

# THE LITERARY GENIUS OF THE JOSEPH NARRATIVE

## Introduction

The story of Joseph has been praised as a treasure of world literature. Voltaire confessed it is one of the most precious documents 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 has still not been completely recognized by biblical scholars.

*The Joseph Narrative* demonstrates conclusively that it 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 will be struck by its literary craft. 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 profound narrative that first reveals then resolves itself in absolute symmetry. To look closely at its major patterns 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 Hebrew Scriptures. 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 organically constructed, 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 into manageable episodes. An episode is 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 has its own exposition which is followed by the action itself. This action always has a climax, and at the end, a definite conclusion. The conclusion 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 clear succession of episodes, displays 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 reader, such literary structure is foreign, and therefore, not appreciated, although to ancient audiences, it was obvious. 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 that has become known in recent times is called *chiasmus* (pronounced as ky-as-mus), also called *chiasm*. Structural analysis of the Scriptures has proven beyond doubt that many writers relied on chiasmus to produce their literary works.

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 Xi (X).

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 chiasmus 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 to appreciate the holistic interpretation of *The Joseph Narrative*.

### **The Significance of Chiasmus in *The Joseph Narrative***

*The Joseph Narrative* contains a number of chiastic elements building toward a climax, then follows a second series wherein matching units in reverse order bring the narrative to resolution. The text, as it stands, exhibits clear unity. This is not only because of the chiastic structure but also 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. This genealogical material works as a division marker between two major sections in the narrative, between Genesis 37:1--46:7 and 46:28--50:26, with the genealogical list climactically delineated in Genesis 46:8-27, functioning as the center of the overall structure, and not 45:1-15 as most posit.

A study of *The Joseph Narrative* yields symmetry, symmetry dependent on the theme of reversals. The narrative begins with Joseph on a high level but, despite his wisdom and capability, his fortunes sink systematically. Then, when he is at the very bottom, a series of 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 chiastic 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 (notably Jacob is called "Israel") in a richly ornamented robe, but loses prestige before his father—not because of any personal sin—but because of the frank telling of two dreams he had received (Gen. 37:1-11). He is subsequently 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".

At this 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 a famine, and they bow to Joseph as the dream had predicted. Joseph demands to see their younger brother; just as they had earlier deceived Jacob by stating 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. The narrative never explicitly tells us that Jacob bows to Joseph, as Joseph's second dream seems to predict, 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 nation. They are secure in the choicest region of Egypt (Gen. 47:11), and 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.

## **CHIASTIC STRUCTURE OF *THE JOSEPH NARRATIVE* (Genesis 37:1—50:26)**

Introduction (37:1-2)

- A Hostility of brothers to Joseph (37:3-11)
- B Apparent death of Joseph, Jacob mourns (37:12-36)
- C Interlude: Judah and Tamar (38:1-26)
  - D Unexpected Reversals (38:27—39:23)
    - E Wisdom of Joseph (40:1—42:57)
      - F Movement to Egypt (43:1—46:7)
        - X The Genealogy of Israel (46:8-27)**
        - F' Settlement in Egypt (46:28—47:12)
      - E' Wisdom of Joseph (47:13-26)
    - D' Unexpected Reversals (48:1-22)
  - C' Interlude: Jacob blesses his sons (49:1-28)
  - B' Death of Jacob, Joseph buries him (49:29—50:14)
  - A' Joseph reassures brothers (50:15-26)

Other important parallels between the two major divisions (Gen. 37:3--46:7 and 46:29--50:26) exhibit reversals. For example, the two brothers Perez and Zerah, in which the one who would be first-born loses his place (Gen. 38:27-30), or 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 Genesis 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'). 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 offer 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 tested 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), welcomed by Joseph, and introduced to the Pharaoh of Egypt. Finally, Israel moves to the prized district of Rameses, having departed for Egypt at the end of the previous section.

### **The Chiasmic Structure Analyzed**

As with other chiasmic 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 Israel's genealogical information (X); followed by six parallel episodes (F', E', D', C', B', A'). The result is a neatly constructed structure 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 Genesis, but even the very last words of Genesis, "in Egypt," is a fitting conclusion to *The Joseph Narrative* that dovetails and neatly sets the scene for the book of Exodus.

A presentation of the structure of *The Joseph Narrative* 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/A', then B/B', etc. After a brief discussion of the parallel ideas, motifs, and story lines, theme-words that highlight the relationship between the two units 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. It is

posited in the study that, with few exceptions, the author intended the various theme-words to operate collectively. They connect the matched units as a group, not just as single words. 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.

