

Chapter Thirty-Seven

This chapter introduces what could be called the third and final phase of the Book of Genesis. The first two phases consist of creation and the call of Abraham; even creation—important as it is—was a prelude to what was considered more important, Abraham’s election. Now the Joseph saga prepares us to introduce us to the person of Moses and his successor, Joshua, after which comes the establishment of Israel as a nation but not for several centuries later. Before Joseph is touched upon, the first two verses of this chapter recount how Jacob “dwelt in the land of his father’s sojournings (*magor*).” This term was first mentioned in 17.8 concerning Abraham, “And I will give to you and to your descendants after you the land of your sojournings...for an everlasting possession.” However, the first verse of the chapter at hand refers to the *magor* of “his father” or Jacob which ended up as a reverse *magor*, back in the land of Paddan-aram and home of Laban. This has a bit of irony: Jacob returns to the home of his father for an extended stay while his father dwells in the land of Canaan. And so Jacob’s story ends rather abruptly for now until his return to yet another land, one of a future *magor*, namely Egypt. Thus Jacob dwells in Canaan for a relatively short period of time.

Now the way is prepared to begin the story of Joseph who, not unlike King David centuries later, is introduced as being a shepherd. This responsibility was an apt one for both men, for later they became shepherds of nations. Joseph was out in the field with the “sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father’s wives. The former was a maidservant who belonged to Rachel whereas the latter to Leah who gave birth to some of Jacob’s sons. This must have been awkward, Rachel being Joseph’s mother while his brothers were a motley group born of Rachel, Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah. However, the text at hand refers to those sons belonging to the maidservants which means Dan, Naphtali from Bilhah/Rachel and the others from Zilpah/Leah. No small wonder they didn’t get along. As for Dinah, the only daughter of this complicated web of family ties, is conspicuous by her absence. She must have experienced considerable difficulty with her twelve brothers and may have refused to go down to Egypt much later, even with Jacob. Perhaps her descendants, knowing the story of Joseph and his brothers’ extended exile into Egypt, were there in Canaan to greet them, one being Jethro, the priest of Midian (cf. Ex 2.15+).

Almost as soon as we’re introduced to Joseph’s tangled web of family relationships, it’s complicated further as indicated by the words “and Joseph brought an ill report of them (sons of Bilhah and Zilpah) to their father” [vs. 2]. The phrase “ill report” reads “evil words,” the exact nature of which goes unrecorded. Since flocks were involved, perhaps it has something to do with stealing sheep from other shepherds. The brothers, of course, got wind of Joseph’s report immediately which set them against him. Here is the first instance of honesty and uprightness displayed by Joseph, the only worth-while member of the family (Dinah excepted), although we have no information about how she comported herself.

“Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children because he was the son of his

old age” [vs. 3]. This favor alone was sufficient for the brothers to resent their youngest member, and in the context of the previous verse, Israel (previously known as Jacob) loved Joseph not just for being born to him late in life but because of his inherent goodness. Jacob must have witnessed instances of his other children’s less than desirable behavior even before they hatched that plot against Joseph. The words “more than any other of his children” read “from any of his children,” the preposition *min* (from) implying even greater preference. Israel demonstrated his love when he “made him a long robe with sleeves.” *Kutoneth* is the word for “long robe,” a tunic or inner garment worn next to the skin worn by both men and women, coming down to the knees. “I have put off my garment, how could I put it on” [Sg 5.3]? Compare this *kutoneth* with the garment Hannah had made for her son, Samuel: “And his mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice” [1Sam 2.19]. The word for “little robe” is *mehyl*, an exterior tunic which reached to the ankles but lacked sleeves.

Preferential treatment of Joseph incensed his brothers so much that they “could not speak peaceably with him” [vs. 4]. The Hebrew reads “to peace” (*shalom*); thus the brothers were not able to bring themselves in a peaceable direction, if you will, toward Joseph. This, however, doesn’t mean the brothers were openly hostile; out of respect for their father they held back their deep resentment. Always the question of an inheritance loomed in the background, so it was worthwhile putting up with Joseph. The situation at home must have been tense but to a lesser degree out in the field while the brothers were occupied with tending flocks. Out there the brothers more or less stayed together while Joseph was off elsewhere decked out in that *kutoneth* which must have made him all the more obvious. Keep in mind that Dinah was in the midst of all this tension. The only brothers with whom she could relate were Simeon and Levi, the ones who slew the inhabitants of Shechem (cf. 34.25). Perhaps she felt sympathetic toward Joseph and sought to get those two brothers to think favorably of him...but to no avail.

“Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they only hated him the more” [vs. 5]. *Chalam* is the verbal root last found in 28.12: “And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth and the top of it reached to heaven.” This is the first of a series of dreams by Joseph; perhaps because of this and his father Jacob’s significant dream of a ladder extending into heaven the two had a connection not found among the other brothers. Joseph recounts this dream in a nonchalant, innocent way as if it were normal to speak of such things. He had in mind the sympathy of his father which, he presumed, his brothers shared or if not, might be won over to his position. Joseph shouldn’t have uttered the words in vs. 6 (‘Hear this dream which I have dreamed’). It drew unwanted attention to him while at the same time demonstrating naivete as to his position relative to his brothers who, incidentally, weren’t inclined in the slightest to pay attention. As for their reaction, it’s put well in the literal Hebrew: “and increased again hatred of him.” Ironically the verb *yasaph* (to increase) is used, the same verbal root to the proper name Joseph.

Vs. 7 puts the dream in terms in terms of (wheat) sheaves: “lo, my sheaf arose and stood

upright; and behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf.” The location is not within the house where Jacob might be but out in the field with all the brothers at work. *Alumah* is the word for “sheath” or wheat which has been bound and has one other biblical reference, Ps 126.6: “shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.” Not only did the other sheaves stand upright—it seemed normal to keep them laying on the ground until the harvesters came by—but they stood around Joseph’s sheaf and bowed down to it, the verb being *shachah* last noted in 33.3: “bowing himself to the ground seven times until he came near to his brother.” Not only did *shachah* seem brash to the brothers but above all, blasphemous, as though he were putting himself not so much in God’s place but as their leader. “Are you indeed to reign over us” [vs. 8]? After these words the text observes a second time (echoing vs. 5) “so they hated him yet more, the same verb *yasaph* (to increase) being used. The words “hated him all the more” show that the more Joseph dreams, the brothers’ hatred outmatches it.

Instead of stopping where you’d think it would be prudent for Joseph to stop—perhaps it was at his father’s request that he continue—he recounts to his brothers a second dream, one that even to the casual reader sounds presumptuous. “And behold, the sun, the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me” [vs. 9]. Maybe if the moon and stars were mentioned as bowing down to Joseph his brothers could put up with this nonsense...but the sun? That was the center around which all other planetary bodies rotated, the equivalent of Joseph setting himself up as a god. As for the sun, chances are it alluded to their father, Jacob and the moon, to their mother, Rachel. Even this was too much for Jacob who upon hearing about it, rebuked him, the verb being *gahar* as in Ps 106.9: “He rebuked the Red Sea and it became dry.” Even though the response from Joseph’s eleven brothers was typical—vs. 11 says they were jealous (*qana*; cf. 30.31) of him—they seemed to be more restrained this time around. However, that was on the surface; the brothers became familiar with Joseph’s bragging (or so they considered his claims as such) and toned down their response. Despite Jacob being upset for the first time, he “kept the saying in mind” [vs. 11]. The verb is *shamar* last noted in 31.24: “Take heed that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad.” *Shamar* pertains to keeping of the divine Torah and often is found in lengthy Ps 119, for example, vs. 167: “My soul has kept your testimonies.” In the verse at hand its object is “the saying” or *davar*, the noun from the verbal root to speak. “When the king heard the saying of the man of God” [1Kg 13.4]. There comes to mind Mary’s words “his mother kept all these things in her heart” [Lk 2.51].

“Now his brothers went to pasture their father’s flock near Shechem” [vs. 12]. Shechem is the place the two sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, had destroyed when their sister Dinah was abducted. It must have brought back not-distant memories when they were younger, of first encamping before the city and later fleeing after it was destroyed. Simeon and Levi surely had some haunting memories when they returned to that place. It must have been unsettling for them as shepherds out in the field, each with his own thoughts of that experience. Some years had passed, and it was safe to return; nothing is said whether people re-populated the area or it was left deserted. Just the fact that it was a place suitable for

pasture suggests the latter. Israel (Jacob) sums Joseph and asks him to “see if it is well (*shalom*) with your brothers and with the flock” [vs. 14]. He must have had some concern because Shechem might still have survivors or escapees who well remembered the slaughter. If it had been somewhere else, Israel wouldn’t have dispatched his favorite son. Joseph set out, apparently lost or uncertain as to the location of Shechem (keep in mind that Joseph was the youngest son and wasn’t born at the time of Shechem’s destruction).

“And a man found him wandering in the fields” [vs. 15]. No identity of this person is given, he being one of several biblical characters who make their appearances suddenly and disappear just as suddenly (not unlike the sudden appearance of angels and their equally sudden disappearance), without leaving any trace behind. If it weren’t for them, the narrative would stop there and history would turn out quite differently. Thus we are to be on the look-out for the appearance of such people before it’s too late, and they have disappeared. Note the words of this man, “I have heard them say” which means he was in their company, perhaps having bedded down for the night though this anonymous fellow isn’t identified as being a shepherd. Then again, he could have been a survivor of the slaughter of Shechem, one who intuited the divine mission of Jacob and was spared for the role he is playing right now. This fellow told Joseph that the eleven brothers—chances are they had no need for a retinue or other shepherds, eleven being sufficient—moved on north of Shechem to Dothan (cf. 2Kg 6.13+, the site of a vision of horses and chariots seen by Elisha protecting Israel). As for Dothan during the time at hand, the brothers had been in a deserted place and may have required the purchase of provisions, etc.

Upon hearing this news from the anonymous man, Joseph set off for Dothan. “They saw him afar off and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him” [vs 18]. It wasn’t difficult to spot Joseph off in the distance with his *kutoneth* or long-sleeved garment, standing out against the stark desert landscape. They put two-and-two together, figuring that the anonymous man whom they met at Shechem had done them an unintended favor by directing their brother right into their midst. Judging by the words of vs. 18, a long time ago, the brothers already had hatched a plot to kill Joseph; just the sight of him on the horizon was sufficient to have it spring into reality. *Nakal* is the verb alternately meaning to act fraudulently and has three other biblical references, one of which is Ps 105.25: “He turned their hearts to hate his people, to deal craftily with his servants.” Words which echo this pre-determined sentiment introduce vs. 20 (i.e., vs. 19), “Here comes this dreamer.” The Hebrew text has the noun *bahal* (lord, master) inserted so it reads “Here comes this master of dreams,” *bahal* being employed as an insult.

“Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits” [vs. 20], possibly a pit used for storing rain water. The idea was to attribute Joseph’s death to an attack by a beast which is wild or *rahah*, this adjective alternately meaning “evil,” a word more applicable to the brothers’ intent. Perhaps they thought one such beast would slay Joseph and afterwards cast him into a pit to save the bodily remains for later. The only brother to protest the proposed murder was Reuben: “Let us not take his life” [vs. 21]. Reuben was the first born of Jacob

through Rachel's maidservant, Leah (cf. 29.32). Thus the first born had sympathy with the youngest which implies that earlier he sympathized with Joseph's dreams and their implications of his special favor above the other brothers. Chances are Reuben shared this with his father and mother, Leah. That, however, didn't arouse suspicion among the other ten brothers though they may have suspected Reuben from time to time the way he and Joseph interacted. As vs. 21 says, when "Reuben heard it (the plot), he delivered him out of their hands." That is to say, even before the plot was put into effect Joseph was essentially rescued. *Natsal* is the verb for "delivered," last used in 32.30: "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." It is used also in vs. 22 with the verb *shuv* ('to restore him to his father') which also means to return. Should that plan ever be discovered, the ten brothers would be in for some harsh words, even banishment, from Jacob. The ten went along with Reuben's plan: "they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore" [vs. 24]. The pit into which they threw Joseph was empty of water which means it wasn't too deep, else Joseph would have been injured or even killed by the fall. He says nothing, maintaining silence before the brothers. The same applies to the brothers; they wanted to get the deed over with as quickly as possible and move on. Perhaps Reuben joined in half-heartedly to hide his plan to rescue Joseph so as not to arouse suspicion. Also Reuben and Joseph may have talked about such a possibility much earlier since they had intuited their brothers' evil intent.

"Then they sat down to eat" [vs. 25]. This verse and the preceding one where the brothers stripped Joseph of his robe is reminiscent of the soldiers at Jesus' crucifixion when they had stripped him of his robe and later sat down to cast dice for it. With regard to the verse at hand, this sitting down to eat a meal appears an extra act of cruelty and indifference with their brother in the pit close enough to hear what was going on. Then again, the brothers may have eaten simply to release tension and used it as an occasion to plan their next move. While nervously and hastily gulping down their food—perhaps Reuben stole some and threw some down to Joseph when no one was looking—"they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead...on their way down to Egypt." These were the descendants of Ishmael, son of Hagar, whose father was Abraham. Thus they were outcasts of a sort making their living by trading and had no qualms about dabbling in slavery. The Ishmaelites must have had a distinctive dress for the brothers to recognize them at a distance. So when these traders drew near, Judah, another son of Leah and perhaps co-conspirator with Reuben, intervened to sell Joseph: "let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh" [vs. 27]. The brothers—and that boils down to nine who were intent of getting rid of Joseph—"heeded him." Thus a bargain was struck for twenty shekels of silver, apparently a fair price for a slave. The Ishmaelites didn't care whether Joseph was one of their brothers; all they wanted was to get an extra bonus on their way through, one that came unexpectedly. Chances are that later these same Ishmaelites heard of Joseph's fame in Egypt and approached him for grain during the famine. Given Joseph's generosity toward his own brothers who betrayed him, it can be assumed that he treated these traders the same way. It wouldn't be surprising to hear that he and they may have gotten together to share their mutual story. Then when the famine relented, relations between the Ishmaelites and Egyptians must have improved

dramatically. Thus Joseph's benevolence extended beyond Egypt's borders.

"Then Midianite traders passed by" [vs. 28], a verse which conflicts with the Ishmaelites just noted. Perhaps the brothers discovered that the former group wasn't interested in Joseph nor was satisfied with the twenty shekels of silver, so they moved on. That would account for the verb *havar*, "passed by" with reference to the Midianites who, like the Ishmaelites, were headed toward Egypt. Thus this pit into which Joseph had been thrown was along a north-south caravan route. Even if both groups decided against purchasing Joseph, chances were high that some other south-bound caravan would pass by shortly. So here at the infamous pit were two groups of traders bound for Egypt with the Ishmaelites winning the deal of twenty shekels for Joseph. It must have been considerably painful for Joseph to hear his brother bargaining over his very life with these two groups of traders. Chances are that the Ishmaelites bound Joseph and had him walk alongside or behind the caravan with other slaves they had picked up en route. On occasion he glanced back at his brothers who didn't dare look at him as he faded into the distance.

Apparently Reuben absented himself from this exchange with the traders, for vs. 29 says "When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he rent his clothes." He must have come up with an excuse (for example, to feed the flocks) so as not to be part of the deal nor behold Joseph's expression as he was led away into slavery. Judah remained with his brothers in order to observe what transpired; if Joseph were to go to Egypt or anywhere else, he would follow along with Reuben. That, however, would not materialize. As for Reuben, after he had rent his clothes he cried out "That lad is gone; and I, where shall I go" [vs. 30]? Four words in the Hebrew stand out to depict Reuben's plight by reason of their similar sound, not unlike wailing, and the rapidity with which he utters them: *'ynenu* (not with us), *'any* (I), *'anah* (where) and *'any* (I, used a second time).

The brothers didn't answer Reuben—hardened and stunned as they were—wanting to cover up their betrayal with all possible haste. Their plan? To slaughter a goat, dip Joseph's *kutoneth* in its blood and bring it to their father. Since Jacob (he's called that now instead of Israel) had made that *kutoneth* for Joseph (cf. 37.3), it was an especially heartless thing to do. "See whether it is your son's robe or not" [vs. 32]: cruel, impersonal words on one hand but on the other, a way to conceal the brothers' guilt and shame. We hear nothing of that until much later when Joseph reveals himself to them. Immediately Jacob recognized the *kutoneth*, the verb *nakar* last being noted with regard to Jacob and his father, Isaac: "And because he (Isaac) did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him" [27.23]. Jacob came to the conclusion on his own that "a wild beast had devoured him; Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces" [vs. 33]. The brothers didn't say Joseph was attacked by a wild beast, thinking the bloodied *kutoneth* was sufficient proof. Like his son Reuben (cf. vs. 29), Jacob rent his garments and took it a step further by fasting many days while dressed in sackcloth. At this point "All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him" [vs. 35]. The verb *qum* (rose) indicate the suddenness and unity of all Jacob's children in response to their father's sorrow. Note that the plural "daughters" is

used; Dinah is the only female recorded among the twelve males born to Jacob. For those nine brothers who conspired fully against Joseph, this act of *qum* was marked by a feigned sorrow. Why Reuben and Simeon didn't inform their father is anyone's guess. Perhaps they feared revenge and end up the same way as their youngest brother. *Nacham* had been noted several times earlier, a united effort by the children to relieve their father. Nothing is said about Rachel, Leah nor their respective handmaids, but emphasis here is upon the false sorrow and equally false comfort of the brothers. Obviously the two just mentioned were touched more to the heart; Jacob may have intuited something was not quite right but decided to let it ride. Only later in extreme old age would he know the truth.

