

# Redactional Structuring in the Joseph Story: Genesis 37–50

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THE trend in biblical criticism in recent years has been toward treating large sections of the Hebrew Bible as unified wholes. For when all is said and done, no matter which school of source criticism one adheres to, we are still left with the Hebrew text as we have it. Instead of dividing up the text into its microscopic parts, scholars have been pulling back the lens and viewing the text as a macroscopic whole. The biblical book which started the move to fragmentation, the Book of Genesis, has not been immune from this trend.

Several important studies should be mentioned here at the outset. In 1975 Michael Fishbane published a seminal article on the Jacob cycle (25:19–35:22),<sup>1</sup> in which he showed that the various stories concerning the third patriarch are all duplicates of one another, aligned in chiasmic order. That is to say, the first and last episodes share the same motifs and concerns, as do the second and next-to-last episodes, etc. Moreover, the relationship between these matching units is highlighted by a series of shared vocabulary items, or theme-words.

In 1980 Jack M. Sasson wrote a similar work on the primeval history (1:1–11:9).<sup>2</sup> Here, too, there are matching units, again sharing related themes and various theme-words. In this instance, the individual units are not in chiasmic structure, rather in parallel columns. Thus, the first and sixth episodes are paired, the second and seventh, the third and eighth, the fourth and ninth, the fifth and tenth. Sasson referred to the literary schema used by the compiler as “redactional structuring” (a term which is borrowed herein) and noted that “the episodes culled from Hebraic traditions of early history were conceived in two matching sequences.”<sup>3</sup>

The groundwork for redactional structuring in a third portion of Genesis had actually been laid years earlier by Umberto Cassuto.<sup>4</sup> This savant noted that the Abraham cycle (12:1–22:19) also consisted of a series of episodes which, to a great extent, duplicate and parallel each other, again in chiasmic order. Cassuto did not live to

complete his work on Genesis, so there is no way to determine if he also would have noted theme-words linking the paired units. Nahum M. Sarna had noticed, apparently independently of Cassuto, some of the same structure.<sup>5</sup> He did point out shared vocabulary items, at least for the two *lek lēkā* (“go forth”) stories, the call at Haran (12:1–9) and the Akedah (22:1–19).

Once it was determined that the first three cycles of Genesis contain a purposeful literary structure, the search for such a pattern in the one remaining cycle, the Joseph story, became an obvious task. The Joseph story, by all accounts, is the most unified narrative in Genesis, perhaps in the entire Bible. As great a source critic as Gerhard von Rad described it as “an organically constructed narrative,”<sup>6</sup> and Sarna spoke of its “unparalleled continuity of narrative.”<sup>7</sup>

Accordingly, if Sasson, Cassuto, and Fishbane are correct about the literary structures of the first three cycles in Genesis, it should not be surprising to find a similar system operating in the Joseph story. This holds not only for the chapters dealing with Joseph directly, but for the material in which he is absent or nominally present as well. I refer, of course, to the interruptions of 38:1–30 and 49:1–28. The Judah and Tamar episode and Jacob’s testament are interludes which break up the telling of the Joseph story, but they nevertheless have been skillfully worked into the redactional plan of the cycle.

The structure of the Joseph story is as follows:

- A Joseph and his brothers, Jacob and Joseph part (37:1–36)
- B Interlude: Joseph not present (38:1–30)
- C Reversal: Joseph guilty, Potiphar’s wife innocent (39:1–23)
- D Joseph hero of Egypt (40:1–41:57)
- E Two trips to Egypt (42:1–43:34)
- F Final test (44:1–34)
- F’ Conclusion of test (45:1–28)
- E’ Two tellings of migration to Egypt (46:1–47:12)
- D’ Joseph hero of Egypt (47:13–27)

C' Reversal: Ephraim firstborn, Manasseh secondborn (47:28–48:22)

B' Interlude: Joseph nominally present (49:1–28)

A' Joseph and his brothers, Jacob and Joseph part (49:29–50:26)

The cycle builds through six episodes, A–F, leading to the climax of the tale, and then concludes with six parallel episodes, F'–A'. The structure is a chiasmic one, just as Cassuto proposed for the Abraham cycle and as Fishbane demonstrated for the Jacob cycle.<sup>8</sup> The themes and motifs of the first half of the cycle are repeated or echoed in the second half. Moreover, just as Fishbane showed in the Jacob cycle, the relationship between any two matching units is cemented by the inclusion of shared vocabulary items, or theme-words.