Once matched units has been demonstrated, the midway point (X) between F and F', upon which the entire narrative pivots, is studied.

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 different inflections from the same Hebrew stem. Some theme-words and catchwords can be like-sounding words that derive from separate stems, while others may be merely similar in meaning or share a similar connotation.

### ***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 narrative. In A Joseph is introduced for the first time (excluding his birth in Gen. 30:22-24) as a 17-year-old "lad" (נער). 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.

In two significant ways, the action in A is repeated in A'. In both sections, Joseph is alone with his brothers, and their father Jacob is not important. 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.

Many 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", also prominent in both A/A', occurs 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, "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, "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)

It may be demonstrated how chiasmus can help explain suggested problems raised by liberal critics, especially those concerning supposed secondary accretions to the text. An 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 this 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 נכַל in the hithpael, "plot", is used in 37:18, and the non-related but assonant root כוּל, "sustain," is used in 50:21.
3. Similarly, the verbal stem נכַר, "recognize," is predicated of Jacob in 37:32-33, and Joseph reports Jacob's use of כַרִיתִי, "I dug," from the non-related but assonant stem כרה in 50:5.
4. The stem אבַל, "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 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 narrative and something of an interruption. However, 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 in the way editors have structured the text. The setting for this poem is in Canaan, a fitting parallel to 38:1-30 that 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 in the narrative is the question to which of Jacob's sons will receive the right of first-born. After all, he did have twelve sons. 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. However, Reuben does the unpardonable. In an effort to prove to his brothers that he will indeed rule them, he sleeps with Jacob's concubine Bilhah (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 would be 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 tries to rescue Joseph. However, it is important to understand 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 his brothers, in Reuben's absence, to sell Joseph to a band of Ishmaelite traders. He thus robs Reuben his chance to look heroic to their father. It is not clear whether Judah detected Reuben's strategy and proposed the sale in order to thwart him, or an act of mercy. Regardless, Judah's words in verses in Genesis 37:26-27 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 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, Reuben tries unsuccessfully to persuade his father 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 the entire honor that went with it. His impetuous power-grab in the detestable act of sleeping with his father's concubine, however, 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 at least shows some sense of pity on his part. 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 the right of Tamar to marry his third and last son, Shelah. Yet, after Judah himself impregnates Tamar, he admits she is more righteous than he is, and 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 legality 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.

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 firstborn, but both of whom obtained that position by God's choice. This phenomenon, divine preference for the younger son, reappears repeatedly in Scripture 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 narrative is that it contributes materially to the story of how Judah achieves the status of first-born. The strange birth 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 among the twelve.

This is confirmed both in Israel's blessing on Joseph's sons (Gen. 48) and 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 Israel blesses 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 chiasmus. The reason for this is now apparent. Both Genesis 38 and 49:8-12 relate to the story 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 Israel's blessing 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 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, traditionally rendered "Shiloh", in 49:10, and שֶׁלָה, "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, "his donkey", in 49:11, evokes עֵר, "Er", Judah's first son in 38:3, 6, 7.

5. Similarly, בני אֶתְנִי, “son of his donkey” in 49:11, brings to mind אֹנָן, “Onan”, Judah’s second son in 38:4, 8, 9.
6. שֶׁרְקָה, “vine, stock”, in 49:11, alludes to the valley of Soreq, which recalls Timnah in 38:12-13.
7. The verbal stem סִיר in the qal, “depart,” appears in 49:10; and in the hiphil, “remove,” it occurs in 38:14, 19.
8. יָבֹא, “he comes”, in 49:10, suggests וַיָּבֹא, “he came,” in 38:18.
9. סוּתָה, “his robe”, in 49:11, although not etymologically related to כִּסְתָה, “she covered”, in 38:15, but they share three consonants, sound alike, and both convey the idea of clothing.
10. The stem לָבַשׁ, “clothe”, appears in both 49:11 and 38:19.

The few verses spoken to Judah contains ten theme-words which link C’ with Judah’s history in C. However, the blessings to the other sons also contain similar expressions to those in Genesis 38:1-30.