“No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning” [vs. 35]. Such was Jacob's response to his family's attempt at comforting him. Actually he would be better off going to Sheol if Joseph had in fact been murdered; hearing this simply would have been too much for him. As for Sheol, here is the first mention of this term in the Bible considered as a subterranean place full of thick darkness. Given that Joseph had been cast into a pit (a dried up well), Jacob may have come up with that as an analogy to his plight, that Jacob was down in the same pit as his first-born son. “In Sheol, who can give you praise” [Ps 6.5]?

Despite the pitiful condition of Jacob having been lied to by many of his sons with two of them too afraid to say or do anything, Chapter Thirty-Seven ends on a note of cautious hope: “Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him (Joseph) in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard” [vs. 36]. Perhaps en route to Egypt the traders compared Joseph with other slaves and caught a glimpse of his intelligence and ability to interpret dreams. This may have happened around even campfires when the Midianites were sharing stories and personal facts, some of which Joseph must have overheard. If Joseph were not an exceptional slave, they wouldn't have sold him to a captain of the guard directly but put him up in one of the many slave markets in Egypt.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

This chapter forms an interlude in the story Joseph right after he had been sold into slavery in Egypt. At first it seems disconnected, but it performs the role of allowing us a breather in the dramatic events that just occurred. Through the chapter at hand our attention is side-tracked to follow the fate of one of the brothers and indirectly, the consequences of his actions with respect to Joseph. We have no information about the other eight who formed the conspiracy; perhaps each one may have had a similar experience though not as prolonged nor as dramatic.

The period covered by Chapter Thirty-Eight certainly is longer than the time between Joseph's betrayal and his actual arrival in Egypt. Then again, thinking in temporal, linear terms isn't what Genesis is about which doesn't mean the text operates outside it. “It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers” [vs. 1]. The actual reason for Judah's going down isn't specified; all he wanted was to get away from scene of the

crime. *Heth* is the word for “time” first noted in 18.10 and can apply to an opportunity not unlike the Greek *kairos*. “At an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of your steadfast love answer me” [Ps 69.13]. In the case at hand, *heth* is a less than acceptable time, the occasion when Joseph was sold into slavery. Perhaps of the nine brothers who consented to his betrayal (murder, almost) the burden of that incident was too much for Judah that he had to break away from his brothers. That means eight of the original nine were left, down by one quarter of their original strength. Interestingly *heth* is used with the words “from (*min*) his brothers,” that is, apart...separated or almost cut off...from them. Judah’s “going down” (*yarad* or descent) is “to a certain Adullamite whose name was Hirah” or to the vicinity of Bethlehem. After vs. 12 he passes off the scene completely. This *yarad* appears intentional, as though Judah had some kind of foreknowledge of Hirah which perhaps he did. Anyway, the sense of this verse is that Judah knew about Hirah and went to him with a specific purpose in mind, perhaps guidance for what had happened.

While with Hirah Judah “saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua” [vs. 2]. The appearance of this woman seems as an after-though or secondary to Judah’s reason for visiting Hirah. The same verse continues with the terse words “he married her and went into her” which means she conceived and bore a son whom Judah called Er which possibly means something akin to “city.” Er was the first of three sons born to Shua, the second being Onan and the third, Shelah. The pace of action has picked up considerably, and now “Judah took a wife for Er his first-born, and her name was Tamar” [vs 6]. How he chose this woman is not disclosed, but given Er’s wicked nature soon to be manifest in full, Judah must have considered her a calming influence. And all the while thoughts of Joseph were going through his mind, inescapable, really. At the same time Judah must have been wondering what he got himself into, that he was back with his brothers. “But Er, Judah’s first-born, was wicked in the sight of the Lord” [vs. 7]. *Rah* is the adjective for “wicked” and was several times earlier. That’s pretty much what is said about Er though the text does not elaborate. Deep down Judah must have felt a certain kinship with the *rah* of his first-born, for he himself and most of his brothers were *rah* to varying degrees. Apparently Er didn’t live long, for vs. 7 continues directly with “and the Lord slew him,” *moth* being the verb which more specifically means “to die” but can apply to death being administered from without. Again, the text doesn’t elaborate upon the death of Er.

With the first-born out of the way, Judah bade Onan (second in birth) to marry Tamar: “perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her and raise up offspring for your brother” [vs. 8]. *Yavam* is the verb, the only other biblical uses being Dt 25.5 & 7, the first reading “If brothers dwell together, and one of them died and has no son, the wife of the dead shall not be married outside the family to a stranger; her husband’s brother shall go in to her (etc.)” This commandment can trace its roots all the way back to the call of Abraham and his subsequent sojourning in the foreign land of Canaan, of the divine command not to intermarry but wait until they gain sufficient strength to dominate. That was very much an issue at the time of the incident at hand...more so, for the grasp upon Canaan remained tenuous. So the issue is more than Onan having “spilled his semen on the ground” [vs. 10]; it was his

disregard for the future of Abraham's descendants. Note, however, that Judah himself violated the divine commandment well before Onan by having taken in marriage Shua, "the daughter of a certain Canaanite" [vs. 2]. It turned out that Onan "did was displeasing in the sight of the Lord, and he slew him also" [vs. 10]. *Rahah* (the root for *rah*, evil, as in vs. 7) is the verb for "displeasing" used to describe Onan's disobedience to fulfil his familial role; such evil seems to run in the family starting with Judah himself and passing over to his first-born Er and now his second-born son. How and when the Lord slew (*moth* is used here as it was in vs. 7) isn't spelled out, just the fact that Onan had died at the Lord's hands.

Now everything falls upon the third and last son of Judah, that is, Shelah, who is much younger than his two brothers slain by the Lord. That must have struck terror into the boy because "he feared he would die like his brothers" [vs. 11] and was thus restrained from following his brothers' footsteps; besides, Shelah has the advantage of being considerably younger and more malleable. Judah was deeply concerned about Shelah, for he asked Tamar to "remain a widow in your father's house until Shelah my son grows up" [vs. 11]. All this intimates the passage of considerable time. One can only guess what Judah's brothers were thinking about...or had they decided to write him off? At an unspecified time Judah does return to them, for he goes down to Egypt where they all meet Joseph. Thus the incident with Tamar comes to an abrupt close. Another event, more important, was developing: the rise of Joseph in Pharaoh's court which would have much broader effects.

Vs. 12 shifts gears with Judah and his friend Hirah (the original purpose of his visit) going up to Timnah, in order to meet his sheep shearers or after the death of Judah's wife. Tamar "was told" [vs. 13] about this implying that either others had spied for her or she found out simply through gossip, the latter seems more plausible. That caused Tamar to put off her widow's garments "and put on a veil, wrapping herself up" [vs. 24]. The verb *kasah* ('put on') means to cover or conceal and even to pardon. "And covered us with deep darkness" [Ps 44.19]. Thus *kasah* ties in well with "veil" or *tsahyph* (only one other use in addition to the two instances at hand), the last reference being 24.65: "So she (Rebekah) took her veil and covered (*kasah*) herself." Not only did Tamar conceal her face thoroughly, she "wrapped herself up" or *halaph* which alternately means to languish, faint, and has four biblical references one of which is Sg 5.14: "His body is ivory work, encrusted with sapphires." Once Tamar cover and face and body, she sat by the entrance to Enaim hoping to catch sight of Judah as he journeyed to Timnah. Jumping to vs. 15, Judah sees Tamar, most likely as he was traveling with Shelah who by this time had grown up; seeing Shelah automatically made her realize that "she had not been given to him in marriage" [vs. 14]. Such head-to-toe concealment prevents Judah from recognize Tamar; instead, he confuses her veiled face and wrapped body as the guise of a harlot. Though the earlier verses don't allude to this, it appears that such was Tamar's intent to capture the attention of Judah.

So without even bothering to ask Tamar to reveal even a bit of herself, Judah gets right down to business: "Come, let me come into you" [vs. 16]. Like a true harlot, Tamar asks a price for her services which is "a kid from the flock" [vs. 17]. Not only that, Tamar requests a

pledge or *heravon*, the other two biblical references being in vss. 18 and 20 as well as Job 17.3: “Lay down a pledge for me with yourself.” As *heravon* she requests from Judah three items which are readily visible: “your signet and your cord and your staff that is in your hand” [vs. 18]. The most important item is the signet or *chotam*, a means by which Judah would affix his ownership to a document. “The engraving of a signet, ‘Holy to the Lord’” [Ex 28.30]. With that in her possession, Tamar had the equivalent of a credit card and could do anything she wished in Judah’s name. Judah unhesitatingly gives the *chotam* and other two items into her possession which reveals his desire to have sexual intercourse, and this with a woman he cannot even see. It was only after this encounter that Tamar exchanged her full wrap-up for her widow clothes (cf. vs. 19).

Next Judah sends to Tamar the pledge of a kid through Hirah, but she was no where to be found. Hirah asked about the “harlot” or *qedeshah* which is related directly to the verb *qadash* (to be holy). Thus a *qedeshah* is a cult prostitute, no ordinary harlot; only two other uses of this word are in the Bible, both here. When Hirah reported back to Judah, he said “Let her keep the things as her own lest we be laughed at” [vs. 23]. In other words, Judah wished to disassociate himself from the disguised Tamar who still retained his *chotam* or signet. It was only three months later that Judah discovered the identity of Tamar as the harlot/cult prostitute, and she was pregnant. Without any expression of surprise or anger Judah requests that she be brought out to be burned because she was “with child by harlotry” [vs. 24]. However, Judah acknowledged the signet, cord and staff which made him explain that Tamar was “more righteous than I inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah” [vs. 27]. In other words, Tamar didn’t abuse Judah’s signet and was thus more “righteous” or *tsedeq* than he, one of the finest qualities to be attributed by one person to another, especially by a man to a woman.

With the tense situation of Tamah possibly being burned alive now resolved, she gave birth to twins. The midwife attached to first one exiting her womb a “scarlet thread” or *shany*, vs. 30 containing the only other biblical use of this term which can’t but make one think of that “scarlet cord” (*chut*) the spies sent to reconnoiter Jericho gave to the prostitute Rahab as a signal: “Behold, when we come into the land, you shall bind this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down” [Josh 2.18]. As for the *shany*, perhaps the midwife wished to tag the first of the twins as it emerged from the womb so as not to confuse the two. This proved accurate, for that baby withdrew his hand while the second baby came out. By reason of this she (and that could be either Tamar or the midwife) exclaimed “What a breach you have made for yourself” [vs. 29]! The noun for “breach” is *parets*, the verbal root *parats* also being used; *parats* was last noted in 28.14: “and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south.” As for the noun *parets*, cf. Ps 106.23: “Therefore he said he would destroy them, had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him.” The next child to emerge from the womb—and this is reminiscent of the birth of Isaac and Esau—is named Zerah, the one with the scarlet thread or *shany* which the midwife used to identify him. The source of this proper name isn’t given as with Perez though it derives from the verbal root *zarach*, to rise (as the sun). Both brothers, born of

Judah, later were to become rivals, and Perez (the first-born was an ancestor of King David (cf. Rt 4.18-22).

Now that this interlude of Judah having left his brothers is ended, the text returns to Joseph who by now has been sold in Egypt. Tamar, around whom much of Chapter Thirty-Eight had revolved, is not heard of again though we can surmise that she accompanied Judah back to his brothers and later, with them all into Egypt.

Chapter Thirty-Nine

“Now Joseph was taken to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there.” The introductory word of a new chapter such as “now,” “when” and “meanwhile” generally is represented by the Hebrew connective *w-* prefaced to the first word which means “and.” Thus *w-* signifies continuous action and unites all the disparate events of Genesis into a single whole. This is the second and only time Potiphar is mentioned by name, the other being 37.36 which is basically the same as the verse at hand. Mention of it here takes place after the Tamar interlude, to remind us of the basic direction of the story. This fellow was an officer or *sarys*, this term alternately meaning a eunuch or any member of a court. “And they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon” [Is 39.7]. However, being a physical eunuch doesn’t seem to be the case with this man because he is married. Perhaps the Ishmaelites knew where to go in order to get a good price for Joseph or Potiphar himself made the rounds looking for new slaves, hence sealing Joseph’s fate. From this point the Ishmaelites dissolve into history, making their way back to Canaan with more goods to be traded, pretty much the story of their lives. If they found themselves caught in Egypt during the forth-coming seven year famine, they were fortunate to have fallen into the hands of Joseph’s care. Then again, they could have made considerable profit during the famine itself by hiking the price of their goods, including slaves. Another phrase which identifies Potiphar and therefore indicative of his important position is “captain of the guard,” *tabach* being the word for the latter which alternately means cook or executioner; the verbal root *tavach* means to kill for food. “And all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down the walls around Jerusalem” [2Kg 25.10].

“The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man” [vs. 2]. This “with-ness” isn’t spelled out but left for our imagination. Some of what it means can be gleaned from our earlier information about Joseph, his indignation at how his brothers behaved and his inclination to see dreams as foretelling future events, both of which endeared him to his father, another dreamer. These qualities stand out all the more against the background of his brothers, three-quarters of whom were treacherous. Then there’s the unmentioned sister named Dinah whom we don’t hear about. Some of the divine “with-ness” may be intuited by how the Lord made Joseph successful, the verb being *tsalach* as in 24.21: “The man gazed at her (Rebekah) in silence to learn whether the Lord had prospered his journey or not.” The text doesn’t say how *tsalach* is achieved but can be intimated by reason of the position held

by Potiphar, “captain of the guard.” The place from which Joseph carried out his duties was “in the house of his master” [vs. 3] meaning that he resided comfortably in a substantial household close to the center of political and economic activity. To Potiphar’s credit, he “saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord caused all that he did to prosper in his hands” [vs. 3]. That means Potiphar had some acquaintance with the Lord either directly or through people like the Ishmaelites who brought captives from Jacob’s extended clan in the land of Canaan. Also some of Abraham’s descendants may have found their way into Egypt and took up residence there. As in most instances of this kind it was a matter of both; whomever Potiphar came into contact with had made a profound impact which enabled him to recognize the Lord working in his newly acquired slave. Besides, Potiphar wasn’t like Joseph’s brothers who indeed “saw” Joseph many a time yet were jealous. The verb *tsalach* is used a second time, here with the Hebrew text reading literally “in his hand” or in all the activity Joseph had undertaken.

“So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house, and put him in charge of all he had” [vs. 4]. “Found favor” or *chen* (grace; see 33.15) suggests that Joseph had to prove himself which he did from the day he ended up in Potiphar’s household. In other words, Joseph didn’t have an easy time of it. This *chen*, if you will, is manifested in three ways: 1) *sharath* is the verb for “attended” which means to perform the chores of a servant and often is applied to priestly service. “They (Levites) shall tend it and shall encamp around the tabernacle” [Num 1.50]. 2) “made him overseer” or *paqad* (cf. 21.1: “The Lord visited Sarah as he had said”) with respect to his house. *Paqad* is a verb with multiple meanings with the general idea being to take care of. 3) “Put in charge” which reads in Hebrew “and all which was to him he gave into his hand.” All three commissions are of the highest order which shows the wonderful relationship between the master and slave, the latter quickly being elevated to master in his own right. It was based, of course, upon that mutual recognition of the Lord being at work as vs. 3 says so well, “(Potiphar) saw that the Lord was with him” and that was repaid by Joseph acknowledging the same with regard to Potiphar. In addition to this exceptional relationship Potiphar must have felt relieved. At last he has found a man on whom he could rely completely and now take it easy. Though Potiphar, by reason of his position and technically owner of Joseph, received the honor his servant brought him, the divine connection between the two transcended that utilitarian one. Note that all this had one purpose in mind which Joseph and Potiphar didn’t see clearly though they had intimations of it: “the Lord blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake”...and not just for Joseph but for those wayward brothers of his who would later come into Egypt. One final observation is made about the relationship between Potiphar and Joseph, deliberately so, to heighten the tragedy that is to befall Joseph shortly. “So he left all that he had in Joseph’s charge” [vs. 6]. The verb *hazav* is used which alternately means to loose, abandon and reveals the complete trust the master had in his servant. As for Potiphar, the only thing he had to concern himself was “the food which he ate.” That can mean either procuring or preparing it or perhaps worrying whether anyone had put poison into it, a way enemies might employ to get not just at him but at Joseph. During the course of their budding relationship Joseph must have informed Potiphar

of his betrayal. If eight of eleven brothers could do such a deed motivated by jealousy, Potiphar better be on guard for his own life.

“Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking” [vs. 6]. This sentence continues from the last about Potiphar and in the **RSV**, begins a new paragraph. In the Hebrew text the same adjective *yaphah* (handsome; it pertains to being bright) is used twice, that is, with regard appearance (*to’ar* suggests form) and sight (*mar’eh*; from the verbal root *ra’ah*, to see). An identically structure sentence can be found in 26.7: “Because she (Rachel) was fair to look upon.” As for an example of *yaphah*, see Sg 1.8: “Oh, fairest among women.” The opening words of vs. 7 in Hebrew reads literally “and after these things “meaning not after a description of Joseph’s physique but after Potiphar had established him firmly in charge. Because of Joseph’s physical attractiveness, immediately the wife of Potiphar is drawn to him (we never get to know her name), an attraction signified by the fact that she “cast her eyes upon Joseph,” *nasa’* being the verb which means to lift up, raise and last found in 18.24: “Will you not then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it?” The verse at hand means that the eyes of the wife of Potiphar were heavy indeed, so heavy that she was forced to raise them up and let them come crashing down upon Joseph. She further aggravates the situation verbally: “Lie with me” [vs. 7]. While this part of the saga unfolds, it must have been close to impossible escaping this woman because Joseph was “in the house of his master” [vs. 2] meaning that both were constantly under the same roof.

In his frustration, Joseph says rather sternly that his master Potiphar has “no concern about anything in the house” [vs. 8]. The verb here is *yadah* or to know in the sense of having intimate sexual relationships as well as a thorough knowledge of Potiphar’s affairs. Surprisingly, Joseph says that Potiphar “is not greater in this house than I am” which seems true. However, given the wife’s determination to lie with Joseph, she must have come up with a pretense to come on all the more stronger which she did. Joseph concludes his admonition with a rhetorical question: “How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God” [vs. 9]? She may have had a vague clue as to what Joseph was talking about from her husband who seemed to have special knowledge of the God worshiped by Joseph (‘his master saw that the Lord was with him,’ vs. 3). Perhaps Joseph was hoping this woman would stop right there but unfortunately did not. Clearly she did not share that special bond between Joseph and Potiphar.

“Although she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her” [vs. 10]. The Hebrew way of putting “day after day” suggests this nagging: *yom yom* or “day day.” You’d think that such persistence would become known to household servants, but apparently Potiphar’s wife was careful enough to nag Joseph when the two were alone. However, this was bound to come to a head one day when the two were alone in the house (cf. vs. 11). Again the familiar words, “Lie with me” which by this time must have become something of a joke. While not strictly so, he had “left his garment in her hand” [vs. 12] after he fled from her presence. This doesn’t suggest that Joseph was indeed attracted to the woman but treated her constant nagging by suddenly turning heels in the opposite direction. This time

it was different. Inadvertently Joseph did his familiar gesture but not quickly enough, for “he left his garment in her hand” [vs. 12]. *Bagad* is the general term for “garment” as in 27.15 (“Then Rebekah took the best garments of Esau her older son”) and since we’re dealing with Joseph, it cannot but remind us of that *kutoneth* Jacob had made for him (37.3), the same one Joseph’s brothers dipped in goat’s blood. In other words, this is the second instance a garment got Joseph into trouble.

Although Potiphar’s wife couldn’t win over Joseph, she had some choice words which she must have rehearsed, namely, that her husband “has brought among us a Hebrew to insult us” [vs. 14]. This is the second time “Hebrew” is used in Genesis, the first being 14.13: “The one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew.” So in a sense this vengeful woman acknowledges Joseph’s pedigree (again most likely picked up from her husband Potiphar and his sympathy with Joseph’s God) which increased her anger. The verb *tsachaq* is used for “insult” which fundamental means to laugh as in 18.12: “So Sarah laughed to herself.” As for Joseph, nothing could be further from the truth, but he had no witnesses except the woman who won out by reason of her status as Potiphar’s wife. After she finished weaving her lie to “men of her household” [vs. 14], she “laid up his garment by her until his master came home.” That is to say, she didn’t want the “men of the household” nor anyone else rush off to Potiphar. She wanted to savor the drama for later in the evening upon his return home when the house would be filled with all the servants and perhaps invited guests. Without a doubt, that would heighten the impact, and she must have enjoyed working out over and over in her mind how and what to say to Potiphar upon his arrival most likely with the “men of the household” all lined up at the door. This meticulous preparation is revealed by the observation, “and she told him (Potiphar) the same story” [vs. 17].

As for Potiphar, he believed his wife’s story though may have had misgivings. Just the fact that she was so devious didn’t escape him, especially in light of Joseph’s benign and calming presence in his household. Nevertheless, Potiphar was confronted not only by his wife but by his entire household and perhaps invited guests, so his only choice was to accept her point of view. Vs. 19 has the woman saying to Potiphar “This is the way your servant treated me,” words which he may not have been inclined to believe but nevertheless consented. The Hebrew has *kadvarym* (literally, ‘as words,’ *davar* being the root which means to speak) to express “this is the way” meaning that Potiphar had no other choice to rely upon his wife’s words, her account of the story. Although Joseph had fled the woman’s presence, he may have remained inside until Potiphar returned home, hoping for vindication. He could have been watching with anxiety from behind a pillar or at the top of stairs watching this dramatic encounter, of a woman belittling her husband who had put such trust in a slave. We don’t hear more about Potiphar nor of his wife; both must have followed Joseph’s rise to second under Pharaoh and feared some sort of revenge, but nothing comes of it, another demonstration of the *chesed* so characteristic of Joseph.

“And Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison” [vs. 20]. This is the third and final humiliation Joseph had to endure, the first being revilement by his brothers and then

having been sold into slavery. Throughout his travails Joseph stands out by reason of never complaining, a temptation that had escaped none of his predecessors; it's a wholly different tone in Genesis, setting the stage for future great ones of Israel until Jesus Christ himself. The word for "prison" is *beyth hasohar* or something like "house of the tower," *sohar* being such within which often is located a prison. As for this word, it is found only in the context of the Joseph story, nowhere else in the Bible. This prison was not an ordinary one but belonged to the king or Pharaoh. That means the prisoners were high ranking or guilty of a crime like treason. Surely Pharaoh himself must have been informed of Joseph's imprisonment though chances are he didn't inquire further since he wasn't guilty of a crime against the state. Despite this imprisonment, "the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison" [vs. 21]. How the Lord was with Joseph isn't spelled out, a fact which Potiphar himself had recognized in vs. 3. Given the text, Joseph stood out by reason of his virtue and kindness, but as to how Joseph related to the Lord is left to our imagination. The verb *natah* is used for "showed" which means "to stretch out, extend." From this being-with Joseph there also was an extending of steadfast love or *chesed*, that virtually untranslatable word noted earlier on several occasions. Even though *chesed* isn't mentioned earlier with regard to Joseph, it's easy to assume that is the trait people recognized in him...all except those brothers of his who betrayed him. This *chesed* was so obvious to someone like the jailer that he saw it in terms of favor or *chen* as did Potiphar (cf. vs. 4). Fortunately for the royal prisoners they were on the receiving end of Joseph's *chesed* because "the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's care all the prisoners" [vs. 22]. So with this charge, the jailer "paid no need to anything that was in Joseph's care" [vs. 23] *me'umah* being the word for "anything whatever." This verse concludes with the now familiar refrain "the Lord was with him" and adds "whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper," the verb being *tsalach* as in vs. 3: "and that the Lord caused all that he did to prosper in his hands."

Chapter Forty

This chapter begins with "Some time after this" or in Hebrew, "and after these things (*davar*, also as 'word')," an unspecified amount of time but an apparently long one. It took time for Joseph and his fellow prisoners to built up a rapport among each other which quickly caught the jailer's attention and others affiliated with the prison. After all, these weren't your run-of-the-mill prisoners but most likely highly trained and educated men who fell out of favor with Pharaoh. All seemed to be living in less than dire conditions, the prison being a society with a society. And with Joseph in charge, prison was better than the society outside. Vs. 1 continues with mention of the king's butler (*mashqeh*: steward of the house) and baker having committed unspecified offenses. *Chata'* is the verb at hand and has overtones of archery, namely, to miss the mark. It was last noted in 20.6: "and it was I who kept you from sinning against me." Such "missing the mark" as to the two officials caused Pharaoh to become angry or *qatsaph* which fundamentally means to break or break forth. "I was angry with my people, I profaned my heritage" [Is 47.6]. These two men were put into the "house of the captain of the guard" which seems a more specific place within that *sohar* or prison

first mentioned in 39.20. This “house” is a more ample residence, not unlike a place where the two were kept under a kind of house arrest. Joseph was in charge of that as well, having been delegated by the captain of the guard (cf. vs. 4). Curiously vs. 4 adds that “he (Joseph) waited on them” possibly meaning that the two were of such high rank that they required this, the verb being *sharath* as in 39.4: “So Joseph found favor in his (Potiphar) sight and attended him.” Finally vs. 4 gives us a clue as to the duration of Joseph’s imprisonment: “and they continued for some time (literally, ‘many days’) in custody.” As for all three, no precise time is given for the sentence of each, possibly life.

“And one night they both dreamed—the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt” [vs. 5]. This dream appears to have taken place after those “many days” of their imprisonment. The dream of each man had a different meaning or *pitron*, a word occurring only within this context and nowhere else in the Bible and meaning to interpret a dream, again only appearing within this context. Both men didn’t disclose their dream to anyone; however, Joseph saw that they “were troubled” or *zahaph*, a verb meaning to be angry or sad. “When a man’s folly brings his way to ruin, his heart rages against the Lord” [Prov 19.3]. At this juncture nothing is said whether the butler shared his *zahaph* with the baker or visa versa; both were too troubled, thinking that anyone who listened to them would disregard them. Finally Joseph says “Why are your faces downcast today” [vs. 7]? *Rah* is the adjective for “downcast” and means “evil;” it and was last noted in 38.7: “But Er, Judah’s first-born, was wicked in the sight of the Lord.” So in addition to their faces being troubled, they had a touch of wickedness about them or more accurately, that evil had come to them in the form of a dream and with bad foreboding for the future. When the men expressed their frustration because no one was able to interpret (*patar*) their dreams, Joseph responds with a question, “Do not interpretations belong to God” [vs. 8]? That is, Joseph does not usurp this interpretive role even though by now those in prison must have known about it first-hand. The verb used in vs. 8 for “tell” (that is, the dreams) is *saphar* which means to inscribe or narrate. With the association of writing in mind here, perhaps the butler and baker wrote down some of their thoughts or images from their respective dreams which they now proceed to tell Joseph.

First the butler recounts his dream to Joseph...in private, away from the prying ears of the baker and other prisoners, a dream which consisted of a vine with three branches. Once the clusters ripened into grapes, the butler took the cup of Pharaoh, squeezed the grapes into it and placed the cup into Pharaoh’s hand. This seems like a simple, straight-forward dream for which not to become *zahaph* or get worked up about as in vs. 6. What must have troubled the butler, however, was no response from Pharaoh who could have been pleased or angry with his butler. All the while the butler was communicating this—*saphar* in the sense of writing it down or scratching out images—Joseph was listening intently to see what was transpiring. He saw the dream’s meaning clearly, but where he truly showed divine inspiration was taking the butler’s dream one step forward into the future. And that future was the butler’s restoration to Pharaoh’s favor. Perhaps this is why we never see Joseph upset. He is able to see just one step ahead with regard to those he dealt with as well as his

personal life and let events unfold accordingly. As for the butler, “within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office” [vs. 13]. That indeed happened three days from the time Joseph interpreted the butler’s dream. Joseph was certain it was to happen which is why he asked the butler to remember him: “when it is well with you, and do me the kindness, I pray you, to make mention of me to Pharaoh and so get me out of this house” [vs. 14]. Joseph wished this man to show *chesed* or kindness, the same as shown by the Lord himself in 39.21. Here for the first time we see the desperation of Joseph, that while he was in relatively good standing, still he was not free and confined to prison. Joseph shows himself for the first time as a kind of chatterbox, of opening up to the butler how he got into prison, referring to it for the first time as a dungeon or *bor*, more accurately, a pit or sepulcher. Equating the prison with a *bor* must have reminded Joseph of those short but terrifying hours of being in the *bor* of 37.20: “and they took him and cast him into a pit.” We don’t hear how the butler responded; possibly he was more intent upon getting out within three days and thus dealt with Joseph politely and with profuse though shallow thanks. Joseph did tell the butler that he had been stolen from the “land of the Hebrews,” nothing more. Nor does he recount how he ended up in prison, supposedly by going after Potiphar’s wife. That must have been common knowledge, hence the reason why the butler may have had some reservations about Joseph despite his kindness.

“When the chief baker saw that the interpretation (*patar*) was favorable.” So begins vs. 16 which suggests that the baker must have gotten word of the butler’s favorable (*tov*: the common adjective for ‘good’) result...not that he was at hand but the butler was so joyful that he couldn’t help but tell his fellow prisoners. In sum, the baker dreamed of three cake baskets on his heat on top of which were baked goods for Pharaoh. However, birds were taking food from that basket. Joseph listened just as intently to the baker’s dream and now offered his *patar* or interpretation which too had its force by projecting into the future where the dream left off. Just the fact that birds were taking bits and pieces of baked goods destined for Pharaoh’s table did not forebode well for the baker who must have had enough common sense to realize that. And so his fears concurred with Joseph’s *patar*: “within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head—from you!—and hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat the flesh from you” [vs. 19]. As with the butler, we have no response from the baker. Those three days must have been the longest in his life, knowing full well the fate in store for him.

This incident ends on a rather pessimistic note. Once the butler was restored to his position and the baker had been hanged, all as predicted by Joseph, we have vs. 23 with “Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph but forgot him.” Despite Joseph having come close to begging the butler to mention him to Pharaoh, the butler’s lack of response foreshadows this. However, the butler did come through for Joseph two years later as 41.9 recounts.

Chapter Forty-One

The last chapter ends with “(the chief butler) forgot him,” and the present chapter begins

with “After two whole years.” At first glance this is a depressing interval during which Joseph pretty much dropped of the scene after his encounter with Pharaoh’s two officials. We have no information about him during that period; to be sure, he wasn’t languishing away but maintained that *chesed* or “steadfast love” [39.21] which the Lord continued to show him and which, in turn, he passed onto his fellow prisoners and jailers. One gets the impression that Joseph would continue this *chesed* even if he remained imprisoned for the rest of his life. You could say he was born into it whether he liked it or not.

Now Pharaoh himself has a dream, that he was by the Nile River from which came “seven cows sleek and fat” [vs. 2]. *Yaphah* and *bary’* are the two adjectives, the former used with the noun *mar’eh* meaning “sight” or “appearance” (cf. 39.6: ‘Joseph was handsome and good-looking’). The latter is also applicable to the corn in vs. 5; another use is Ps 73.4: “For they have no pangs; their bodies are sound and sleek.” These cows head for the reed grass or *’achu*, the only other use of this noun being vs. 18. Immediately after these healthy cows came from the Nile, Pharaoh beholds seven others which were “gaunt and thin” [vs. 3]. *Rah* is the adjective similarly used with *mar’eh* or appearance; basically *rah* means evil or wicked, and judging from not just the last use but from others, this word has broader application: “Why are your faces downcast today” [40.7]? Both groups of cows stood close to each other, and soon the gaunt ones ate those which were healthy. A brief sentence which is part of vs. 4 puts the conclusion nicely: “And Pharaoh awoke.”

By no means was this the end of Pharaoh’s dream, for he had a second one: “behold, seven ears of grain, plump and good, were growing on one stalk” [vs. 5]. Like the first dream, this one begins with *hineh* (behold) which in this instance signifies astonishment and surprise at the content of the dream. Like their bovine predecessors, the first group of seven is *bary’* and *tov*; the first adjective is applied to the fat cows, and the common adjective for “good” is used. Shortly afterwards “behold, after them sprouted seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind” [vs. 6]. The two descriptive words at hand are *daq* and *shadaph*: the former applies to anything slender or thin as well as a fine dust particle. “And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as hoarfrost on the ground” [Ex 16.14]. As for the latter, only two other biblical references are used, both in the same context. Pharaoh awoke immediately after the blighted ears ate the healthy ones, again at a loss but comforted that “it was a dream” [vs. 7].

“So in the morning his spirit was troubled” [vs. 8]. This doesn’t include the previous night when Pharaoh must have been equally troubled. The verb here is *paham* meaning to strike, beat, and was referenced to earlier in another context. One gets the idea that the dream beat upon Pharaoh’s spirit or *ruach* during the night until it woke him up. Refer to Dn 2.3, a context similar to the one at hand where King Nebuchadnezzar was troubled not unlike Pharaoh: “I had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream.” For Pharaoh, the first task was to calm himself down after which he “sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men” [vs. 8]. One gets the impression that Pharaoh had sent messengers to scour the entire country, rooting out any and all magician he could find.

