



LITERARY ANALYSIS OF GENESIS 46:31—47:27

With Jacob's family now settled in Egypt under Joseph's provision and protection, just as Pharaoh had guaranteed, a major phase in God's program has come to a close—yet God's redemptive program continues. Joseph ensured that his family would be taken care and prosper in Goshen so that they could live there and flourish until God delivered them as promised to Abraham (cf. Gen. 15:13-14). 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 would require wisdom from God.

Genesis 46:31—47:27 may be divided into two spheres of Joseph's work: the presentation of his family before Pharaoh, and his administrative rule over the land. The first part (Gen. 46:31—47:6) speaks of Joseph's care for his family wherein Pharaoh provides land and food for his family. The second part (Gen. 47:11-27) carries forward the motifs of the preceding section and emphasizes the administration of Joseph. He provides 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 essential 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 then in chapter 47 our narrator recounts the outcome of the events of the plan. The point is to underscore that Joseph's plan was successful and thereby reinforces a central them of the Narrative: "The LORD was with Joseph and so he prospered" (Gen. 39:2). Joseph's wisdom resulted the Israelites dwelling safely in Goshen while a sever famine raged in the land of Canaan (Gen. 47:1-4). Pharaoh's response (vv. 5-6) is even more generous than the previous episode (Gen. 46:1-30) suggests. Not only did Pharaoh grant their wish and allow Joseph's brothers to settle in Goshen, he also places Joseph's brothers in charge of his own livestock as well.

The wisdom that Joseph exemplifies, 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. This spiritual principle has been clearly revealed to the patriarchs for generations. God will bless the lineage of Abraham and will make them into a great nation.

A further evidence of a distinct thematic strategy behind this episode may be seen in the ironic twist given to the earlier episodes by the outcome of this episode. The Joseph Narrative began with Joseph being sold (Gen. 37:27-28) into slavery (Gen. 39:17) in Egypt for twenty pieces of silver (Gen. 37:28). Now, near the conclusion of the Joseph Narrative, Joseph is shown selling (Gen. 47:20) the entire land of Egypt into slavery (Gen. 47:19, 25) and taking their silver (Gen. 47:18). In the end, because of Joseph's wisdom, the offspring of Abraham became "fruitful" (Gen. 47:27; cf. Gen. 49:22), "increased greatly in number", and were dwelling safely and prospering in the "region" of Goshen. Such a picture appears to be an obvious replication of the intended blessing of the earlier chapters of Genesis.

The Literary Unity of Genesis 46:31—47:27

- A Joseph prepares his family to receive Pharaoh's favor (46:31-34)
 - B Joseph chooses only five brothers to present before Pharaoh (47:1-2)
 - C Brothers' reason for being in Egypt: the famine is severe (47:3-4)
 - D Pharaoh's decree that Joseph's family may settle in Egypt (47:5-6)
 - a Jacob presented to Pharaoh (7a)
 - b Jacob blesses Pharaoh (7b)
 - c Pharaoh's question (8)
 - c' Jacob's answer (9)
 - b' Jacob blesses Pharaoh (10a)
 - a' Jacob leaves Pharaoh (10b)
 - D' Joseph settles his family in Egypt (47:11-12)
 - C' Joseph's reason for collecting money: the famine is severe (47:13-19)
 - B' Joseph collects one-fifth from all the people (except priests) (47:20-26)
 - A' Israel (as a people) prospered and multiplied greatly in Egypt (47:27)
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Our narrator relates in Genesis 46:31-34 (A) Joseph's plan. He simply tells Pharaoh that his family was herdsmen. 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. The Hebrew term for "herdsmen" occurs only Genesis 46:32 and 34, and nowhere else in biblical literature. Furthermore, the brothers do not mention it in response to Pharaoh's question (Gen. 47:3).

