prose to express the leading up to a climactic point (Gen. 26:13; 41:49; 2 Sam. 23:10; 2 Chron. 26:15) or an inclusive sense (Gen. 28:15; Pss. 110:1; 112:8). Thus Judah's capacity for rule would extend up unto Shiloh and beyond. If the promised Shiloh were not to be of Judah's descendants, this prophecy would actually be hostile to Judah. It would announce that at some point in the future Judah would lose his leadership to the Messiah, and in him to the tribe of his birth. Manifestly, however, it was Jacob's intention to bless Judah and to paint a picture of his future without negative stroke. Thus it is best to see in this statement the implicit promise that Messiah would

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come from the tribe of Judah. Later prophecies will make the tribal ancestry of Messiah crystal clear.

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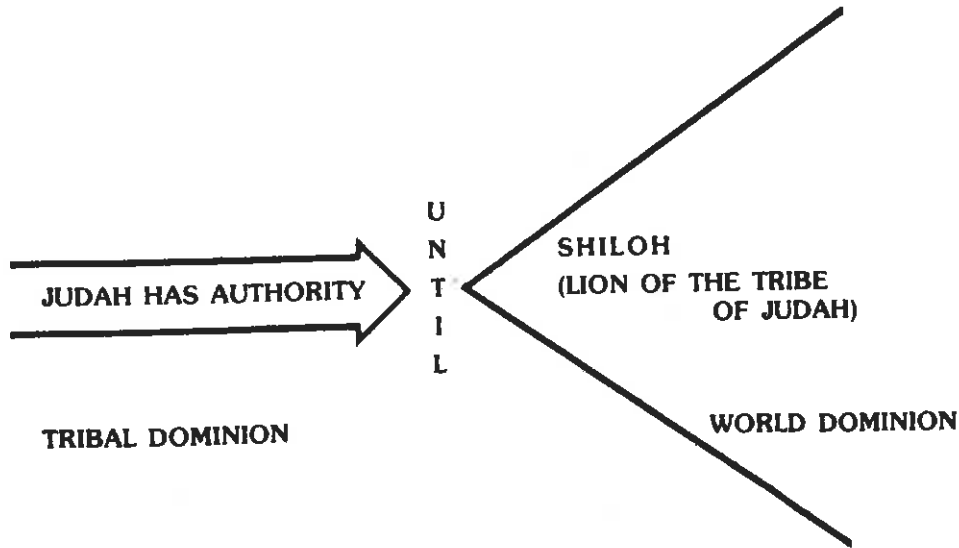


Figure 32.

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This compound preposition does not imply that when "Shiloh" comes that the kingship will then depart from Judah; rather, as in the case of Genesis 26:13 and 41:49, the clause introduces a relative limitation. This means that in the case of Genesis 26:13, the man grew in wealth "until" he became very wealthy. This does not imply that having obtained this level of wealth that his riches stopped growing. Likewise, in 41:49, Joseph is depicted as having accumulated so much grain ("like the sand of the sea") "that" he stopped keeping records. The text does not imply or even suggest, however, that he stopped accumulating grain. The compound prepositional phrase expresses not the end, but the climax!! Thus Judah exercises hegemony over the tribes for a period of time leading up to some climactic event. But what is this climactic event?

### C. The Name "Shiloh."

Our text tells us that this climactic event is when "Shiloh comes." It may well contain prediction of the Messiah, although the words in 10c are not easy to translate. The real difficulty comes in translating the word "Shiloh," as is evident from the rendering in our different English translations:

- KJV: "until **Shiloh** come"
- NASB: "until **Shiloh** comes"
- NIV: "until he comes to **whom it belongs**"
- RSV: "until he comes to **whom it belongs**"
- NRSV: "until **tribute** comes to **him**"
- NJB: "until **tribute** be brought **him**"
- NEB: "so long as **tribute** is brought to **him**"

To compound the problem further, a variant reading of the Masoretic Text is *sheloh* (שִׁלֹּה/*slh*), which is supported by over 40 Hebrew manuscripts, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Septuagint (τὰ ἀποκείμενα αὐτῶ), the recensions of Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion, and the Itala, Syriac, *Targum Onkelos* ("until the Messiah comes, whose is the kingdom, and him shall the nations obey") and the Fragment Targum (Jerusalem), and finally, the Vulgate.

There are so many different interpretations of this word that we cannot begin to list them all, much less discuss them in detail. We will therefore limit our consideration to a few main-line interpretations of this difficult word. We will begin by listing some observations:

1. The word "Shiloh," found in some EVV (KJV, NASB, ASV, BV, and in the margins of the NIV and RSV), is simply an untranslated form of the Hebrew expression שִׁלֹּה/*šiloh*. These translations understand it as a proper name and thus is properly capitalized. Shiloh appears to be the subject of the verb "shall come" and hence is to be regarded as a personal name. Shiloh would then be the first proper name given to the Messiah in the Hebrew Scriptures.

It is likely that the word "shiloh," as it was originally used, was not actually a proper noun, but perhaps acquired that function through usage, just as the word "seed" did. So it has been left untranslated by these EVV as "Shiloh" similar to "the Seed of the woman." The use of words taken from other languages to designate the promised

Messiah was not unusual (note Ps. 2:12, "kiss the son," where the word for "son" [בָּר/̄bar] is not a Hebrew word but Aramaic).

2. Other English versions (NRSV, NEB, NJB) chose to revocalize the Hebrew שִׁילֹחַ/šilōḥ and understand šilōḥ as a combination of *shai*, "tribute," and *loh*, "to him." Such a reading does form an excellent parallel to the final line of the verse and results in the following translation for the verse as a whole:

*"The scepter will not depart from Judah,  
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,  
until tribute comes to him  
and the obedience of the nations is his."*

This solution has the advantage of making sense out of a difficult verse. It also preserves the parallelism of successive lines so characteristic of Hebrew poetry in general and of this poem in particular.

3. Two of the English translations (NIV, RSV) cited above translate šilōḥ as "to whom it belongs." They understand šilōḥ as a composite of š-l-h. The š is an attested form of the relative particle (Gen. 6:3[?]; Judg. 5:7; 6:17). The short form relative š- is similar to the Akkadian *ša*. The l- is the Hebrew preposition "to" or "for." The -ōḥ is the Hebrew 3rd masculine pronominal suffix, "who to him" which occurs subsequently in verse 11. In other words, the scepter--that is, the theocratic administration--would remain in the tribe of Judah and find its fullest expression when the "one comes to whom it belongs." However, a transcriptional error has to be postulated if one is going to insist on the view that *shiloh* is a combination of a relative pronoun, a preposition and a pronominal suffix.
4. "Shiloh" as spelled in Genesis 49:10c (שִׁילֹחַ/šilōḥ) is never used elsewhere in the Old Testament. Some have suggested that the term comes from the Hebrew stem which means "to be at rest" or "to be content" (שָׁלַח/šalah). In this case šilōḥ is the "man of peace" or "the one who brings peace" (cf. Isa. 9:6). This led Luther to translate it "hero." It was later traced possibly to a Hittite word that means "ruler." All of this cannot be determined with certainty.
5. Some have suggested that the place-name Shiloh (1 Sam. 1:3), a town that was later built near Bethel (in central Canaan) was



originally named in commemoration of the prophecy and the One to whom it referred. For a while during the period of the judges, the tabernacle was set up there (1 Sam. 1-4); but it never was a very important town and was later destroyed by the Philistines. However, the place-name is never spelled like it is as in the text of Genesis 49:10c. Sometimes it is spelled as שִׁלֹה/šilō (21x) or שִׁלֹה/šilō (8x), or שִׁלֹה/šilō (2x), never as שִׁלֹה/šilōh as in Genesis. The tradition was careful to distinguish the two forms, though it is not without exception--The Qere has šilō from Genesis 49:10.

6. Others see Shiloh as a geographical designation. "The scepter shall not depart from Judah . . . until he (Judah) comes to Shiloh." The argument is that Judah is the subject in the following two verses, and so he should be regarded as the subject of the last clause of verse 10. After conquering Canaan Israel erected the Tabernacle at Shiloh (Josh. 18:1). According to Delitzsch, this is the fulfillment of Jacob's prediction (*Genesis*, 1978:333). Did Judah, however, have the primacy among the tribes during the Egyptian, Wilderness and Conquest periods before the Tabernacle was set up at Shiloh? Moses and Aaron were from the tribe of Levi, while Joshua was an Ephraimite. Furthermore, the Canaanites did not submit to Judah any more than to the other tribes during the Conquest period. There does not appear to be any adequate fulfillment of this prediction if Shiloh is taken as a geographical designation.
7. Some commentators understand *shiloh* to be a common noun meaning "peace" or "tranquility." Judah maintains the leadership among the tribes *until peace comes*. Those who adopt this interpretation do not believe that there was any concept of a personal Messiah during the Patriarchal period. This, of course, is an erroneous assumption, for if *shiloh* be taken as a common noun, the concluding statement "unto him shall be the obedience of the peoples" comes limping along rather lamely.
8. The most likely interpretation of *shiloh* is that the term is a personal Messianic title. The spelling here is unique in the Hebrew Scriptures. If "Shiloh" is a Messianic title, the New Testament ignored that fact since it nowhere quoted Genesis 49:10 in whole or in part. It is sometimes objected that the interpretation of *shiloh* as a proper name is a rather recent development, appearing for the first time in

the last century. An early tradition, however, found in texts from Qumran (4QGen 49:10), in the Targums, and in rabbinic literature, sees in "Shiloh" a Messianic title, although no biblical passage supports this.

Is it possible that Revelation 19:11-13 reflects this prophecy, where among numerous allusions to the imagery of Genesis 49:8-12, the Messiah is described as One who "has a name written on Him that no one knows but He Himself"? It is very interesting that the numerical value of the consonants שִׁילֹה/יב' שִׁי' šylh, "Shiloh will come," is equal to that of מָשִׁיחַ/māšīaḥ, "Messiah": 358!

The context makes it certain that *šilōh* is intended to be the name or title of a person, because of the following personal pronouns in verses 11 and 12 ("to him," v. 10d; "He," v. 11a, c; "His," v. 11b, d, 12a, b).

To determine to whom verse 10c is referring, we should carefully consider the context in which the word "Shiloh" appears. We must also ask ourselves what will characterize this coming of "Shiloh." It is obvious that the coming of "Shiloh" would not be a diminishing of the glory of Judah's superiority. On the contrary, the coming of "Shiloh" would be far more glorious than the honor that Judah would attain.

#### *D. The Rule of Shiloh*

The most startling aspect of the description of this one from the tribe of Judah comes next: "and to him *shall be* the obedience of the peoples" (v. 10d). The prepositional phrase "and to him" (וְלֹ/וֹ *wəlō*) definitely has Shiloh as its antecedent who was just named, and it stands first in the sentence by way of emphasis, as if to say: He shall be so great that men will readily yield Him obedience.

The use of the plural word "nations" (אֲמִיּוֹת/*'ammîm*; the article is omitted because the statement is poetic; a common phenomenon in Hebrew) suggests that Jacob had in view a kingship that extended beyond the boundaries of the sons of Israel to include other nations as well. With the appearance of Shiloh, therefore, tribal dominion expands into world dominion. The peoples of the world will render homage to Shiloh. This homage will not be forced servitude to some tyrannical oppressor, but as the Hebrew word יִיֻקָּחַת/*yiqqhat*

("obedience") indicates, a willing submission, an inner submission cheerfully rendered (Leupold, 1975:1180).

There may be an anticipation of this prophecy in God's promise to Jacob in Genesis 28:3 and 48:4: "I will make you a company of peoples (אֲמִיִּם/'*ammîm*)." It is clear that the purpose of this verse is not to point again to Judah's supremacy. That was presented in verses 8 and 9. Here we are concerned with the coming of the Messiah in whom this supremacy would reach its highest and fullest expression. The prophecy, although dim in its details, provides an early hint at the coming of Messiah. Although it is not specifically stated that the Messiah would stem from Judah, this is obviously implied in this reference to "the coming one" in the context of Judah's supremacy. This "telescoping" effect is also true of the future Davidic King (2 Sam. 7:8-16, especially verses 12-16).

It is evident that later inspired biblical writers took up this theme of world-wide dominance and were apparently guided by this Messianic dominion in formulating their view of the universal reign of the future Davidic king:

[12] "When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant (lit. "seed") after you, who will come forth from you, and *I will establish his kingdom*. [13] He will build a house for My name, and *I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever*. [14] I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; . . . [15] but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took *it* away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. [16] *And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever*" (2 Sam. 7:12-16).

[7] "I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD:

He said to Me, 'Thou art My Son,  
Today I have begotten Thee.

[8] Ask of Me, and *I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Thy possession*". (Ps. 2:7-8).

[1] "The LORD says to my Lord:

'Sit at My right hand,

*Until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.'*

[2] The LORD will stretch forth *Thy strong scepter* from Zion, saying,  
'*Rule in the midst of Thine enemies.'*

[3] *Thy people* will volunteer freely in the day of Thy power;  
In holy array, from the womb of the dawn,  
Thy youth are to Thee *as* the dew.

[4] The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind,  
'Thou art a priest forever  
According to the order of Melchizedek.'

[5] The Lord is at Thy right hand;  
*He will shatter kings in the day of His wrath.*

[6] *He will judge among the nations,*  
He will fill *them* with corpses,  
He will shatter the chief men over a broad country.

[7] He will drink from the brook by the wayside;  
Therefore He will lift up *His* head" (Ps. 110).

[6] "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;  
*And the government will rest on His shoulders;*  
And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,  
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

[7] *There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,*  
On the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness  
*From then on and forevermore.*

The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this" (Isa. 9:6-7).

[13] "I kept looking in the night visions,  
And behold, with the clouds of heaven  
One like a Son of Man was coming.  
And He came up to the Ancient of Days  
And was presented before Him.

[14] And to Him was given *dominion,*  
Glory and a kingdom,  
*That all the peoples, nations, and men of every language*  
Might serve Him.

*His dominion is an everlasting dominion*  
*Which will not pass away;*

And His kingdom is one  
Which will not be destroyed" (Dan. 7:13-14)

[5] "And one of the elders said to me, 'Stop weeping; behold, *the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah,* the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.' [9] And they sang a new song,

saying 'Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood *men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation*'" (Rev. 5:5, 9).

Thus Jacob's prophecy of the "obedience of the peoples" looks forward to the time when every knee shall bow to the universal rule of the Messiah (cf. Isa. 45:23; Phil. 2:10-11; Rev. 5:13). Of course this prophecy of kingship in Judah has in view the line of David, the Davidic Covenant promising perpetual kingship in his line (2 Sam. 7), and the eternal rule of Christ, David's greater son (Ps. 110), on the throne of David.

It is clear throughout the rest of Scripture that Judah did indeed become the leading tribe, but it was not until the days of King David. The earlier leaders were from other tribes: Moses from Levi, Joshua from Ephraim, Gideon from Manasseh, Samson from Dan, Samuel from Ephraim, and Saul from Benjamin. There was really no way for Jacob to foretell Judah's pre-eminence except by divine inspiration (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16). Judah did not actually receive the "scepter" of leadership for over 640 years after Jacob's prophecy. Once David became king, however, Judah was the dominant tribe from then on.

It is interesting to note that God's plan for the administration of His program resurfaces after all that had happened. God had created humankind to "rule and have dominion" over the earth as His vice regent. And now, as the plan to restore that blessed estate and purpose for His creation developed, God selected one family with a view to the restoration of rulership. The New Testament affirms that the anticipated king is Jesus the Messiah, the second (and last) Adam, a son of David of the tribe of Judah.

It does seem reasonable in such a prophetic valedictory as this, Jacob would make it clear which son would transmit the promised Seed. The promise of a personal Messiah began in the Garden of Eden, as expressed by God in Genesis 3:15. Through all the ages, men have looked for the coming Messiah, and this was certainly true of Jacob. By all means, he would be expected to indicate something of that hope in his prophecy. This promise to Judah must be Jacob's specific reference to that hope. The "obedience of the peoples," of which Jacob prophesies, corresponds clearly to God's Messianic promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that through their coming Seed "shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14, etc.).

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As mentioned above, the New Testament clearly identifies the LORD Jesus Christ ("Messiah") with this prophecy concerning Judah, calling Him "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Rev. 5:5). In addition, the prophet Micah also seems to refer to this prophecy when, just after saying that the coming Savior would be born in Bethlehem, in Judah, and that He would be "great unto the ends of the earth," he says: "And this man shall be the Peace" (Micah 5:2-5).

Also in favor of this rendering of the passage is the fact that it has been fulfilled. Once the tribe of Judah, under King David, attained leadership over the nation of Israel, the scepter (that is, the position of leadership in the nation) never departed from Judah until after Christ came. The kingdom was divided, and later all the tribes were taken into captivity; but as far as Israel itself was concerned, Judah was always the dominant tribe. Even during the captivity, Daniel, of the nation of Judah, was the greatest among the Israelites, and in fact became the third ruler in the kingdom of Babylon (Dan. 2:46-49).

After the captivity, those who returned were primarily from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, along with many Levites, as the other ten tribes had been scattered by the Assyrians. Although many from the ten tribes did manage to return under the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-4; see also Dan. 9) to the land, Judah was essentially from then on synonymous with Israel as a whole. This condition continued, of course, until the actual coming and crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah. Soon after, Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews (a name contracted from "Judah") were dispersed into the nations. Since then, even the genealogies have been lost, so that the tribal distinctions have all been fused and blurred among the Jews as a whole. This did not happen, however (that is, the scepter did not pass from Judah), until "Shiloh" came--just as Jacob had predicted!! This fact, incidentally, confirms that the Messiah *did come*, and that He must have come sometime before A.D. 70, since any form of rulership had collapsed with the advent of the Roman invasion and the fall of Jerusalem.

If indeed Jacob's prophecy points to the One who will ultimately rule over the house of Judah and the peoples of the world, then this cannot be applied to Christ *defacto* at His first appearing, but when He will appear to rule, when the kingdoms of this world have become the "kingdoms of our Lord, even His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15; also see 1 Cor. 15:23-28), which indeed is the context within which the imagery in verses 11-12 is found.

When all is said and done, "until he comes to whom it belongs," is probably the best choice of translating a difficult and elliptical cola in the light of several Messianic passages: Ezekiel 19 and 21, and Zechariah 9. We will briefly examine these passages in the light of the terms used in concord with Genesis 49:10-12.

By way of introduction, the Book of Ezekiel was written during the time of Judah's bondage to Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar's rule. During these final years Ezekiel was ministering in Babylon, predicting the coming collapse of Jerusalem. His message fell on deaf ears till word of the city's destruction was received in Babylon. The fall of the city prompted a change in Ezekiel's prophetic message. Before Jerusalem fell, Ezekiel's message focused on Judah's forthcoming destruction because of her sin (chpts. 1--24). After Jerusalem's fall, Ezekiel's message centered on Judah's future restoration (Ezek. 33--48).

Our first passage which we want to examine is Ezekiel 19:1-11, which is during the period of time that Judah did not believe she would fall, despite the prophet's warning of certain destruction. It is without question that Ezekiel's dirge in this portion of Scripture is richly inspired by Jacob's blessing in Genesis 49:8-12. The remarkable concordance of terms and images between the two leaves little doubt on this point. However, the allusions are not reused in a positive sense, but as a dirge forecasting of the imminent reversal of the old hopes of Judah as inspired by Genesis 49. The lioness which once lived on prey (vv. 1-3; cf. Gen. 49:8-9) will be caught and exiled (Ezek. 19:5-7); the vine which provided the staff of rulers (vv. 10-11; cf. Gen. 49:10a) will be cast down and burnt; 'and there will be no strong branch in her, no staff to rule'.

Even bleaker than Ezekiel 19:1-11 prophetic reversal of Genesis 49 is the reuse of "until . . . comes" in Ezekiel 21:24-27. This passage of Scripture is very significant when we remember that these words were addressed to the last king of Judah before they were carted off into bondage and exile, and that they are couched in a Messianic context!

The profane and wicked prince of Israel was King Zedekiah. Because he violated his oath of allegiance to Babylon, he was deposed. Zedekiah was stripped of authority (his turban and crown were removed), blinded, and imprisoned for life in Babylon (2 Kgs. 25:4-7). The once-proud king was humbled.

The right to rule in Judah was taken from Zedekiah, and the land was destroyed. Ezekiel's triple use of "ruin" stressed that Judah's throne was to be absolutely desolate:

"Therefore, thus says the LORD God, 'Because you have made your iniquity to be remembered, in that your transgressions are uncovered, so that in all your deeds your sins appear--because you have come to remembrance, you will be seized with the hand. And you, O slain, wicked one, the prince of Israel, whose day has come, in the time of the punishment of the end,' thus says the LORD God, 'Remove the turban and take off the crown; this will *be* no more the same. Exalt that which is low, and abase that which is high. A ruin, a ruin, a ruin, I shall make it. This also will be no more, *until He comes* (עַד כִּי יָבֵא) whose right it is; and I shall give it *to Him*' (Ezek. 21:24-27).

This passage of Scripture is explicit and recalls Genesis 49:10, which speaks of "the scepter" in the line of Judah. The line of David would not be restored till the righteous, God-appointed King would come. There were no valid claims until Jesus rode into Jerusalem to claim His rightful rule (cf. Zech. 9:9; Matt. 21:1-11; Rev. 19:11-16; 20:4). By Ezekiel recalling the elliptical phrase in Genesis 49:10c, עַד כִּי יָבֵא "until He comes," he grammatically explicates Jacob's blessing upon Judah.