These theme-words can be of several types. The most obvious are those where the same word is used in matching episodes. Others are different words or, to use more precise grammatical terminology, different inflections, from the same root. Some theme-words can be like-sounding words which derive from separate roots, and still others may be merely similar in meaning or share a similar connotation. What links all of these variations is the ability to connect, if the writer or compiler has achieved his goal, the different units of the cycle.

Let us progress to a unit-by-unit discussion where all of this is more clearly seen.

A Joseph and his brothers, Jacob and Joseph part (37:1–36)

A' Joseph and his brothers, Jacob and Joseph part (49:29–50:26)

Unit A establishes the major conflict of the tale, the conflict between Joseph and his brothers. This conflict will not be fully resolved until the story's end, unit A'. The action of A is repeated in A' in two major ways. In both sections Joseph is alone with his brothers, their father Jacob not part of the scene. Also, in A father and son part due to the faked death of the latter, and in A' father and son part due to the actual death of the former.

Twelve theme-words link the episodes still further:

1) In 37:1 we read that Jacob lived *bě'eres mēgûrê 'ābîw* "in the

land of his father's sojourning"; and in 49:29 the patriarch instructs Joseph *qibrû 'ôtî 'el 'ăbôtāy* "bury me with my fathers."

- 2) *bě'ereš kěnā'an* "in the land of Canaan" occurs in 37:1; and *'aršāh kěnā'an* "to the land of Canaan" occurs in 50:13.
- 3) The word *rā'āh* "evil" appears three times in each unit, in 37:2, 37:20, 37:33, and in 50:15, 50:17, 50:20.
- 4) *'ăbîhem* "their father" is also prominent in both A and A', occurring in 37:2, 37:4, 37:12, 37:32, and in 49:28, 50:15.
- 5) In 37:4 we read *wayyir'û 'ehāw* "his brothers saw"; and in 50:15 we have *wayyir'û 'ăhê yôšēp* "Joseph's brothers saw."
- 6) The verbal root *dbr* "speak" is used in A in 37:4 and commonly in A' in 49:28, 50:4 (bis), 50:17, 50:21.
- 7) In 37:7, 37:9, 37:10, the Hišthaph'el (Št) of *hwh* "prostrate"<sup>9</sup> is used in Joseph's dreams to illustrate his brothers' obeisance; this reverberates with *wayyipēlû lēpānāw* "they [his brothers] fell before him [Joseph]" in 50:18.
- 8) *wayyelēkû (gam) 'ehāw* "his brothers went" occurs in 37:12 and 50:18.
- 9) A local man assists Joseph in 37:15–17 and the local Canaanites witness Joseph's and his entourage's mourning in 50:11.
- 10) The verbal root *nkl* in the Hithpa'el "plot" is used in 37:18, and the nonrelated but assonant root *klkl* "sustain" is used in 50:21.
- 11) Similarly, the verbal root *nkr* "recognize" is predicated of Jacob in 37:32–33, and Joseph reports Jacob's use of *karîtu* "I dug" from the nonrelated but assonant root *krh* in 50:5.
- 12) The root *'bl* "mourn" is used in connection with Jacob's mourning for Joseph in 37:34–35, and in 50:10–11 in connection with Joseph's mourning for Jacob.

## B Interlude: Joseph not present (38:1–30)

## B' Interlude: Joseph nominally present (49:1–28)

It hardly takes deep analysis into the Joseph story to realize that B is a unit with no direct relationship to the general story line. Joseph is nowhere mentioned, and although there are connections between B and A and C,<sup>10</sup> the narrative is complete without 38:1–30. That this chapter is an interlude has not only been recognized by modern scholars,<sup>11</sup> but by Rashi and Ibn Ezra centuries ago.

Although it has been worked into the story a bit more directly, B' is also an interlude. It interrupts the narrative, as a comparison of 48:21–22 and 49:29 demonstrates. Joseph is only nominally present, unlike C' and A' where he dominates. 49:1–27 is clearly an independent poem. Donald B. Redford has astutely noted that it is set in Canaan,<sup>12</sup> and in this sense it is a fitting parallel to 38:1–30 which deals with Judah's life in Canaan. The Egyptian flavor which characterizes the Joseph story throughout is lacking in both units.<sup>13</sup>

The Judah and Tamar episode and the Testament of Jacob might seem too different—beyond their role as interludes and their setting in Canaan—to have themes and theme-words linking them in any meaningful way. But such is not the case, for as the following list indicates, there are surprisingly more such items shared by B and B' than by any other matching units in the cycle.