11. בְּכוֹר, “firstborn”, occurs in 49:3 and 38:6.
12. אֹנִי, “my vigor”, in 49:3, might also suggest אֹנָן, “Onan,” in 38:4, 8, and 9.
13. The word עָז, “strong, fierce”, is used in 49:3, 7; and in 38:17, 20, we have עֲזִים, “goats”.
14. וַיִּט is used in 49:15 and in 38:1, 16 meaning “to turn aside”.
15. In 49:17 we read עַל־דֶּרֶךְ, “by the road”; and in 38:16 we have אֶל־הַדֶּרֶךְ, “by the road”.
16. The alliteration גַּד־גִּדּוֹד יִגְדֹּדוּ, “Gad shall be raided by raiders”, in 49:19, suggests the important גַּדִּי, “kid”, in 38:17, 20, and 23.
17. יִגַּד, “He shall raid”, in 49:19, evokes וַיִּגַּד, “it was told”, in 38:24.

There are seventeen theme-words highlighting parallels between Genesis 38:1-30 and 49:1-28. As a comparison with other matching units, seventeen such parallels is an unusually high number. Perhaps because the Judah and Tamar episode and the Blessings of Israel are so dissimilar, the need was felt for more shared words and ideas than is customary. That is to say, A/A’ and the other matching units of *The Joseph Narrative* are similar enough in action not to require that many theme-words. C/C’ is 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)  
 Perez and Zerah (38:27-30)  
 Potiphar's wife innocent, Joseph guilty (39:1-23)
- D' UNEXPECTED REVERSALS (48:1-22)  
 Jacob favors Joseph (48:1-12)  
 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 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 בָּרַךְ, "bless" is important to both units, occurring in 39:5 and in 48:3, 9, 15, 16, and 20.
2. וַיִּמָּאֵן וַיֹּאמֶר, "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 וַיִּמְצֵא יוֹסֵף חֵן בְּעֵינָיו, "Joseph found favor in his eyes"; and in 47:29, we have אֲנִי נֹאֵם מִצָּאתַי חֵן בְּאֵינֶיךָ, "if I have found favor in your eyes."
4. The word "favor" חֵן is used in both 39:21 and 47:29.
5. The verbal stem "to lie", שָׁכַב is prominent in D, occurring four times in 39:7-14, and it reverberates in D' in 47:30.
6. "Hand", יָד 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 is used figuratively for "wife" in 39:6, and בֵּית־לֶחֶם, "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 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, "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

חם בִּית לַחֶם in D' in Genesis 48:7. The two act as theme-words which serve to bind 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 that 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, occurs ubiquitously in E and in E' in 47:13, 20.
2. The word “bread”, לֶחֶם, is used twice in E in 41:54-55, and commonly in E'.
3. “He hung/will hang”, תָּלָה, occurs in 40:19, 22, and “languished”, תָּלָה 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, is used in 41:56-57 and in 47:14.
5. The word “stalk”, קָנָה, appears in 41:5, 22, and the verbal stem to “buy”, קָנָה occurs in 47:19, 22, and 23.
6. “Cities”, עָרִים, is used in both 41:48 and 47:21.
7. “The land of Egypt”, הָאָרֶץ מִצְרַיִם, or simply “the land” is exceedingly common in E and E'; the latter also uses אֲדָמָה, “land”, and various forms.
8. The Hebrew stem חָמַשׁ, 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 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, an account of the brothers' two trips to Egypt is narrated. During the first trip, they go merely to acquire food, and in the second trip, they return with Benjamin in order to free Simeon.

Various items link these two units together:

1. In 42:1-2 “go down”, ירדו, and “Egypt”, מצרים, are collocated; in 46:3 we read “from going down to Egypt” מרדה מצרימה.
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, and 4.
3. Judah has a prominent role in 43:3-10, and he appears in 46:28 as well.
4. The verbal stem שלח, “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”, פִּי, 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 narrative’s literary structure. Some critics have posited 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).

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). However, 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.”

### **X GENEALOGY (46:8-27)**

The pivotal 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 narrative before preceding to the balance of the narrative 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 the first major half of the structure, Genesis 36:1--46:7, the climax 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) and the announcement to Jacob that his beloved son lives. 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 Israel bestowed upon 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 Israel serve to resolve these questions, end the story of the patriarchs, and look ahead to the story of the nation.