The next passage which will be examined is found in the Book of Zechariah. It has been said before that the Book of Zechariah is the most Messianic, the most truly apocalyptic and eschatological of all the writings of the Old Testament. The Messianic emphasis of Zechariah accounts for its frequent citation by New Testament authors (41 citations or allusions).

The fall of Jerusalem to the armies of Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. marked the finale of the kingdom of Judah, much as the earlier defeat at the hands of the Assyrians in 722 B.C. brought to an end the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Most of Jerusalem's inhabitants were deported to Babylon for a period of about 70 years, as prophesied by Jeremiah (Jer. 25:11; 29:10). During this exile the prophet Daniel received the revelation that Gentile kingdoms would be dominant over Judah and Israel until God would set up His kingdom on the earth under the rule of the Messiah (Dan. 2; 7).. This period was referred to by Jesus Christ as "the times of the Gentiles" (Lk. 21:24).



When the Babylonian Empire fell to the Persian Empire (539 B.C.), Cyrus the Great decreed that the Jews could return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple (Ezra 1:2-4; cf. Isa. 44:28). However, only a small minority of about 50,000 Jews (including Haggai and Zechariah) returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest (Ezra 2). Levitical sacrifices were soon reinstated on a rebuilt altar of burnt offering (Ezra 3:1-6), and the second year of their return the foundation of the temple was laid (Ezra 3:8-13; 5:16). However, external oppression and internal depression halted the rebuilding of the temple for about 16 more years of spiritual apathy till the rule of the Persian King Darius Hystaspis (522-486 B.C.). In the second regal year of Darius (520 B.C.) God raised up Haggai the prophet to encourage the Jews in rebuilding (Ezra 5:1-2; Haggai 1:1). Haggai preached four sermons in four months and then disappeared from the scene. Two months after Haggai delivered his first sermon, Zechariah began his prophetic ministry (cf. Haggai 1:1; Zech. 1:1), encouraging the people to spiritual renewal and motivating them to rebuild the temple by revealing to them God's plans for Israel's future. With this prophetic encouragement the people completed the temple reconstruction in 515 B.C. (Ezra 6:15). The dated portions of Zechariah's prophecy fall within the period of the rebuilding of the temple. The undated prophecies of Zechariah 9--14 were probably written much later in his ministry.

With this historical backdrop we want to examine Zechariah 9 (cf. Ps. 72:8 which expands it) because of its striking parallels with Genesis 49:10-12.

Beginning with Zechariah 9:9 and continuing through 10:12, the prophet foretells the blessings of the coming Messiah. Our focus will only be on Zechariah 9:9-11, which is a royalist-Messianic passage that the New Testament authors quote within Messianic contexts, finding Jesus as its fulfillment (Matt. 21:5 and Jn. 12:15):

[9] "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
 Shout *in triumph*, O daughter of Jerusalem!  
 Behold, your king is coming to you (יָבוֹא לְךָ);  
 He is just and endowed with salvation,  
 Humble, and mounted on a donkey,  
 Even on a colt, **the foal of a donkey** (בֶּן אֲתוֹנוֹת).  
 [10] And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim,  
 And the horse from Jerusalem;  
 And the bow of war will be cut off.  
 And He will speak peace to the nations;

**And His dominion will be from sea to sea,  
And from the River to the ends of the earth.**

[11] As for you also, because of the blood of *My* covenant with you,  
I have set your prisoners (אֲסִירֶיךָ) free from the waterless pit (מְבוֹר אֵין מַיִם בוֹ)."

It is striking that Zechariah fuses the terminology found in Genesis 49:11-12 with that of Joseph and his time in prison. In verse 9 the inhabitants of Jerusalem are personified as the "daughter of Zion" (cf. Zech. 2:10; Isa. 1:8) and the "Daughter of Jerusalem" who, representing the whole nation of Israel, were exhorted to welcome the coming King not with fear but with glad rejoicing. The announcement that "your King comes to you" refers to the long-awaited King and Messiah (Isa. 9:5-7; Micah 5:2-4; Lk. 1:32-33). "Righteousness" describes both His character and His reign (Ps. 45:6-7; Isa. 11:1-5; 32:17; Jer. 23:5-6; 33:15-16). The phrase "having salvation" denotes that He will come as a Deliverer, as One to give salvation to others (cf. Isa. 62:11). His peaceful entrance--riding on a donkey--was fulfilled when Jesus presented Himself to Israel in the Triumphal Entry (Matt. 21:1-5). In the ancient Near East, if a king came in peace, he would ride on a donkey instead of on a war stallion. Christ rode "on a colt, the foal (lit., "son") of a donkey." Like some other Old Testament prophecies, this one blends two events into one perspective--events that the New Testament divides into two distinct advents of Christ separated by the present Church age (cf. Isa. 9:6-7; 61:1-2; Lk. 4:18-21). In His First Advent Jesus rode on a donkey and presented Himself to the nation Israel, but they rejected Him as their King. So His universal rule will be established when He comes again.

***IT WILL BE THE DAWN OF A NEW AGE (verses 11-12)***

- 11a "He ties *his* foal to the vine,  
b And his donkey's colt to the choice vine;  
c He washes his garments in wine,  
d And his robes in the blood of grapes.  
12a His eyes are dull from wine,  
b And his teeth white from milk."

Verses 11 and 12 must be understood in the context: verse 8 predicates royal stature; in verse 9, power of empire which daunts the adversary; in verse 10, the culmination of Judah's dynasty is the Messiah. Thus there is a

progressive march in the imagery. What follows must pertain to the next stage. These verses give to us imagery which will characterize the Messiah's rule and draw an extended picture of the reign of this one from the tribe of Judah.

The language of blessing is used in the last two verses, showing abundance in the land. Binding a foal to a vine and washing garments in wine, whatever else they may signify, speak of a time of great plenty and paradisiacal splendor. Each expression speaks of abundance--it will be a golden age. As Kidner says, "It bids adieu to the pinched régime of thorns and sweat" for the shout of rejoicing and feasting (*Genesis*, 1967:219). Although this prophecy does not go into detail, it does catch the mood of a time when the curse will have little effect and the land will have great blessing.

In the Messianic Age there will again be plenty for everyone. Poetically this idea of plenitude is expressed with the images of the donkey tethered to the choicest of vines and clothing washed in vintage wine (v. 11). The sense of the imagery is that wine, the symbol of prosperity and blessing, will be so plentiful that even the choicest vines will be put to such everyday use as tethering the animals of burden and vintage wine will be as common place as was water. Abundance of wine is also associated with Messianic days in Amos 9:13-14, Hosea 14:7 and Jeremiah 31:12.

The fact that one tethers a donkey to a vine seems problematic because a donkey would soon destroy the vine to which it is tied. However, the idea is that the luxuriance and productivity of the vine will be so great that the destructive proclivities of the donkey will be of no significance--indeed, the curse from the ground has been lifted.

The apostle John picks up this Messianic symbolism where in John 2:1-11, Jesus turned the water into wine at the marriage of Cana in Galilee. John describes that miracle as the "first sign" that He did (v. 11; none of Jesus' subsequent signs were so numbered). By the miracle Jesus was signifying that He was inaugurating the kingdom, a message that He also declared verbally (Mark 1:14-15). The creation of the abundance of wine (120-180 gallons) signaled that the Messiah was present, which Andrew had just previously announced (John 1:41). And everyone knew that Messiah would come out of Judah (Micah 5:2).

A description of the outward appearance of this Messianic figure is also added in verse 12. His eyes would be "darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk" (literal translation of the Hebrew). Thus these figurative descriptions

of dark eyes and white teeth, so highly valued among people of Eastern countries, picture great outward beauty for the coming Messiah.

The eschatological Messianic Age has another aspect: judgment ("blood of grapes," v. 11d). Isaiah 63:1-6 envisions the coming of a conquering king whose clothes are like those of one who has tread the winepresses. His crimson clothing is then likened to the blood-stained garments of a victorious warrior. He is the one who has come to carry out God's vengeance wrath upon the ungodly nations (אַמִּיִּם/'*ammîm*; Isa. 63:6). In the Book of Revelation, this same image is applied to the victorious return of Christ. He is the rider on "the white horse" who is "dressed in a robe dipped in blood" (Rev. 19:11, 13). "Out of His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations . . . He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty" (Rev. 19:15).

Since the Book of Revelation depicts the progress of redemption from the cross through the interval of the treading down of Jerusalem and the trampling of the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of God, it may be said that Genesis 49:11 depicts the coming judgment, and that it does not matter that the donkey is tied to the vine near the winepress; what could offer more convenient facilities? If judgment then is in view, then verse 12a refers to the eyes of the coming Messiah clouded with anger and the whiteness of teeth symbolic of judgment which the Messiah's words bring forth (cf. Dan. 7:9; Rev. 19:11, 14; 20:11ff.). Thus there is intimated the progress of redemption through to judgment, to be accomplished through "the one whom it belongs." Jacob may be said to have established in Scripture the imagery of the wrathful Judge, which is taken up again in Daniel and Revelation.

Just as preaching the gospel is a two-edged sword ("For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" 1 Cor. 1:18) so the Messianic Age is a two-edged sword (one of blessing and one of judgment). It is interesting that the Gospel of John puts these two aspects together; for after the miracle of changing the water into wine at Cana, John places Jesus cleansing the temple into juxtaposition (Jn. 2:13-25). According to the synoptic Gospels, the cleansing of the temple took place shortly before His passion (cf. Matt. 21:2ff; Mk. 11:11ff; Lk. 19:45ff.). The perhaps more correct chronological order of the synoptic Gospels gives way to John's Messianic emphasis and theological order (not to speak of his chiasmic order!!).

It is obvious that we are dealing with language that abounds in symbols and figures of speech. Such figures as tying a donkey to the choice vine and washing clothes in wine can, of course, be descriptive only of natural abundance and fruitfulness. But when we see these figures in the context of the prophecy about "Shiloh" coming, and when this is, in turn related to Genesis 3:15 and the covenant promises, we get a picture of the incalculable spiritual abundance and fruitfulness that would be ushered in by the coming Messiah.

The curse of Paradise certainly included a devastation in the realms of nature, thorns and thistles, laboring and sweating to bring forth crops, etc. But this was by no means the only nor the primary consequence of man's sin. The essential element in the Paradise curse was humanity's separation from God. Therefore, the gospel, in its deepest essence, promised the overcoming of this estrangement and separation and the restoration of abundance of peace. The "seed of the woman" would crush the spiritual force that stood behind the serpent and its destructive campaign against humankind. The Messiah would bring, first of all, spiritual blessings. The figures used here in this text certainly indicate that those spiritual blessings would be abundant and overflowing, and this would be the true glory of the victory of the Messiah. When Genesis 49:10-12 is related properly to Genesis 3:15, the true glory of the promised Messiah is described with graphic clarity.

Finally, we should say a word about the fulfillment of these prophecies. As far as the coming of "Shiloh" is concerned, this can readily be seen since the Messiah was born of the tribe of Judah. Thus, the obedience of the nations and the personal glory that are described here are fully realized in the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ!

But how were these prophecies fulfilled in the tribe of Judah as such? We have already observed, in the first part of verse 10, that Judah's superiority over the other tribes is a reference to a general superiority. Thus the argument that the kingly "scepter" did not actually continue in the tribe of Judah until the coming of the Messiah carries no weight. This, of course, can be readily established.

In the census, taken two years after the Exodus (Num. 2:4), and also in the census at the close of the wilderness wanderings (Num. 26:22), Judah was the largest of the tribes. Judah had the largest number of fighting men according to Numbers 2:9. Throughout the wilderness journeys, Judah was the predominant tribe (Num. 2:3; 10:14). When the tabernacle was dedicated (Num. 7:12), Judah was given the first position again. When Canaan was

divided after the conquest of the Promised Land, Judah was the first to be assigned an inheritance (Jos. 15:1). Although this predominance of Judah was less obvious during the period of the Judges, it was still present. Judah was the first to attack the Canaanites (Judg. 20:18). The tribe of Judah really came into prominence during the Davidic kingdom. Then, when the kingdom was divided, Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, remained the center of religious life for the entire nation, and the southern kingdom was known as the kingdom of Judah. After the destruction of the Ten Tribes of Israel, Judah alone continued and those who returned from exile were primarily of the tribe of Judah. Although there were some traces of descendants from other tribes, the continuing history of Israel up to the time when Christ came actually because the history of Judah, and the people of Israel became known as Judeans.

#### V. *God declares the destinies of His people (13-21, 27)*

Jacob's words regarding the remaining sons, with the exception of Joseph, are noticeable, not only for their brevity, but also for their cryptic allusions to epic events that at the time lay yet in the future of the particular tribe. True to the poetic qualities of the text, the images of the destiny of the remaining sons are, in most cases, based on a word play of the sons's name. The central theme uniting each image is that of prosperity. Just as in the image of the victorious king from the tribe of Judah who will reign over all nations in a time of rich blessing, so also each of the remaining brothers will experience the same sort of prosperity and blessing.

Because we lack the necessary information about the ancestors of these tribes and about their tribal history, we cannot interpret beyond noting that God spoke through Jacob concerning their destinies.

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- 13a "Zebulun shall dwell at the seashore;  
 b And he *shall be* a haven for ships,  
 c And his flank *shall be* toward Sidon.
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The usual order, Issachar-Zebulun, is here reversed. This is strange because, according to the birth narrative of Genesis 30:17-20, Issachar was the older of the two and he generally appears first in the tribal lists. Yet the Blessing of Moses in Deuteronomy 33:18, as well as Numbers 34:25f. and Joshua

19:16-17, give Zebulun precedence over his brother tribe, reversing the sequence, reflecting a genuine reason for this reversal. But what is it?

Certainly, the content of the sayings about them in both poems--Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33--suggests that Issachar was the less energetic of the two tribes, and this impression is reinforced by the Song of Deborah, which gives high praise to Zebulun for its contribution to the national victory, mentioning it before Issachar and citing it a second time (Judg. 5:14, 18; cf. 4:6, 10), the only tribe to be so honored. Zebulun also joined Gideon's battle against the Midianites (Judg. 6:35), and its importance in the time of David is illustrated by the fact that it contributed to David's armies the largest military contingent of all of the western tribes (1 Chron. 12:33).

Yet, this does not explain fully why Jacob reversed the order of Issachar and Zebulun. Perhaps, like Rachel, he desired to honor his other wife, Leah, by placing the son whose name means "God has endowed me (*z<sup>e</sup>bādānī*)" before the son's name which means "God has given me my hire" (cf. Genesis 30:20, 18, respectively). It is interesting that in this naming narrative that Leah comments on the importance of Zebulun's birth in her and Jacob's relationship: "now will my husband honor me (*יִזְבֵּלֵנִי/yizb<sup>e</sup>lēnī*), because I have born him six sons."

In this instance there are two motivations for the name. The first one, *z<sup>e</sup>bādānī*, is loosely connected. *Zābad* means "to endow with" (a dowry). This verb is strengthened in the verse by its cognate accusative. The second word play appears to be based on this recognition of providence. *Yizb<sup>e</sup>lēnī* expresses Leah's expectation (or wish) for honor. The verb *zābal*, translated "dwell" in the KJV and NASB, actually means "exalt, honor" (NRSV, NIV). With the gift of another son, Leah thus hoped that Jacob would honor her. In the context of Genesis 30:14-21, the name Zebulun would therefore remind her of divine justice in the face of human injustice. Leah received the divine justice (the births of Issachar and Zebulun); but she still had not found human justice (Jacob's love). Now in Genesis 49:13, Jacob gives "honor" (*zābal*) to Leah by reversing the birth order and giving prominence to the son that means "honor."

Zebulun is the only one of the sons of whom a geographical motif is given. Indirectly it may indeed reveal something of Zebulun's character, as he who wants to reach out into the world.

Jacob declared that Zebulun would be enriched by seaborne trade, obviously referring to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Essentially the oracle

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declared that the tribe would border on the Mediterranean Sea and the city of Sidon. Scholars have been bothered by the mention of Sidon this early, but archaeological evidence supports the antiquity of Sidon (it could be *Zidanum* in the Ur III tablets and in Ebla). Tyre is the later city (Isa. 23:12 refers to Tyre as the daughter of Sidon). Tyre did not develop into a prominent city until much later, in the 9th and 10th centuries B.C.. In Jacob's day, only Sidon was the predominant city of that area. At any rate, Zebulun would dwell close to the commercial shoreline.

The reference to Sidon may be significant. Sidon was the predominant Phoenician seaport prior to the invasion of the Sea Peoples ca. 1200 B.C. It did not come back to preeminence until after 700 B.C. The golden age of Tyre, the other Phoenician seaport of major size, extended from ca. 1200 B.C. down to the times of Isaiah (see above). The omission of Tyre and the mention of Sidon may argue for a pre-13th century date for the composition of this oracle.

The reference to "a haven for ships" suggests that the section of the coast that they would occupy would not be the barren, rocky area, but an area where ships could safely dock. Although Jacob spoke of Zebulun as a tribe, he pictured the tribe as a person who faced in one direction, that is toward the other tribes, while his back would be toward Sidon. This was to the north of Israel, the area that later became Phoenicia.

In considering the fulfillment of this pronouncement, it should be noted that when Canaan was divided among the tribes, Zebulun was not actually assigned a coastal area (Jos. 19:10-16). Zebulun was located in the northern part of Palestine, but not on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The inheritance of Asher lay between Zebulun and the coast. It is possible, of course, that later shifts in the population of that area did place Zebulun on the coast, but Scripture records no record of this.

It is noteworthy that there is another prediction regarding Zebulun, in the Blessing of Moses in Deuteronomy 33:18-19, which describes this tribe and Issachar as feasting "on the abundance of the seas, on the treasures hidden in the sand." This does not imply necessarily that Zebulun would be located on the seacoast, but could mean that the benefits of the sea, via trade and commerce, would be enjoyed, even though their location was somewhat inland. But the most natural interpretation would be that Zebulun was to have direct access to the sea. Even though there is no biblical evidence to confirm that this actually happened, there is no evidence to the contrary either. Therefore, most



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scholars agreed that at one time or another the tribe of Zebulun lived on the Mediterranean coast and thus the prophecy was fulfilled.

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- 14a "Issachar is a strong donkey,  
 b Lying down between the sheepfolds.  
 15a When he saw that a resting place was good  
 b And that the land was pleasant,  
 c He bowed his shoulder to bear *burdens*,  
 d And became a slave at forced labor."
- 

Issachar (יִשָּׂכָר/*yissākār*), whose name is a play on the word "wages" (cf. Gen. 30:18), is pictured as a strong donkey. A rawboned donkey is a strong, powerfully built donkey. When Issachar is compared to such a beast of burden, this is not a derogatory description. Donkeys were held in higher esteem in the ancient East than they are in the Western world today.

The Hebrew term that the NASB translators rendered "sheepfolds," is more literally, "saddlebags" (NIV). This term probably refers to open, protected areas such as we describe today in mountainous areas as a "saddle." Such an area, between two elevations, offered a shelter for cattle in time of bad weather. The figure seems to picture a powerful people who lived a relatively sheltered, relaxed life. Thus, it is said that they enjoyed a "resting place" on their land.

The expression, "when he saw that a resting place was good (בְּטוֹב/*tôb*)" is perhaps an allusion to Genesis 1 where the similar expression, "and God saw that it was good (בְּטוֹב/*tôb*)," is a constant reminder that God's purpose in Creation was to provide the "good" (בְּטוֹב/*tôb*) for humankind. The use of the term "resting place" or "land of rest" aligns the words of Jacob with the theme of the future rest that God will give His people in the Promised Land (cf. Ps. 95:11).

It is quite apparent from the Books of Joshua (Jos. 15:63; 16:10; 17:16) and Judges (Judg. 1:19-34) that during the wars of conquest, and for a long time afterwards, the invading Israelites were unable to dislodge the Canaanites from many of their strongholds in the plains and lowlands. The aphorism relating to Issachar seems to be connected with this situation. It is interesting that the tribe is not even mentioned in the inventory of Judges 1, which may suggest that this tribe played a very minor, if not inglorious, role in

the wars. Here it is chided for passively submitting to servitude as the price of peace with its neighbors.

In this case, there may be a further play on words with Issachar's name in relation to the tribe's future destiny. In the birth narrative of this son, his name is explained by popular etymology, as deriving from the Hebrew stem *s-k-r*, "to hire," and is taken to mean "man of wages" (cf. Gen. 30:18). There the name is intended to be understood as "hireling."

It is possible that the oracle predicted that, because Issachar would prefer abundance and luxury, he would be too willing to trade his liberty for the material things of life. The future of this tribe seems to be forced labor, for seeing that rest was "good" and the land "pleasant," Issachar would become a servant, lowering his shoulder to accept the burden. The words "to bear" and "became a servant under tribute" describe compulsory labor of subservient people (Ex. 1:11; Jos. 16:10; 1 Kgs. 9:21; 2 Chron. 8:8). This type of enforced hard labor imposed upon a subservient people is well illustrated by the experience of the Israelites in Egypt: "So they set *taskmasters* over them to oppress them with *forced labor*" (Ex. 1:11).

Issachar would be levied for corvée work like prisoners of war (cf. Deut. 20:11; Jos. 16:10; 17:13; Judg. 1:28, 30, 33; 1 Kgs. 9:21). Jacob says that, instead of using his ability to work for himself, Issachar would work for the Canaanites for food and rest. This gain was considered a mockery by the oracle, for it was a reversal of the relationship that should have prevailed between Israel and the Canaanites.