Since the only common material in B and B' is that concerning Judah, it is appropriate to begin looking at Jacob's words to his fourth son in 49:8–12. These verses are filled with cruxes, but scholars in the last several decades have begun to solve many of them by reading them as references to the Judah and Tamar episode. From the works of Edwin Good,<sup>14</sup> Calum Carmichael,<sup>15</sup> and James Ackerman<sup>16</sup> the following tie-ins may be cited.

- 1) The key to seeing the blessing of Judah as a reference to 38:1–30 is the similarity between *šilôh*, traditionally rendered “Shiloh,” in 49:10, and *šēlāh* “Shelah” in 38:5, 38:11, 38:14, 38:26.<sup>17</sup>
- 2) The *šēbet* “sceptre” shall not depart from Judah in 49:10, just as Judah's *matteh* “staff” was handed to Tamar in 38:18 and used as evidence against him in 38:25.
- 3) A sexual connotation can certainly be read into *mēhōqēq mibbēn*

*raglāw* “the staff between his legs” in 49:10, and allied to Judah’s visiting a prostitute in 38:15–19.

- 4) *’irôh* “his donkey” in 49:11, evokes *’ēr* “Er,” Judah’s first son, in 38:3, 38:6, 38:7.
- 5) Similarly, *bēnî ’ătônô* “son of the she-ass” in 49:11, brings to mind *’ônān* “Onan,” Judah’s second son in 38:4, 38:8, 38:9.
- 6) *sôreqāh* “vine, stock” in 49:11, alludes to the valley of Soreq, which recalls Timnah in 38:12–13.<sup>18</sup>

Other links between the blessing to Judah and his earlier escapades may also be pointed out.

- 7) The verbal root *swr* in the Qal “depart” appears in 49:10; and in the Hiph’il “remove” it occurs in 38:14, 38:19.
- 8) *yābō* “he comes” in 49:10, suggests *wayyābō* “he came” in 38:18.
- 9) *sûtôh* “his robe” in 49:11 is not etymologically related to *kissē-tāh* “she covered” in 38:15, but they share three consonants, sound alike, and both convey the idea of clothing.
- 10) The root *lbs* “clothe” appears in both 49:11 and 38:19.

The few verses spoken to Judah thus contain ten theme-words which link B’ with Judah’s history in B. But the blessings to the other sons also contain similar expressions to those in 38:1–30.

- 11) *běkôr* “firstborn” occurs in 49:3 and 38:6.
- 12) *’ônî* “my vigor” in 49:3 might also suggest *’ônān* “Onan” in 38:4, 38:8, 38:9.
- 13) The word *’āz* “strong, fierce” is used in 49:3, 49:7; and in 38:17, 38:20 we have *’izzîm* “goats.”
- 14) *wayyēt* is used in 49:15 and in 38:16 meaning “he bent, he turned”; and it also occurs in 38:1 meaning “he pitched.”
- 15) In 49:17 we read *’ălê derek* “by the road”; and in 38:16 we have *’el hadderek* “by the road.”

- 16) The alliteration *gād gēdūd yēgūdennū* “Gad shall be raided by raiders” in 49:19, suggests the important *gēdī* “kid” in 38:17, 38:20, 38:23.
- 17) *yāgud* “he shall raid” in 49:19, evokes *wayyuggad* “it was told” in 38:24.

In sum, there are seventeen theme-words which highlight the parallel status of 38:1–30 and 49:1–28. As a comparison with other matching units in the Joseph story will determine, seventeen such parallels is an unusually high number. Perhaps because the Judah and Tamar tale and the Testament of Jacob are so dissimilar, the need was felt for more shared words and ideas than is customary. That is to say, A and A' and the other matching units are similar enough in action not to require that many theme-words. B and B' are less homogeneous, however, and thus the redactor has ensured their correspondence through a veritable plethora of theme-words. Commentators have usually dismissed the two pericopes as interludes, which is here not denied, but they should also be recognized as the balancing second and penultimate sections in the Joseph story.<sup>19</sup>

C Reversal: Joseph guilty, Potiphar's wife innocent (39:1–23)

C' Reversal: Ephraim firstborn, Manasseh secondborn (47:28–48:22)

In the first of these pericopes, a switch of positions finds Joseph, who is innocent, found guilty, and Potiphar's wife, who in actuality is guilty, found innocent. In the second episode, Ephraim, who actually is the secondborn, is declared the firstborn, and Manasseh, who naturally is the firstborn, is reduced to the secondborn. In both instances, Joseph's superior is ultimately responsible for the reversal, whether it be his master Potiphar or his father Jacob. In each case the action centers around the bed. This is explicit in C' where Jacob lies in bed (*mittāh* in 47:31) and Joseph is beside him, and implicit in C where Potiphar's wife presumably is in bed or has the bed in mind and Joseph is beside her.