Genesis 47:27 (A') describes the conclusion to Joseph's plan in A. The people were beginning to grow into a great nation. The text states that they "were fruitful and became very numerous". These verbs recall the plan of the Creator (Gen. 1:28) and anticipate the greater fulfillment in Exodus 1:7. It is interesting to note that the accompanying verb "lived" after "Israel", is in the singular form. Whereas the succeeding three verbs are plural ("acquired

property”, “were fruitful”, and “became numerous”). The inconsistency is deliberate and the ambiguity intentional: Israel the individual merges with the national entity. This phenomenon appears again in Genesis 48:20.

Almost with a parenthetical remark, our narrator reports that Joseph brought only five of his brothers with him (B, Gen. 47:1-2). This is a curious detail. Why did Joseph choose only five of his brothers to the exclusion of the other six? Our narrator does not give us the reason. Strikingly, the counterbalance of B' (Gen. 47:20-26) reflects also a numeration. The Egyptians must hand over to Pharaoh one-fifth of the produce that comes from the seed that Joseph had given 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.

There are echoes of the famine motif in the brothers' request as they stood before Pharaoh and the Egyptians as they bowed before Joseph. This motif binds the panels C and C' together.

In Genesis 47:3-4 (C) the Pharaoh addresses Joseph's brothers with a question about their occupation. They answer as Joseph had instructed them (cf. Gen. 46:33ff.). 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, when 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. 13-15a). 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.

Pharaoh's approval given in Genesis 47:5-6 (D), is spelled out in detail in verses 11-12 (D'). In verse 6b, Pharaoh commands Joseph's family to settle in Egypt. This corresponds to verse 11a where Joseph settles his family in Egypt: this is as “Pharaoh had ordered” (v. 11e). Likewise, Pharaoh's order for Joseph's family to settle in the “best of the land” (v. 6b) recurs in verse 11c. One further note about D//D'. 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”.

The climax of this episode clearly occurs in X (Gen. 47:7-10) when Jacob has an audience before Pharaoh. These verses offer a dynamic meeting between the lord of Egypt and the father of promise. The posture of these two men is sharply contrasted. Pharaoh has land; he is settled, safe, and prosperous. Jacob has no land, but he is sovereign old age personified. He believes in God's promise that extends far beyond any Egyptian realities.

Consequently, the land of Pharaoh is at Jacob's disposal (vv. 11-12). The LORD's promise is at work for this family in Egypt, as it was in Canaan.

The continuity of the meeting between Pharaoh and Jacob with what immediately precedes (Gen. 46:31-34) and what follows (Gen. 47:13-27) is to be understood in the context of Joseph's ingenious ploy. His family gains "a possession in the land of Egypt" apart from the Egyptians (cf. Gen. 47:11) where "they acquired property in it and were fruitful and became very numerous" (Gen. 47:27). Of course, Jacob's 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. He who first sent his sons to beg for food, now comes to bless. In addition, Joseph, through his capable management, greatly enriches Pharaoh (Gen. 47:13-27). This theme is not isolated to this episode. Genesis 39:3 has already noted that God prospered Potiphar for promoting Joseph to a high position in his house. Therefore, this scene further develops the theme that of divine favor on those who favor the God's chosen vessels of blessing.

Significantly, the central concern of this scene is to show that it was Jacob who "blessed Pharaoh" (vv. 7b, 10a) when he was brought before him. The importance of the blessing can be seen from the fact that it is mentioned twice. Lying behind such an emphasis in the episode is God's promise to Abraham. He would bless those who blessed the offspring of Abraham (cf. Gen. 12:3), which is echoed later in Exodus 12:32, where the Pharaoh asks, "and also bless me". The passage clearly shows that in both Joseph and Jacob, the promise to Abraham was being fulfilled with the nations round about them.

Though Pharaoh was the more wealthy and powerful individual, Jacob clearly was the superior, for he "blessed Pharaoh". The king-priest Melchizedek had blessed Abraham (cf. Gen. 14:19ff), thus showing his superiority to Abraham, for "the lesser is blessed of the better" (Heb. 7:7). Since Jacob was the recipient of the promised blessings, his words to Pharaoh would be more than a wish; he spoke for God in granting the blessing to Pharaoh, one that began shortly through the wise administration of Joseph.

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