The Blessing of Moses similarly specifies the withdrawn nature of this tribe, but not in a disparaging way. By the time of Deborah, the Canaanites had become sufficiently weakened for Issachar to be emboldened to rally to the cause of the northern tribes. For this it received the praise of Deborah and Barak (Judg. 5:15).

#### **Bilhah's First Son Is Blessed: Dan (verses 16-18)**

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- 16a "Dan shall judge his people,  
b As one of the tribes of Israel.

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- 17a Dan shall be a serpent in the way,  
 b A horned snake in the path  
 c That bites the horse's heels,  
 d So that his rider falls backward.  
 18 For Thy salvation I wait, O LORD.
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Beginning with Dan (v. 16) and extending through Naphtali (v. 21), Jacob pronounces the destinies of the four sons of the two concubines. They are not listed in chronological order, but chiastically structured. Perhaps these sons are placed centrally in the chiastic structure to underscore the fact that they, although being sons of their father's concubines would actually share in the inheritance and be part of the "twelve tribes of Israel" (cf. Gen. 49:28). Perhaps they themselves would question their inheritance because of what happened to Hagar and Ishmael (cf. Gen. 16:3-16).

Furthermore, it is interesting that the sons of Zilpah and Bilhah, the concubines of Leah and Rachel respectively, form the center of the chiastic structure of Genesis 49:3-27. What is the significance of this?

We may begin by observing that our narrator intertwines these "lesser" sons with one another (Dan [Rachel]; Gad and Asher [Leah]; Naphtali [Rachel]). The presence of these sons concerns the continuation of the rivalry between Jacob's wives in their sons (Gen. 29-30), the rivalry between the wives and the concubines. It is these very same sons that Joseph brought to his father a "bad" ("evil") report (Gen. 37:2). So far in the Joseph Narrative, none of these sons are mentioned by name again until Genesis 49:16-21. There is no doubt that they are part of the brothers' caravan when they descended twice to Egypt (Gen. 42-44), and finally when Jacob's entire family descended to Egypt (Gen. 46:16-17, 23-24).

But why does Leah concubine's two children stand in the center of the Poem and not Rachel's? Perhaps like in the case of Zebulun, Jacob desires to continue to show honor to his "less loved" wife (Gen. 29:30-31) Leah in death by centering her concubine's children at the heart of the chiastic structure of the Poem, thus underscoring that even these children will have part of the inheritance in the Abrahamic promise, although natural expectations would have thought otherwise.

Jacob divides Dan's prophetic oracle into two parts. The first builds on a wordplay on the name (cf. Gen. 30:6), the other on an animal metaphor.

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The first deals with Dan's status among the tribes of Israel, the second with its position vis-à-vis its enemies. What is common to them is that both speak of Dan in terms of praise. Our meager knowledge of the history of this tribe and the elliptical language used here greatly complicate our understanding of the aphorisms and make it difficult to identify the historic situations behind them.

Dan is the first of the concubine tribes to be addressed. This implies a position of importance, a conclusion reinforced by its also being the only such to be allocated territory between the Leah and Rachel tribes. Furthermore, in the wilderness censuses it is actually the second largest tribe, its adult male population numbering over 60,000 (Num. 2:26; 26:43).

There is much evidence, however, that during the settlement period Dan was a small tribe in a precarious position. The tribal genealogies of the Hebrew Testament assign it only a single clan (Gen. 46:23; Num. 26:42), part of which seems to have been absorbed by the neighboring Benjaminites (cf. 1 Chron. 7:12; 8:8). The genealogies of Chronicles ignore the tribe altogether. The stories about the Danite blasphemer in the wilderness whose father was an Egyptian (Lev. 24:11), about Samson's easy relationships and intermarriages with Philistines (Judg. 14:1ff.; 16:4), and about the Danite master craftsman Hiramabi whose father was a Tyrian (2 Chron. 2:12f., but contrast 1 Kgs. 7:13f.) all point to a certain amount of intermingling of blood between Danites and neighboring peoples.

Very significantly, the Book of Joshua does not define the borders of the tribe. These are inferred from those of the neighboring tribes, Ephraim to the north, Benjamin to the east, and Judah to the south. All we have is a list of cities allocated to Dan (Jos. 19:40-48), but some of these, such as Zorah, Eshtaol, and Ekron, are earlier assigned to Judah (Jos. 15:11, 33, 45). There are no reports of the Danites having captured any of their allotted cities. In fact, the term "the Camp of Dan" in Judges 13:25 (cf. Judg. 18:12) shows that they occupied a fortified camp, not a true settlement, between the two Canaanite cities of Zorah and Eshtaol. All attempts on the part of the Danites to settle in the Valley of Ajalon and in the Shephelah were unsuccessful, and they finally despaired of gaining their originally assigned territory and migrated northward, as told in Joshua 19:47 and in Judges 1:34f. and chapter 18. Biblical tradition thereafter presupposes the presence of Dan in the north. The Song of Deborah, Judges 5:17, censures Dan for not participating in the war of the northern tribes against the Canaanites (cf. Deut. 33:27).

The oracle begins with a word play on the name, giving the significance for the future (cf. Gen. 30:6, in which the word play gave the significance for the mother). Dan ( $\text{דָּן}/d\bar{a}n$ ), whose name is a play on the expression "[he] shall judge" ( $\text{יָדִין}/y\bar{a}d\bar{i}n$ ), is the one who will judge his people. The tribe of Dan will maintain its independence like any other tribe, despite its tribulations and failures. However,  $\text{יָדִין}/y\bar{a}d\bar{i}n$  more frequently means "to vindicate" (Gen. 30:6; Deut. 32:36; Ps. 54:3), and the object could refer to all Israel. Samson, for instance, was from this tribe (Judg. 13:2), and so in this case, the allusion could be to the exploits of Samson against the Philistine oppressors, which acquire national significance.

Although Dan would be smaller than the other tribes, its calling was to help its fellow tribes against the suppression of a mighty enemy: "Dan shall judge (vindicate) his people, as one of the tribes of Israel" (v. 16). Issachar, like a large-boned ass, was equipped to get the job done but preferred a relatively easy life; Dan, born of a concubine and not as privileged as the others, would help its people get their rights.

The images in verse 17 explain how this vindication would happen. As a snake can strike at the legs of a horse and overthrow the mightier animal, so too would Dan be able to exert itself as one of the tribes. The tribes of Israel would be a minority in Canaan, as they were in Egypt, and Dan would be one of the smaller tribes. But if this blessing should come true by the power of God, as verse 18 expresses, then Dan would be a victorious tribe over others that might seem more powerful.

On the other hand, the reference to the serpent may also refer symbolically to the fact that it was the Danites who introduced idolatry into the land of Israel on a regular official basis (Judg. 18:30-31). It was also in Dan that Jeroboam, who led the rebellion that culminated in the divided kingdom, set up one of his two golden calves (1 Kgs. 11:26; 12:28-30). It may be that this is why Dan is not listed among the tribes in Revelation 7:4-8 (note Deut. 29:16-21). A strong pre-Christian Jewish tradition and the early church believed that out of Dan the Antichrist was to arise from this tribe, and for this reason, it was not included.

This latter interpretation is strengthened by the fact that Jacob, immediately after his reference to the serpent, must have thought of the one whom the serpent throughout Scripture typifies--that old "dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan" (Rev. 20:2). Thinking of the Serpent and his enmity against God's people, Jacob would naturally also think of God's

primeval promise of the coming Seed whose heel would be bitten by the Serpent, but who would in turn finally crush his head and bring the long-awaited salvation (Gen. 3:15). It was in reference to this Messianic promise that he had just spoken to Judah. It is natural, therefore, that right at this point, he would cry out: "For Thy salvation I wait, O LORD!" It would not be too imaginative to suggest that, in Jacob's mind, this Salvation for which he was waiting was actually a person. The word itself is the Hebrew *ישועתך/yesû'atka*, which is none other than the name "Jesus!" (cf. Matt. 1:21). This becomes even the more significant when it is realized that here we have the first mention of the word "salvation" in the Bible. In this case, after the impressive opening in verse 16, the anticlimax of verse 17 reveals the same gulf between calling and achievement that was Reuben's disgrace in verses 3 and 4.

Verse 17 describes Dan as a serpent that causes the rider to topple off the horse. The unique Hebrew term "a horned snake" (*שׁוֹפֵיפֹן/š'pîpōn*) is probably to be identified with the horned cerastes, which buries itself in the sand, especially in the hollows made by camel's hoofs, and feeds on rodents and scavenger birds attracted by grains and particles of food left by the Bedouin along caravan routes. It has a venom-injecting spinelike scale above each eye that kills its prey on contact, almost instantaneously. However, its poison is not powerful enough to be fatal to a camel or a horse. It will bite its heel if it crosses its path and cause the beast to rear suddenly and violently; thereby throwing its rider.

This imagery is to be viewed as a contrast of the "little" versus the "great," indicating that Dan is weak and thus small, yet he will succeed. So Dan did win an inheritance above the Huleh Valley and so gave the northern terminus to the saying "from Dan to Beersheba."

The metaphor of a "serpent" and a "horned snake" differs perceptibly from the Judah metaphor of the lion (v. 9); the lion is conscious of his own power ("who dares rouse him?"); Dan is a small, though dangerous, serpent, referring to the smallness of the tribe; it has at its disposal all too few warriors to be able to engage its Canaanite enemies in open battle. Now and again it can risk a surprise attack, an ambush, as the metaphor describes it; the weaker resorts to a stratagem against the stronger, as did Jacob against Laban in different circumstances (cf. Gen. 30).

When we turn to the fulfillment of this prediction, we can observe, first of all, that the tribe of Dan was divided into two sections. Part of the tribe remained in the southern part of Canaan, near the Mediterranean Sea where they

had the Philistines as their neighbors. The other half of the tribe moved to the far northern part of the country and established themselves near the city of Laish, which later was renamed "Dan" (Judg. 18). That this put considerable strain on their provision of justice should be obvious. Our attention should primarily be given to their close proximity to the powerful Philistines. That part of the tribe was under constant threat from these wily neighbors, as for instance, during the time of Samson. We can then see Jacob's prediction fulfilled in Samson's victories over the Philistines. Here was a clear-cut case of a small people overcoming a strong opposing force—like the small serpent and the big horse.

Although we have commented already on verse 18, a few further words are needed. Breaking in, as these words do, on the increasingly terse poetic images, this expression of hope in the LORD's deliverance provides the much-needed clue to the meaning of Jacob's words.

After the pronouncement regarding Dan, Jacob cried out, "For Thy salvation I wait, O LORD." The term "salvation" or deliverance certainly does not apply only to spiritual deliverance. It includes prospering in all areas of life. For instance, it would certainly include Israel's deliverance from Egypt (Ex. 14:13). Our conclusion regarding the intent of Jacob's prayer must be based on the context in which it appears.

The use of the first person, as in verses 1, 3-4, 6-7 and 9, leaves no doubt that the worshiper is Jacob. It is if Jacob paused to catch his breath with the heartfelt prayer, "For Thy salvation (deliverance) I wait, O LORD!" An elderly man on his deathbed, Jacob pleaded for God's help as he continued his strenuous speech, a speech that must have taxed all his physical, intellectual and spiritual faculties. Such a plea was entirely in character when voiced by God's people (cf. Isa. 25:9). It can also serve as a model prayer for us today, because it demonstrates one man's patience as well as his confidence in the LORD's love and concern for him.

There must be some reason why he made this outcry at this point in his "blessing" of his sons. We can probably find this in Jacob's inspired expectation that God would sustain the tribe of Dan in the difficulties they would face in the future. Such a prayer would only originate in a situation of danger. What, then is its context here?

It might be a personal prayer for the strength to finish the Blessing, at a moment of physical weakness. The prayer could also be invoked by the

discouraging experiences of the tribe of Dan in its struggle for a territorial foothold. But if this blessing should come true by the power of God, as verse 18 expresses, then Dan would be a victorious tribe over others that might seem more powerful.

But there is more than deliverance for Dan involved. Jacob's cry must have a far wider application; support for a broader application is clearly recognized in the Hebrew text when we note that "LORD" by word count (184 words before and 184 after) stands right in the middle of the entire chapter! This fact is more striking when we also note that the name "LORD" occurs only here in chapter 49. Throughout his many difficulties, Jacob constantly trusted God for deliverance. Now he looked to the future and considered the welfare of his descendants, especially the family of Dan, for whom he foresaw such great difficulties. In the individual and future destiny of the sons is embodied the hope of all Israel. And so he reaffirms his trust in God's unfailing deliverance. That trust is of a future prosperity for the nation and a future victory over their enemies. At the center of that hope is the king from the tribe of Judah.

#### Zilpah's Sons Are Blessed (verses 19-20)

- 19a** As for Gad, raiders shall raid him,  
**b** But he shall raid *at* their heels.

In the Hebrew text, verse 19 contains only six words. Four of the six Hebrew words consist of Gad's name and word plays on it; thus this brief statement regarding Gad contains a word play on nearly every word: "As for Gad (גַּד/*gād*) raiders (גִּדְדִּים/*gēdūd*) shall raid him (יִגְדְּנֵם/*yēgūdennū*), but he shall raid (יִגְדֵם/*yāgud*) at their heel[s]." This word play emphasizes that border raids would be the lot of Gad.

The name "Gad" probably means "fortune," as can be determined in the naming narrative (Gen. 30:11). But *gēdūd* translated "raiders," is related to the root גָּדַד/*gādad* ("to cut off"). The verb "overcome" or "attack" comes from the root גָּדַד/*gūd*. The sounds of the words thus work together to stress the point of the oracle that eventually Gad would overcome these raiders.

Again, though it is very brief, the saying falls in line with the others following in the path of the prophecy regarding Judah in that it gives expression to the hope of the final defeat of the enemy. Gad's territory was so situated,



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however, that it was open to this kind of attack. This tribe settled in Transjordan, between the tribe of Manasseh and the tribe of Reuben. Their territory was exposed to raiding parties coming from the desert to the East, as the 9th century B.C. Mesha inscription illustrates. One example of this would be the attack by the Ammonites, recorded in Judges 10:7ff (see also the attack by the Arameans, 1 Kgs. 22:3; 2 Kgs. 10:33). The deliverer in that case was Jephthah (Judg. 11:1), who was of the tribe of Gad. The difficult situation in which the Transjordanic tribes lived is also described in 1 Chron. 5:18-22, where we are told about their vigorous counterattacks against these enemy raids. Thus its members acquired a reputation as fighting warriors (Deut. 33:20; 1 Chron. 5:18; 12:8).

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**20a As for Asher, his food shall be rich,**  
**b And he shall yield royal dainties.**

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The oracle regarding Asher, like Gad, has but one sentence. Although there are no clear word plays, the name "Asher" means "fortune, happiness" (Gen. 30:13) and contains a veiled allusion to the prosperity of the tribe.

The blessing bestowed on the tribe of Asher predicts that they would occupy a territory that would be fertile and productive, so much so that he would produce delicacies to royalty. This prediction was fulfilled in the section of Canaan occupied by this tribe after Israel entered the land of Canaan. They settled in the fertile coastal plain that stretched from Mt. Carmel to the borders of Phoenicia. The area was famed for its fertility (cf. Deut. 33:24). To this day this is one of the more fertile areas of Palestine, and it exports significant supplies of olive oil.

A technical note concerning the first colon is in needed. The word for "rich" (NASB; *šmēnâ*), more literally "fertile" or "fat" (related to *šemen*, "fat" or "oil"), is probably an adjective modifying the word "food" (literally, "bread"), even though there is disagreement in gender. In Deuteronomy 33:24 this is paralleled by the phrase "dip his foot (toe) in oil," which suggests he will walk in a "fat" land, enjoying the richness of the soil of the Esdraelon Valley. When the word is used to describe the ground, the idea of quality and quantity of harvest is present (Isa. 30:23).

The second colon of the oracle (v. 20b) describes what Asher would do with his abundant produce--deliver it to the court. The choice of the term "royal dainties" (מַאֲדַנֵּי מֶלֶךְ/*ma'adannê melek*) signifies that the produce was delightful or pleasurable. It is probably not ordinary food but delicacies that kings would afford. The reference to providing royal dainties indicates the proof of the productivity of the territory of Asher.

### **Bilhah's Second Son Is Blessed (verse 21)**

**21a Naphtali is a doe let loose,  
b He gives beautiful words.**

Naphtali is the third to be given but one sentence. Naphtali would be a free mountain people, as the play on the name may suggest (cf. Gen. 30:8). The characterization of Naphtali is as a "doe let loose" and conveys a symbol of beauty of swiftness and agility, especially in battle (Ps. 18:33; 2 Sam. 22:34; Hab. 3:19). Naphtali is the only tribe compared to a female animal, but the significance of the fact is not apparent. The verb "let loose" (שָׁלַח/*šluḥâ*) is frequently used in military contexts where a message is being sent (cf. 1 Kgs. 14:6; Gen. 32:19).

The second colon reveals what the message is: "beautiful words" (אִמְרֵי שָׁפָר/*'imrê šāper*). The word translated "beauty" could perhaps be translated as "message" (*šipru* in the Amarna letters). In this case it means simply that he gives the words of the message. If "beauty" is retained as the NASB translates, then it suggests good news. Historically, this may refer to a swift runner from Naphtali who brings good news of victory in Deborah's war against the Canaanites and fulfilled in measure by the victory song of Deborah and Barak (Judg. 5:1-31).

Whereas the above interpretation makes sense, the reader should be aware that the Hebrew consonants translated as "words" (אֵילָה/*'ylh*) in the second colon can be vocalized differently, yielding a translation of "fawns" or "boughs," as evident in some of our modern English versions:

KJV: "He gives beautiful words"  
 NASB: "He gives beautiful words"  
 NIV: "That bears beautiful fawns"  
 RSV: "That bears comely fawns"  
 NRSV: "That bears lovely fawns"  
 NJB: "Bearing lovely fawns"  
 NEB: "Putting forth lovely boughs"

Translators have recognized that a deer does not bring forth words. Because of this difficulty, alternate translations have been offered by the NIV, RSV, NRSV, NJB and NEB, interestingly enough, without changing any of the original Hebrew consonants (it will be remembered that the original had no vowels--only consonants; the vowels were added centuries later).

The term translated "words" (אָיָלָה/'*ayyālâ*) may be also be translated as "fawns" (אֵלָה/'*elâ*), the meaning depending only on the pointing of the subject. So far there have been only animal metaphors; the poetic parallel word in the first colon, "let loose" is characteristic of an animal; the present passage is close to 2 Samuel 2:18, "as swift of foot as a wild gazelle," and Job 39:5, "who has let the wild ass go free?" This is confirmed by comparing it with Judges 5:18, "Naphtali too on the heights of the field," and Psalm 18:34, "he made my feet like hinds' feet, and set me secure on the heights."

As is almost always the case, the second colon says something more specific about the way in which the animal mentioned in the first acts. The MT (Massoretic Text) could be rendered, "who gives forth beautiful words/speech," but this is not likely as a concrete expansion of the first colon. In other words, one should look at the separate verse-halves and look for some logical parallel to "doe"; in this case "fawns" provides it. If this be the case, one should look for a definite emphasis on fruitfulness of people and land.

The fulfillment of the first colon was evidenced in Naphtali's skill in warfare. Judges 4:6 and 5:18 make mention of their expertise in this as they fought against the Canaanites under Barak and Deborah. With respect to the latter part of the statement we must simply admit that we do not know with certainty because of the ambiguity of the text.

**VI. *God gives ultimate blessing and victory to those who patiently endure persecution and opposition (22-27).***

The fourth major section concerns Joseph. Jacob treated this son more lavishly than all the others, for here lay the coveted blessing (as the Chronicler noted, 1 Chron. 5:1-2). Jacob took up the promise of fruitfulness from Ephraim's name and lavished prosperity and blessing on Joseph's tribes.

The Blessing of Jacob upon Joseph is of extraordinary length, equaled only, and significantly, by that to Judah (see page 935 of the notes). Lavish blessing is showered upon Joseph, the name here standing for Ephraim and Manasseh together (as it does elsewhere). The language is enigmatic and sometimes allusive, and the meaning is often uncertain. Echoes of Jacob's oracle are to be found in the Blessing of Moses (Deuteronomy 33:13-16).

There seem to be four themes in the oracle directed to Joseph: the attributes of the tribes (v. 22), an historical allusion (v.23f.), divine protection (v. 24f.), and blessings of prosperity (v. 25f.). This is the only oracle that does not commence with the name of the tribe. This stylistic variance may be intended to draw attention to the special importance of the Joseph tribes.

As translated in the KJV, NASB, NIV and RSV, the thought moves from the present, the summer of Joseph's days, back to the stresses of the past, and behind both to God, whose array of titles forms the rich centerpiece of the oracle. Then His profusion of blessings is called down on Joseph, carrying the thought on into the future.

**Rachel's Sons Are Blessed (verses 22-27)**

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- 22a Joseph is a fruitful bough,  
 b A fruitful bough by a spring;  
 c Its branches run over a wall.**
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The Blessing of Moses similarly uses the name "Joseph" for the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh; but such usage is rare (Deut. 27:12; Ezek. 47:13; 48:32; Ps. 77:16). Otherwise, the name designates the entire northern kingdom of Israel (Ezek. 37:16, 19; Amos 5:15; 6:6). The two tribes are known as "the House of Joseph" (Jos. 17:17; Judg. 1:22, 23, 35) or "the sons of Joseph" (Num. 1:10; Jos. 16:1).