A series of theme-words links the two units.

- 1) The verbal root *brk* “bless” is important in both units, occurring in 39:5 (bis) and in 48:3, 48:15, 48:16, 48:20 (bis).

- 2) *wayǔmā'ēn wayyō'mer* "he resisted and said" appears in 39:8; and the same words with the subject *'ābîw* "his father" interposed occur in 48:19.
- 3) In 39:4 we read *wayyimšā'yôsep hēn bē'ēnāw* "Joseph found favor in his eyes"; and in 47:29 we have *'im nā'māšā'tî hēn bē'ēnekā* "if I have found favor in your eyes."
- 4) The word *hesed* "favor" is used in both 39:21 and 47:29.
- 5) The verbal root *škb* "lie" is prominent in C, occurring four times in 39:7–14, and it reverberates in C' in 47:30.
- 6) *yād* "hand" in its various forms is extremely common and very important in C, occurring nine times. It is equally important in C' since the reversal results from Jacob's crossed hands and because it is used in Joseph's swearing to Jacob; see 47:29, 48:14, 48:17 (bis).
- 7) The method of swearing in 47:29 involves the sexual organs,<sup>20</sup> and clearly Potiphar's wife has sexual intercourse in mind in 39:7, 39:12.
- 8) *lehem*, literally "bread" but figuratively "wife,"<sup>21</sup> occurs in 39:6; and *bêt lāhem* "Bethlehem (house of bread)" occurs in 48:7.

#### D Joseph hero of Egypt (40:1–41:57)

#### D' Joseph hero of Egypt (47:13–27)

Twice during the Joseph story we have episodes which describe how Joseph saves Egypt from famine and becomes a national hero. It is clear that these units, one relatively long and one relatively short, are parallel. The following theme-words highlight the correspondence.

- 1) The word *rā'āb* "famine" occurs ubiquitously in D and in D' in 47:13 (bis), 47:20.
- 2) The word *lehem* "bread" is used twice in D in 41:54–55, and commonly in D'.

- 3) (*wē*)*tālāh* “he hung, he will hang” occurs in 40:19, 40:22, and *wattēlah* “languished” appears in 47:13.
- 4) The verbal root *šbr* “buy/sell grain” is used in 41:56–57 and in 47:14; the noun *šēber* “grain” also occurs in 47:14.
- 5) *qāneh* “stalk” appears in 41:5, 41:22; and the verbal root *qnh* “buy” occurs in 47:19, 47:22, 47:23.
- 6) *‘ārīm* “cities” is used in 41:48 and 47:21.
- 7) *‘ereš mišrayim* “the land of Egypt,” or simply *hā’āreš* “the land,” are exceedingly common in D and D’; the latter also uses *‘ādā-māh* “land” and various forms.
- 8) The root *hms* in the sense of dividing the land into fifths occurs in 41:34 and 47:24, 47:26.

#### E Two trips to Egypt (42:1–43:34)

##### E’ Two tellings of migration to Egypt (46:1–47:12)

As the Joseph story progresses there follows the account of the brothers’ two trips to Egypt. In the first trip they go merely to acquire food and in the second trip they return with Benjamin in order to free Simeon. Parallel to the two journeys are two tellings of how Jacob’s family migrates to Egypt and settles in Goshen. The first account is comprised mainly of a genealogical list and the second describes the presentation of Jacob and his sons before Pharaoh. Furthermore, the first trip to Egypt in E and the second telling of the eventual migration to Egypt in E’ are both centered on economic concerns. Similarly, the second trip in E and the first telling in E’ are both centered on family concerns. Accordingly, even within the greater chiasmic structure of the entire Joseph story, there is a minichiasm built into these two matching units.

Various items link the two units.

- 1) In 42:1–2 *reḏû* “go down” and *mišrayim* “Egypt” are collocated; in 46:3 we read *mêreḏāh mišraymāh* “from going down to Egypt.”