Despite the magnitude of the task, it was rather simple and straight-forward: magicians were well-known in their communities, so it was easy to pick them out. *Chartom* is the word for “magician” which can apply to sacred scribes versed in writing hieroglyphics. Reference to it is limited to this incident, later with Moses and Daniel. “Then the king commanded that the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and Chaldeans be summoned to tell the king his dream” [Dan 2.2; in the context of King Nebuchadnezzar just cited]. In addition to *chartom* we have the “wise men” or those endowed with the gift of *chakmah* (wisdom). Another Pharaoh was to do the same thing in Ex 7.11, only to perform a miracle: “Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers.” As for expressing himself, the verb *saphar* in vs. 8 is used (‘told’) which as in the same context of 40.8, can apply to Pharaoh writing down hieroglyphs or symbols as he attempted to communicate his dreams.

Despite this unusual assembly “there was none who could interpret it (the plural ‘them’ is used, i.e., the dreams) to Pharaoh” [vs. 8], that is to say, no one was present among all the magicians who could *patar* or interpret the dream, this verb last noted in the context of Joseph concerning the butler and cook. This must have been cause for much embarrassment in the assembly, each magician recalling what Pharaoh had done to the chief baker (cf. 40.18-19). Since the occasion was formal with Pharaoh presiding, it was natural for him to have his chief butler on hand. During the assembly this man broke in with the words “I remember my faults today” [vs. 9], that is, he began with words of obeisance not to arouse Pharaoh’s anger a second time during such delicate proceedings. The chief butler spells out what he wishes to say—and this was approximately two years ago according to vs. 1 of this chapter—of how Joseph had interpreted both his dream and that of the chief cook and how both had fared. “And as he (Joseph) interpreted to us, so it came to pass” [vs. 13]. That incident must have jogged Pharaoh’s memory because he “sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon” [vs. 14]. *Ruts* is the verb for “brought hastily” meaning to run. “I will suddenly make them run away from her” [Jer 49.19]. *Bor* is mentioned again for “dungeon,” that pit into which Joseph had been cast by his brothers. Thus Pharaoh of Egypt draws Joseph from his second *bor* and now sets him on course to become second in charge of the country. Symbolic of this change is that before entering the presence of Pharaoh and the assembled magicians, Joseph shaved and changed his clothes.

Once all this had been done in haste, Pharaoh recounted to Joseph his dream adding that “there is no one who can interpret it” [vs. 14], a dig at the notables on hand as well as a threat to Joseph himself who, if he couldn’t fulfil Pharaoh’s request, would end up just like his chief baker. Joseph responded truthfully: “It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer” [vs. 17]. And so we have a confrontation between Joseph and the Lord before the magicians not unlike that which was to take place centuries later between other magicians and Moses. The point is not the correct interpretation of Pharaoh’s dream but the supremacy of the Lord over any occult powers as well as favoring the stock of Joseph. As for the word “favorable,” it is *shalom*: the Lord will give an answer of peace, if you will. This word is appropriate, for Pharaoh was so troubled that he took the effort of summoning in haste all the magicians of Egypt.

Now Pharaoh begins his account of the two dreams, that is, of the seven lean and gaunt cows followed by the fat and blighted ears growing on one stalk. Upon completion of his account Pharaoh said “I told it to the magicians, but there as no one who could explain it to me” [vs. 24]. *Nagad* is the verb for “explain” which means “to show” or “to declare.” “The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork” [Ps 19.1]. When the magicians heard this word *nagad* uttered, they shrank in fear and terror that their very lives might be on the line. The same applies to Joseph though he proceeds with his interpretation in a matter-of-fact manner. Joseph wisely begins by saying that the dream is “one” [vs. 25]...“God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do.” The verb *nagad* is used here, namely, that he has communicated with Pharaoh alone and not through any medium. Such introductory words spoken with quiet confidence must have impressed Pharaoh. Like the chief butler earlier, Joseph brings in the Lord whom both had not known personally but may have gotten word either through travelers, captives or by hearsay...all from the land of Canaan about the descendants of Abraham.

Under the guise of two different images Pharaoh dreams of seven good years followed by seven of famine. “It is as I told Pharaoh, God has shown to Pharaoh what he is to do” [vs. 19]. All this sounds a bit odd: some obscure, provincial deity from the land of Canaan telling the ruler of a powerful country like Egypt what to do. Surely the magicians who were in Pharaoh’s presence were mortified and did their best to block any plans for Joseph to take charge. However, the Lord had a different purpose, support of Jacob’s family during the lean years that they may survive in Egypt for many generations and eventually return to Canaan and take it over once and for all. The two-fold imagery (cows and ears of grain) “means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass” [vs. 23]. *Davar* is the word for “thing” or that which had been spoken or in this instance, a *davar* which requires *patar*, interpretation. Now comes the part which Joseph would rather not utter: “Let Pharaoh select a man discreet and wise and set him over the land of Egypt” [vs. 33]. Joseph knew he was destined to be that man characterized as *byn* and *chakam*; the first from a verbal root meaning to distinguish, separate, and the latter related to the noun *chakmah* or wisdom. Pharaoh also is to appoint overseers who are to “take the fifth part of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plenteous years” [vs. 35]. Note that Pharaoh, not the man who is *byn* and *chakam*, is the one designated for this instead of the man who is to be appointed; he has no say in nominating the overseers. That would take too much power out of Pharaoh’s hands and put it into those who easily could work against him. As for the overseers, the word is *paqyd* which works hand-in-hand with the verb *paqad* used here, to appoint. Something similar had happened a few years earlier: “So Joseph found favor in his (Potiphar) sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had” [29.4]. Would the same fate befall Joseph a second time only now at the hands of Pharaoh? If it did happen, surely Joseph would be put to death. As for Potiphar, we don’t know what happened to him though given his high rank, he must have heard about Pharaoh’s recognition of Joseph. Perhaps he warned Pharaoh about Joseph, that he would attempt to seduce his wife but Pharaoh figured it was worth taking the risk with

so much at stake.

“The food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine which are to befall the land of Egypt” [vs. 36]. Such are the concluding words of Joseph where the seven years are to become a “reserve” or *piqdon*; it is derived from the verb *paqad* noted above with regard to overseers. Only two other uses of this word are found, Lev 6.1 and 4, the former being cited: “If anyone sins and commits a breach of faith against the Lord by deceiving his neighbor in a matter of deposit or security.” This proposal (*davar*, vs. 37) met general approval and was put into practice. However, a man “discreet and wise” [vs. 33] had to be put in charge...obviously Joseph. Pharaoh, like Potiphar, freely uses “God” which is an acknowledgment of Joseph’s religious heritage, no small matter to speak out in public. Then come the scary words: “You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command” [vs. 40], so reminiscent of Potiphar putting him in charge. The verb “order” is *nashaq* means to arrange, put in order though mostly used (as in 33.4) to kiss. “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth” [Sg 1.2]. While Pharaoh makes it clear that the throne is his, very well that can be symbolic which in fact, it turns out to be. This erosion of power must have frightened some in Pharaoh’s court and plotted against Joseph but to no avail.

To seal this deal before all his servants—and by that, chiefly his magicians—Pharaoh takes his signet ring off his hand and puts it on Joseph’s (vs. 42). Note that the word “hand” is used, not finger, meaning that the signet ring (*tavahath*) can mean any ring whether of the finger, wrist or even neck. “You shall cast four rings of gold” [Ex 25.12]. Immediately after this, Pharaoh puts on Joseph “garments of fine linen” and a “gold chain about his neck.” It must have been especially pleasing to Joseph while he was being clad with the linen garments, for they were reminiscent of that long robe with sleeves (37.3) which Jacob had made him. Fine as the linen garments were, they couldn’t outshine his father’s robe. *Ravyd* is the word for gold chain which doesn’t conflict with the *tavhath*; just one other biblical reference is found, Ezk 16.11: “and a chain on your neck.” Such were the signs of Joseph’s authority and office. While out on business or on formal processions, Pharaoh had Joseph ride in the chariot right behind him. When passing by, the words “Bend the knee” were to be cried out, *avrek*. A footnote to the **RSV** says this term is “probably an Egyptian word similar in sound to the Hebrew word meaning ‘to kneel.’” Regardless, people had to do Joseph obeisance or else suffer the consequences even if Joseph was against such a practice. That experience, when it occurred, must have been the most painful for Joseph.

Then there came words from Pharaoh which Joseph later would use with respect to the overseers about to be appointed: “without your consent no man shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt” [vs. 44]. Only Joseph would be responsible for the distribution of authority, and that got really close to Pharaoh’s ultimate authority. If another man could usurp Joseph’s position, the kingdom of Egypt would be his. Joseph was a foreigner, something usually abhorred by Egyptians, so Pharaoh changed his name to Zaphenath-paneah (he who can reveal secret things with ease), possibly a Hebrew transcription of an

Egyptian title. Regardless, this name is indicative of Joseph's chief gift, the ability to interpret dreams, the one which got him to such a lofty position. One could argue that Pharaoh went overboard in his enthusiasm about Joseph's ability to interpret his dream and showed him exaggerated affection. Often this can be the case but with Joseph, it was backed up by his ability to manage affairs and deal kindly with people. Still, that was in the confines of a prison, not in command of a super-state such as Egypt. After Pharaoh completed the inauguration of Joseph as second-in-command, he gave him to Asenath, the daughter of the priest of On (Heliopolis) as wife. That unites Joseph by marriage to the religious system of Egypt, perhaps more important for that country than for others. As for Asenath, she pretty much passes off the scene—perhaps a ceremonial wife—except for giving birth to Manasseh and Ephraim (cf. vs. 50 & 46.20). Once this marriage had taken place, "Joseph went out over the land of Egypt" [vs. 45]. He didn't waste a moment, wanting to get down to business. It was as though his inauguration was similarly the inauguration of the seven days of plenty, so might as well make the most of them.

Throughout the installation of Joseph and his subsequent fulfillment of duties, we have no record of how Joseph felt, especially when it came to such close alliance with the Egyptian religious system. His tacit acceptance of duty and determination to make the most of it for his family for generations to come was extraordinary by any standards. Besides, the Egyptians were completely unaware of this secret intent. While the first part of the Book of Genesis is often held out as a prelude to Abraham's saga, in truth it and the account of Abraham form a prelude to the story of Joseph. Abraham and his descendants sought to take the land of Canaan by possessing it from without whereas Joseph takes possession of Egypt from within. Still, despite the overwhelming benefit Egypt was to Joseph's family and later generations (the story of Moses and the latter Pharaoh really be an exception, a short one at that), it is not the land promised by God.

"Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh, king of Egypt" [vs. 46]. The Hebrew for "entered service" is "stood before his face," an apt description for a face-to-face relationship Joseph had in the prime of his life...not just that but for a foreign society. While true, one gets the impression while reading Genesis of a basic common thread among all peoples, that they are basically the same and are equal. The special relationship with Abraham doesn't not annul this unity but is meant to preserve and enhance it.

Now for the third time we have Joseph moving in an outward direction which is representative of his authority or better, his assumption of that authority: "And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh and went through all the land of Egypt" [vs. 46]. One gets the idea this was neither a triumphal nor formal journey where people had to bow when it was cried out "*avrek!*" noted in vs. 43. Joseph was all business and had no time for such formality except, perhaps, at Pharaoh's court. He was out and about not just on several occasions but pretty much the whole time during the seven years of abundance or better, during the first half of that time once things were organized for reaping and storing the harvest. Vs. 47 says that the land "brought forth abundantly," the adverb being a noun in

Hebrew, *qomets*, meaning the fist or a handful. When used in the form it assumes here (something like 'to the handfuls'), super-abundance is implied. Three other references to *qomets* are found, all in Leviticus, the first being from 2.2: "And he shall take from it a handful of the fine flour and oil with all its frankincense."

Both for better distribution and protection of the produce (grain seems to be the chief crop though other types of grains, etc., must have been included), Joseph "stored up food in the cities" [vs. 48]; he did this so the abundance would be "like the sand of the sea until he ceased to measure it, for it could not be measured" [vs. 49]. This job must have gotten tedious not just for the workers, overseers and Joseph himself, but more so in the latter part of the seven years. That's a fairly long time which could give the illusion that the abundance would never fail. People traveling to and from Egypt must have taken note of all this industry, that the country was preparing for a major disaster. Some may have had intimations of hard time to come, so they moved either into Egypt or close by.

Shortly before the famine, Joseph's wife Asenath gave birth to two sons. "Joseph called the name of the first-born Manaseh, 'For' he said, 'God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house'" [vs. 51]. The proper name for this first-born son...the first-born in the land of Egypt...means "Making to Forget." Actually that was impossible for Joseph despite being comforted by this son. It was one thing to forget hardship or *hamal* (heavy, burdensome labor) but his father's house? More specifically, Joseph is forgetful not of Jacob his father but his house or his brothers. He must have been thinking not so much of the brothers but of their betrayal. The second-born son was named Ephraim, "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction" [vs. 52]. And so Ephraim means "to be fruitful" which Joseph was. With his capacity for interpreting dreams, Joseph must have dreamt about his brothers in Canaan and wondered how they would respond to the two sons born in Egypt. Nothing is said about Joseph having premonitions of this encounter which indeed would occur, but at this stage it wasn't certain. "Land of affliction" (*'erets ony*) seems to imply Egypt itself over which Joseph was virtual lord. That shows that despite his prestige, Joseph longed for the land of his ancestry, Canaan, a anticipation of the Israelites longing to be free in Egypt. As for the birth of these two sons by a daughter of the priest of On, the chief religious center of Egypt, that means they were allied closely with the native deities. Nothing is said of this nor of Joseph's opinion. Perhaps he and his two sons maintained an outward allegiance to the gods and goddesses but privately worshiped the God of Joseph's father and grandfather.

So after all the diligence expended over seven bountiful years, at last the dreaded seven years of famine arrived. *Savah* is the word for "plenty" which is derived from the same verbal root (*savah*, to become satisfied) as the number seven (years). This new period of time is described as "began to come" [vs. 54]. At first the famine wasn't noticeable but gradually made its presence felt...for example, after the first year when no rain fell. Vs. 54 continues with "there was famine in all the lands" or all the lands about Egypt. Despite the hard-hitting impact of the famine, "the people cried to Pharaoh for bread" [vs. 55]. *Tsahaq* is

the verb dramatically expressed by Esau in 37.24: “When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry.” In the verse at hand, this *tsahaq* didn’t come from an individual or group of individuals but from all Egypt itself. The people had gotten to know Joseph’s kindness...his *chesed*...yet recognized that despite his power, he was second to Pharaoh. That’s why their *tsahaq* was directed to him and to him alone. Pharaoh’s response to this *tsahaq*? “God to Joseph; what he says to you, do” [vs. 55].

After this common *tsahaq* reached a crescendo—and Joseph knew this would happen; it was matter of at what intensity he’d intervene—“Joseph opened all the storehouses” [vs. 56]. The Hebrew here reads “all that was in them” after which he sold grain to the Egyptians. When we hear such words automatically there comes to mind government officials cheating as the people as much as possible. That wasn’t the case with Joseph which is why we hear the simple fact that he sold grain minus any comments about the process. Throughout all this Pharaoh isn’t mentioned; he has faded into the background which perhaps he always had wanted, allowing a competent person like Joseph to do the actual ruling. Never have we learned the name of this Pharaoh. The reason is that he is a figurehead and someone at the service of Joseph...and Joseph was at the service of his wayward brothers whose ancestors would thrive in Egypt over the next four hundred years before leaving the country for a return to Canaan, that long-lost land of their ancient forebears starting with Abraham.

Chapter Forty-Two

Beginning with this chapter considerable details are given concerning Joseph’s dealing with his brothers. Because they are more or less straightforward and fall under what we’d call an historical context, the text tends to have a less than broader meaning from the point of view of *lectio divina*. In most other places throughout much of the Book of Genesis this has been otherwise. A similar situation is found with the Acts of the Apostles which the Church employs for readings during the Easter season: many details as to the founding of churches and travels of Paul. Focus upon particulars like this tend to less the material used for *lectio*.

“When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, ‘Why do you look at one another’” [vs. 1]? Note that it was Jacob, not his sons, who learned about grain in Egypt. The verb here is *ra’ah* (to see). Since he and his favorite son Joseph were both dreamers, it was Jacob who “saw” in a dream that abundance of food was available in Egypt, not through hearsay or any other means. His use of *ra’ah* contrasts with those of his sons who *ra’ah* (stare) at each other, the common use of this verb. Such staring is marked by mistrust and fear, almost certainly compounded by what they had done to Joseph. The brothers were completely devoid of seeing in the positive sense and couldn’t get beyond themselves and their immediate problems. In the next verse Jacob elaborates upon his *ra’ah* by saying that “I have heard (*shamah*) that there is grain in Egypt.” That means he heard about it through others whereas his sons hearing was closed. And so, Jacob’s seeing changes in hearing which hopefully will modify his sons’ attitude which it does though not without much travail.