### **Structure of the Individual Episodes in *The Joseph Narrative***

#### **Genesis 37:2b-11 (Episode 1)**

Introduction: Joseph's background within the family in Canaan (2b-e)

- A Israel's preferential love of Joseph (3)
- B Brothers' hatred of Joseph (4a)
- C Brothers' silence toward Joseph (4b)
- D Brothers' reaction to Joseph's first dream (5)
- E Joseph's first dream report (6-7)
- X Brother's Embittered Hatred of Joseph (8)**
- E' Joseph's second dream report (9-10a)
- D' Jacob's reaction to Joseph's second dream (10b)
- C' Jacob's speech to Joseph (10c)
- B' Brothers' envy of Joseph (11a)
- A' Jacob ponders the matter (11b)

#### **Structure of Genesis 37:12-36 (Episode 2)**

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' first plan to eradicate Joseph (18-22)
- X The Brothers' Violation of Joseph (23-24)**
- D' The brothers' second 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)

**Structure of Genesis 38:1-30** (Episode 3)

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

## A The childless widow (6-11)

- a Tamar exchanges her widow's garb for that of a prostitute (14)
- b Judah's proposition to Tamar (15-16b)

B **x Exchange of pledges (16c-18b)**

- b' Judah's consummation with Tamar (18c)
- a' Tamar exchanges her prostitute's garb for that of a widow (19)

- a **The kid is sent for the pledge, Tamar is not found (20)**

- b **The Adullamite's inquiry about the prostitute (21a)**

- X** x **The Response to the Adullamite's Inquiry (21b)**

- b' **The Adullamite's report to Judah (22)**

- a' **The pledge is forfeited, Tamar is not found (23)**

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

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

B' **x Judah's recognizes the items of his pledge (25-26a)**

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

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

## A' The birth of twins to a widow (27-30)

**Structure of Genesis 39:1-23** (Episode 4)

Setting: 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)

- X Joseph's Refusal to Commit Sin (8-9)**

- D' Potiphar's wife request: "Lie with me"! (10-12)

- C' Potiphar's wife desire 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)



**Structure of Genesis 40:1-23** (Episode 5)

- 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)
  - X 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)

**Structure of Genesis 41:1-57** (Episode 6)

- 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)
    - X 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)

**Structure of Genesis 42:1-38** (Episode 7)

- 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 first test to his brothers (14-16)
    - X Joseph Places His Brothers in Prison (17)**
    - E' Joseph's second test to his brothers (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)

**Structure of Genesis 43:1-34** (Episode 8)

- 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)
          - X The Steward's response: God 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)

**Structure of Genesis 44:1-34** (Episode 9)

- a Joseph's instructions to his steward concerning his ruse (1-2)
  - b Brothers' departure from the city (3-4a)
    - c Joseph's instructions to his steward (4b-6)
      - x Brothers' protestation 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)

**X 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 first journey (19-23)
      - x Brothers' justification before their father (24-29)**
        - c' The consequences 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)

**Structure of Genesis 45:1-28** (Episode 10)

- 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)
      - X 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)

**Structure of Genesis 46:1-30** (Episode 11)

- A God spoke to Israel in night visions at Beer-sheba (1-7)
- X Israel-Jacob's genealogical record (9-27)** [the structural center of the narrative]
- A' Joseph appears [word used only for visions] to Israel in Egypt (28-30)

**The Structure of Genesis 46:31—47:27** (Episode 12)

- 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)
- X 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 the priests] (20-26)
- A' Israel (as a people) prospered and multiplied greatly in Egypt (27)

Many central elements are chiasmic in themselves in order to underscore the importance of the action transacting. Genesis 47:7-10 serves as an excellent example of this phenomenon:

- a Jacob presented to Pharaoh (7a)
- b Jacob blesses Pharaoh (7b)
- c Pharaoh's question to Jacob (8)
- c' Jacob's answer to Pharaoh (9)
- b' Jacob blesses Pharaoh (10a)
- a' Jacob leaves Pharaoh (10b)

**Structure of Genesis 47:28—48:22** (Episode 13)

- 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 Joseph's children (13-14)
- X 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)

**Structure of Genesis 49:1-33** (Episode 14)

- 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)
  - D Bilhah's first son is blessed (16-18)
  - X Zilpah's Sons are Blessed (19-20)**
  - D' Bilhah's second son is blessed (21)
  - C' Rachel's sons are blessed (22-27)
- B' Epilogue to the prophetic oracle (28)
- A' Israel is gathered to his people (29-33)

**Structure of Genesis 50:1-26** (Episode 15)

- A Burial arrangements for Israel (1-3)
- B Joseph's petition to Pharaoh (4-6)
  - C Preparation to bury Israel (7-9)
  - X 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)

In characteristic fashion of *The Joseph Narrative*, Genesis 50:1-26 forms a tight chiasmic structure, displaying as its literary center (X) the deep and profound mourning over Israel's passing. Genesis 50 contains a number of word and thematic chiasmic elements building to a climax, which then follows a series where matching units in reverse order bring the entire narrative to resolution and fulfillment. The test, as it stands, exhibits clear unity. This is not only because of the chiasmic structure, but also because of the organic cohesion of the entire chapter. The result is an artistic literary construction in what has already proven to be a remarkably unified narrative.