- 2) The brothers present themselves as *'ābādekā* “your servants” to Joseph in 42:10, 42:11, 42:13, and use the same term in speaking to Pharaoh in 46:34, 47:3, 47:4 (bis).
- 3) Judah has a prominent role in 43:3–10, and he appears in 46:28 as well.
- 4) The verbal root *šlh* “send” is used in connection with Jacob sending his sons led by Judah to Egypt in 43:4–5, and in 46:28 when he sends Judah ahead to pave the way.
- 5) *lô' tir'û pānay* “you shall not see my face” are Joseph’s words quoted to Jacob in 43:5; and *rě'ôû 'et pānekā* “I have seen your face” are Jacob’s words to Joseph in 46:30.
- 6) Similarly, *ha'ôd 'ābîkem hay* “is your father still alive?” are Joseph’s words quoted to Jacob in 43:7; and *kî 'ôděkā hāy* “that you are still alive” are Jacob’s words to Joseph in 46:30.

F Final test (44:1–34)

F' Conclusion of test (45:1–28)

Standing at the middle of the Joseph story are the units leading up to the cycle’s denouement and the denouement itself. The former is highlighted by Judah’s famous speech, unsurpassed in Scripture for the sympathy and suffering, emotion and pathos it stirs. Indeed it moves Joseph to tears and to disclose his true identity, actions which dominate the latter unit.

F and F' are further connected by the following theme-words.

- 1) The verbal root *mhr* “hasten” occurs in 44:11 and in 45:9, 45:13.
- 2) *pî* “mouth of” occurs in the sense of the mouth of the bag in 44:1, 44:2, 44:8, and in the sense of a human mouth in 45:12, 45:21.
- 3) Benjamin is essential to F, mentioned specifically in 44:12 and alluded to as the youngest brother throughout Judah’s speech in 44:18–34; he is also notable in F' in 45:12, 45:14, 45:22.

- 4) The verbal root *šlh* “send” appears in F in 44:3 and commonly, six times to be exact, in F’.
- 5) The verbal root *yrd* “descend” is common in F, occurring seven times, and appears in F’ in 45:9, 45:13.
- 6) Judah describes Jacob’s reaction to Joseph’s absence and presumed death in 44:28 *ṭārōp ṭōrāp* “he must have been torn to pieces”; Joseph lets his brothers know that he knows the true story in 45:5 *mēkartem ’ōtî* “you sold me.”

The foregoing dissection of Genesis 37–50 demonstrates that a systematic editorial pattern is operative in the Joseph story. A series of units builds toward a climax, then follows a second series where matching units in reverse order bring the story to resolution and fulfillment. The two sequences A–F and F’–A’ are hinged at a pivot point standing smack in the center of the cycle, 45:1–4, where Joseph reveals himself to his brothers.<sup>22</sup> Everything in A through F (with the possible exception of the interlude in B) has been structured to lead us to this climax, with Joseph in the position of power whereby he can exact playful revenge on his brothers. From F through A (again with the possible exception of the interlude in B) all is resolved. Jacob’s family migrates to Egypt and settles in Goshen, famine strikes, yet Joseph sustains the people, Joseph’s children receive Jacob’s blessing, Jacob breathes his last breath, and Joseph too dies, having lived the fullest of lives as indicated by his 110-year lifespan.<sup>23</sup> Our redactor has done his job remarkably well, even to the very last word of Genesis, *bēmiṣrāyim* “in Egypt,” a fitting conclusion to the Joseph story which also neatly sets the scene for the Book of Exodus.<sup>24</sup>

The shared theme-words cement the parallelism of the respective units. It is obvious that an occasional example among the dozens listed above may be coincidental, especially when we are dealing with a fairly common verb, e.g., *šlh* “send,” which links both E and E and F and F (in each case as point 4 in the lists above). However, the cumulative weight of the evidence suggests that the theme-words have been specifically selected by the redactor to link the units of the cycle. Moreover, my sense is that, with few exceptions, the redactor intended the various theme-words to operate collectively. They connect the matched units as a group, not just as single words.

The recognition of the literary structure of the Joseph story has important ramifications for both redaction criticism and source criti-

cism. The results of my study impact on the traditional methods of each of these approaches, as the following examples will illustrate. A glance at any standard commentary on Genesis will reveal that most scholars believe that the Joseph story in its final form is an expanded version of an originally shorter tale. That is to say, various secondary passages have been added, for one reason or another, to the essential story. However, the literary structure of the cycle I am proposing invalidates these suggestions. Four examples may be put forward.

First, the reference to the unnamed stranger who assists Joseph in his search for his brothers in 37:15–17 is admittedly most peculiar. Both von Rad and Redford have labeled this passage “secondary,”<sup>25</sup> but a closer look reveals that it is integral. It is needed to counterbalance the reference to the local Canaanites in 50:11. Redford also considers the latter verse secondary,<sup>26</sup> but it is odd that both “secondary” additions are among the points which cement the bond between A and A (point 9 in the appropriate list above).