So ten of the brothers heeded their father's request and headed south to Egypt, "But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might befall him" [vs. 4]. Benjamin was one of the brothers involved in the conspiracy against Joseph; if Jacob was aware of what had happened, he would have chosen Reuben ('he delivered him out of their hands,' 37.21). As for the word "harm," it is *'ason* and has just a few references in the Bible, one of which is Ex 21.22: "When men strive together and hurt a woman with child so that there is a miscarriage and yet no harm follows." With Benjamin kept at home, the other brothers set off for Egypt "among the others who came" [vs. 5] not only from Canaan which is mentioned in this verse but surely people from beyond Canaan. They had little preparation against the famine, let alone foreknowledge that it would last seven long years.

"Now Joseph was governor over the land" [vs. 6], the word for "governor" being *shalyt* which is the first proper designation of Joseph's position in Egypt we've come across. It is an adjective meaning "powerful" with three other references in Ecclesiastes one of which is 7.19: "Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers that are in a city." Joseph knew full well that not only did he sell grain to Egyptians but to those like his brothers who came from other lands. Chances are it was difficult to enter Egypt under circumstances of a prolonged famine, so he and his underlings had to be careful what they doled out to sustain the native population for the foreseeable future. "And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground" [vs. 6]. The text has the brothers coming directly to their brother, the governor, instead of some lower official. The brothers knew about Joseph, the man now called Zaphenath-paneah (41.45), and decided to seek out this, the highest official they could. Perhaps they thought the Egyptians would be suspicious of a fairly large band of brothers and wished to allay these suspicions immediately. The last thing they wanted to be taken as were spies. That's why the text says they came to Joseph; it doesn't say they were brought to him. If the latter, we can be certain it would have been recorded. Besides, their voluntary (and accidental) meeting with Joseph adds to the drama about to unfold.

Despite Genesis' portrayal of Joseph as marked by *chesed*, when he saw the brothers lined up before him "he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them" [vs. 7]. Of course, Joseph had the upper hand in every possible way. The words "Where do you come from?" don't sound rough (*qashah*: hard, harsh) in and by themselves, so it must have been the tone of his voice. With the brothers before him, now it was Joseph's turn to test them which he did by first waiting a bit to see if they recognized him but fortunately they did not. Apparently Joseph had dreamt about them (vs. 9) but nothing is said about the content of these dreams. We can assume that the dreams concurred with events not taking place. Above all else Joseph was responsible for the safety of Egypt as a country which is why he accused his brothers who "have come to see the weakness of the land" [vs. 10]. *Herwah* is the noun for "weakness" which fundamentally pertains to nakedness or that which is exposed. "Your nakedness shall be uncovered, and your shame shall be seen" [Is 47.3]. Of course, every foreigner was touched by the famine for seven years and got wind of Egypt's

bounty. If some neighbors could check out the weakened condition of that country, perhaps a military invasion might be in store. Joseph must have been especially galled when the brothers protested as a group, “We are honest men” [vs. 11]. *Ken* is the adjective for “honest” and found four other times only in the context of this exchange.

The brothers continued to give information about themselves to Joseph saying that their father had kept their youngest back home in case something went awry. Still, Joseph continued pressing them as spies, something he must have enjoyed doing secretly. He proposes a test, namely, that all the brothers remain in Egypt until the youngest comes. In the meanwhile, Joseph puts the group in prison, most likely the same one in which he had spent time. While there, some inmates must have recounted to them how well they had been treated, but even they had no idea of the familial connection. Finally Joseph agreed to keep in prison just one brother while the others were allowed to go home, along with grain and return with their youngest brother. Joseph took a gamble. Given his experience at their hands, the possibility that they would desert another brother was a possibility. Joseph had the resources to pursue them back into Canaan should this occur, but he was hoping it wouldn't come to that desperate measure.

All this had shaken up the brothers. However, Joseph's words “do this and you will live, for I fear God” [vs. 18] must have aroused some suspicion or curiosity about the man they were dealing with. He was using terms familiar to them (‘fear God’) which they wouldn't expect from a native Egyptian. Then again, they may have surmised that this man was a foreigner who had achieved loft rank, perhaps someone from Canaan. However, they dare not pursue this; the brothers weren't in a position to ask but follow orders. Finally what had been eating at the brothers for so long came to the surface. “In truth we are guilty concerning our brother” [vs. 21]. They had seen the distress of his soul “and we would not listen.” A similar drama was being acted out now but with a different twist: Joseph was looking upon the distress of their souls. Finally Reuben chimed in, that they should have listened to Joseph's pleas not to be cast into the pit. All the while Joseph was standing there—more accurately, sitting on a throne of sorts—watching this drama unfold. At the same time the brothers were unaware that Joseph could understand their bickering, for “there was an interpreter between them” [vs. 23]. *Lyts* is the word for “interpreter” derived from the verbal root *luts* which means to deride, mock. “Godless men utterly deride me, but I do not turn away from your law” [Ps 119.51]. The idea seems to be that someone who translates from one language into another is engaged in a form of mockery, of not transmitting with accuracy the meaning of what is said or written.

All this was too much for Joseph who turned aside and wept privately after which he gathered his courage and returned with taking Simeon as surety after which he sent them away. However, Joseph had one last ploy up his sleeves: he put money as well as grain in their sacks so later they could be accused of robbery. When one of the brothers discovered this shortly after their departure, his heart and those of the others “failed them” [vs. 28]. In Hebrew this translates literally as “their hearts went out,” the drama of which is emphasized

all the more by “they turned trembling to one other.” So the group continued straightaway home to Canaan without any incident after which they recounted in detail their extraordinary experience. Upon seeing the sacks filled with money Jacob exclaimed that his sons had bereaved him first of Joseph followed by Simeon and with the prospect looming that Benjamin would be no more.

Finally it was Reuben, the brother who had intervened on behalf of Joseph years earlier as well as having rebuked them about it vs. 22 who stood up and said boldly, “Slay my two sons if I do not bring him back to you” [vs. 37]. Jacob refused, for he wanted to avoid further loss of his family which by now was thoroughly in disarray, especially the apparent loss of his favorite, Joseph. Jacob concludes this chapter with the plea, “you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol” [vs. 38]. This is the second mention of Sheol, the first being used by Jacob himself when hearing about the supposed death of Joseph (cf. 37.35).

Chapter Forty-Three

“Now the famine was severe in the land.” This simple sentence suffices to convey the sufferings people were experiencing which would have been far greater if not for the foresight of Joseph. Chances are this statement was made well into the second half of the famine when its severity (*kaved*; adjective meaning heavy) was felt all the more and intensified by so many people flooding Egypt in search of food. This influx of foreigners is what made the famine *kaved*; otherwise the Egyptians themselves could have handled it easily.

From this overview the scene shifts to Jacob and his sons who, despite having obtained grain, used up their supply. Jacob feared that his sons might resume staring at each other as the opening of Chapter Forty-Two recounts, only this time leading to violence. Judah reminds his father that the “man”—no name is given to him—“solemnly warned us” which in Hebrew is expressed by a double use of the verb at hand (*hud*; also means to take as witness, affirm). “Now then hearken to their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them” [Isam 8.9]. This warning, of course, was that Benjamin must come with the brothers to Egypt. Israel—the text shifts from using the proper name Jacob—asks a question which at the same time is a rebuke for their stupidity: “Why did you treat me so ill as to tell the man that you had another brother” [vs. 6]? Their response: that the man had “questioned us carefully” which is another instance of a double verb, *sha’al*. All this detail about the brothers being in Egypt didn’t arouse their suspicion that something out of the ordinary was transpiring. Yes, “the man” or Joseph had the right to suspect them as spies which is why he wanted to put them on the spot by going into exceptional detail as to their background, etc. Finally Judah intervenes to stop this bickering with a request to his father that he go with Benjamin to Egypt. “I will be surety for him” [vs. 9] was his point, *harav* being the verb which means to pledge. “My son, if you have become surety for your neighbor, have given you pledge for a stranger” [Prov 6.1].

Furthermore , Judah insists that he “will bear the blame forever” [vs. 10].

This argument won over Israel who consented to have them all go and “take some of the choice fruits of the land” [vs. 11]. *Zimrah* is the noun and has four other biblical references, all of which pertain to melody which is the fundamental sense of this word: “Raise a song, sound the timbrel, the sweet lyre with the harp” [Ps 81.1]. *Zimrah* as applied to the best the land of Canaan had to offer was rather paltry; after all, it had been hit just as hard as Egypt by the famine if not worse due to lack of foresight. If Joseph had somehow gotten in charge, things would have turned out differently. As for this *zimrah*, it would have been an insult to someone other than Joseph who must have rejoiced at seeing produce from Canaan despite its wretched condition. Nevertheless, he resisted the temptation to show emotion.

As for the extra money the brothers discovered in their bags upon returning from Egypt, Israel says “perhaps it was an oversight” [vs. 12]. The word for “oversight” is *mishgeh* or error, the only use in the Bible. The brothers were to take double the amount back to “the man.” In addition to the *zirmah* just noted, this money must have placed an extra burden upon Israel, but in his eyes, it was well worth it.

Finally Israel bade his sons to leave: “may God Almighty (*El Shaddai*) grant you mercy before the man” [vs. 14]. *Rachamym* is the word for “mercy” and is the plural of *racham*, to show tender compassion, not unlike *chesed* for which Joseph was renowned. Perhaps “the man” might respond to *rachamym*. For another use of this term, cf. Ps 103.4: “who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy.” In addition to this hope, Israel resigns himself: “If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved” [vs. 14]. The verb for “bereaved” is *shakal* which means to be childless. Perhaps Israel had in mind his father Isaac when he had caused him grief by usurping Esau’s right as first-born: “Why should I be bereft of you both in one day” [27.45]? Then at last the brothers set out with Benjamin in tow: “And they arose and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph” [vs. 15]. This arising is not necessarily a physical one but symbolic of their resignation and desire to get on with the task at hand.

The brothers arrived safely in Egypt, most likely jostling with plenty of other foreigners going there for grain. Since the brothers form a large, coherent group, the boarder guards recognized them from their earlier visit. Perhaps they had something like a pass from Joseph whom the boarder guards certainly knew. Once the formalities were over and they came to the city (no specific one is given), straightaway they came to Joseph who prepared a meal. Actually it was the sight of Benjamin (cf. vs. 16) which moved Joseph to take this unusual gesture of having strangers dine with him. Naturally the brothers were suspicious of “the man” whom they thought would throw them into prison. Prior to their meeting with Joseph the brothers told his steward (literally ‘the man on his house’) and told him about the money and how they brought back double the (unknown) amount. This steward told them not to worry but to “rest assured” or be at peace (*shalom*). He continued, “your God and the God of your father must have put treasure in your sacks for you” [vs. 23]. Such knowledge of their God came from Joseph, a clue as to the identity of “the man,” but the brothers did

not get it. Finally the brothers entered Joseph's house, washed up and prepared the present they brought him. They must have felt embarrassed at it because as noted above, any produce from Canaan must have been paltry. Anyway, it was the best they could do, fidget with their dry and withered gifts as they nervously awaited arrival of "the man."

When Joseph appeared, the first words out of his mouth was about their "welfare" or *shalom* after which he inquired of their father; apparently in no way did he pay attention to their gifts. Actually this inquiry is a ploy to see how they responded. Given Joseph's stature, he must have sent spies to Canaan to inquire about Jacob so he was well informed about him. Shortly afterward Joseph "lifted up his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin" [vs. 29]. Without a doubt Joseph's eyes went to him first though he wished to avoid giving himself away, at least for the moment. Although a dialogue is taking place between Joseph and his brothers, in actuality interpreter was present to avoid the two parties from direct communication, another way of maintaining Joseph's disguise. All this was too much for Joseph who, despite the interpreter, must have disguised not only his voice but gestures to avoid being detected. Finally he couldn't bare it any long but withdrew because "his heart yearned for his brother, and he sought a place to weep" [vs. 30]. The verb here is *racham* which had been noted in vs. 14 which is to say that Joseph was moved to his bowels for Benjamin though Benjamin did not recognize this. The verb is intensified by addition of the preposition *el* (to)... "was moved to his brother." It didn't take long for Joseph to control himself, the verb being *'aphaq* (to hold fast). It is used at the beginning of Chapter Forty-Five: "Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him."

According to Egyptian custom, foreigners had to eat separately which means Joseph had to endure going through the gestures of eating. Such interaction the Egyptians considered an abomination or *tohevah*, a word usually used for ritual observances. "So keep my charge never to practice any of these abominable customs which were practiced before you and never to defile yourselves by them" [Lev 18.30]. However, this segregation doesn't mean the two parties ate in separate rooms, for as vs. 33 says, "And they sat before him." All the brothers sat in accord with their birth rank or from the first-born to the youngest. They took it upon themselves to observe this order to impress "the man" and others in the Egyptian court. While at table, "the men looked at one another in amazement" [vs. 33]. *Tamah* is the verb as used in Is 13.8: "They will look aghast at one another; their faced will be aflame." Such *tamah* was an expression of fear as well as honor, for they wondered what will happen when the meal was over and they had to confront "the man" yet again. Still, this *tamah* is a far cry from the way the brothers had looked at...stared at...each other in 42.1. Despite the separation in apparently one large room between Egyptians and foreigners eating together, Joseph did break the *tohevah* or abomination by sending portions from his table to Benjamin, making the latter's five times greater. Neither Benjamin nor his brothers dare say a word, wondering about "the man" eating alone in a room close by who easily could eavesdrop on their conversation. So without further ado, all the brothers "drank and were merry with him" [vs. 34], *shakar* being the latter verb which makes to drink to the full: in other words, they got drunk. Might as well get as drunk as possible so they would be

numb as to the dread they feared after the meal. After all, Joseph had invited them for the noonday meal, not supper. Plenty of time was left in the day for things to happen.

Chapter Forty-Four

This chapter brings to dramatic conclusion the cat-and-mouse game Joseph had been playing with his brothers. Given the fact that he had been betrayed, he had every right to string them along but did so in a disciplinary fashion, if you will, out of *chesed*, in order to prove their character. “Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him” [vs. 1]. The verb at hand is *’aphaq* used in 43:31: “Then he washed his face and came out; and controlling himself he said, ‘Let food be served.’” “So I forced myself and offered the burnt offering” [1Sam 13:14]. It was one thing not to control himself before his brothers but another before those others around him, the interpreter and servants, who were witness to this drama. The obvious reason for dismissing the Egyptians was to make himself known to his brothers. Only the interpreter would have understood the conversation; everyone else wouldn’t have a clue as to the discussion. Yet before we hear a response Joseph “wept aloud so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it” [vs. 2]. The Egyptians at hand were servants and other court attendants out of sight but not out of hearing range which, as just noted, wasn’t a problem except for the interpreter who could understand the conversation. We can imagine the courtiers huddling around this man as he listened in and then translated for their benefit. In sum, this situation is a perfect example of court gossip. What’s more revealing is that the same verse recounts that Pharaoh’s household heard it. The servants must have communicated the strange dialogue immediately to the ears of Pharaoh, that is, through the interpreter. However, we have no response from Pharaoh whose trust in Joseph never wavered.

Joseph must have wept not just loudly but for a fairly prolonged period. Perhaps his brothers had an inkling that indeed this important figure was their brother since his crying must have reminded them of those pitiful wails from the pit into which they had cast him. Then vs. 3 says in a matter-of-fact way “I am Joseph; is my father still alive” [vs. 3]? Tantamount to Joseph was the welfare of Jacob (Israel), not so much the brothers themselves. Obviously the “brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence” [vs. 3]. *Bahal* is the verb which connotes terror and confusion. “My soul also is sorely troubled” [Ps 6:3]. Note that *bahal* is used with the phrase “at his presence” which connotes the way Joseph was behaving as well as their astonishment. Immediately came to mind the possibility that Joseph would either slay them on the spot or worse, cast them into prison for life. So in order to relieve their anxiety he bade them to draw close to him after which he restated his identity but added “whom you sold into Egypt” [vs. 4]. To preclude any such thoughts Joseph reassured the brothers: “Do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here” [vs. 5]. Here we have yet another demonstration of that *chesed* which Joseph had honed since his days in prison and now put to its ultimate test. Joseph informed his brothers that they were instruments in a larger plan, “for God sent me before you to preserve life.” It wasn’t the Midianite traders who brought Joseph but the

Lord; they were just as instrumental as the brothers. As for the words “preserve life,” the noun *michyah* is used as in Judg 6.4: “and leave no sustenance in Israel.” Reference is to both the people of Egypt, the brothers and their future descendants.