The description of Joseph begins with a phrase traditionally translated as "fruitful bough" (בֶּן פֹּרֵת/*bēn pōrāt*). Although *bēn* (בֶּן) means "son," "bough" was chosen over "son" by our translators because Joseph is pictured here as a vine extending over the wall, an image of prosperity.

A greater translation problem concerns the meaning of *pōrāt*, rendered "fruitful." The Hebrew form seems to be an active participle, feminine singular, from the root פִּרְה/ *prh*, "to be fruitful." The literal rendering of the phrase would thus be "son of fruitfulness." The theme of fruitfulness has appeared before in the line from Rachel: God at first withheld fruit from her womb (Genesis 30:2) but later made her fruitful (v. 22). Then Joseph himself was made fruitful with the birth of Ephraim (Gen. 41:52).

To emphasize its fruitfulness, we are told that it was near a spring (cf. Ps. 1:3). The fruit tree grew so abundantly that its branches extended above the wall that protected it. The nature of the tree is not specified, but many think it was a grapevine.

The well-watered, far-spreading fruit vine delightfully pictures Joseph's depth of character and width of influence, and the fact that it takes up his own metaphor, enshrined in the name Ephraim, supports the familiar translation of the KJV, NASB, NIV and RSV.

#### *AN HISTORICAL ALLUSION (verse 23)*

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**23a** The archers bitterly attacked him,  
**b** And shot *at him* and harassed him;

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In these two verses we are told what Joseph had endured in the past. This description refers to Joseph personally and not to the tribe that sprang from him. The same occurs in the cases of some of the other sons. In speaking of what happened in the past, the reference is to them as persons, but when the future is described the application is to the tribes that stemmed from them.

Verse 23 follows logically from verse 22 in that it was because of Joseph's prosperity which spurs attacks from his enemies. His enemies showed bitterness toward him, shot their arrows at him, and hated him. Arrows are used literally or figuratively (for malicious words or slander) in the Bible (Jer. 9:2, 7; Prov. 25:18; 26:18f.). It would be difficult to establish the fact that

Joseph, personally, had been attacked by archers. We are dealing with figurative language here. Although there is not enough information to determine which is meant here, it is clear that people tried to destroy Joseph's prosperity. This pressure began, it may be recalled, in Joseph's life with his brothers. Later there were also those in Egypt who "bitterly attacked him"--the slanderous accusations of Potiphar's wife with their bitter aftereffects; the oracle extends that envy into the future as a prediction.

***DIVINE PROTECTION (verses 24-25b)***

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- 24a But his bow remained firm,  
 b And his arms were agile,  
 c From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob  
 d (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel),  
 25a From the God of your father who helps you,  
 b And by the Almighty who blesses you
- 

Since these attacks on Joseph are described by the figure of archery, his defense against these attacks is described by the same figure since "his bow remained firm, and his arms were agile." Thus his influence remained powerful.

Objection should not be made that Joseph did not actually fight back against his brothers (although Gen. 42:21) and against Potiphar. We are dealing with a figure, and every detail of that figure should not be stressed. The meaning is obvious. All the opposition Joseph faced did not waken him as a person, but, in fact, served to make him stronger and more effective. This is emphasized by the following statement which ascribes Joseph's strength to the sustaining hand of God. e

The names ascribed to God here are some of the most descriptive in all of Scripture, and certainly of Scripture up to this point. God is described as "the Mighty One of Jacob," "the Shepherd" and "the Stone of Israel."

The first name ascribed to God by Jacob is "the Mighty One of Jacob." This is a rare divine title, appearing elsewhere only four times (Isa. 1:24; 49:26; 60:16; Ps. 132:2, 5), always in poetic texts. It corresponds to the Akkadian divine title *bel abāri*, "endowed with strength." In all of these biblical usages, the term אֱבִיר / *abîr*, "Mighty One," is used of God as champion of

His cause. Thus the idea seems to be that Joseph remained steadfast in the face of adversity and drew his strength from God, who was championing His cause all along. Joseph himself acknowledge that his power came from God (Gen. 40:8; 41:16; 45:5-8).

The image of the hands of the LORD is frequent in passages of judgment and deliverance (Ex. 9:3; Deut. 2:15; Judg. 2:16). Here it is strengthened by the term "Mighty One."

The One who had strengthened Joseph's hand, and who would be likewise the strength of his tribe, is said to be both "the Shepherd" and "the Stone of Israel." These titles further develops the concept of God in this oracle. Although there had been a reference to the shepherding work of the LORD in Jacob's words to Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen. 48:15), this is the first time where God is actually called the Shepherd. Thus the God who defends Joseph is a Shepherd, one who is able to lead and defend His people.

Likewise, this is the first time when God is called either the Stone or the Rock (see Isa. 8:14, where "stone" and "rock" are parallel). The term "stone" is nowhere else used as a divine name or in association with God. However, a frequent epithet of God is "rock" (Deut. 32:4, 15, 31, etc.). It is possible that "Stone of Israel" may have been a very ancient title that disappeared early and that might have derived from Jacob's action of setting up a stone pillar at Bethel, as reported in Genesis 28:18, 22 and 35:14. This suggestion is bolstered by the use of the epithet "God of . . . your father" on that occasion (Gen. 28:13) and by the title El Shaddai associated with the revelation there (Gen. 35:11; 48:3). All these terms occur here in Jacob's Blessing. God is call the Stone because He is stable and unchanging.

Jacob also stressed again that this God was the same God as his God, the God of his fathers. This description reminds the reader of the ancestral calling and promised blessings (cf. Gen. 31:5; 32:9-10; 46:3). Finally, He is described as "Almighty" (עֲשָׂה/šadday). These last two titles seem to fit the last two verbs: the God of the father would save him, and the Almighty would bless him. Without the help and blessing of God, Joseph could not have made it as far as he had, and his descendants would not make it further.

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**BLESSINGS OF PROSPERITY (verses 25c-26)**


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- 25c** *With* blessings of heaven above,  
**d** Blessings of the deep that lies beneath,  
**e** Blessings of the breasts and of the womb.  
**26a** The blessings of your father  
**b** Have surpassed the blessings of my ancestors  
**c** Up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills;  
**d** May they be on the head of Joseph,  
**e** And on the crown of the head of the one distinguished among his brothers.
- 

In close connection with the statement that described Joseph's past, the same sentence goes on to speak about his future. Jacob's oracle of Joseph now shifts from the miseries of the past to the promise of the future. Underlying the blessing is the concept of a God who has a personal relationship with the individual and who, at the same time, is a cosmic, universal deity in sovereign control of all the forces of nature.

God the Almighty, who had turned Joseph's trials into blessings in the past, would continue to favor him abundantly in the future. The blessings that would be bestowed on the house of Joseph are poetically described, and cover a wide range of experiences.

Five times in these last verses the word "blessings" (בִּרְכּוֹת/*birkōt*) is used to describe the lavish treatment of Joseph. To bless someone means to give success to someone, and especially success in fertility (Gen. 1:22, 28, and the patriarchal narratives). Jacob declared that God would bestow His power on Joseph so that the latter could continue to be successful and fruitful. Here the oracle delineates blessing in agricultural pursuits, blessing of livestock, and blessing of descendants.

A comparison of this blessing at the end of Genesis with the blessing of God for humankind at the beginning of creation reveals that the prized blessing handed down by the patriarchs retained much of God's original desire for His first-born of creation. Here Joseph received that bounty of the first-born, which as we have seen, would be divided among his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. This blessing would exceed anything given to any of the progenitors, according to this oracle.



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By saying that the blessing extends to the hills, it selects the places of choice agricultural lands for the blessing terminology, for they were a symbol of fertility (Isa. 5:1; Deut. 33:15; Ps. 72). In short, the blessing on Joseph would be so great that it would exceed anything that anyone could imagine from a very fertile land.

Just as Joseph had overcome hatred and opposition to become successful in Egypt by the power of God, so too would his tribe continue to have the greatest of blessings. Jacob discerned the faithful perseverance of his favorite son and the blessing of God richly on him, and so in his final blessing he confirmed that word of God on Joseph.

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- 27a Benjamin is a ravenous wolf;**  
**b In the morning he devours the prey,**  
**c And in the evening he divides the spoil.**
- 

Although Joseph is treated before Benjamin in the order of the chapter, I shall comment on Benjamin within the section of short aphorisms. Benjamin, according to the oracle, would be so successful that he would be able to share with others of his substance.

Jacob prophesied that he would become as a ravening wolf, devouring the prey and dividing the spoil. This seems like a strange forecast for a son whom Jacob specially loved. This characterization of Benjamin is startling. Yet it portrays constant aggressive activity as indicated by the references to morning and evening activity. The point to be determined is to what this activity refers.

The picture of Benjamin drawn here is certainly not the same as the one that emerges from the Joseph Narrative. Far from being a "ravenous wolf," he is Jacob's lamblike youngest son whom he is reluctant to let out of his sight. Clearly, the image here, which portrays the Benjaminites as warlike and predatory, is tribal and not individual.

Benjamin is compared to a ravenous wolf that is bringing down its prey and devouring it from morning till evening. These two contrasting terms express continual action (cf. Pss. 55:18; 92:3) or describe the wolf as prowling among the sheep at night, snatching its prey and returning to its lair to share it with its young. In the latter instance, the image would be poetic hyperbole: the

loot is so great that there is even enough left to eat the next morning (cf. Zeph. 3:3). Thus the Benjamites were to become wild and vigorous warriors.

The martial qualities of this small tribe are indeed well attested. The first judge of Israel from Moabite oppression was Ehud the Benjaminite, mentioned in Judges 3:15, and the army of the tribe took part in the war of Deborah (Judg. 5:14). In a civil war, it is said to have mustered twenty-six thousand men armed with swords and seven hundred crack slingers and to have fought back savagely against the combined forces of the other tribes (Judges 20:15-25). It provided skilled archers, men "valiant in battle" (1 Chron. 8:40; 12:2; see also 2 Chron. 14:8 and 17:7), and two of David's heroes came from this tribe (2 Sam. 23:27, 29).

The historic explanation for the militancy of the Benjaminites is grounded in the geographical situation of its territory. Occupying a narrow strip of land separating the hill country of Judah to the south from the hill country of Ephraim to the north, it was so strategically located that the important north-south central highway, as well as a main east-west road leading to Transjordan, passed through it. As a result, the territory of Benjamin became an arena for wars. It is no accident that Israelite opposition to Philistine oppression was centered in that tribe (1 Sam. 10:5; 13:3) and that Saul, first king of Israel and warrior-liberator, came from the tribe of Benjamin (1 Sam. 9:1).

The Blessing of Jacob reflects this general historic situation. It is quite likely that Benjaminites preyed upon the caravans that passed along the trade routes within their territory, an activity echoed in the text.

#### **Epilogue To The Prophetic Oracle (verse 28)**

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**28 All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them. He blessed them, every one with the blessing appropriate to him.**

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This verse forms the epilogue to Jacob's prophetic oracle, the counterpoint (B') to the prologue to the prophetic oracle in verse 2 (B).

This verse is something like a postlude with which our narrator of the Pentateuch concludes these statements of blessing by the aged Jacob. He wanted to emphasize the fact that these statements referred not so much to the

persons of Jacob's sons as such, but to the tribes that would spring from them. Even so, the actual words were spoken to the sons in person, as they gathered about the deathbed of their father. The entire poetic address was in the form of a "blessing." Each son, and thus each tribe, received a specific blessing that was intended just for him and his descendants.

Thus our writer sums up in unequivocal terms the substance of Jacob's words to his sons. They are an expression of the theme of the blessing that was to be passed along through the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Within Jacob's words to each of the sons (after Judah), the theme of blessing has been evident in two primary images. First, the reverse side of the blessing is stressed in the imagery of the victorious warrior. The defeat of the enemy is the prelude to the Messianic peace. Second, the positive side of the blessing is stressed in the imagery of great prosperity and abundance. Behind such imagery of peace and prosperity lies the picture of the Garden of Eden--the Paradise lost. The focus of Jacob's words has been the promise that when the One comes to whom the kingship truly belongs, there will once again be the peace and prosperity that God intended all to have in the Garden of Eden.

Jacob's last words to his sons have become the occasion for a final statement of the Book's major theme: God's plan to restore the lost blessing through the offspring of Abraham. The key to the writer's understanding of Jacob's last words lies in the narrative framework that surrounds them. In Genesis 49:1 we are explicitly told that Jacob was speaking about those things that would happen "in the last days."

Now at the close of Jacob's discourse (v. 28), our writer goes to great lengths to draw a line connecting Jacob's words in this chapter to the theme of "the blessing" that has been a central concern of Genesis since 1:28. He does this by repeating the word "blessing" three times in the short span of verse 28, which literally reads: "And he **blessed** them, each according to his **blessing** he **blessed** them." By framing Jacob's last words between verse 1 and verse 28, the writer shows where his interests lie. Jacob's words look to the future--"in the days to come"--and draw on the past, viz., God's blessing of mankind. It is within that context we are to read and understand Jacob's words in this chapter.

**VII. *The death and burial of a believer provides one of the greatest opportunities to demonstrate the abiding faith in the future promises (49:29-33).***

What is recorded in these verses closely relates to what precedes it. After pronouncing his formal blessing on his sons, Jacob expressed his last desire that he might be buried in his family burial ground in Canaan. Earlier he had made the same request of Joseph, and since Joseph was the one son who had the authority to carry out this request, Jacob had made him promise under oath that he would take care of this (cf. Gen. 47:29-31). Now, shortly before his departure from this life, he made the same request with added detail in the presence of all his sons.

The point of the request within the present narrative is the renewal of the reader's awareness of the promise of the land--the promise that Jacob's seed would live in peace in the land promised to Abraham and Isaac. It is to show that Jacob's faith in God's promises remained firm to the end. With such an expression of faith still on his lips, the scene concludes with the fitting remark: "he drew his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people" (v. 33).

**Jacob Is Gathered To His People (verses 29-33)**

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- 29** Then he charged them and said to them, "I am about to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite,  
**30** in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field from Ephron the Hittite for a burial site.
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The Hebrew stem *צוה*/*swh* "to command" (translated as "he charged" NASB; cf. v. 33) is used in the sense of laying a charge on someone in preparation for death (Deut. 3:28; 2 Kgs. 20:1 = Isa. 38:1). This usage has given rise to the post biblical Hebrew word for "last will and testament."

Jacob's description of that family burial plot made it clear that he was not satisfied with a grave somewhere in Canaan. The specific place he had in mind was "Machpelah," the burial place purchased by Abraham in chapter

Through the blessing oracle, Israel's sons are reminded that their actions in the present, as illustrated from the past, have far reaching repercussions. As is often the case, the activities and nature of the parents will affect the destinies of the descendants. It was true for Adam and Eve, and it was true for the sons of Jacob. If they live godly lives, it will be a blessing to coming generations as the lives and resultant blessings of Judah and Joseph illustrate. If they are godless, however, the nation will reap the dire consequences as the lives of Reuben, Simeon and Levi illustrate with coupled with their fitting blessing. Therefore, the interlinking principle of obedience/disobedience with that of blessing/cursing are strong here. For the reader of Moses' day the lesson would be clear and the application immediate as they were poised on the borders of that land depicted in the prophecy, ready to take it by conquest. Their success would be dependent on their response to the demands of this principle. The basis of their obedience would be the hope founded on the faithfulness of their God Who is able to bring about the promised blessings contained in the poem.

Also in regard to the content of the future hope depicted in the poem, it is clear that a future Messianic deliverer is portrayed in the blessing of Judah. Both Jacob and his sons by this point in their lives have come to the realization that man has a deep sin problem, the pronouncements on the first three sons clearly mark this. God would provide through the descendants of Judah, who was a man himself, and disseminate forgiveness as the blessing assumes, their ultimate salvation. Through Him deliverance would come. In light of their sinful state, they should realize that both their blessings and their future deliverance would be an act of grace. Jacob's sons, their descendants, and the readers in Moses's day would not inherit grace from their forefathers, but they must accept it personally. As it was true for the Old Testament saint, it is still true for anyone today: "Whoever will call upon the name of the LORD will be saved" (Joel 2:32; cf. Rom. 10:13).

Just as the hope of the Old Testament believer was a future hope, it is with us today as New Testament believers, living under the New Covenant. For the descendants of Jacob it laid in that future Promised Land, not in the present reality of Egypt. For the believer today, it lays not in the present, but in the ultimate reality to come (cf. Heb. 11:1; 1 Pet. 1:3-5). This is why we are commanded by God to "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7).

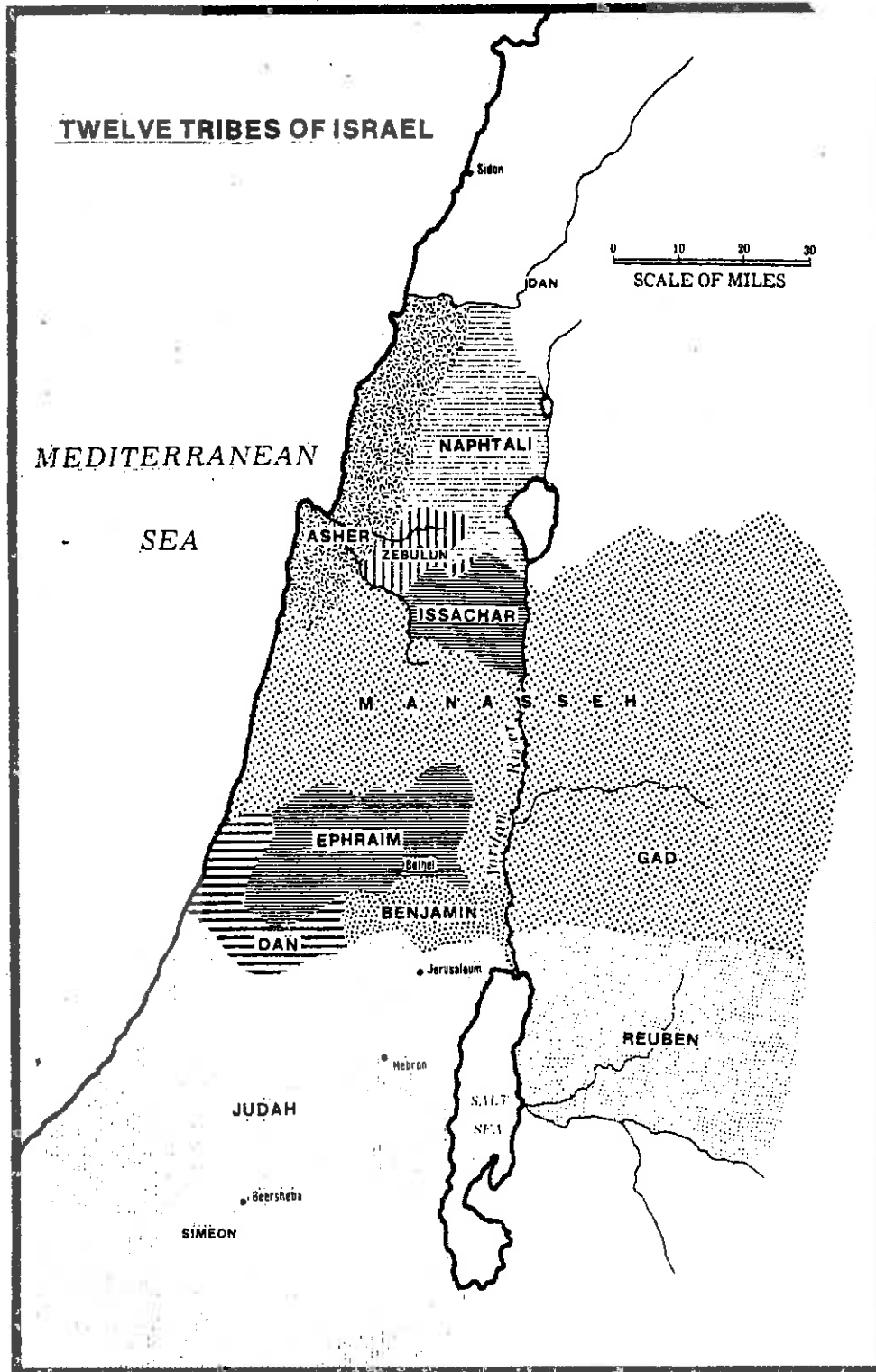
The future hope should encourage the Christian to live a life of purity just as it should have the patriarchs and all their descendants (2 Pet. 3:10-13; 1 Jn. 3:2-3). The principle of obedience/disobedience--blessing/cursing should guide our actions just as it should have Jacob's sons and their des-

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cendants. For the Christian who has already entered into the New Covenant by faith, having believed that Jesus Christ as God has appeared in flesh and died for their sins, the result is greater blessing (Rom. 8:17; 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 4:16-18; 5:1-10), for the unbeliever it is the greatest blessing of all, eternal life (Jn. 3:16).

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How do the names of Israel's sons figure in the blessings in Genesis 49?
2. What differences are there in the meanings of the sons now and the meanings at birth?
3. Are these personal blessings or prophetic utterances? Support your answer with biblical texts.
4. What are the implications of a prophetic oracle?
5. Explain the meaning of "Shiloh" in verse 10.
6. Explain the significance of Jesus changing the water into wine at Cana.
7. List at least two new concepts in your study of Genesis 49.