Panels A through C are 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 in death (cf. Gen. 47:29-31 compared to Gen. 50:4-8). Panels C' through A' is a final resolution, not only to this episode, but also to the entire narrative. Israel is buried in the ancestral burial plot, Joseph brothers' petition, and finally, the embalmment of Joseph himself.

Each panel in this episode is carefully structured to underscore its importance. A and A' act as the introduction and conclusion to Genesis 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 notably not Rachel) had been buried (Gen. 49:29-32). Having given his sons his final command, Jacob died at the ripe old age of 147 years old (Gen. 47:28).

In two significant ways, the action in A is repeated again in A'. The process of embalment, first with Jacob and then with Joseph, is described. Also in A and A', there is point-counterpoint: Joseph prepares to keep his promise to his father by preparing for the long journey to Canaan by having him embalmed. Then Joseph extracts a promise from his brothers to carry his bones from Egypt into Canaan when God will deliver them, and thus they embalm his body for safekeeping until such time (otherwise, the bones would have turned to dust).

A Burial arrangements for Israel (1-3)

- a Joseph weeps (1)
  - x Joseph's command (2-3a)**
- a' Egyptians weep (3b)

B Joseph's petition to Pharaoh (4-6)

- a Joseph petitions Pharaoh's court (4a)
  - x Joseph's petition (4b-5)**
- a' Pharaoh grants Joseph's petition (6)

C Preparation to bury Israel (7-9)

- a Joseph's entourage assent to Canaan (7a-8)
  - x The people who stayed behind in Egypt (8b)**
- a' Additional details of entourage to Canaan (9)

**X The Mourning Over Israel (10-12)**

- a Place and duration of mourning (10)
  - x The Canaanites observe the lamentation (11a-b)**
- a' Place renamed to reflect the duration of mourning (11c)

C' Burial of Israel (12-14)

- a Descent to Canaan (12-13a)
  - x Israel is buried in Canaan (13b-c)**
- a' Ascent to Egypt (14)

B' Joseph brothers' petition (15-21)

- a Joseph's brothers fear (15)
  - x Joseph's brothers petition and dream fulfilled (16-18)**
- a' Joseph reassures his brothers (19-21)

A' Burial arrangements and death of Joseph (22-26)

- a Joseph's age (22)
  - x Promises remembered and made (23-25)**
- a' Joseph's age (26)

B and B' function to unite several thematic concepts in the 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).

A large entourage of relatives and dignitaries, including Jacob's household and many prominent Egyptians, make the trip in C (vv. 7-9). The specific purpose of this entourage was to bury Jacob (v. 7a); however, it is not until C' (vv. 13-14) that Jacob is actually buried.

The pivotal point of the chiasmic structure comes in X (vv. 10-12), which describes 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; 43:14); however now, Jacob dies in peace because Joseph is alive (cf. Gen. 46:30) and those around him mourn!

Over half of Genesis 50:1-26 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 by both Joseph and the Egyptians (v. 2). A special request was granted by Pharaoh to bury Jacob in his homeland (vv. 4-5), and a large entourage (lit. "a very large company") was provided by 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 ceremony of mourning" (v. 11). The author goes out of his way to emphasize the magnitude of the ceremony of mourning.

## CONCLUSION

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 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 its purpose. By failing to observe and appreciate that symmetry, it is possible to misread the "conceptual center" and consequently distort the author's message.

While one of the aims for studying the 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 its structure.

The most important implication of *The Joseph Narrative* literary structuring 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.

It is sufficient to say that chiasmus provides a foundation for arguing a particular subsection of a larger text is not a later addition. It argues against a documentary source-critical approach to a text that radically cuts across the chiasmus. If there is not a plausible explanation how a group of hypothetical sources was combined into an evident chiasmus, the hypothetical source documents probably never existed.