Now we have a more precise time reference: Joseph says that the famine “has been in the land these two years” [vs. 6], that is, with five years to go. Since the brothers came to Egypt either in the first or second year, this decision to buy grain early on shows the severity of the famine in Canaan plus the fact that those in that land hadn’t the foresight to prepare for it as Joseph had done for the Egyptians. Now Joseph refines what he means by *michyah* or the preservation of life: “to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors” [vs. 7]. The verb *sum* for “preserve” refers to a setting or placing, a gesture implying a more permanent act. “The Lord your God has chosen to put his name there” [Dt 12.21]. At first glance there seems to be a paradox between “remnant” and “many survivors.” *Sh’eryth* is the former and *peleytah* is the latter, both found in Is 37.32: “For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors.” Perhaps Joseph the dreamer had in mind this future prophecy. Regardless, the verse at hand has the two groups; it starts out small with the brothers yet over the course of some four hundred years to Moses it expands into a great multitude.

For the third time in a few verses Joseph restates the fact that God had sent him to Egypt by means of his brothers: “So it was not you who sent me here but God” [vs. 8]. By becoming “a father to Pharaoh” [vs. 8], Joseph was free to assist his family in any way possible. Surely he had in mind the remaining five years of famine which would devastate his father and those with him, so he better hasten their arrival. That’s what Joseph does in vs. 9 not through sending a delegation of Egyptians nor by going himself—for he was sorely needed as the famine increased in intensity—but by ordering his brothers home to Canaan and have them return as quickly as possible (cf. vs. 9). Apparently some years before Joseph had set his eyes upon the “land of Goshen” [vs. 10], a fertile strip of land by the Nile. Though that place was affected by the famine just as well, after five years its fertility enabled it to recover more quickly than other places, just in time for Jacob and his family to move there. Joseph had his residence in Goshen as well, again settling in that area by way of preparation. Joseph will provide for everyone, the verb in vs. 11 being *kul* connoting to sustain and used again in 50.21: “So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” As for the verse at hand, Joseph re-assured his brothers that they will not “come to poverty” or *yarash* which also means to take possession, occupy. The sense is that poverty will not possess Joseph’s family. “Have you invited us here to impoverish you” [Judg 14.15]?

“And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you” [vs. 13]. Emphasis is upon Joseph’s speaking to which he invites his brothers to see that indeed it was Joseph among them. Note that he (as in 42.4) singles out Benjamin as “my brother” even though in truth the others were his brothers, Benjamin presumably being among the group that conspired against Joseph. You’d think Joseph would have had special affection for Reuben who interceded for Joseph’s life (cf. 37.21). Still, the bonds of

birth run deep, for both Joseph and Benjamin were born of Rachel (cf. 35.24), not Leah nor the maid servants of both sisters. Next Joseph bids all the brothers to “tell my father of all my splendor in Egypt and of all that you have seen” [vs. 13]. *Kavod* is the word for “splendor” and in 31.1 refers to “wealth:” and from what was our father’s he has gained all this wealth.” After these words Joseph cried upon the neck of Benjamin and *visa versa*; next he kissed the brothers after which “his brothers talked with him” [vs. 15]. These last few words are important because they reveal the ease everyone felt after some very tense moments.

Vs. 16 says that “and the household of Pharaoh heard it” (Joseph making himself known to his brothers) whereas now a report (*qol*: voice) was heard in Pharaoh’s house that these men indeed were brothers of Joseph. This anonymous ruler of Egypt deserves an immense amount of credit and openness, for “it pleased Pharaoh and his servants well.” Then again, he was quite desperate due to the famine and apparent lack of men with the stature of Joseph to govern the land. He stands in sharp contrast to the other Pharaoh with whom Moses will contend. Pharaoh bade Joseph to have his brothers return laden with gifts 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” [vs. 18]. Surely Pharaoh knew about how these brothers had betrayed Joseph yet was impressed by his *chesed* toward them. That is to say, Pharaoh had a less than desirable opinion about them yet for Joseph’s sake welcomed them to Egypt. He also must have been interested in meeting Jacob the dreamer in whose image surely Joseph was begotten. Note that Pharaoh says he will give “the best” and “the fat” of the land whereas Joseph says that his brothers will dwell in Goshen. Actually both don’t conflict but work wonderfully together: the brothers will live in the best part of Egypt (Goshen) and from there branch out to take the fat of the land. That incredibly good news was surpassed by “Give no thought to your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours” [vs. 20]. The literal reading of “Do not let your eyes pity” is stronger and shows the attractiveness of Egypt compared to Canaan, the verb being *chus* meaning to have compassion. “He shall spare the poor and the needy” [Ps 72.13].

Vs. 21 simply says “The sons of Israel did so.” While hardly no one, including Jacob, could resist Pharaoh’s offer, what about the hard-won effort to get established in Canaan? It seemed to be utterly abandoned with no hope for the future. Above all else the family of Jacob must stay together if there was any hope to reclaim Canaan. Fortunately they had done that despite many of their less than desirable characteristics. The brothers were to return clothed in festal garments with five for Benjamin. This was a bit risky, for the brothers conspired against Joseph because of his gifts and favorite of his father, Jacob. Benjamin better lay low during the journey home as well as the return trip to Egypt lest a similar fate befall him. However, that threat was mitigated with Joseph’s experience. Benjamin remained a kind of symbol of him, that never were they allowed to give into such base impulses. This is set amid the bestowal of “festal garments” or *chalyphah* which applies more to the change of garments (*chalaph* is the verbal root, to change). “Two changes of garments” [2Kg 22.23]. Surely the brothers, including Benjamin, must have felt ashamed

donning them because it reminded them of Joseph's robe (cf. 37.31+). Joseph had this in mind when he said "Do not quarrel on the way" [vs. 24]. The verb *ragaz* is quite strong meaning to be moved or disturbed, especially with regard to anger. "When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid, yes, the deep trembled" [Ps 77.16].

As for the extensive provisions for the journey to Canaan (they were intended for use in returning to Egypt as well), they stand in sharp contrast to the Exodus when the Israelites left Egypt suddenly. So when the party reached Jacob and informed him about Joseph, "his heart fainted, for he did not believe them" [vs. 26]. *Pug* is the verb for "fainted" which fundamentally means to become cold and has three other biblical references one of which is Ps 77.3: "I think of God and I moan; I meditate, and my spirit faints." No problem there, really, for it was natural for him to do this. What the brothers had to explain away—and this isn't recorded—is how Joseph got to Egypt in the first place, that is, after the brothers lied to their father about his fate. No small wonder Jacob "did not believe them." However, Jacob believed upon hearing not from the brothers but the "words of Joseph" [vs. 27] himself as well as seeing the wagons to bring everyone to Egypt. These words belonging to Joseph are singled out because they are so different from the tendency to lies and deceit from his brothers. No small wonder that then and only then did the *ruach* or spirit of Jacob revive (cf. vs. 27) for since word about his apparent death at the hands of a wild beast (cf. 37.33). Indeed, this was incredible news for Jacob and everyone else of his household but as noted above, what about the call of Abram to forsake his land and move to Canaan? For all intensive purposes his hold on the land, let alone that of Isaac and Jacob, was tenuous at best. Surely except for such dramatic moments as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah plus that of Shechem these people were simply a blip on the landscape and wouldn't be missed at all.

Chapter Forty-Six

"So Israel took his journey with all that he had and came to Beersheba and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac" [vs. 1]. That is to say, despite his eagerness to see his long-lost son in Egypt, Israel (as he is called now) was fully aware that he was leaving the land to which his grandfather had migrated. After this initial flush of excitement wore off, Israel has second thoughts about leaving and wished to pay respects at the shrine associated with his father, Isaac. At Beersheba the Lord appeared to Isaac at night (whether a dream or not, the text doesn't say) saying "I am with you and will bless you and multiply your descendants for my servant Abraham's sake" [26.24]. Also shortly after leaving Beersheba (cf. 28.10) Jacob himself had a dream of that ladder reaching into heaven with angels ascending and descending upon it. Thus two divine appearances at night as well as Abraham himself are closely tied in with Beersheba. Both are important: the first as a ratification of the covenant with Abraham and the second occurring shortly before Jacob's extended stay with Laban, some twenty-six years. Perhaps for Israel the latter was more significant: obviously his advanced age meant that he wouldn't return from Egypt but was confident his immediate children would.

True to the nature of Beersheba as holy place, the Lord appeared to Israel “in visions (*mar’eh*) of the night” to which he responded “Here am I” [vs. 3]. For another use of *mar’eh* in this context (It was last used in 41.2-3 with respect to the cows of Pharaoh’s dream), see Dan 8.16: “and behold, there stood before me one having the appearance of a man.” What the Lord now communicated was wonderful news for Israel, that he should fear to go to Egypt; there “I will make of you a great nation” [vs. 3]. Even better, “I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again” [vs. 4]. Reassuring words to hear towards the end of one’s life, of the Lord accompanying Israel to Egypt which made the journey all the more agreeable. Surely Israel must have compared that commandment with the one given by God to his grandfather Abraham to leave Haran for Canaan. It is interesting to contrast the shortness of the journey into Egypt with the forty year long departure through the desert. As for the time his descendants would remain there, the Lord is silent as to how long he would “bring you up again.” Knowing it wouldn’t occur until over four hundred years later would have overwhelmed both Israel and his sons. In the interim we have no word as to the fate of shrines like Beersheba; most likely they had performed their function and no longer were meaningful. So if the Lord accompanies Israel into Egypt, the land promised to Abraham seems to have shifted though the Lord is silent on the matter. After all, Joseph had succeeded in Egypt and saved the country from famine. If the Lord had wrought that miracle, why couldn’t Egypt be considered as the place of inheritance even though the Lord said nothing of it to Abraham? Now Canaan was about to be thoroughly forsaken: “They also took their cattle and their goods which they had gained in the land of Canaan and came into Egypt, Jacob and all his offspring with him” [vs. 6]. The next verse spells this out further with reference to his sons and daughters.

Vss. 8-27 detail the “names of the descendants of Israel who came into Egypt.” This dwarfs anything compared to Canaan and must have been a relief to the inhabitants there, to see these upstart foreigners from Haran finally leave. Of course they heard about Joseph because they were affected by the famine. At the same time they must have felt some grudge of envy toward these people, of having the privilege of dwelling under Joseph’s protection. While the party made its way slowly but steadily to Egypt, Israel “sent Judah before him to Joseph, to appear before him in Goshen” [vs. 28]. Judah was chosen because earlier he had been a spokesman of sorts to Joseph for his brothers and seemed to be on better speaking terms, Benjamin excepted. Everyone knew Goshen during the famine; Joseph himself had settled on the place due to its fertility, the renown of which increased as the famine intensified. So when the party finally entered Egypt and when word got to Joseph that his father was about to come into Goshen, “he presented himself to him and fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while” [vs. 29]. *Ra’ah* is the verb to “presented,” the common one for “to see” which here implies that Joseph made himself been seen by Jacob. This fits in well with the situation, for Israel was virtually blind and required reassurance it was indeed his son. Israel must have had in mind the experience when he deceived his nearly blind father Isaac of Esau’s birthright. Thus he had to make sure—doubly so—that it was Joseph and not an imitator. Then again, Joseph had achieved high office in Egypt, second after

Pharaoh, which to Israel must have seemed a fantasy. “Let me die since I have seen your face and know that you are still alive” [vs. 30], words not entirely unlike those of Simeon when he met the Christ child: “Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation” [Lk 2.29].

Once this emotional meeting is over, Joseph pays a visit to Pharaoh telling him about his family’s arrival and they can be of service as shepherds and keepers of cattle.” It is again to the credit of Pharaoh and his magnanimity that he allowed so many foreigners into Egypt, especially lush Goshen, for “every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians” [vs. 34]. *Tohevah* is the word for “abomination” as used in 43.32 when Joseph ate alone or not with his brothers. The reason for this second *tohevah* isn’t exactly clear, especially because cattle breeding was important for the Egyptians. Nevertheless, it was a stigma Israel and his descendants had to accept and live with. As for the Egyptian people, this stigma grew worse. It was their leader who invited this huge influx into their country to settle, not just purchase grain. They cannot be condemned for holding a grudge against both Pharaoh, Joseph and Israel. So with the passage of four hundred plus years the Israelites became so closely associated with this *tohevah* that it was only natural for another Pharaoh to oppress them. At least for the time being Israel’s family would be safe and fairly isolated in Goshen.

Chapter Forty-Seven

In line with his position as well as his character, Joseph informs Pharaoh that his brothers and their possessions have arrived in the land of Goshen. Surely he must have had to restrain himself to meet the party, even going to Canaan itself, but Joseph’s services were direly needed in Egypt. Once the party had arrived, Joseph “from among his brothers took five men and presented them to Pharaoh” [vs. 2]. The Hebrew for “among” is *qatseh* or from the edge or boarder. “All the people from every quarter” [19.4]. We don’t have the names of these five brothers except that chances are high Joseph included Benjamin, Judah and Reuben; the last urged his brothers not to kill Joseph but cast him into a pit after which he intended to rescue him. Upon being asked their occupation—and Pharaoh was interested to make use of these newcomers as best as he could—they responded by saying they were shepherds. Surely Pharaoh knew about this from Joseph but wanted to see them first hand; even more importantly, he wanted to see if they were made of the same stuff as Joseph (obviously not). Joseph had coached them beforehand as the concluding verses of Chapter Forty-Six recounts. Joseph wished to tell them about that *tohevah* or abomination with regard to shepherds so they wouldn’t be surprised and loose heart. So the five brothers said with obvious pride that they were “shepherds as our fathers were” [vs. 3]. Another important statement they made, again at Joseph’s bidding, is that “we have come to sojourn in the land” [vs. 4]. This sojourning (*gur*) was important for Pharaoh to hear because it meant they did not intend to settle permanently in Egypt, just long enough for the famine to subside. Both this pride of occupation going way back to the days of Abraham in Canaan and intention to sojourn impressed Pharaoh who said “The land of Egypt is before you” [vs. 6]. He expected them to come up to the equal of Joseph and not be freeloaders of the

government. Although Joseph had informed his brothers that they would reside in Goshen, still it was a relief to hear from Pharaoh himself. Although they would engage in an occupation that was abominable to the Egyptians, it was a valuable one at that, for quickly they could make it into a monopoly. Besides, they would be left alone to cultivate their own traditions which went all the back to Abraham. As for the brothers, at this point they were unsure whether they would be sojourners or become full-time residents. Joseph, they believed, would see to that once their father Israel had passed away.

To crown this meeting with Pharaoh Joseph now brings forth his father and “set him before Pharaoh” [vs. 7]...literally so, because of his advanced age. Then Jacob took the initiative and blessed Pharaoh; he wasn’t coached to do this but blessed Pharaoh spontaneously. Joseph and his brothers must have watched their father before the most powerful man in the known world, hoping he wouldn’t say anything foolish or divulge any unwanted information about his sons. Pharaoh’s asking Jacob about his age was a nice personal touch; he must have known it already but was intrigued to see how this elderly man, son of Joseph who saved Egypt, behaved. Also it reveals a concern about Joseph. After the audience Joseph “settled his father and his brothers...in the land of Rameses as Pharaoh had commanded” [vs. 11]. Such was another name for Goshen; that Pharaoh’s name gave added protection to the newly arrived immigrants. Since the famine was still oppressing Egypt, Joseph took it upon himself to provide them with food “according to the number of their dependents” [vs. 12].

Jacob and his family arrived in Egypt just in time, for “now there was no food in all the land; for the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished” [vs. 13]. Since Egypt and Canaan are mentioned in the same breath, Egypt most likely cut off all contact with Canaan

in order to prevent people coming from that country to within its borders. This must have applied to other lands as well. Surely Pharaoh couldn’t get out of his mind the dream of those thin and gaunt cows which had devoured the seven fat ones; reminders of it were everywhere. As for Pharaoh and his dreams, they ceased with the one foretelling the seven good years and seven lean ones. Now Joseph was forced to take more drastic measures. He gathered all the money he could (from Canaan as well) and gave it to Pharaoh. When the people approached Joseph for food, he asked for their cattle in exchange for grain. That was the approach Joseph adopted “for that year” [vs. 27]; for the next, the Egyptians came to him saying that they were so desperate that they offered themselves as slaves (cf. vs. 19). In the meanwhile, Jacob and his retinue were in Goshen; they condition isn’t mentioned but presumed to be somewhat better. At the same time they looked on with growing fear, for despite having been welcomed personally by Pharaoh, the Egyptians might rebel against him and demand he hand over Goshen from these usurpers.

Reluctantly Joseph agreed to the people’s demand to become slaves of Pharaoh. However, the priests were exempt: “the land of the priests he did not buy; for the priests had a fixed allowance from Pharaoh” [vs. 22]. While the priests enjoyed some exemptions, they too must have been nervous as the famine tightened its grip upon Egypt. After all, they were the

religious representatives and to date their prayers and sacrifices had done nothing to alleviate the famine. A bit later when the Egyptians had sold themselves voluntarily to Pharaoh, Joseph gave them seed for which they were grateful. “You have saved our lives” [vs. 25]. Meanwhile “Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen” [vs. 27] where they “multiplied exceedingly,” a fact that would continue later even under a different Pharaoh’s harsh rule. At this juncture Joseph had been in Egypt seventeen years and Jacob (still his name alternates between this one and Israel) a hundred and forty-seven or seventeen years older than when he had come before Pharaoh (cf. vs. 9). So despite his advanced age, Jacob lived longer than he or anyone else had expected, no doubt his life extended by having met his long-lost son, Joseph.