## Genesis 50:1-26

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### Death and Unfulfilled Promises

#### WALKING BY FAITH, NOT BY SIGHT

This last episode of the Joseph Narrative (which also corresponds to the last episode of the Book of Genesis) reports the burial of Jacob and the death and burial of Joseph--each to be eventually buried in the ancestral home and not in Egypt. Their deaths and the manner of the burials represent their faith in God's promise that Egypt was not their home, but Canaan, the Promise Land.

The future of God's people lay elsewhere, and they knew it. This passage confirms the point of Abraham's purchase of the cave of Machpelah and illustrates the Old Testament saints' hope beyond the grave.

The passage can be divided between the father and the son, Israel and Joseph. Genesis 50:1-14 records the final events of the life and death of Jacob: the dirge (Gen. 50:1-3), and the account of the burial procession with lamentation (Gen. 50:4-14). Genesis 50:15-26 brings to a close the story of Joseph. It includes the brothers' speech (v. 15), their message to Joseph (vv. 16-17), their audience with Joseph (vv. 17-18), and Joseph's speech of reconciliation (vv. 19-21). Then follows Joseph's death report and the promise of the exodus (vv. 22-26).

It should be noted that apart from the few meager details about Joseph's career in Genesis 47 and 48, nothing more is known about the lives of Jacob and his family in the land of Egypt. The seventeen years that Jacob sojourned there are shrouded in silence, as are the fifty-four years by which Joseph outlived his father. Only Jacob's Oracle to his sons are quoted at length, and in Genesis 50 the funeral arrangements given in detail.

A touch of local color is added by the mention of the embalming of Jacob, as well as of Joseph after him, the only instances in the Bible of such a peculiarly Egyptian practice. It is well-known that mummification, with all its elaborate ritual, played an important role in the cult of the dead. It had a distinctly religious connotation and was connected with the belief in survival after death, a belief in immortality which the Egyptians were incapable of dissociat-



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ing from the notion of the physical survival of the body. This being the case, it is all the more worthy of note that the embalming of Jacob and Joseph has no religious setting, but seems to have been a purely practical measure. Since Jacob was to be buried far from the place of his death, and Joseph hundreds of years later, the preservation of the body was desirable.

### Genesis 50 as an Inclusio to the Book of Genesis

In this work it has been demonstrated that the Joseph Narrative is structured chiasmically. Perhaps a few words should be said about its importance as the concluding narrative in the Book of Genesis.

The Patriarchal Narratives (Gen. 12--50) begin with Abraham's obedience to the divine command to migrate to Canaan, thus reversing the theme of expulsion, alienation and scattering abroad that marks the human experience posited in the first eleven chapters of Genesis. The particularism of the election of the Patriarchs (and thus of Israel as a nation) is also a universalism meaningful to the whole human race portrayed as disobedient and fallen into sin in chapters 1 through 11. In Abraham, "All the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3).

Thus, it is not a new thing to say that in this respect all of Genesis holds together thematically. What is being suggested here is that the composition of the Book of Genesis is a complete entity in itself, functioning as a completion and consummation to everything in the Book of Genesis preceding it.

Specifically, it is posited here that the Joseph Narrative, taken together with the primeval narratives that comprise chapters 1 through 11 in Genesis, forms with them, rhetorically, an *inclusio* for the whole of Genesis. That is to say, the Joseph Narrative at the end and the primeval history at the beginning provide together a literary bracketing--a beginning and ending enclosure--to the Genesis narrative; and this is of primary interpretive significance for the Book. Let me single out the specific points of affinity between ending and beginning which have led me to realize this.

First, we should be reminded that following an account of the LORD's prohibition against eating the fruit from the Tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil, the serpent and the woman undertake their famous colloquy. The serpent says to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:4-5).

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It could be coincidence, but probably not that, when in the closing chapter of Genesis, we hear the brothers appealing thus to Joseph: "Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin" (Gen. 50:17), and we hear Joseph responding in just this fashion: "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Gen. 50:19-20).

Read very carefully the words. The serpent declares, "You will be like God . . ." and Joseph exclaims, "Am I in God's place?" The serpent promises, ". . . knowing good and evil," and Joseph declares, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." The woman is told, "You will not die," but Joseph offers a confession of faith: ". . . God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive." It seems apparent that the use of these specific words in Joseph's conversations with his brothers, a conversation in which he in effect responds to the serpent's lines almost point for point, serves and is intended to serve, dramatically and theologically, as a reversal of the scene portrayed earlier in Eden, and as a resolution of the problem exposed there.

Such correspondence between the beginning and the ending of Genesis is by no means limited to the example just given, although that one is the most obvious and arresting. There are a number of affinities of like nature which, taken singly, might reasonably be attributed to coincidence but which, taken together, support collectively my suggestion that the Joseph Narrative is intended as the climactic outworking of the human problems posed in the first eleven chapters of Genesis.

In many respects, Joseph appears to have been drawn intentionally as an antitype to Adam and, for that matter, to other main representatives of humanity who figure in chapters 1 through 11. It is interesting to note that humankind is to have dominion over everything (Gen. 1:28), and to till the garden and keep it (Gen. 2:15). While in Egypt, we see that Joseph does on a grand scale what Adam was created to do but did not because of disobedience.

Again, Adam and Eve, expelled from Eden, are shut off from access from the Tree of Life (Gen. 3:22-24); Joseph, disclosed to his brothers as alive and not dead, declares to them--who had to leave Canaan because of famine--"God sent me before you to preserve life . . . God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors"

(Gen. 45:5-8). The expulsion from Eden is echoed, but the movement away from life is reversed.

Furthermore, when Joseph was made vizier over all Egypt, Genesis 41:37-45 recounts the events which transpired. It will be remembered that Pharaoh set Joseph over all the land of Egypt (v. 41), corresponding to Adam's dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:28); three things are bestowed upon Joseph as symbols of the authority which he received: a signet ring, a fine linen garment, and a gold chain; he received a new name and a wife, all of which is reminiscent of Adam.

In a number of other ways the Joseph Narrative seems to resonate thematically with the rest of Genesis. The strife between Joseph and his brothers, and its resolution in reconciliation, is explored in detail with insight and recognition that it is at the same time, paradoxically, the outworking of God's will (Gen. 45:5-8; 50:20). Hence in this way the Joseph Narrative forms a concluding and conclusive word on that perennial conflict between brothers portrayed initially in the Cain and Abel narrative, and carried into the narratives of Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Perez and Zerah.

The brothers' deception of their father Israel (Jacob) by the false evidence of Joseph's coat dipped in goat's blood has been seen by several commentators as a subtle and ironic recollection of Jacob's own youthful deception of Isaac using the skin of a goat. Also relevant in this connection is the Hebrew expression *kethoneth passîm* used to designate the "coat of sleeves" (Gen. 37:3) that Israel made for Joseph, because "Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children." The noun *kethoneth* occurs in Genesis only one other time (in the plural) to describe the "garments of skins" that "the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife" (Gen. 3:21). The occurrence of such imagery in just those places suggests again that in the mind of our narrator Joseph is indeed a counterpart to Adam.

### Source Criticism Considerations

Those who divide the sources ascribe the first fourteen verses of chapter 50 are generally divided between the three usual sources. Verses 12 and 13 are ascribed to "P" because they point back to Genesis 49:29-33. The rest of this section is given to "J," except for a few isolated statements that allegedly came from "E."

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One basis for identifying an additional an additional source is the use of the name "Israel" in verse 2. This has already been discussed in detail in the introduction to Genesis 37 (pages 54-58). It is also alleged that there is some duplicity evident. In verse 3 there is mention of 40 days, but also of 70 days. But it is obvious that these two figures refer to different activities--embalming and mourning. It is further alleged that in verse 8 we are told that Joseph's brothers were present when Jacob's body was carried away, while verse 9 suggests that this was not the case. In response, let it be noted that verse 9 mentions only a military guard that accompanied the procession. Again, it is charged that the mourning ceremony is described as taking place at two different locations (v. 10), at the threshing floor of Atad, and according to verse 11 at Abel Mizraim. In response it should be seen that verse 11 clearly indicates that these two names designated the same place. When all of these charges are put together they adduce no evidence whatsoever for two or more separate traditions as sources for this episode.

### THEOLOGICAL IDEAS

Out of this episode come two prominent theological ideas. First, and perhaps the more striking, is the theology of Joseph that God's sovereign plan used the evil intents of human beings. God was able to turn human wickedness to serve His divine purpose. Consequently, if it was "the will of God" throughout, Joseph had no right to retaliate or need to forgive--God does both.

Behind all the events and human plans recounted in the Joseph Narrative lies the unchanging plan of God. It is the same plan introduced from the very beginning of the Book of Genesis where God looks out at what He has just created for man and sees that "it is good" (Gen. 1:4-31). Through His dealings with the patriarchs and Joseph, God had continued to bring about His good plan. He had remained faithful to His purposes, and it is the point of this narrative to show that His people can continue to trust Him and to believe that "in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

Second, death is a major theme in the passage--specifically, how believers die when the promises are yet unfulfilled. Believers fully expect them to be fulfilled, and so will anticipate them for the ones who live on, as well as for themselves in the world to come. This confidence explains Joseph's desire to be carried to the land of Canaan for burial and the announcement that God would surely visit them and deliver them from Egypt. Both Jacob and Joseph

die with the divine promise of redemption on their lips. The patriarchal period opens (cf. Gen. 12:2) and closes on the same note (Gen. 48:3-4, 21; 50:24). The formative period in Israel's history is over and the great national drama is about to unfold.

## STRUCTURE, SYNTHESIS AND TRANSLATION

### Structure

Jacob's commission for burial in Canaan was given to Joseph in Genesis 47:29-31 and to all the brothers in Genesis 49:29-32. These two instruction passages frame the account that begins with the announcement of Jacob's death in Genesis 47:29 and ends with the death itself in Genesis 49:33. The report of Joseph's grief in Genesis 50:1 is the response to the death of Jacob, and the burial in Canaan (vv. 12-14) is the goal of the account of the journey (vv. 4-11).

The repetition of the motif of Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers serves to strengthen the point after the death of the father. The little unit (vv. 15-21) is a self-contained scene. There is apprehension, sending a messenger, and face-to-face dialogue. The crucial words that form the ground for the reconciliation are in the middle of Joseph's answer (vv. 19-20). The reiteration of this motif seems to round off the narrative by recalling the theme of reconciliation from Genesis 45:3-8.

Two final sections (vv. 22-26) have been added to bring the story to a close and to provide a transition to the Book of Exodus. They summarize Joseph's life and Joseph's last words.

### Chiastic Structure

In characteristic fashion of the Joseph Narrative, the entire 50th chapter forms a tight chiasmic structure, displaying as its literary center (D) the deep and profound mourning over Jacob's passing. Chapter 50 contains a number of word and thematic chiasmic elements building to a climax, which then follows a second series where matching units in reverse order bring the entire Narrative to resolution and fulfillment. The text, as it stands, exhibits clear unity. This is not only because of the chiasmic structure but because of the organic cohesion of the entire chapter.

As with other chiasmic structures in the Joseph Narrative, chapter 50 builds to a pivot point after which words and themes are repeated in reverse order. There are three units (A, B, C) leading to the climax of a great lament over Jacob's death (D); then three parallel units follow (C', B', A'). The result is an artistic literary construction in what has already proven to be a remarkably unified Narrative.

Units A through C have been structured to underscore Joseph's faithfulness to his father; just as he was always faithful to his father in life (cf. Gen. 37:2, 13), so he is now also faithful to him in death (cf. Gen. 47:29-31 compared to Gen. 50:4-8). From C' through A' there is the final resolution, not only to this chapter, but also to the Joseph Narrative. Jacob is buried in the ancestral burial plot, Joseph brothers' petition, and finally, the embalment of Joseph.

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#### CHIASMIC ARRANGEMENT OF GENESIS 50:1-26

- A Burial arrangements for Israel (1-3)
- B Joseph's petition to Pharaoh (4-6)
- C Preparation to bury Israel (7-9)
- D THE MOURNING OVER ISRAEL (10-12)**
- C' Burial of Israel (13-14)
- B' Brothers' petition to Joseph (15-21)
- A' Burial arrangements and death of Joseph (22-26)

Figure 33.

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#### *Presentation of Chiasmic Matched Units*

- A BURIAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR ISRAEL (50:1-3)**
  - Aa Joseph weeps (1)
  - Ab Joseph's command (2-3a)
  - Ac Egyptians weep (3b)
- A' BURIAL ARRANGEMENTS AND DEATH OF JOSEPH (50:22-26)**
  - A'a Joseph's age (22)
  - A'b Promises remembered and made (23-25)
  - A'c Joseph's age (26)

These two matched units act as the introduction and conclusion to chapter 50 and are framed in the context of death and promises. After Jacob had blessed his twelve sons, he told them that he was about to join his ancestors in death. He made Joseph and his other sons swear to bury him in the cave of Machpelah where the other patriarchs and their wives (Gen. 47:27-31), as well as his own wife Leah (but not Rachel) had been buried (Gen. 49:29-32). Having given his sons that final command, Jacob died at the ripe old age of 147 years (Gen. 47:28).

The action of A is repeated in A' in two significant ways. In both sections we have the process of embalment, first with Jacob and then with Joseph. Also, in A and A' we have point-counterpoint: Joseph prepares to keep his promise to his father by preparing for the long journey to Canaan by having him embalmed; then we have Joseph extracting a promise from his brothers (their progeny) to carry his bones up from Egypt and into Canaan when God will deliver them, and thus they embalm his body for safe keeping until such time (otherwise, the bones would have turned to dust).

There are several macro-intrastructural theme-words and concepts which link these two units together:

1. The proper name "Joseph" (יֹסֵפִי/*yôsefî*) is used as the predominant subject of the verbs in both units: "Then Joseph fell (v. 1) . . . And Joseph commanded (v. 2) . . ."; "Now Joseph stayed . . . (v. 22) . . . And Joseph saw (v. 23) . . . And Joseph said (v. 24) . . . Then Joseph made . . . (v. 25) . . . So Joseph died (v. 26)."
2. "His father" (אָבִיו/*'ābîw*) occurs in both verses 1 and 2 as well as in verse 22.
3. The verb "to embalm" (הָנַח/*hānat*) only occurs in verses 2 and 26 in all Hebrew Scripture; the nominal form (הַחֲנוּטִים/*haḥanutîm*) occurs only in verse 3. Thus the burial of Israel and Joseph forms a very nice *inclusio* for the chapter.
4. The proper name "Israel" (יִשְׂרָאֵל/*yisrā'ēl*) only occurs in verses 2 and 25 in chapter 50.
5. The place-name "Egypt" (מִצְרַיִם/*miṣrayim*) occurs in verses 3 and 22 and 26.
6. The consonants שָׁבַע/*š-b-* occur in verse 3 (שִׁבְעִים/*šib'im*, "seventy") and verse 25 (וַיִּשָּׁבַע/*wayyašba'*, "swear").
7. As far as family relations, Joseph and Jacob occur together in verses 1-3, while in verses 22-26 it is Joseph and his brothers.

8. In verse 2 Joseph commanded the physicians (רפאים/*rp'ym*) to embalm Israel's body, while in verse 23 we are told that Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim's (אפרים/*'prym*) sons. Ephraim's name is a consonant reversal of the Hebrew word for physicians.
9. Verse 3 reports that the process of embalming required 40 days, after which the Egyptians lamented over Jacob for 70 days. These two numbers when added together equal 110 days. This number is echoed in verses 22 and 26 where we are told that Joseph lived for 110 years.

A few notes concerning the micro-intrastructure may be helpful. Chapter 50 begins with Joseph weeping (וַיִּבְכֶּה/*wayyēbk*) over his father's dead body (Aa) and is echoed by the Egyptians lament (Ac) and their weeping (וַיִּבְכּוּ/*wayyibkū*). The center of the micro-intrastructure (Ab) concerns Joseph's command to the Egyptian "physicians" to embalm his father. In the counter chiasmic structure (A'), Joseph's age is repeated twice (vv. 22 and 26), framing the micro-intrastructure of Joseph's dialogue (vv. 23-25), underscoring and reminding them of God's promise to Abraham, Isaac and to Jacob.

#### **B JOSEPH'S PETITION (50:4-6)**

Ba Joseph petitions Pharaoh's court (4a)

Bb Joseph's petition (4b-5)

Bc Pharaoh grants Joseph's petition (6)

#### **B' JOSEPH BROTHERS' PETITION (50:15-21)**

B'a Brothers' fear (15)

B'b Brothers' petition and dream fulfilled (16-18)

B'c Joseph reassures his brothers (19-21)

These two units function to unite several thematic concepts in the Joseph Narrative. Joseph petitions Pharaoh to bury his father, but only indirectly (v. 4). Likewise, Joseph's brothers petition him indirectly concerning their past guilt (v. 16). These petitions form the micro-intrastructure (Bb, B'b).

#### **C PREPARATION TO BURY ISRAEL (50:7-9)**

Ca Joseph's entourage assent to Canaan (7-8a)

Cb The people who stayed behind in Egypt (8b)

Cc Additional details of entourage to Canaan (9)

#### **C' BURIAL OF ISRAEL (50:12-14)**

C'a Descent to Canaan (12-13a)

C'b Israel is buried in Canaan (13b-c)

C'c Ascent to Egypt (14)



A large entourage of relatives and dignitaries, including Jacob's household and many prominent Egyptians, made the trip (vv. 7-9). The specific purpose of this entourage was to bury Jacob (v. 7a); however, it is not until verses 13-14 that Jacob is actually buried, which is so stated in verse 13.

#### **D MOURNING FOR JACOB (50:10-11)**

Da Place and duration of mourning (10)

Db The Canaanites observe the lamentation (11a-b)

Dc Place renamed (11c)

The pivotal point of the chiasmic structure comes at verses 10-12 which describe at length the people's mourning over Jacob's death. This in itself is ironic because it was Jacob who was going to mourn (cf. Gen. 37:33-35, 42:36 and 43:14); however now, Jacob dies in peace because Joseph is alive (cf. Gen. 46:30) and those around him mourn.

The death of Jacob brings together once more the family's story with the larger narrative in Genesis of the roots of the nation Israel. We have had anticipations of Jacob's death from the outset; the Narrative necessarily leads to his death, but the manner and context is not that feared by him and others for so long (cf. Gen. 37:35; 42:38; 43:27-28; 44:22, 29-31; 45:3, 28; 46:30).

Over half of chapter 50 is occupied with a description of the mourning and burial of Jacob. Joseph himself mourned (v. 1) and then the Egyptians (v. 3). Great preparations were made both by Joseph and the Egyptians (v. 2). A special request was granted by the Pharaoh to bury Jacob in his homeland (vv. 4-5), and a large entourage ("a very large company," NIV) was provided by the Pharaoh as a burial procession to carry Jacob's body back to Canaan. "All Pharaoh's officials . . . and all the dignitaries of Egypt" (v. 7) along with Pharaoh's chariots and horsemen accompanied Joseph on his journey back to Canaan. Even the Canaanites recognized this as "a very large ("solemn," NIV) ceremony of mourning" (v. 11). The writer himself seems to go out of his way to emphasize in detail the magnitude of the ceremony of mourning.

#### **Translation**

- <sup>1</sup> Joseph flung himself upon his father's face and wept over him and kissed him.
- <sup>2</sup> Then Joseph ordered the physicians in his service to embalm his father, and the physicians embalmed Israel.

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- 3 It required forty days, for such is the full period of embalming. The Egyptians bewailed him seventy days;
- 4 and when the wailing period was over, Joseph spoke to Pharaoh's court, saying, "Do me this favor, and lay this appeal before Pharaoh:
- 5 'My father made me swear, saying, "I am about to die. Be sure to bury me in the grave which I made ready for myself in the land of Canaan." Now, therefore, let me go up and bury my father; then I shall return.'"
- 6 And Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your father, as he made you promise on oath."
- 7 So Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went up all the officials of Pharaoh, the senior members of his court, and all of Egypt's dignitaries,
- 8 together with all of Joseph's household, his brothers, and his father's household; only their children, their flocks, and their herds were left in the region of Goshen.
- 9 Chariots, too, and horsemen went up with him; it was a very large troop.
- 10 When they came to Goren ha-Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they held there a very great and solemn lamentation; and he observed a mourning period of seven days for his father.
- 11 And when the Canaanite inhabitants of the land saw the mourning at Goren ha-Atad, they said, "This is a solemn mourning on the part of the Egyptians." That is why it was named Abel-mizraim, which is beyond the Jordan.
- 12 Thus his sons did for him as he had instructed them.
- 13 His sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, the field near Mamre, which Abraham had bought for a burial site from Ephron the Hittite.
- 14 After burying his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.
- 15 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrong that we did him!"
- 16 So they sent this message to Joseph, "Before his death your father left this instruction:
- 17 So shall you say to Joseph, 'Forgive, I urge you, the offense and guilt of your brothers who treated you so harshly.' Therefore, please forgive the offense of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph was in tears as they spoke to him.
- 18 His brothers went to him themselves, flung themselves before him, and said, "We are prepared to be your slaves."
- 19 But Joseph said to them, "Have no fear! Am I a substitute for God?"

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- 20 Besides, although you intended me evil, God intended it for good, so as to bring about the present result--the survival of many people.
- 21 And so, fear not. I will sustain you and your children." Thus he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.
- 22 So Joseph and his father's household remained in Egypt. Joseph lived one hundred and ten years.
- 23 Joseph lived to see children of the third generation of Ephraim; the children of Machir son of Manasseh were likewise born upon Joseph's knees.
- 24 At length, Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. God will surely take notice of you and bring you up from this land to the land that He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."
- 25 So Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "When God has taken notice of you, you shall carry up my bones from here."
- 26 Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

## Synthesis

In compliance with the instruction of Jacob, Joseph gained permission from Pharaoh to bury his father in the Land of Promise; and in response to his brothers' fears, Joseph assured them of his favor in spite of their past actions, promising, before he died, that God's promises would be fulfilled.

## EXEGETICAL OUTLINE

- I. Joseph, in compliance with his father's instructions, gained permission from Pharaoh to bury the patriarch in the land of Canaan (50:1-14).
  - A. Joseph directed the physicians to embalm Jacob in preparation for his burial (50:1-3).
    1. Joseph mourned over the death of his father (1).
    2. Joseph directed the physicians to begin the embalming process (2).
    3. During the embalming period Jacob was mourned by the Egyptians (3).
  - B. In order to carry out Jacob's wishes, Joseph obtained permission from Pharaoh to leave for Canaan (50:4-6).
    1. In order to carry out Jacob's wishes, Joseph obtained permission from Pharaoh to leave for Canaan (50:4-6).
    2. Pharaoh granted Joseph permission to take his father's body back to Canaan (6).

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- C. Joseph led the burial procession of his father to the land of Canaan (50:7-11).
    - 1. Along with Joseph went the dignitaries of Egypt to the burial (7).
    - 2. Leaving only the children and cattle behind, all the Israelite households attended the burial (8-9).
    - 3. The intense mourning of the burial party aroused the attention of the Canaanites (10-11).
  - D. The sons of Jacob thus did as he had instructed them (50:12-14).
  - II. Joseph, in response to his brothers' fears of retaliation for their past sins, assured them of his kindness to them and of God's purposes (50:15-21).
    - A. The brothers, fearing that Joseph would now punish them, begged him to forgive them and attributed such a wish to Jacob (15-18).
    - B. Joseph, explaining that, although they had meant harm, God meant it for good, promised his kind favor to them (19-21).
  - III. Joseph, after a full and prosperous life, died in faith that the promises would be fulfilled (50:22-26).

### EXPOSITION OF THE PASSAGE

- I. *The burial of a believer provides one of the greatest opportunities to demonstrate the abiding faith in the future promises (50:1-14).*

Jacob was with Joseph the first seventeen years of his son's life. And by God's grace, Joseph was able to be with his father for the last seventeen years of his. Now, however, for the second time in his life, Joseph experiences the wrenching pain of separation and loss of his father. The Joseph Narrative has slowed to the mournful cadence of a funeral procession. But a surprising turn of grace still lies ahead.

#### Burial Arrangements For Israel (verses 1-3)

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- 1 Then Joseph fell on his father's face, and wept over him and kissed him.
- 2 And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel.

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3 Now forty days were required for it, for such is the period required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days.

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Chapter 50 follows closely on chapter 49. The two narrative segments are connected by a word play:  $\text{וַיִּדְרֹשׁ} \dots \text{וַיִּסְבְּ}$  (*wayyē'āsep* . . . *wayye'esōp*), "he drew . . . and was gathered" (Gen. 49:33) with  $\text{וַיִּסְבֵּן}$  (*yōsēp*), "Joseph" in Genesis 50:1.

Joseph's immediate reaction to his father death is a spontaneous expression of grief and love. This is entirely congruent in the spirit of the Joseph Narrative. One recalls his first question to his brothers after making himself known to them, "Is my father still alive?" (Gen. 45:3). With the passing of any parent, Bush aptly remarks:

The death of a parent is at all times an event peculiarly affecting. The source of our own life appears to us thereby, as it were, dried up. While our parents live, we seem to have a kind of barrier betwixt us and the grave; but that being removed the destroyer appears advancing upon us with hastier strides. If we look forward, there is nothing interposed for our defense; if backward, our very children are pressing upon our heels and ready to lay their hands upon our eyes. Joseph no felt the full force of these impressions (*Genesis*, 1978, II:418).

As soon as his father died, Joseph threw himself on the body in uncontrolled weeping and kisses. Such a gesture is unique. The usual phrase for such an emotional embrace is "to fall on the neck" (Gen. 33:4; 45:14; 46:29), but this would be appropriate only when the parties involved are in an upright position. For the kiss as a farewell token, see Genesis 31:28, 32:1 and Ruth 1:9, 14. It is not otherwise attested in parting from the dead.

That only Joseph's reaction is recorded does not imply that the other sons did not express their sorrow. The biblical narrator focuses on that especially tender relationship between Joseph and his father, which in the macro-structure of the Narrative, finds its counterpart in Genesis 37:3. Because he was separated for so many years and finally so dramatically reunited in Egypt, his father's death here in Egypt was especially traumatic for Joseph. And so Jacob's favorite son vented his emotions in an unrestrained expression of love for his dead father.

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As God had promised Jacob at Beersheba, "Joseph will close your eyes" (Gen. 46:4). Although the text does not expressly inform the readers, there is little doubt that Joseph had done this. It seems that such honor is reserved beforehand to the survivor acknowledged to have been closest to the departed.

A short time after Jacob's death, Joseph collected himself and assumed full charge of the arrangements for having his father's body embalmed by Egyptian physicians. He too is to be embalmed at death (v. 26). Such a practice is never again referred to in the Bible.

It is well known that mummification, with all its elaborate ritual, played a crucial role in the Egyptian religion and was bound up with the cult of Osiris and conceptions of the afterlife. Survival of death was taken for granted by the Egyptians. Central to this notion was the belief in the importance of the physical preservation of the body. They took meticulous care to prevent the putrefaction of the corpse in order to ensure the right of the deceased to immortality. But the embalming of Jacob and Joseph is without any religious significance. In both cases the act is a purely practical measure, for Jacob is to be buried far from his place of death, and Joseph is to be reinterred many years later (v. 25).

The text subtly underlines the disconnection of the embalming procedure from any pagan context by having Joseph entrust the task to "physicians in his service." Instead of "and they did so," Scripture reports, "the physicians in his service embalmed Israel," which seems to indicate that Joseph informed them and the public after his father's death that "Israel" was his God-given name of honor, though, from now on the father is no longer mentioned by either name except in verse 25. Therefore, the embalming of Jacob was not performed by professional mortuary priests.

The text observes that the embalming process took forty days and the mourning process seventy days, the former perhaps being included in the latter period. It is not clear if the two periods overlap or are consecutive. But in any event the time periods are in general harmony with what we know of ancient Egyptian custom.

Detailed information on the embalming process is lacking for the ancient period, but is available from the fifth century B.C. and from the late Hellenistic period. Herodotus (*Histories* 1.91) describes a thirty-day dressing of the corpse with oils and spices and seventy-two days of public mourning for a

king. Jacob is apparently being accorded royal honors. Jewish exegetes have by and large understood that forty days were required for embalming, followed by another thirty days of mourning (thus the time period being overlapped). The time of mourning would be in accordance with the period of public grief observed for Aaron (Num. 20:29) and Moses (Deut. 34:8). Jewish law to the present time requires a thirty-day mourning period after burial for close relatives, during which various restrictions are observed.

However, the text seems to indicate that following the period of time set aside for the embalming process (40 days), there was a seventy-day period of mourning (thus adding up to 110 days, which is echoed in vv. 22, 26). This period obviously also was determined by Egyptian custom with the length of the mourning time indicating the exalted position of the deceased. Since Jacob was the father of the highest official in Egypt, except for Pharaoh, this period was set accordingly. We are told that the Egyptians also joined in this mourning for Jacob for seventy days, just two days short of the time of the mourning for Pharaoh. Thus Israel was bewailed almost as long as an Egyptian king.

Although the mummification process differed from period to period and person to person, several generalizations may be made. First, an incision was made in the left side and the liver, lungs, stomach and intestines were removed and treated separately. Ultimately these were placed in four stone containers known as canopic jars, which were sealed and had their lids carved to represent human heads during the Middle Kingdom. In Joseph's day the brain normally was left in place. Second, the body was dried out over an extended period of time by continued application of natron, a mixture of sodium carbonate and sodium bicarbonate. Third, the body was washed with a natron bath and anointed with cedar oil and other ointments. Fourth, the chest and abdominal cavities were stuffed with linen soaked in resin. Fifth, the body was wrapped with endless layers of linen strips soaked in resin, and often resin was poured over the mummy when it was partially wrapped. Finally, the body was placed in a painted wooden coffin inscribed with religious formulae.

#### **Joseph's Petition to Pharaoh (verses 4-6)**

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- 4** And when the days of mourning for him were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, "If now I have found favor in your sight, please speak to Pharaoh, saying,

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- 5** My father made me swear, saying, "Behold, I am about to die; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me." Now therefore, please let me go up and bury my father; then I will return."
- 6** And Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear."
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Before he could carry out the final phase of the burial of his father, Joseph sought permission for a leave of absence. After the days of mourning had passed, Joseph addressed the members of Pharaoh's court and asked them to intercede with Pharaoh in his behalf. He told them that he had sworn with an oath to his father that he would bury him in the family tomb in Canaan. Now he requested permission to carry out this mission.

The question has been asked why Joseph did not address his request directly to Pharaoh. This question cannot be answered with certainty. Various answers have been suggested, however. Some have said that there was a policy that a high official could not address the Pharaoh directly when it involved a personal matter. Others claim that Joseph's request was so out of the ordinary that he hesitated to present it in person. Still others suggest that it was not proper for a grieving person to approach Pharaoh as long as the dead loved one had not yet been interred. This last conjecture may be the most plausible but even so it is no more than an unsubstantiated conjecture. The long delay, of course, was the consequence of the process of embalming practiced in Egypt. At any rate, Pharaoh was wholly consenting to Joseph's request.

#### **Preparation To Bury Israel (verses 7-9)**

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- 7** So Joseph went up to bury his father, and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household and all the elders of the land of Egypt,
- 8** and all the household of Joseph and his brothers and his father's household; they left only their little ones and their flocks and their herds in the land of Goshen.
- 9** There also went up with him both chariots and horsemen; and it was a very great company.



These verses give us a catalog of all those who made up the funeral procession. The funeral procession comprises a vast throng. The elite of the court and government participate. The word "all" should be perhaps understood hyperbolically ("all" compared in Ex. 9:25 with 10:5).

Nowhere else in Scripture do we have such a full description of a funeral. Jacob was buried with full military honors as though he had been commander-in-chief of Egypt's armed forces instead of a nomadic shepherd who had wandered into the land late in life. There was a mourning entourage and a military escort. Joseph was there, the other brothers and their households were there--all except the little children who were left behind either as proof of Joseph's good faith or because their presence would have been a hindrance.

Joseph, as the supreme ruler of Egypt, is mentioned first. Then came all the officials of Pharaoh's court (whose presence represented Pharaoh at the funeral) and the dignitaries of Egypt. Then all the members of Jacob's family are mentioned. This apparently included the women, although children, as well as their flocks, were left behind in Goshen. There was also a military complement that accompanied the procession, including chariots and horsemen. The charioteers, not usually depicted in Egyptian tomb paintings of such events, are most likely present for security reasons, since the burial is to take place beyond the borders of the land.

Altogether it was a very large company. Neither Joseph or Jacob made no request for an official ceremony honoring Jacob's death. It appears that Pharaoh himself initiated the national affair, even though Joseph apparently had intended to handle as simply a family matter. Yet this does seem suited for the funeral of the father of the second most powerful man in Egypt. Thus Jacob was brought to his last resting place with great honor.

Presumably Joseph was still vizier of Egypt, even though the famine was well behind him. Whether or not any of Joseph's brothers were then in the employ of Pharaoh is not known. If Pharaoh had any initial worry about the return of Joseph and his family, it was eliminated by the explicit mention of their exclusion--that they left their children and possessions behind in Egypt--a fact which assured any Egyptian who might be skeptical that they would, indeed, return.

This funeral procession constituted a tremendous caravan, wending its way up from Egypt, skirting the Red Sea, heading across the Sinai desert,

south of the Dead Sea, and then up its eastern shores to the Jordan River. The route was similar to that taken later during the Exodus.

### **The Mourning Over Israel (verses 10-12)**

The funeral takes place in two stages. The entire cortege first proceeds to a place at which a great public mourning ceremony is held. Here formal Egyptian participation in the rites is completed. Then, after a week's stay, the immediate family continues the journey to the Cave of Machpelah, where the body is privately interred.

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**10 When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they lamented there with a very great and sorrowful lamentation; and he observed seven days mourning for his father.**

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The journey ended at a place called "Goren-ha-atad" (גֹרֵן הָאֲתָד/*gōren-hā'ātād*), which was located near the Jordan, most likely on the east side of the river. Whether "beyond the Jordan" is east or west of the river depends on the standpoint of the speaker or narrator. In this case it obviously means east of the Jordan, because verse 13a reports that Jacob's sons "carried him (across the Jordan) to the land of Canaan," toward Hebron.

This seems to imply that the procession did not follow the usual route from Egypt to Canaan but traveled around the Dead Sea and up the east side of the Jordan River. As stated earlier, this was the same route the Israelites took later, after their wilderness wanderings. Why this route was chosen at this time is not stated. We can only surmise that there may have been some political complications had this company taken the usual, well-traveled route to Canaan.

The name "Goren-ha-atad" has generally been translated "the threshing floor of Atad." It really means the threshing floor of the thorn bush. The particular bush indicated was common in that area and was used for hedges or fences with which areas could be enclosed. It is generally thought that the name, then, designated a well-known threshing floor near the Jordan that was identified by the fence that enclosed it, and was made of thorn bushes.

It is worthy of note that to this day there are native tribes in Syria who have the custom of carrying their dead, accompanied by all the people of the area, to a threshing floor and there have a seven-day period of mourning. It

seems obvious, then, that Joseph first observed the customs of Egypt with a period of mourning there. Then when they came to Canaan they observed a period of mourning that was in keeping with the custom of that area.

The seven day mourning period custom is well attested in antiquity. In biblical times we find the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead fasting seven days after the funeral rites for Saul and his sons (1 Sam. 31:13). Job and his friends similarly observe a seven-day mourning period (Job 2:13). This is a well-established rule among Jews by the early second century B.C (Ben Sira 22:12; cf. Judith 16:24). Strict mourning for seven days following the burial of a close relative has remained the Jewish practice to this day.

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- 11 Now when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, "This is a grievous mourning for the Egyptians." Therefore it was named Abel-mizraim, which is beyond the Jordan.
- 12 And thus his sons did for him as he had charged them;
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This event made a deep impression on the neighboring Canaanitish people. They interpreted it as an especially solemn mourning ceremony on the part of the this large company that had come from Egypt. Therefore, they named the place Abel Mizraim (אַבֶּל מִצְרַיִם). The first part of this name is used in many different names such as Abel Keramim in Judges 11:33, Abel Maim in 2 Chronicles 16:4, and Abel Meholah in Judges 7:22. Abel originally seems to have referred to a plain or a grassy meadow. Later it was weakened to mean simply "place," usually an open place. Thus the people of the area called it the "place of the Egyptians."

It is more than striking that the Hebrew word for "grief" (אבל/בל) is very similar. By a play on words, Abel is connected with the Hebrew stem which means "to mourn." Thus the word play on this name would serve to retain the event in the memory of Israel. The very mention of that name would now recall *'ēbel miṣrayim*, the "mourning of Egypt" and the burial of the great patriarch, Jacob.

It is apparent that our writer wishes to underscore the great lament for Jacob; not only by Joseph and the Egyptians, but also by what bystanders looking upon the scene saw. He does this by using three different terms for sorrow. The first is בָּכָה/*bākāh*, used when Joseph and the Egyptians "wept" over

Jacob in verses 1 and 3. The second term is *סָפַד*/*sāpad* used twice in verse 10 and translated as "lament." The third and last term is what we just saw in verse 11, *אָבַל*/*'ābal* and translated as "mourning." This last term has the distinction from the other two in that it does not describe the inner feeling of the mourner, but his outward behavior. This word occurs in other mourning passages (cf. Gen. 37:34; 2 Sam. 11:27) where the mourner puts on sackcloth, sprinkles dust and ashes on the head, and shaves his beard and the hair of his head.

In addition to the unusual quantity of words for mourning, there seems to be a clear crescendo of emotion, extending from Joseph's weeping to the Canaanites recognition of the entire funeral procession lamenting over Jacob, so much so that they renamed the place from "the threshing floor of Atad" to "Abel-mizraim." Thus the momentum began with Joseph in verse 1, gathered with the Egyptians weeping in verse 3, and culminated when the Canaanites observed the "grievous mourning for the Egyptians" and their subsequent renaming of a city to reflect the event. Our writer therefore artfully builds to a climax, all of which moves to fulfill the promise of carrying Jacob's body to the Promise Land.

The question naturally arises why such detail over the burial of Jacob is given when in the death of the other patriarchs we are simply given the bare facts that they died and were buried. Even the account of the death of Joseph, which is also recorded in this chapter, consists only of the brief notice that he died and was embalmed and entombed in Egypt (v. 26). Was his burial of any less magnitude than Jacob's? Surely it was not, but virtually no attention in the narrative is devoted to it. Why, then, the emphasis on Jacob's burial? Perhaps such a description is intended merely as a concluding flourish at the end of the Book of Genesis, or does it play a part in the ongoing theological strategy of our writer? In light of the writer's careful attention to his larger themes throughout the patriarchal narratives, it is appropriate to seek a motive for such an emphasis within the narrative. We can do that by asking what themes may be sustained or highlighted in such a full description of the burial party.

One theme that immediately comes to mind is that at a number of points throughout the Narrative the writer's concern focuses on God's faithfulness to His promise of the land and the hope of God's people in the eventual return to the land. In the later prophetic literature, a recurring image of the fulfillment of the promise to return to the land pictures Israel returning to the land accompanied by many from among the nations. The prophets of Israel saw the return as a time when "all the nations will stream to" Jerusalem, and "many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,

to the house of the God of Jacob'" (Isa. 2:2-3); or, as Zechariah prophesied, "In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you'" (Zech. 8:23).

It is difficult not to see the same imagery at work in the present narrative. Jacob, in his final return to the Land of Promise, was accompanied by a great congregation of the officials and elders of the land of Egypt. With him was also the mighty army of the Egyptians. Thus the narrative of Jacob's burial in the land foreshadows the time when God "will bring Jacob back from captivity and will have compassion on all the people of Israel" (Ezek. 39:25).

Jacob, who fought his way into life, departs life just as dramatically. The life of Jacob, which has stretched over half of the Book of Genesis, has seen the family through times of trust and betrayal, sterility and fertility, feast and famine, separation and reunion, all within the covenantal promise and providence of God. Whether in trust or in treachery, Jacob/Israel was never far from the center stage.

With the Egyptians remaining on the west side of the Jordan, all the brothers, now on the same level with Joseph, carry the casket of their father across the Jordan. In Jacob's burial in Canaan we see the brothers united in action as verse 12 clearly states. Their father's love had once separated them; his death unites them as they fulfill his wishes, journeying together now from Egypt to Canaan and back again.

#### **Burial of Israel (verses 13-14)**

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- 13** for his sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre, which Abraham had bought along with the field for a burial site from Ephron the Hittite.
- 14** And after he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers, and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.
- 

The second and final stage of the funeral now takes place. After the period of mourning, Jacob's sons crossed the Jordan to bury the remains of their father in Canaan in the cave of Machpelah, near Mamre, in the field that Abraham had purchased from Ephron the Hittite. There they buried him, as he

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had commanded, giving testimony not only of love for their father but also of faith in God's promises concerning the land, which someday would go to their seed for an everlasting possession.

The intent of the narrator seems to be to indicate that the large company of Egyptians that had accompanied Joseph and his family did not go along for this final rite. This may have been at Joseph's specific request so that their family privacy could be maintained. It is also possible that there may have been some political involvements as far as the Egyptians were concerned, which made it unwise for them to trespass in the land of Canaan.

When the funeral ceremonies had concluded they all returned to Egypt. The entire patriarchal family had seen the Promise Land once more and had been reminded that God had promised it to them and their descendants forever. The time had not yet come for Jacob's family to return to Canaan for their place of residence. According to God's instructions, they were still to remain in Egypt for a long time.

Wherever "father" appeared before the funeral it is in connection with Joseph as if to signify his greater intimacy with him. Otherwise the patriarch is referred to by pronoun. "His" father, instead of "their" is because of Joseph's reassurance to Pharaoh (cf. v. 5). "All who had gone up with him" (v. 14) indicates that none of the armed escort was killed and underscores Joseph's faithfulness of returning to Egypt.

The family of Jacob, with its attendant company of Gentiles, rehearsed, as it were, the future homecoming of the nation in fulfillment of the promises to Israel. Once more the children of Israel would leave Egypt, taking with them the bones of Joseph (see Ex. 13:19). Here, however, the pilgrimage to the Land of Promise was only temporary; the grave was only a claim to the land. Moses would lead the next pilgrimage to Canaan.

## **II. *Fears and anxieties after the passing of a believer provide one of the greatest opportunities for demonstrating faith in the sovereignty of God (50:15-21).***

The Joseph Narrative returns to its opening theme: the complicated relations between the brothers and Joseph. Earlier the brothers had not sought forgiveness. In fact, they had maintained an unbroken silence (cf. Gen. 45:1-

15). Yet throughout the seventeen years that elapsed since the day of reconciliation, the nagging voice of conscience was not stilled. Now that death has removed the commanding presence of the patriarch, family cohesion falls apart and the brothers anticipate Joseph's revenge for the terrible crime they committed against him.