Finally Israel knew it was his time to die and summoned Joseph, not his other sons. “If now I have found favor in your sight, put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal loyally and truly with me” [vs. 29]. This gesture of putting a hand under another person’s thigh (*yarek*) was found in 24.2 with regard to Abraham’s servant in 24.2. In Jacob’s case it assumed greater importance, for in 32.25 the mysterious man who had wrestled with Jacob struck him there causing him to limp. The oath enjoined upon Joseph was easy; he was to demonstrate *chesed* and *’emeth* or love and truth, traits which were characteristic of him. Joseph wasn’t surprised to hear the terms of oath, “Do not bury me in Egypt.” Despite the kindness of Pharaoh, Israel wished to “lie with my fathers” [vs. 30] in Canaan. Besides, it was a reminder to Joseph of his roots, that despite his success in Egypt, his real loyalty lay elsewhere. So after Joseph swore to return his father to Canaan, Israel “bowed himself upon the head of his bed” [vs. 31], a gesture of reverence and gratitude which he knew Joseph could fulfil, not his other sons.

Chapter Forty-Eight

At first glance the concluding verses of the last chapter would lead us to believe Israel had died, but not so. He was close to it which made Joseph “take with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim” [vs. 1]. They had been born to Joseph by the native Egyptian Asenath who had passed off the scene but most likely was present at this somber occasion since it was so important. “Your son Joseph has come to you” [vs. 2]...just Joseph, not the other sons who aren’t summoned until later in Chapter Forty-Nine. “God Almighty (*El Shaddai*) appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me” [vs. 3]. Israel used the same proper name in 43.14 when addressing his sons, so apparently it was for special occasions. Note that Israel hearkens back to his experience at Luz—not the first encounter with angels ascending and descending upon a ladder, the place having been changed to Bethel—but his second visit in 35.9-15. Israel’s memory of this second encounter with God (‘God appeared to Jacob,’ 35.9) situates him within the same divinely appointed mission of his grandfather Abraham which Israel repeats to Joseph in vs. 4. Important words to remember in a land other than Canaan, for they would echo for the next four hundred plus years until the time of Moses and the Exodus.

In light of this important declaration to Joseph, Israel exerts his claim to Ephraim and Manasseh: (they) “shall be mind as Reuben and Simeon are” [vs. 5]. That is to say, Israel singles out his two eldest sons though they are not on the same level as Joseph both his youngest and his favorite. Israel continues laying out the plan of succession, if you will, for future inheritance of God’s promise in this an alien land. Hopefully the stay would be relatively short, until the famine abated, but no one at the time could foresee that it would last for centuries. In the meanwhile Canaan languished from their point of view. Surely as the years passed and one generation succeeded another, awareness of the land’s importance subsided though certainly it never ceased. The Lord himself was greater than any land, and this exile in Egypt which started voluntarily was a time to sift and prove this shift of allegiance. As for Ephraim and Manasseh, still quite young, they had been waiting outside until summoned to visit Israel. Of course, he had no idea of who they were nor perhaps did they of him, for Israel says rather bluntly and to the shame of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, “Who are these” [vs. 8]? Joseph didn’t dare bring in his wife Asenath; she had no claim whatsoever in any divine blessed that reached back to Abraham. Once Joseph identified his two sons, Israel blessed them; not only that, he “kissed them and embraced them” [vs. 10]. It must have been awkward for these children to meet a foreigner who had come to Egypt; even more so because they knew their own father was not Egyptian. Thus their lineage made them subject to being taunted and ridiculed.

Vs. 12 presents a touching scene: “Then Joseph removed them from his knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth.” Despite being on the throes of death, Israel was well enough to sit on the edge of his bed and dote upon his two grandchildren. Once the two got close to Joseph, he leads them back to Israel: Ephraim toward his left hand and Manasseh toward his right hand (cf. vs. 13). The reason: Ephraim is given precedence for reasons that aren’t clear to Joseph, for the two sons seem to have gotten along quite well. Perhaps deep inside Israel’s mind was his defrauding of Esau when both were young. Now on the point of death Jacob wishes to undo that mistake though it turned out beneficial in the long run. As for Esau himself, we don’t hear about him being present here. He must have gotten word of his brother’s descent into Egypt and the notoriety gained by Joseph. Then again, Esau may have perished much earlier than Israel, given his inclination toward living outdoors and thus more dangerously.

Israel begins his blessing in vs. 15 with “The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked.” That is to say, he informs Ephraim and Manasseh of their heritage which does not spring from Egypt nor from their mother’s influence. If they keep alive the memory of Abraham, Isaac and now Israel whom they encounter first hand, they will be able to pass this on to future generations in Egypt. It was a vital blessing because the Egyptian propensity to many gods was strong, and worship of the one true God was tantamount. Surely Ephraim and Manasseh heard this from their father but here was someone who came directly from Canaan and could give first hand accounts of his dealings with God. In other words, the two sons, born of a dreamer now encountered their grandfather, similarly a dreamer. Vs. 16 continues the blessing (it ends in the same verse) with “the angel (*mal’ak*)

who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lands.” Perhaps Israel was thinking of that mysterious man whom he wrestled (cf. 32.22+) though *mal’ak* isn’t applied to him. Then again, with the passage of time Israel grew in awareness that it was an angel; not only that, his wrestling match was an occasion for a change of names, of Jacob to Israel. Israel’s other encounters with angels was his dream at Luz-turned-to-Bethel noted above, though he seems to have in mind a particular *mal’ak* whom he wishes to bless Joseph’s two sons. The heart of Israel’s blessing re-states his experience “at Luz in the land of Canaan” [vs. 3] when he invokes for a second time the names of Abraham and Isaac. Israel is their direct descendant, so “in them let my name be perpetuated.” The words “be perpetuated” in Hebrew run “let my name be named on them” which bore out to be true down to the present day. Israel wasn’t content with this perpetuation of his name but that Joseph’s two sons “may they multiply into a multitude;” the unusual verb is *dagah*, used only here, which means to grow or multiply as fishes (*dagah* is the noun for ‘fish’). It turned out that Israel was correct in his prophecy as the first chapter of the Book of Exodus bears out. This multiplication was to take place “in the midst of the earth,” *qerev* being the word for “midst” and implies being at the center of something. “The children struggled together within her” [25.22].

Once this extremely important blessing had taken place, Joseph was upset over his father having placed his right hand upon Ephraim’s head or upon the head of the second born, not the first born. “But his father refused” [vs. 19] most likely having in mind that experience with Esau. And as it turned out many years later when the two became reconciled, Esau turned out to be the more gracious of the two brothers, a painful memory for Israel. The blessing Israel bestows upon Ephraim and Manasseh again are reminiscent of Israel’s father, Isaac, having blessed him and Esau (cf. vs. 19). “And thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh” [vs. 20].

Now Israel was prepared to die in the presence of his favorite son and his two grandchildren who were destined to carry on the family tradition in Egypt with a hopeful speedy return to Canaan from which they could pick up where Israel had left off. “Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your fathers” [vs. 21]. That must have both thrilled and terrified Joseph: thrilled in that at last he was destined to return home and terrified in that he would have to abandon his position in Egypt as second to Pharaoh, an act of treason. However, it wasn’t revealed to him (neither most likely to Israel) as to when that would happen. Israel bestowed upon Joseph “one mountain slope which I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow” [vs. 22]. This inheritance in Hebrew is a *shekem* or shoulder from which Shechem is derived. And so the proper name Shechem hearkens back to two instances. The first is noted in 12.6 when “Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem to the oak of Moreh.” The second is chapter thirty-four when the ruler of Shechem (similarly named) abducts Jacob’s only daughter. As for Dinah, we don’t hear anything about her since after this chapter though can assume she went to Egypt along with her brothers. As for Israel mentioning that he took Shechem with sword and bow, it was he who did not wish to do violence against the city;

rather Simeon and Levi carried out the slaughter. Despite this, Shechem was never again re-inhabited and was destined as a suitable place of inheritance for Joseph who could rebuild it as he had saved Egypt in seven years of famine.

Chapter Forty-Nine

“Then Jacob called his sons.” That is to say, now that he had blessed the two sons of Joseph, Jacob (he’s called that now, not Israel) brings them in because he didn’t want them privy to what he had just done. This summoning reflects Jacob’s preference for Joseph, evident from the start, yet realizes that they too would play a vital role in the future. To neglect them would be unfaithful to his grandfather Abraham’s divinely appointed mission. Vs. 1 continues with “Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the days to come.” The word for “befall” is *qara’* or to call and intimates a destiny larger than the brothers. *Qara’* in vs. 2 is followed by *qavats* (gather), literally to take or grasp by the hand and is more intensive and is found in 41.35: “And let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming.” Jacob was well aware of having been summoned to the bed of his father Isaac when he defrauded Esau and didn’t want the same thing to happen to him. He had no wealth to speak of, but the sons figured the vast resources of his beloved Joseph would form part of the inheritance, hence they came quickly to their father. In vs. two we find two uses of the same name, Jacob and Israel used together.

Israel proceeds to bless his sons which is a way of foretelling their future roles both in Egypt and later in Canaan. He could do this, being a dreamer not unlike his favorite son, Joseph. Refer to Chapter Thirty-Three of Deuteronomy for a similar blessing by Moses of the twelve tribes. The first son to receive Israel’s blessing came as no surprise...Reuben...the first-born who had planned to rescue Joseph from the pit into which his brothers had cast him. “Reuben, you are my first-born, my might and the fruit of my strength.” *Re’shyth* is “first-born,” not unlike *bekor* (first-born), yet has greater significance; it is also translated as “beginning:” “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” [1.1]. Reuben is preeminent or *yeter* which comes from a verbal root meaning to abound and similarly means “the rest:” “And the rest of Gilead” [Dt 3.13]. *Yeter* is applied to Reuben in two ways: in pride and in power or *se’eth* and *haz*. The first applies to eminence or excellency as in Ps 62.4: “Their only plan to thrust him down from his eminence.” The second intimates a certain ferocity as in Sg 8.6: “For love is as strong as death.” Indeed, Reuben had demonstrated this amply in his attempted rescue of Joseph. At the same time he is “Unstable as water, you shall not have preeminence because you went up to your father’s bed” [vs. 4]. This must have been extremely embarrassing for Reuben in the presence of all his brothers and refers to 35.22: “While Israel dwelt in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father’s concubine; and Israel heard of it.” Perhaps Reuben may have forgotten about this but now was painfully reminded of the incident. *Pachaz* is the only use of this term in the Bible and refers to lasciviousness; a related noun is *pachazuth* (pride): “and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness” [Jer 23.32]. So despite Israel calling Reuben preeminent in both pride and power, he now says that he shall not have it because

he had “defiled it (my couch).”

Two brothers, Simeon and Levi, are summoned together which must have surprised them, thinking they would receive an individual audience and therefore a blessing. The advantage of coming in together was that if they had the same experience as Simeon’s rebuke, they would have each other to lean upon for support. Israel gets right down to business by saying of the two that “weapons of violence are their swords” [vs. 5]. *Chamas* is the word for “violence,” clearly applicable to violence with respect to human beings, and is reminiscent of 6.11: “the earth was filled with violence,” something both brothers didn’t want to hear. They were expecting a recrimination, but this? Israel had nothing positive to say, and that continues right through vs. 7. It really gets bad when Israel says in vs. 6, “O my soul, come not into their council,” *sod* being the latter word which applies to a couch and therefore to familiar conversation. “I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart in the company of the upright, in the congregation” [Ps 111.1]. The image conjured up is familiar to all at hand. Since they had been familiar with living in tents, cushions (*sod*) were a common feature of nomadic life. To be deprived of that intimacy, especially from your father, was devastating indeed. In addition to this *sod*, Israel speaks now of his spirit (glory or *kavod* in the Hebrew text) which in this instance can refer to Israel’s personal history and role in carrying on Abraham’s divine commission. He doesn’t want his *kavod* associated with the *qahal* or assembly of Simeon and Levi.

Both brothers demonstrated their anger by slaying men, a reference to Shechem 34.25-30 which was against the counsel of their father. “You have brought trouble on me by making me odious to the inhabitants of the land” [34.30]. The ferocity of Levi would prove beneficial at Moses’ service later as directed against those Israelites who had worshiped the golden calf (cf. Ex 32.25-29). As for their wantonness, the noun *ratson* also means delight or will: “You cover him with favor as with a shield” [Ps 5.12]. Reference to the hamstringing of oxen could refer to the men of Shechem who were disabled by circumcision and shortly afterwards slain. For an example of this punishment, cf. Jos 11.9: “And Joshua did to them as the Lord bade him; he hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots with fire.”

In vs. 7 Israel continues with a curse (*’arar* being the verb) upon the anger of Simeon and Levi saying that it is fierce or *haz*, the same adjective used in vs. 3 as a noun (power): “preeminent in power.” The word “wrath” is *hevrah* or more specifically as wrath that is poured out: “Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger” [Is 13.9]. Not only is this wrath poured out, it is “cruel” or *qashah* (hard): “and she (Rachel) had hard labor” [35.16]. Finally, Israel says that he will both divide and scatter them and uses his two proper names Jacob and Israel accordingly: divide (*chalaq*: ‘At night he will divide the spoil,’ vs. 27) and scatter (*puts*: ‘lest we be scattered,’ 11.4). We have no account of the reaction by the two brothers after this heavy-duty encounter with their father. Judah, who comes in next, must have been terrified.

Judah had no need to worry, for he is about to receive a blessing—no curse included—which turns out to be the longest of them all with the exception of Joseph a bit later. Not only that, his brothers (including the beloved Joseph) “shall praise you” [vs. 8] which foretells Judah’s preeminence over the other tribes later in history. The verb for “praise” is *yadah* from which the proper name Judah is derived. As with many ancient signs of victory, Judah’s hand “shall be on the neck of your enemies.” “Then they came near and put their feet on their necks” [Jos 10.24]. Not only that, “your father’s sons shall bow down before you,” words reminiscent of Joseph’s dream in 37.9: “Behold, the sun, the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” Next Judah is compared to a lion’s whelp or a *gur*, the verbal root meaning to sojourn as in 47.4: “We have come to sojourn in the land.” The idea seems to be that a young lion lives...sojourns...under the care of its mother. “Dan is a lion’s whelp that leaps forth from Bashan” [Dt 33.22]. Later on when this whelp has matured it acts both as a lion and a lioness of which Israel says “who dares rouse him up” vs. 9]?

The primacy of Judah over his brothers and later over the tribes of Israel is borne out by vs. 10: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet.” Scepter and staff signify rule: *shevet*, which can apply to a rod for support or striking: “As if a rod should wield him who lifts it or as a staff would lift him who is not wood” [Is 10.15]. *Chaqaq* is a verb used as a participle which means to cut, to carve: “Judah is my scepter” [Ps 60.7]. The verse at hand continues with a different reading in the Hebrew: “until Shylah comes” or “until he comes to Shylah (Shiloh).” These words are obscure, with *shylah* meaning tranquility or rest. “And to him shall be the obedience of the people,” *yiqhah* being the word for “obedience,” the only other instance being Prov 30.17: “The eye that mocks a father and scorns to obey a mother will be picked out by the ravens of the valley.”

Vs. 11 continues speaking of Judah’s supremacy with “Binding his foal to the vine and his ass’s cold to the choice vine.” *Sreqah* is the word for “choice vine,” the only biblical instance, which refers to a shoot or tendril...in other words, Judah will have access to the best vines of the land (and that could be Egypt as well as Canaan later on). This theme of abundance of wine continues when Judah “washes his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes.” *Suth* is the noun for “garment,” the only use of this biblical word. “His eyes shall be red with wine and his teeth white with milk” [vs 12] is the last verse showing the primacy of Judah. *Chaklyly* is the adjective for “red,” another sole biblical reference, and is similar to the noun “redness found in Prov 23.29: “Who has redness of eyes?” Of course, Judah was thrilled at this blessing yet must have felt a tinge of jealousy coming from his other brothers. The task for him now was how to realize it responsibly; his preeminence most likely wouldn’t take effect in Egypt, a place which he and all his family thought they would reside until the famine eased. Besides, he had his father’s favorite son, Joseph, to contend with who already was in a position of authority.

Next in line is Zebulun whose experience, like the next six brothers after him (Benjamin’s blessing comes after Joseph), will be favorable but quite brief, his physical position being “at the shore of the sea” [vs. 13]. Would that mean Zebulun would live at the mouth of the Nile

River and control access by sea to Egypt? If that were true, Zebulun would in effect be just as important as Joseph, if not more, and could pose as a threat to his authority. Unbeknownst to him, that would not happen for another four hundred years. Zebulun's border would be at Sidon which is to the north in what is not Lebanon. Even should he have to wait several centuries, the prospect of his future is bright.