The leaving of the central character creates uncertainty in any social structure. Not unexpectedly, apprehension strikes this family at Israel's death. We do not have to thin of the brothers as unchanged and petty to understand their fear at their father's death. The resolution of past family issues had happened in a specific social context. The brothers' guilt and Joseph's forgiveness and use of power had been reconciled in a context which included Israel as the head of the family. But with Israel's death the family is dramatically changed; the social context within which the resolution happened no longer exists. The unexpected resignation of a pastor, the sudden removal of a political figure (Ahaz; Isa. 6), can have the same effect on those contexts as the death of a central figure has on a family. All of the relationship within the community are affected. When the family gathers at the death of a member, they must deal with their apprehension concerning the family's future. For example, how will the brothers and sisters get along when the parents are gone?

In terms of the plot of the Joseph Narrative, the reconciliation within the family is completed in Genesis 50:15-21. In a final fulfillment of Joseph's dreams, his brothers fall down before him and exclaim, "we are your servants." Indeed, this is the first time they have bowed down to Joseph as *Joseph*. Joseph meets their humility with his own: "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place?" This maturity in his sibling relationships is matched by the theological maturity with which he views all that has happened: "you meant it for evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (v. 20).

#### **Brothers' Petition to Joseph (verses 15-21)**

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**15** When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph should bear a grudge against us and pay us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!"

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A tension arose among the brothers. Fearing that, now that Jacob had died, Joseph would deal harshly with them, the brothers sent to Joseph,

pleading with him for forgiveness. The impact of the request reduced Joseph to tears.

The opening statement of verse 15 offers some difficulty. We read, "When Joseph's brothers *saw* that their father was dead . . . ." Now it is obvious that they saw this before the periods of mourning, the trip to Canaan, and the burial of Jacob. In order to relieve this semantic problem, the Latin Vulgate reads thus: "And Joseph's brothers *feared* after their father had died (*quo mortuo timentes fratres eius et mutuo conloquentes*)." This is possible since the words in Hebrew are very similar (וַיִּירָאוּ/*wayyir'û*/"and they saw"; וַיִּירָאוּ/*wayyir'û*/"and they became afraid"). There has understandably been a preference for this reading among Roman Catholic scholars.

Another solution that has been suggested for this difficulty is that it would be possible to conclude that this entire episode recorded in verses 15-21 actually took place before the burial of Jacob in Canaan. This would be in keeping with Hebrew narrative style where events are not always recorded in strict chronological order (sometimes for chiasmic structural reasons!). There are examples of this characteristic in earlier chapters of Genesis. For example, Terah's death, recorded in Genesis 11:32, actually occurred later in the narrative. Isaac and Rebekah sojourned in Gerar (Gen. 26) before the birth of their children, which was recorded earlier. The events of Genesis 37 took place before the death of Rachel. Thus we could justifiably place the events described in this passage before the trip to Canaan for Jacob's burial.

But do we have to resort to this to remove the difficulty at hand? We certainly need not read "they *saw* that their father had died" as indicating that now for the first time they saw this. They certainly saw that as soon as their father breathed his last breath. Many scholars have insisted that what we have here is a declaration that now for the first time Joseph's brothers began to realize the full implications of their own situation there in Egypt without the protecting presence of their aged father. It dawned on them that they were now at the mercy of their brother Joseph whom they had wronged so deeply in the past. Feelings of guilt again were aroused within them. Now that their father was out of the picture, what attitude would Joseph assume toward them?

"What if" (וְאִם/*lû*) is unparalleled in this sense. It is always used in conditional sentences (cf. Gen. 17:18). It must be assumed that the apodosis, or resolution of the condition, is understood but unspoken. The complete idea would be, "If Joseph should harbor a grudge, what would become of us?"



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- 16 So they sent *a message* to Joseph, saying, "Your father charged before he died, saying,
- 17 'Thus you shall say to Joseph, "Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong." And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.'" And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.
- 

A very important point conveyed in this chapter concerns partly the attitude God's people are to have toward evil and God's purposes therein. These can be understood only in the realm of faith, and in this confidence Joseph exhibits the appropriate balance of forgiveness and patience. Though evil may be visited upon brothers by brothers, the victim has no cause to be embittered thereby or to bear grudges, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the LORD" (Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19).

It is understandable that, after Jacob was gone, the ten brothers who had sold Joseph into slavery would be afraid he might finally take vengeance on them. Even though he had assured them that he would take care of them and their families and that he regarded his sale into Egypt as providential (Gen. 45:4-11), their sense of guilt was still so strong that they could not really believe he had forgiven them.

Actually, they had never made a full confession of their sin to Joseph, although they had shown by their actions that they were sorry. Joseph, of course, had given no indication that he held any grudge, but he may have wondered why they still were silent. A combination of pride and fear seemed to inhibit them from saying anything further as long as Jacob was living. They assumed that, for Jacob's sake, Joseph would not do anything to them. Now that Jacob was no longer a restraining influence, however, their fear and guilt complex suddenly returned.

It is to be noted that the concept of forgiveness of sin is used twice in verses 16-17; and it is keenly and deliberately avoided in Genesis 45.

There is here seen the apprehensions of those who had been deeply scarred, and were now fearful, because of what they had done to Joseph. When their father was dead and the protection his presence offered was gone, their fear and apprehension was revealed. The use of a messenger (presumably by either Judah or Benjamin) to remind him that Jacob had urged him to forgive

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them. This time, their message did include a clear and definite confession of sin and plea for forgiveness.

Their tension became so great that they followed the messenger into Joseph's presence (notice the pronoun "And Joseph wept when *they* spoke to him" in v. 17c). Perhaps he had delayed to respond and this had caused them even greater anxiety. Yet Joseph was most likely astounded at such an appeal. They were to understand that he could long since have disposed of them in any way he chose.

There is no previous statement in Genesis telling of this command of Jacob to Joseph. The natural question arises, therefore, how did Jacob learn about Joseph's fate . . . or did he?

The exposition of Genesis 45:26f. posited that Jacob did not learn the truth from either the Ten or from Joseph, but that he fathomed it just the same: Had the brothers upon their second return from Egypt merely told Jacob that they found Joseph alive, the father might well have believed them. "His heart went numb, for he did not believe them" (Gen. 45:26) because they added, omitting Joseph's own message, that "it is he who is the ruler over . . . Egypt." How could he have believed that it was his Joseph who had suspected them of espionage, had pumped them about Benjamin--who he insisted must be taken from his old father--and had kept Simeon as a hostage! When, however, the brothers precisely cited Joseph's own words, authenticating him as the author, and the father saw the crown carriages (permitted to go abroad only by royal permission), ". . . the spirit of their father surged up and Israel said, 'Enough! My son is still alive!'"

He not only knew then that Joseph was indeed alive but the upsurging spirit of "Israel" intuited the answer to the riddle that made him first disbelieve his sons! He recognized that it was the Ten who had caused Joseph's enslavement and that because of this he, "the ruler over the land of Egypt," had first to "test" them before he could disclose himself to them. The word "enough!" implies that since the spirit had given him the answer, he would never ask any of his sons about it. Yet he wanted to help bring about a complete reconciliation and to give his charge the greatest impact, he made it "[just] before he died" (cf. v. 16).

Understanding that the ten truthfully reported Jacob's command, the following points are a rebuttal to the objections to this interpretation:

1. Even within the Joseph Narrative (Gen. 37:21; 42:12, 16, 34b; 43:3, 7), as elsewhere in Scripture, important information is given subsequently and indirectly. Perhaps this information is given subsequently in order to balance the chiasmic structure.
2. Jacob surely knew Joseph's magnanimity, yet he also knew the Ten's obsessive pride. He wanted them to be able to live at peace with themselves after his protective presence no longer would be with them, by helping them to ask for Joseph's forgiveness.
3. The Ten may well have entreated their father to give Joseph the charge directly. If he refused, it was not only to avoid the impression that he had impelled Joseph, but also to make them overcome their pride. One of the reasons for Joseph's tears is that he was so deeply moved not only by the father's anxiety but also by how he helped the Ten to express their guilt and plead for forgiveness.
4. Though it was an agonizing shock for the Ten when they realized from the father's order that he knew about their "transgression" and "sin" (cf. v. 17a)--which, naturally, made them assume that it was Joseph who had told him about it--they did not yet fear Joseph because of the father's protective presence, recalling that Joseph had "kissed all his brothers, and wept over them" (Gen. 45:15a) after he had told them, "Be not grieved and angry at yourselves . . . for . . . it was not really you but God Who sent me here" (Gen. 45:5, 8a). Nevertheless, they were ready to obey their father who wanted them to make up after his death for what they had left undone, to confess their guilt to Joseph and to ask for his forgiveness. They were convinced that this would add to Joseph's kindly feelings for them. Yet, that after the father's death "the brothers saw that their father was dead," indicates the traumatic effect of his death upon them. For whatever changes they imagined having noticed in Joseph's attitude to them, they were one by one overcome by fear, as they found out when they felt the need to consult one another.
5. Perhaps their fear was keenly felt because they recalled that after their own father had deprived his brother of his blessing, "Esau hated Jacob and said to himself, 'When the time of mourning for my father is at hand, I will kill my brother'" (cf. Gen. 27:41): Joseph may merely have pretended not to bear any grudge against them, to spare the father the anguish of seeing them punished. Though

Joseph is no Esau--and would "if he hates us" not kill them--he still would "surely pay us for all the evil we did to him," by selling them as slaves as they had caused him to become a slave. Moreover, their fear is confirmed by what they only now recall: Had not Joseph refrained from declaring his forgiveness when he disclosed himself to them? Now their father's order appears to them in a new light: While before his death, its fulfillment would have run counter only to their pride, now they are eager to make use of it as a protection against Joseph's revenge.

6. As Jacob did not dare to approach his brother directly but "sent messengers ahead to his brother Esau" (Gen. 32:4ff.) to appease him before coming before him in person, so the Ten sent word to Joseph. But whereas Jacob sent gifts with his servants who conveyed his own words, the Ten have first the father's words sent instead.

Although Joseph had not thought of punishing them, their confession and plea did touch him deeply. He was no doubt thankful for their sakes that they had done this, since it testified further that their repentance was genuine and complete. Quite possibly Jacob himself had urged them to make a full confession. When the messenger conveyed this message to Joseph, he was moved to tears. He accepted the request of his brothers as wholly sincere.

Joseph's tears are indicative of several factors. First, the brothers' words are words from his father from, as it were, his grave. Second, Joseph would be deeply moved learning the father's anxiety about the Ten's future relation to him and the father's sagacity to express *for them*, as it were, their plea for forgiveness. Third, he is distressed that his brothers must assume that *he* revealed their crime. He is shocked that they fear his revenge and recognizes that, had they ever confessed to their father, they would not now suspect him of insincerity when he expressed his affection at his disclosure. Fourth, perhaps too he is moved by remembrance of the events that had led to the reconciliation. And last, what stirs him most is their declaration to have become "the servants of the God of your father." It is their relationship to the same God, the God of their family, that binds them, so they refer once more to their father. They had all by this time apparently become sincere in their understanding of God's special calling for them.

Joseph's brothers did not stop with this message of confession, but quickly followed it up by coming directly into his presence with an offer to become his slaves.

- 18** Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants."
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Though the brothers are convinced that Joseph will retaliate, his tears give them the nerve to approach him now directly.

There is a direct echo here of the first episode of the Joseph Narrative (Gen. 37:7-10). The boyhood dreams of lordship over his kin have long been fulfilled, but the reality is now distasteful to him for his character is being called into question (cf. Gen. 42:6, 9; 44:14, 16). There is irony here. Joseph's brothers had sent him to Egypt to become a slave. Now they were willing to compensate for their deep offense to him by becoming his slaves for life.

Joseph had earlier tested his brothers concerning their character (Genesis 42-44); now they challenge him, even though they are wholly in his power. Their hope, naturally, was that this display of humility and penitence would gain for them Joseph's forgiveness and favor. Will the base human desire for revenge triumph over the God-like character of forgiveness?

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- 19** But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place?"
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Joseph's speech begins the process of redefining their relationships (Gen. 50:19-21). Before the speech the narrative again marks this moment of family tension in Egypt with Joseph's tears (cf. Gen. 50:17b). After Joseph's assurance, "Do not be afraid," Joseph's speech continues with an enigmatic question: "Am I in God's place?" The rhetorical question expects to be answered with a resounding, "No!" On the surface, a simple "No" does little to clarify matters for the brothers, who are unsure about where they stand. Even though ambiguity remains in the rhetorical question, the element that carries the speech is the twice repeated assurance: "Do not be afraid (Gen. 50:19, 21). Joseph declares that his actions in the future can be trusted to promote life, not to avenge past wrongs.

The brothers' anxiety is allayed at once: "Do not be afraid." Joseph has no interest in seeking revenge because the very idea offends his personal theology. What a person believes determines their behavior! Joseph immediately assures them that they need not fear his revenge. But why?

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The word "for" (כִּי/*kî*) introduces the reason why Joseph will not take revenge upon his brothers. He asks of them a rhetorical question with the expected answer: "Am I in God's place? [No! I am not to take God's place in this matter]." The significance of Joseph's question is salient: Joseph desired, beginning in Canaan those many years ago when he was a youth to this day when his brothers sought forgiveness (and therefore no retribution) was always to be God's instrument, never His substitute!

"Am I in the place of God" are almost the identical words Jacob once said to Rachel, reprimanding her for her folly (cf. Gen. 30:2). Yet Joseph uses for "I" (אֲנִי/*'ānî*) a different pronoun than Jacob employs for "I" (אֲנֹכִי/*'ānōkî*), contrasting it with his father's words, as if to say, "Neither am I the place of God," and giving his exclamation a much deeper meaning. The pronoun which Joseph uses here emphasizes the character of the person: "Am I in God's place?" Joseph dares not usurp the prerogative of God to whom alone belongs the right of punitive vindication (cf. Lev. 19:18; Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19).

Even if Joseph had still harbored a personal resentment against his brothers, he would have feared to take vengeance. God had so clearly used their deed to accomplish His own good purpose to preserve life through the famine that Joseph knew it would be bold presumption on his part were he now to punish them for that same deed. If they still deserved any punishment, God Himself could take care of it.

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20 "And as for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive."

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Joseph looked at all of this from a completely different perspective than his brothers. He recognized that they had been motivated by evil intentions when they sold him into Egypt, but God was able to turn their evil intentions to good purposes. Joseph pointed to what was now taking place in Egypt in the saving of many lives from the famine. What would have happened in Egypt if he had not been sold into Egypt, there to become the personal adviser to Pharaoh? Therefore, Joseph declared, he had no intention of punishing them and they need have no fear. He did not consider himself to be God and take vengeance for what God had intended for the saving of the lives of many

people. Joseph was obviously convinced of the sincerity of their penitence and was willing to leave the events of the past in God's faithful hands.

The brothers can trust the future because of God's intention. Joseph's speech places the "intention" (NIV) of the brothers over against the "intention" of God. The brothers intended evil; God intended good. The brothers intended death to one; God intended life to many. The intention of God prevailed over, worked through, circumvented the intention of the brothers. Joseph's speech does not tell us exactly how God's intention works its way, something we all would like to "know." Joseph's speech does not offer us this information, but calls forth praise of the God who works the divine intention amidst the human drama. This one statement from Joseph's speech captures much of the theology of Genesis--and much of the theology of God's redemptive actions working within human history.

Perhaps there is a tinge of irony here. When Joseph announced his dreams to his brothers and father, and because of their subsequent interpretation of them, it cause them to fear that *he* "had meant evil" against *them*, wherefore they plotted to first kill him, but because of Judah's plea, sell him into slavery.

It is worthy of note that Joseph here described God's purpose differently than he had in Genesis 45:7. At his self-disclosure (cf. Gen. 45:1ff.) the brothers had said nothing about their guilt towards Joseph, though they had implicitly referred to their sin against God (cf. Gen. 44:16b). At that time, Joseph desired them to recognize that God is not only the LORD of justice, but also of providence whose design they had served (see notes on Gen. 45:8).

Now, however, after they had acknowledged their guilt towards him, Joseph adds his view about it. Human actions and their consequences are far more profound than human intentions. God may use man's evil purposes as the instrument for ultimate good, beyond the knowledge, desire, or realization of the human agents involved (cf. Gen. 44:5-7). What may seem to be a change succession of disparate incidents is in reality a process, so that what has happened and what is unfolding take on meaning when viewed from the perspective of God's time: "A man's mind plans his way but the LORD directs his step" (Prov. 16:9; see also 19:21; 20:24).

In Genesis 45:5-8 Joseph emphasized the fact that he had been sent to Egypt to save a remnant of God's chosen people. Here he seemed to refer to the huge population of Egypt that he had been enabled to keep alive. These two concepts are not in conflict, however. The saving of the population of Egypt

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served to provide a favorable milieu where the patriarchal family could live in peace and grow into a mighty nation. It was here that God provided the opportunity for His chosen people to develop from a family into a great nation that would then return to Canaan, conquer the land flowing with milk and honey, and occupy it as their homeland in fulfillment of the promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This in turn was the opening of the way for the coming of the promised Messiah, the Seed of the woman, who would redeem sin-cursed humanity and in that way "all peoples of the earth would be blessed" through the seed of Abraham.

It is an understatement to say that verse 20 marks the fulcrum of the entire Joseph Narrative. Joseph teaches that at times, as here, God uses man's very transgression to serve His salvational purpose. Consider what Peter says on the Day of Pentecost:

Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know--this *Man*, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power . . . Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified (Acts 2:22-24, 36).

Biblical wisdom teaches expressly that a relationship exists between acts and consequences (the explicit theme of Genesis 49). One of the most well known passages of Scripture in the New Testament says the same thing: "whatever one sows, that shall one reap" (Gal. 6:7). However, caution should be exercised when quoting this verse. However basic this teaching relates to everyday living and even to one's relationship to God, our relationship to God cannot be reduced to this simple formula. The axiom does not make sense to Job when the disaster of the moment cannot be explained as the consequence of any of his actions. Joseph's words to his brothers: "You meant it for evil . . . but God meant it for good," provide another experience in which the act-consequence pattern is broken. Job, and even Joseph, experienced undeserved disaster, but Jacob and the ten brothers experience unmerited grace!



Luther, writing on Genesis 50:20-21, worries that the people of God will misread this text as excusing or even promoting evil action in the expectation that good will result (*Commentary*, II:364). Calvin too is concerned to maintain that the good act-good consequence, bad act-bad consequence pattern be understood as the basic premise of life (*Commentaries on Genesis*, 1963, II:488). One must always expect, as Joseph's brothers did that a direct relationship between acts and consequences will eventually work out (cf. Gen. 42:24; 50:15).

Nevertheless, once in a while the believing community finds itself confronted by God's surprise. Within biblical faith, the matter of consequences belong to God (cf. Rom. 12:19). Hence when they least expect it, God's people find themselves surprised by God's grace. The world cannot be reduced to an inherent law of crime and punishment, but must reckon with the elusive presence of God.

Good Friday and Easter represent the model in the Christian faith of the surprise factor in God's dealing with the evil of the world. The consequences of Jesus' life should not have led to the cross. But he was nailed there nevertheless, crying out "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me" (Mk. 15:34). Three days later God surprised all humanity with good: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (2 Cor. 5:19). Joseph's brothers were surprised by the same God who surprised us on Easter Sunday: "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good!"

*They tried to comfort JACOB 37:34-35*

21 "So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Joseph first assures his brothers that everything will remain as it was while Jacob was alive. For emphasis he repeats "Do not fear!" Joseph assures his brothers that he will look after them, as he had promised (the same verb) his father when he invited him to come down to Egypt. Joseph's provision will extend also to "your little ones." The Joseph Narrative shows continual concern for the children. Then "he comforted them," helping them no longer to reproach themselves for their past.

*Look at word for provide = has it  
too? Look like ~~you~~ 150?*

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In verse 19a "Do not fear" preceded his reasoning why they need not fear him. "So therefore, do not be afraid" sums up verse 20: Because God's using their hatred, envy and evil intent "for good" implies His forgiveness, they need neither fear God!

Verse 21a actually concludes Joseph's answer to his brothers; verse 21b is our narrator's conclusion to verses 15-21a. This concluding section began with the revival of the brothers' fear; but Joseph's answer has removed this; he has reassured them. The two verbs "comfort" and "speak to the heart" occur together also in Isaiah 40:1-2.

The last description of Joseph's dealings with his brothers is the statement that "he comforted them and spoke kindly to them," literally "he spoke on their heart" (וַיְדַבֵּר עַל לִבָּם / *waydabbēr 'al-libbām*), meaning that he endeavored to win their affection (cf. Gen. 34:3; Judg. 19:3; 2 Sam. 19:8; 2 Chron. 30:22; 32:6; Hosea 2:16). It is again difficult not to see in this picture of Joseph and his brothers a foreshadowing of the future community of the sons of Israel in exile awaiting their return to the Promised Land. To that same community the call went out by the prophet Isaiah to "comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, . . . she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins" (Isa. 40:1-2).

It is interesting to note that two elements in this final scene recapitulate the first scene in Genesis 37:3-11. The brothers bow down before Joseph, reminding the reader a final time of the dream with which the Narrative began, and the brothers are comforted, a comfort not possible in the first episode (Gen. 37:35). The words which control the family's future come still from the heart, but are quite different from the "evil words" with which the Narrative began (cf. Gen. 37:2). Through this web of phrases the Narrative artistically unites and brings to a close the narrative of this family.

Relationships among God's people may sometimes be tense, especially when, through death, leadership changes hands. But believers can use this to demonstrate God's sovereign design, even through human failures. They may do so through forgiveness and kindness. Therefore, on the basis of his confidence in the ways of the LORD, Joseph was able to comfort his brothers and relieve their fears.

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**III. *The prospect of dying without receiving the promises provides one of the greatest opportunities for demonstrating faith in the future deliverance (50:22-26).***

Though his words are few, the final statement of Joseph to his <sup>sons</sup> gives the clearest expression of the kind of hope taught in these narratives. Again, as had his father Jacob, Joseph wanted his bones returned to the Promised Land (v. 25). Also like Jacob, he saw to it that his sons swore to return his bones when they returned to the Land. Though he knew he would die and not see the time when his sons returned to the land, he nevertheless expressed clearly the hope and trust that he had in God's promise (v. 24). As has been characteristic of the literary technique of the Joseph Narrative, Joseph repeated a second time (cf. 41:32) his statement of trust in God's promise: "God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here."

**Burial Arrangements And Death Of Joseph (verses 22-25)**

Between verses 21 and 22 more than fifty years have passed. Our narrator passes over these years in silence. Joseph is no longer vizier of Egypt and the Pharaoh under which he had served had long since passed away. What we do know for sure is that Joseph had lived long enough to begin to see fulfillment of Jacob's blessing of "the breasts and of the womb" (Gen. 49:25e).

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**22 Now Joseph stayed in Egypt, he and his father's household, and Joseph lived one hundred and ten years.**

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Our narrator stresses again the fact that Joseph and his entire family remained in Egypt. At the conclusion of the Joseph Narrative, the writer states that "Joseph stayed in Egypt" which relates to its prologue, "Jacob lived in Canaan" (Gen. 37:1).

Egypt was to become the "womb" in which the embryo of the nation of Israel was to develop until it was ready for birth as an independent nation. Then, by means of intense birth pains, it was to "come forth" as a nation and take its place among the nations of the earth.

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Jacob died when Joseph was fifty-six years old (compare Gen. 41:46, 53; 45:6; 47:28). Joseph continued to live for another fifty-four years after that, finally dying at the age of 110. These first words of the epilogue will also conclude it (v. 26).

One hundred and ten years were regarded in ancient Egypt as the ideal life span, though it ought not to be overlooked that the same number of years, 110, is also accorded Joshua (Jos. 24:29; Judg. 2:8). The concept is exemplified by the words of another vizier of Egypt who writes:

What I have done on earth is not inconsiderable. I attained one hundred and ten years of life (*Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 414; cf. especially n. 33).

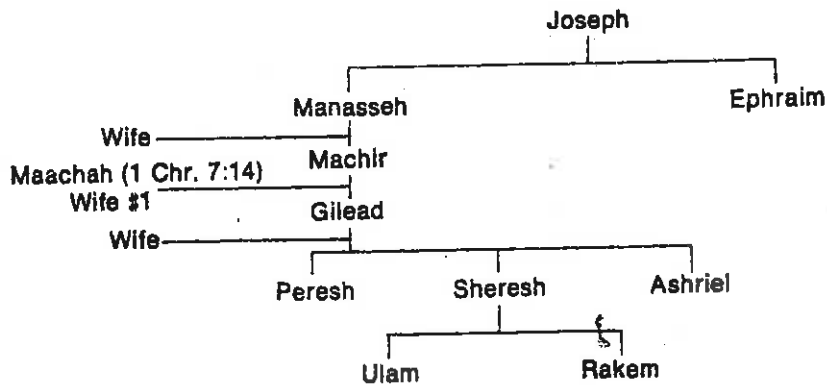
So far, no less than twenty-seven such references to this ideal age limit have been noted in Egyptians texts (See J. M. A. Janssen, *OMRO*, XXXI [1950], pp. 33-44). In Israel it seems to have been 120 years (cf. Gen. 6:3), attained only by Moses (Deut. 31:2; 34:7).

So we picture Joseph living out his days in a splendor known by only a few. His contemporaries at court were spending fortunes on their tombs, but not Joseph! We can only imagine some of the dialogue between them. They would say to him: "Joseph, don't you thin it's about time you started work on your tomb? Do you think you're going to live forever?" And Joseph would bear testimony to his faith and to his God. For though he had success and influence, majesty and power, children and grandchildren, wisdom and wealth, and all that this world could offer, he never forgot the true values of life and death. And those values did not include a tomb in Egypt. One suspects he would have traded Egypt with all its magnificence any day for a tent in Canaan. His heart's affections were in the Promised Land, not in Egypt. His heart was in safekeeping in the hands of God. No wonder then, God could trust him with such wealth and power. It is not money that is a root of all evil; it is the love of money. Joseph, then, dwelt in Egypt, but desired Canaan where God's promises would certainly come to fruition.

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**23** And Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim's sons; also the sons of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were born on Joseph's knees.

Joseph is singularly blessed with respect to age and progeny. The faithfulness of God is sounded in the mention of Joseph's descendants, in fulfillment of Genesis 49:25 relative to blessings of "breast and womb," i.e., there was no physical hindrance to births. Figure 34 illustrates this.



The Book of Chronicles indicates the abundance of the sons of Ephraim also (1 Chron. 7:20ff.), and comparison with Genesis 48:14, regarding the superiority of Ephraim, the son given preference, again confirms the faithfulness of God. The children of Israel could not fail to behold it as they observed the many sons begotten by Ephraim.

Joseph did live to know some of his great-grandchildren. His older son, Manasseh, seems to have had two sons of his own, Machir and Asriel (Num. 26:29-31; 1 Chron. 7:14), and possibly others, but apparently only the children of Machir were born while Joseph was still able to enjoy them. These included Gilead, the ancestor of the Gileadites (Num. 26:29).

The "children of Machir" represents the most important of the clans of Manasseh and, at one time, was identified with the tribe as a whole. The Machirites captured and occupied the Transjordanian regions of Gilead and Bashan (Num. 26:29; 36:1; Judg. 5:14; for their conquests, see Num. 32:39f.; Deut. 3:15; Jos. 13:31; 17:1).

It is not clear whether the great-grandchildren (= "children of the third generation," cf. Ex. 20:5; Num. 14:18) are Ephraim's or Joseph's ("through Ephraim"). If the former, Ephraim's line would have begotten one more generation than Manasseh's in the same period of time. This would be in

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fulfillment of the blessing of Genesis 48:19. If the latter, then Joseph would have seen only the grandchildren of both his sons before dying. He would thus have lived to see at least the fourth generation. This is a sign of special favor, such as Job enjoys as a reward for his piety (Job 42:16).

What a delightful grandfather Joseph must have made! Somehow it adds a delightfully human touch to the Joseph Narrative to picture him as a grandfather with little ones on his knee. The idiom, "were born on Joseph's knees," as explained in the notes on Genesis 48:12, usually implies legitimation of progeny, or a gesture signifying they belonged to him (cf. Job 3:12). At the least this idiom connotes that Joseph formally and joyfully accepted the sons of Manasseh into the family. A similar expression occurs in Genesis 30:3. Even so, the statement here is not identically the same as the one used in this earlier reference. It is known that among some present-day Arabian tribes there is a custom of placing a newborn child on the knees of the father of the child. We probably should think of a similar ceremony in connection with Joseph and his grandchildren. Some scholars are convinced that this indicates that Joseph actually adopted these children as his own, but this cannot be determined with certainty.

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- 24    **And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you, and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob."**
- 25    **Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here."**
- 

Joseph died in Egypt after a long and fruitful life in faithful service to God. Like his father before him, he requested that his bones be taken out of the land of Egypt at the great deliverance. This deliverance, he reassured them, would take place when God intervened to fulfill the promises of the fathers.

When Joseph knew that he was about to die, he called his brothers (and possibly his nephews as well, to whom the biblical term "brethren" might be applied) and reminded them--in case they were in danger of forgetting--that God intended some day that all the children of Israel return to Canaan, where He would finally give them the Promised Land, as He had sworn to their forefathers.

Joseph's last words would seem to imply that he died before his brothers, even though, with the exception of Benjamin, they were all his seniors. Perhaps "brothers" here is employed in a general sense, supported by the next verse wherein it is the "children of Israel" who are put under oath. Perhaps we have here another example of the biblical tendency to treat the tribe or people as a corporate personality (cf. Gen. 46:3f).

When the time came for Joseph to die, he told his brothers twice that God would surely come to their aid. The expression, "God will surely take care of you" is literally, "God will surely visit you." This expression guarantees that the fulfillment of the promises lay in the future (as Ex. 3:16-17 affirms). The verb "visit" (פָּקַד/ *pāqad*), signifies divine intervention for the sake of blessing or cursing--both, in the case of the exodus, in which Israel was delivered at the expense of the Egyptians. The word usually carries the connotation that destinies would be changed by the visitation from on high (Gen. 21:1; Ex. 20:5; 32:34; Ruth 1:6; 1 Sam. 2:21). The words of Joseph, given twice, amazingly summarize the hope expressed throughout the Old Testament and the New.

Joseph stated that "God . . . bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. This clustering of the three patriarchs for the first time sets the pattern for all such subsequent citations, which are invariably in a context of the divine promises of national territory for the people of Israel (Ex. 3:16; 6:3; 32:13; 33:1; Num. 32:11; Deut. 1:8; 6:10; 9:5, 27; 29:12; 30:20; 34:4), the unifying theme of all the patriarchal narratives. The LORD will not forget his promises to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, or to their descendants. He would continue to express His loving concern for the people of Israel and would bring them back to Canaan.

A further overall observations should be made at this juncture concerning the promise which Joseph is reiterating in verse 24. First, this unit, which opened with Jacob on his deathbed, closes with Joseph on his, and with Joseph's death. A significant part of Jacob's deathbed statement was his testimony to Joseph as recorded in Genesis 48:3-4:

Then Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, and He said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and numerous, and I will make you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your descendants after you for an everlasting possession'".

Reciting the definitive experience of his life, Jacob transmits the fundamental heritage of the patriarchal ancestors, much as Isaac transmitted it to him (cf. Gen. 28:3-4). Since the patriarchal narratives do not include testimony in which God delivers the promise to one of Jacob's sons, Jacob's own testimony is the only way the knowledge of those promises can continue. Jacob is the last "eyewitness" to the direct disclosure of the divine will. As he approaches the ultimate threshold of death, he also approaches the moment of his greatest responsibility, which is precisely to testify to that disclosure for all generations to come.

When Jacob assumes the responsibility of reciting what God had promised, his identity is complete: he is indeed "Israel," the father of his people. Indeed, it is only because of Jacob's testimony that Joseph too can transmit the legacy of the ancestors from his deathbed: "God will surely take care of you, and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob" (v. 24; cf. Gen. 48:21). This is the first and only time Joseph refers to the divine promise. It is a promise that he has never heard directly from God. Thus his trust in this promise--and in the God who stands behind it--is perhaps the most exemplary in the entire patriarchal narratives, for in order to trust in God, Joseph must also trust in the "witness" to God (cf. Jn. 20:29; 1 Pet. 1:7-9).

We can now see in retrospect how crucial the LORD's oath is to Abraham in chapter 22. The oath is repeated at critical moments throughout the patriarchal narratives, in each case at the transition from one generation to another (Gen. 24:7; 26:3; 50:24). In this passage before us Joseph's final words also connect the oath to the exodus, which is soon to unfold (cf. Ex. 3:7-8).

Before his death also, Joseph made the request that his bones be buried in the land of Canaan, in much the same way as Jacob had requested it. In this connection Joseph made a prophetic statement. He did not ask the members of his family to bring his remains to Canaan at the time of his death. He predicted that the people of Israel would eventually return to Canaan, the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Joseph fully believed that God would fulfill His promises and so they would someday all move back to Canaan, and it would be at that time that he wanted them to take his bones with them. For this confidence and faith, he was mentioned in the "faith" chapter of Hebrews (Heb. 11:22). So sure was he of this that he was content to have his remains buried in Egypt with the firm



understanding that when the descendants of Israel returned to Canaan, they would take his bones with them. He made the members of his family swear with an oath that they would carry out his wish in this regard when they returned to Canaan. This can only mean that he has his brothers take the oath as representatives of the later generation of the Israelites of the exodus. They take this oath, an oath finally fulfilled by their heirs (Ex. 13:19; Jos. 24:32).

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**26** So Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

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The Joseph Narrative ends with the account of Joseph's death. Twice within the span of five verses we are told that he was 110 years old when he died (vv. 22, 26). Significant? Absolutely! Joseph's age may be a play on the life spans of Abraham (175 years; Gen. 25:7), Isaac (180 years; Gen. 35:28) and Jacob (147 years; Gen. 47:28). The pattern of the patriarchs' ages strikingly follows a succession of square numbers:

Abraham	175 = 7 x 5 <sup>2</sup> or 7 x 5 x 5 (sum of factors = 17)
Isaac	180 = 5 x 6 <sup>2</sup> or 5 x 6 x 6 (sum of factors = 17)
Jacob	147 = 3 x 7 <sup>2</sup> or 3 x 7 x 7 (sum of factors = 17)

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110 = sum of the succession of squared #s (5, 6, 7).

The above numerical pattern could be coincidence, but the data as analyzed below has cumulative weight.

In each case the squared number increases by one while the coefficient decreases by two. In addition, in each instance the sum of the factors is 17, thus forming a chiasmic inclusion with Genesis 37:2 where Joseph was first introduced in this Narrative, beginning with his age as 17!. Incidentally, although the EVV translate Genesis 50:22 and 50:26 identically, the idiomatic "son-of-such and such age" is reserved until 50:26 (with verse 22 simply reading יָשָׁן יוֹסֵף מֵאָה וְעֶשְׂרִים / "Joseph [was] one-hundred and-ten years"), thus finding an exact correspondence with Genesis 37:2.

Whether by coincidence or not, 110 is the sum of the succession of squared numbers ( $5^2 + 6^2 + 7^2 = 110$ ). Furthermore, there is another point of possible relevance concerning this pattern of descending numbers: Joseph is the

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4th in the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the sum of  $7 + 5 + 3 + 1$  is  $4^2$ , and 4 is the middle number between 1 and 7.

Because Joseph's age can be factored as  $1 \times 5^2 + 6^2 + 7^2$ , it is perhaps the intention of our narrator to underscore Joseph's age in order to express his significance at the end of the Genesis narrative: Joseph is not only the successor in the pattern (7 - 5 - 3 - 1), but also the sum of his predecessors ( $5^2 + 6^2 + 7^2 = 110$ ). Thus, at the end of Genesis, the life span of Joseph symbolically brings the ancestral narratives of Genesis to completion. In this way, then, Joseph embodies the coincidence of opposites and points to the archetype, the Coming One who is the Successor and the Sum of all things, Jesus, the Messiah (Col. 1:15-19; 2:2-3). This is reflected in the above factorial patterns making the patriarchal chronologies constituting a rhetorical device expressing the profound biblical conviction that Israel's formative age was not a concatenation of haphazard incidents but a series of events ordered according to God's grand design to reflect the coming Messiah (see Gen. 47:28).

After his brothers had taken the oath that Joseph requested, some time later he died and his body, like that of Jacob (verse 2), was embalmed and placed in a coffin (or wooden mummy case) and entombed in Egypt. In that way, it could be seen by his descendants and those of his brothers, serving as a perpetual reminder of God's promise to them--and therefore also a reminder of God's purpose--that they would all someday return to Canaan.

The use of a coffin is characteristically Egyptian and is never again mentioned in biblical literature. If that coffin had been the final curtain in the biblical drama, we of all people would be most miserable--but it was not, and we are not.

In Hebrew the word for the "Ark" of the Covenant, the receptacle for the Tablets of the Decalogue, is the same word as used here, and nowhere else, for "coffin," Joseph's sarcophagus. Jewish Tradition renders an interesting insight: "He who is enshrined in the one, fulfilled the commandments enshrined in the other" (Ginzberg, II:183; V:376, n. 442).

In striking contrast to the honors accorded Jacob, no ritual or mourning is recorded. The atmosphere, heavy with the anticipation of enslavement, is filled with foreboding.

Throughout this epilogue, it should be noted that Joseph is the only subject, but instead of being referred to by the personal pronoun, his name appears again and again. It perhaps reflects how much our narrator regrets to part from this noble and great man who in spite of all his honors and the splendor of the court remained the truest "son of Israel," faithful to his people and to God's promise.

To all intents and purposes the last of the patriarchs had now passed from the scene, and our story, in one sense, is over. The Book of Genesis, the book that began with the fragrance of life, concluded with the stench of death. It started "in the beginning" (Gen. 1:1) and ended "in a coffin in Egypt" (Gen. 50:26).

The Book of Genesis ends with the Israelites "in Egypt." The Narrative, however, does not end here. As in earlier segments of the Book, the death of the patriarch is followed by a list of names that opens a new narrative of the events in the lives of the next generations (cf. Gen. 50:26--Ex. 1:5 with Gen. 35:29--36:43).

Significantly, the last Hebrew word of the epilogue and of Genesis reads "in Egypt." It prepares the mind for the new era that awaits the Israelites in Egypt, and for the great event of the Exodus. The Joseph Narrative ends with the bones of Joseph resting "in a coffin in Egypt," but the vision of characters is already directed and focused toward another horizon:

For He [the LORD] established a testimony in Jacob,  
 And appointed a law in Israel,  
 Which He commanded our fathers,  
 That they should teach them to their children,  
 That the generation to come might know,  
*even* the children *yet* to be born,  
*That* they may arise and tell *them* to their children,  
 That they should put their confidence in God,  
 And not forget the works of God,  
 But keep His commandments (Psalm 78:5-7)

It is interesting to note that the Book of Genesis falls silent on this note of the expectancy of God's visitation, just as the Old Testament itself does, until Zacharias identifies the birth of Jesus as the long-awaited visitation (Lk. 1:68). The New Testament also ends with the expectation of the visitation from

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heaven from the ultimate redemption and final fulfillment of God's promised blessing--"Come, LORD Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

That, however, is another story . . . .

### APPLICATION

Believers are convinced that their future in God's program lies elsewhere and that this current world is but part of a pilgrimage to that land. They know that God will surely visit and deliver His people, in spite of death and discouragement. ***THOSE WHO TRUST THE LORD TO BRING ABOUT HIS PROMISED BLESSINGS IN HIS OWN INSCRUTABLE WAYS WILL DEMONSTRATE THEIR FAITH THROUGH THE ADVERSE CIRCUMSTANCES OF LIFE.*** If believers trust in the sovereignty of God, death will lose its power over them, and persecution and antagonism will fade into His sovereign plan, providing a spirit of confidence and kindness.

Only in death were the patriarchs possessors of the Land. Nevertheless, in faith, they viewed God's promises as going beyond the grave. Jacob knew as did Abraham that the covenantal promises would be opposed, but his very blessings upon his sons revealed his faith in the ultimate fulfillment of the promises of God. Canaan was the land of their destiny and in time the nation would indeed possess that land. The patriarchs died not knowing exactly how or when God would fulfill His covenant promises, but only that He doubtlessly would do so.

Joseph's life was lived in an alien land with infrequent references to God and none of the dramatic divine revelation that his father encountered. Still, in his final speeches Joseph teaches the next generation to read life as a manifestation of God's presence with a willingness to await God's visitation, however hidden and delayed that visitation might be.

Genesis thus ends with the promise yet unfulfilled but with the expectancy of the visitation from on high. The company of the faithful thus waits in expectation for that day when the promised seed will be victorious over the curse and establish in reality the long-awaited blessing promised by God.

Many of us live in a culture in which we do not know how to die: a world of machines and sterile rooms, where the final actions are likely to be a frantic hospital alert and a hasty family gathering. The world we leave is not

the family world left by Israel and Joseph. But perhaps by listening closely to the accounts of the testamentary activities of our ancestors, the Church can find alternative ways by which the Christians can draw their lives to a close. Perhaps we can discover ways in which we can gather up our own lives and assist the next generation as they step into God's future--a future of faith and blessing.

Thus ends Genesis. It began with God creating life and ends with a coffin. It began with the vastness of eternity and ends with the shortness of time. It began with the living God and ends with a corpus. It began with a blaze of brightness in heaven and ends with a box of bones in Egypt. This is the Spirit's final comment in the Book on the nature and tragedy of human sin. This is the final exposure of the Serpent's lie: "You shall not surely die!" spoke Satan to the woman (Gen. 3:4) . . . but "Joseph died . . . and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt." Death even came to the most Christ-like man in all the Bible because of Adam's sin!

Let them who have ears to hear what the Spirit of God expressly teaches in these last days, take heed!

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is significant about the fact that Jacob is called "Israel" throughout Genesis 50:1-14?
2. What do we know about the process of embalming?
3. Why does Joseph have the physicians embalm Israel instead of the professional mortuary priests?
4. Analyze the naming of Abel-Mizraim.
5. Relate the theology of Genesis 50:20 to the major events of the Book.
6. Explain the statements of Joseph in Genesis 50:23-26 with a view to the faith of the patriarchs in the promises of the covenants.
7. What is significant about our narrator giving Joseph's age at his death? In your explanation, include the significance of the patriarchs' ages (Abraham, Issac, and Jacob) of their death.

*begins with a coffin  
in death  
final rest  
with separation  
Adam for sinners  
& not spirit*

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