"Issachar is a strong ass crouching between the sheepfolds" [vs. 14]. That is to say, Issachar is likened to a domesticated animal—a beast of burden at that—which means he will be at the service of others, not an especially favorable blessing. However, he will be "strong" or *gerem*, a noun with four other biblical references, and means a bone: "His bones are like bars of iron" [Job 40.18]. The place where Issachar will crouch will be "a resting place (that) was good, and that the land was pleasant" [vs. 15]. So of all the brothers with the exception of Joseph Issachar is implied as being gentle. In light of his submissiveness, Issachar "bowed his shoulder to bear and became a slave at forced labor." Such words aren't exactly something Issachar would look forward to; although they apply to his submission to neighboring tribes in Canaan, they have application to the slavery the Israelites would endure after the prosperity of Joseph and welcoming spirit of the current Pharaoh.

After Issachar comes Dan who "shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel" [vs. 16]. This special task of lawgiving is inherent in Dan's proper name, *dyn* (to judge) and is extended to all Israel's descendants now put in terms of larger entities or tribes, *shevet* being the same word as "scepter" above as it applies to Judah. Among all the blessings Israel extends this one of *dyn* can be applied immediately or while the family was in Egypt. Vs. 17 expands upon the personal character of Dan which is less than flattering when he is equated to a serpent and a viper lurking on the road, symbolic of a small tribe attempting to usurp power, especially when both these reptiles cause the rider of a horse to fall off. Perhaps the rider may refer to Judah who has preeminence among the twelve brothers. *Nachash* was applied to the serpent which had tempted Eve, a comparison which must have made Dan uncomfortable. Would he be responsible for setting off a chain reaction as Eve had done? Not only that, Dan is a viper or *shephyphon*, the only use of the term in the Bible and applies to a snake with black and white spots. Then Israel interjects a cry for divine assistance: "I await for your salvation, O Lord." He has five more sons to bless and by this time was pretty much worn out due to the mixed nature of the blessings and the response from his sons. *Qawah* is the verb which was noted toward the beginning of Genesis with a different meaning: "Let the waters...be gathered" [1.9].

Next come in rapid succession blessings for the next three sons starting with Gad: "Raiders shall raid Gad, but he shall raid at their heels" [vs. 19]. The proper name Gad is similar to "raiders" or *gedod* and applies more to a band or raiders. "Yes, by you I can crush a troop; and by my God I can leap over a wall" [Ps 18.29]. And so Gad turns out to be an outcast of sorts among his brothers, a person whom they must be wary of.

"Asher's food shall be rich, and he shall yield royal dainties" [vs. 20]. *Shamen* is the adjective

for “rich” and is similar to the word for oil and fatness. “And they found rich pasture” [1Chron 4.40]. As for “dainties,” the noun is *mahadan* with three other references in the Bible, one of which being Prov 29.17: “He shall give delight to your soul.”

“Naphtali is a hind let loose that bears comely fawns” or in Hebrew, “gives beautiful words” [vs. 21]. *Ayalah* is the word for “fawn” with six other biblical references, one of which is Sg 2.7: “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the hinds of the field that you stir not up nor awaken love until it pleases.” The graceful freedom of a fawn is reflected by the ease by which Naphtali will be able to speak, that is, by his ability to give words which are beautiful or *shepher*, the only use of this adjective in the Bible derived from a verbal root meaning beautiful in the sense of pleasing.

Now comes the son most favored by Israel, Joseph, who is next to last to receive a blessing. While the other brothers were getting theirs, Joseph must have had some foreknowledge of his father’s blessings, the two being dreamers. That means of all the other sons Israel could share his inmost thoughts and desire with Joseph. While the others could catch only glimpses into their particular blessings, no problem with Joseph would could comprehend his father’s words readily. “Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring” [vs. 22]. As later events turned out, Joseph’s tribe was to suffer division by those born of Manasseh and Ephraim, his two sons who had their roots in Egypt. “Bough” is the simple noun for “son” who has a hidden, underground supply of refreshment that enables him to be fruitful, possibly intimating Joseph’s care for Egypt during the seven years of plenty which preceded those of the famine. Reference to “wall” can apply to the protection intended for the spring so that others—Egyptians, his brothers or later inhabitants of Canaan—will not plunder. This image of a wall brings up another, a fortified place assailed by archers in vs. 23, a type of harassment revealed by the verb *hatam* which more properly means to lay snares. Two other biblical references are found, all in Genesis, the previous one being in 27.41: “And Esau hated Jacob.” Perhaps that’s what Israel was referring to with his favorite son, Joseph, recalling those painful days of estrangement. However, Joseph was able to repel the archers (symbolic of Esau) with his arms which were agile or *pazaz*; one other reference with a different though not dissimilar meaning occurs which is 2Sam 6.16: “King David leaping and dancing before the Lord.” This ability to ward off assailing arches comes not from Joseph’s own strength but “by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (by the name of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel)” [vs. 24]. Thus Joseph is the only brother to whom Israel bestows a clear divine assistance in terms of three images: Mighty One or *Avyr*, shepherd (which Joseph had been doing while providing for Egypt during the famine) and rock. Four other biblical references to *avyr* are found, one of which being ps 132.2: “How he swore to the Lord and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob.”

Next Israel continues with explicit mention of divine favor toward Joseph though historically that would turn out otherwise, so he must have been thinking of the more immediate role he played in Egypt by providing for his family. Vs.5 opens with a continuance of the previous verse, “by the God of your father who will help you.” Israel, of course, refers to God who

appeared to him a number of times, actually the most of all the patriarchs, Abraham and Isaac being the other two. Israel made explicit that which was implicit, namely, that the God who helped Israel, his father and grandfather, will continue doing the same with Joseph. Next God is further identified by “God Almighty who will bless you,” that is to say, *El Shaddai* of 48.3: “God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me.” Israel specifies this divine blessing by mentioning those “of heaven above” and those “of the deep that couches beneath.” After including the blessing which comes from heaven and the earth and those from *tehom*, that primal chaos from which the earth had emerged, Israel adds one of “the breasts and of the womb.” Already Joseph had experienced this blessing through the birth of his two sons by his wife Asenath, a native Egyptian. Perhaps she and later her descendants dwelt at Goshen with the eleven brothers and the unmentioned sister, Dinah, and formed part of the heritage the Israelites formed and brought into Canaan after the Exodus.

Israel concludes his most favorable blessing upon Joseph by saying that they come from him directly (so did those of his other sons, but here he explicitly makes an association between him and Joseph). Such personal blessings transcend those “of the eternal mountains” which in Hebrew reads “of my progenitors.” *Harah* is a verb used for “progenitors” and means to conceive. “The chambers of her who conceived me” [Sg 3.4]. Next these “progenitors” are likened to the “bounties of the everlasting hills,” “bounties” being *ta’awah* and found in 3.6: “that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise.” Such “progenitors” and “bounties” are to be upon “the brow of him who was separate from his brothers,” a clear reference to Joseph having been sold into slavery, which must have made his brothers very uncomfortable. *Nazyr* is the noun for “separate” and derives from a verbal root meaning to make a vow; from it comes the proper noun Nazarite which applies to a consecrated person: “to vow a vow of a Nazarite” [Num 6.2]. This blessing would set Joseph over his brothers which indeed continued as long as he was alive in Egypt but would not survive later on in history.

Finally Israel asks the last of his sons, Benjamin to enter who he likens to “a ravenous wolf” [vs. 27]. The tension must have been quite intolerable for him while he watched all his brothers enter and leave Israel’s presence. Benjamin could intimate the nature of each blessing by the look on the face of each of his brothers. *Ze’ev* is the word for “wolf” with six other biblical references, one of which is Ezk 22.27: “like wolves ravaging the prey.” Benjamin behaves such during the morning whereas at evening he divides the spoil. Thus he is occupied with pillage and plunder all the day long, nothing to look forward for Israel’s first-born son who despite his importance, was inferior to Joseph. As for Dinah, the only daughter, we have no blessing which is in keeping with tradition. As noted above, we can presume her present all along, especially while her father was doling out blessings, and perhaps in the company of Asenath, Joseph’s wife.

Finally Israel completes his important task of conferring blessings upon his twelve sons and did so not so much for them but for their ancestors who centuries later would continue the

divine mission initiated by Abraham. After all, Israel was a dreamer and knew what was in store later on. Despite the generosity of Pharaoh and blessings of Egypt, Israel speaks of his impending death and desire to be buried in his native Canaan. "I am to be gathered to my people" [vs. 29]. *Asaph* is the verb for "gather," a term for death, and means a summing up of one's entire life which here is situated within the larger context of "my people" or those sons present in Egypt as well as anyone who might remain in Canaan. Israel makes very clear his final resting place, "in the field of Ephron the Hittite" [vs. 29] which harkens all the way back to Chapter Twenty-Three when Abraham bought a cave for burial for Sarah, himself and later descendants. Vs. 31 is clear about this by mentioning their names including Isaac and Leah. Though that cave had been purchased long ago and was well maintained until the time Israel left Canaan for Egypt, he must have intuited that it continued to be in possession of their extended family. It was to remain an anchor of hope for eventual return to Egypt despite the prosperity and later hardship experienced through that extended exile.

Chapter Forty-Nine concludes with Israel having "breathed his last" or *gawah*, a verb noted in conjunction with the deaths of Abraham and Isaac (25.8 and 35.29). Immediately afterwards Israel was, as he had requested, "gathered to his people" which in the immediate circumstances consisted of his sons and others who had come with him into Egypt. It was later in 50.12 that Joseph makes the journey to the cave of Ephron and buries his father. Chances are that given Joseph's prestige and influence with Pharaoh, he had assigned a military guard of sorts or some other people to watch over the place. Indeed, the burial spot had remained undisturbed and ready to receive Joseph at his request (cf. 50.25).

Chapter Fifty

This chapter brings to a conclusion the Book of Genesis by telling of Israel's death and burial in the land of Canaan which involves a journey there from Egypt. In other words, we have the last account of a journey between these two countries; a number of such journeys had been recounted which shows the close proximity between the two lands. However, this will change dramatically in the next book, Exodus. There the Israelites will not make quick passage into Canaan but will be detoured into the Sinai wilderness for forty years. Given the small geographical area, staying in that one place for such a long time seems unlikely. It is from the temporal point of view but from the spiritual it is another matter, for that realm is not dependent upon temporal or historical conditions even though it works through them.

Chapter Fifty begins with a picture of Joseph's *chesed* as manifested with regard to his father: "Joseph fell on his father's face and wept over him and kissed him." Note that the text doesn't mention the other brothers who were stunned to varying degrees over the blessings they had just received. They paid their due respects but nothing more. As for their relation to Israel, it's put negatively later in vs. 15: "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil which we did to him"...and to their father, it might be added. In accord with Egyptian burial practice, Joseph "commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father" [vs. 2]. *Chanat* is the verb for "embalm" which originally means to spice or season

with three other references, the only one not in this particular context being Sg 2.13: “The green tree puts forth its green figs.” The embalming period lasted forty days followed by a seventy day mourning period during which the Egyptians paid their respects (cf. vs. 3). They did so not knowing Israel but out of reverence for Joseph who had saved them from the famine. If Joseph were of such noble character surely his father was the same, so they reasoned.

In vs. 5 Joseph speaks to “the household of Pharaoh” or those to whom he was directly responsible about traveling to Canaan in order to bury his father. In the same verse Joseph speaks “in the ears of Pharaoh” which means he was able to approach him directly, something off limits to most mortals. True to Pharaoh’s generous character, immediately he bids Joseph to “Go up and bury your father” [vs. 6]. Joseph didn’t travel alone. With him went “all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household and all the elders of the land of Egypt” [vs. 7]. Surely such a complement would have been unheard of for a foreigner which reveals how highly the Egyptians respected Joseph. Israel’s sons are conspicuous by not being mentioned except more or less in passing, vs. 12. They must have experienced considerable shame and embarrassment at how they let down their father and betrayed their brother.

When the Egyptian escort arrived at the threshing floor of Atad, the native Canaanites remarked that “this is a grievous mourning among the Egyptians” [vs. 11]. The adjective *kaved* is used for “great” meaning heavy. Egyptians were their mighty neighbors to the southwest, always threatening invasion, so when the Canaanites saw such a large contingent of them it was only natural to be afraid. Could this be a ruse to let down the guard of the native inhabitants? Would the Egyptians use this occasion to settle permanently? They were relieved when Joseph made his presence known, his reputation having been known in Canaan as well as other places outside Egypt. If it weren’t for him, surely the inhabitants would have been alarmed and may even have taken some preemptive military action. So after the burial of Israel who was carried to Canaan by his sons (cf. vs. 12), they, Joseph and the Egyptians returned home.

Back in Egypt after having experienced a brief stay at home, Joseph’s brothers returned to Goshen, glad to get back to a place unaffected by the severe famine. Their visit to Canaan must have made them homesick, but remaining in Egypt was a matter of survival. Now that the mourning period was over, the brothers feared what Joseph may do to them. “It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil which we did to him” [vs. 15]. *Satam* is the verb for “will hate” and fundamentally means to lay snares. Five other biblical references exist, one of which was noted in 27.41: “and Esau hated Jacob.” The brothers had in mind the painful separation between their father and their uncle, so it was only natural to project this fear onto the betrayal of Joseph which aggravated the situation. This betrayal had been noted from time to time since it occurred, a recurring theme which reveals how deeply it had affected the family. Also the brothers can be seen as hiding behind the dead body of their father, a dastardly deed if there ever was one.

Finally the brothers decided to resolve as best as possible this nagging guilt. They did it, however, by what seems to be a half-truth. They claimed that “your father gave this command before he died” [vs. 16], namely, that Joseph is to forgive “the transgression of your brothers and their sin because they did evil to you” [vs. 17]. No record of this request is given which means it isn’t untrue. Given the rather unsavory nature of these brothers, it wouldn’t be surprising if they had concocted this idea or expanded on something their father may have said earlier. Regardless, emphasis upon the brothers’ faults is, objectively speaking, proof that the account is not fabricated. Any depiction of the founding of a nation stresses the positive side, never the negative. As for the brothers, at issue was the collective “transgression” or *pesheh* which means a fault or rebellion. “Jacob said to Laban, ‘What is my offense’” [31.36]? While all this is a less than desirable way to bring the Book of Genesis to conclusion, it serves as a kind of preface to Joseph’s *chesed* which had been manifest right from the beginning. “But Joseph said to them, ‘Fear not, for am I in the place of God’” [vs. 19]? Joseph doesn’t evade the subject of his brothers having betrayed him. He acknowledges this yet skips over it to what is really at issue here, a sentiment that echos 45.5: “but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive as they are today” [vs.20]. Finally the brothers were put at ease. “Thus he reassured them and comforted them” [vs. 21]. The Hebrew for “comforted” reads literally “and he spoke on their hearts.”

With this painful situation finally out of the way, Joseph continued dwelling in Egypt along with his brothers. On his deathbed at the age of one hundred and ten he said to his brothers, all of whom presumably were alive and well up there in age, “God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob” [vs. 25]. *Paqad* is the verb for “will visit” and was noted in 39.4: “So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had.” As for this *paqad*, Joseph is silent. He must have known it would be many centuries off but again in accord with his *chesed*, he did not disclose this to his brothers, else they would despair. Apparently neither they nor their descendants did but continued remaining in Goshen.

To bring the Joseph saga to a conclusion, he has his brothers swear an oath—and he may have had doubts as whether they would keep it—that “you shall carry up my bones from here” [vs, 26]. This is preceded by another use of *paqad* as to God’s visit sometime in the future. So despite the generosity of Egypt, Joseph wished not to remain there even in death. Finally his body was “put in a coffin in Egypt” vs. 26], *aron* being the word for “coffin.” This word later was used as referring to the ark of covenant after the Israelites had left Egypt. Thus it is fitting for Joseph to be placed in such an *aron* without having been embalmed as was his father, Israel.

Addendum

A quick mention of the role Moses had to play is in order, for he is responsible for having composed the Book of Genesis. No specific mention of him is found throughout, but we can intimate his presence especially at the beginning and end. The beginning or up until the flood comprised prehistorical accounts of creation with the emergence of some historical data though not much of the latter compared with Genesis as a whole. Then the text develops according to the lines of what we call history, especially starting more specifically with Abraham. This historical phase, if you will, reaches its climax with the saga of Joseph being sold into Egypt in Chapter Thirty-Seven. The details from that point to the end of Genesis are remarkable...Joseph's dramatic rise in Egypt to second in command after Pharaoh. This emphasis upon meticulous details continues with Joseph's dealing with his eleven brothers, of testing them and eventually settling them in Egypt along with their father. Moses was especially concerned to get all the details right, of setting all in order, so that the Israelites could get established. Once this had been done over a period of some four hundred plus years, the stage was set for Moses himself to insert his presence in the Bible, namely, in the Book of Exodus. And so Moses moved from a mythic to an historical presence—an incarnation, if you will—all in accord with the divine plan begun in Chapter One of Genesis right to his death.

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