A second example is especially illustrative. Many scholars have been puzzled by the reference to Rachel’s death and burial in 48:7. John Skinner wrote, “The notice . . . is very loosely connected with what precedes.”<sup>27</sup> Von Rad stated, “The reference to Rachel’s death has no recognizable relation to what follows or precedes.”<sup>28</sup> Robert Davidson opined, “This brief note about the death and burial of Rachel (see 35:16–20) is poorly related to the context. . . . What is not clear is why it appears at this point in Jacob’s speech to Joseph.”<sup>29</sup> And finally Bruce Vawter called it “a seemingly pointless reference to Rachel’s death and burial.”<sup>30</sup> August Dillmann was less concerned about the notice as a whole, stating that “the absence of any apparent motive prevents our regarding the verse as a mere gloss,” but he did note that “the words *hw’ byt lhm* are out of place in Jacob’s mouth, and are a late addition.”<sup>31</sup> Admittedly this is correct, for one would not expect to see such a gloss (see Genesis 14 for many more examples) in direct speech. But by paying heed to the use of *lehem* in C in 39:6, where it is pregnant with meaning, we are able to uncover the redactor’s reason for including *bêt lāhem* in C in 48:7 (see point 8 in the appropriate list above). Such an important word from C needed to be reverberated in C, and the inclusion of Bethlehem, no matter how out of place, was a way of accomplishing that task.

My third example deals with an entire unit, namely D, the fifteen verses which describe the implementation of Joseph’s agrarian reforms in Egypt. Redford considered the entire section “extraneous to the plot of the Joseph Story,”<sup>32</sup> but attention to redactional structuring indicates that this pericope is needed to counterbalance unit D and thus should be considered an integral part of the cycle.

My final example of a redactional problem which may be alleviated by paying heed to the literary structure outlined above is the case of 46:6–27, the list of Jacob's descendants. E. A. Speiser considered these verses to be "intrusive in the present narrative,"<sup>33</sup> and Davidson has similarly contended that "the list has obviously been inserted into the narrative at this point; verse 28 being the natural continuation of verse 5."<sup>34</sup> One cannot deny that the genealogical material interrupts the flow of the narrative, but the literary schema I have presented explains why the list is placed where it is. Since there are *two* journeys which the brothers make in E, there needs to be *two* descriptions of the final migration to Egypt in E'. Since there was only one actual migration by Jacob's family, the compiler could give only one account, namely 46:28–47:12. But to balance the two actual journeys of 42:1–43:34,<sup>35</sup> the redactor incorporated a brief notice about a theophany discussing the descent (46:1–5) followed by a long genealogy describing the extent of the family which settled in Egypt (46:6–27).

These four examples sufficiently demonstrate the lesson to be learned here. Exegetes should be careful in their use of the term "secondary" and should take note of the artistic manner in which *all* portions of a particular story operate together.<sup>36</sup>

The implications of the literary structure of the Joseph story for source criticism are also crucial. The establishment of a basic unity in a large section of narrative in the Torah by necessity leads to a discussion of the Documentary Hypothesis. Now it is true that the presence of a literary structure in the Joseph story does not a priori militate against the conclusions of the JEDP Theory.<sup>37</sup> Fishbane, for example, in his treatment of the Jacob cycle, wrote, "This is not to side-step 'documentary' issues. For it is clear that the Jacob Cycle has been composed from numerous traditions. It is, however, the point of this paper to see what was 'done' with these traditions."<sup>38</sup> In other words, it is possible that the compiler of the Joseph story or the Jacob cycle merely took the J, E, and P materials and edited them in a manner to produce the corresponding sections.

Cassuto took a more negative view toward the Documentary Hypothesis in his discussion of redactional structuring in the Abraham cycle. He concluded, "The perfected form of this structure does not support the view espoused by most modern exegetes, who regard the text as an accidental product of the combination of a number of fragments from various sources. . . . This theory and the problem of the sources of the narratives in general we shall discuss later."<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, the author's death prevented him from completing this task, though a few pertinent sentences may be culled from the commentary on 12:1–13:5 which survived. But even these statements do

not speak to the specific point of how the cycle's unity contradicts the JEDP Theory. Thus it is difficult to predict what route Cassuto would have used.

This does not mean that Cassuto's basic assumption is incorrect. Notwithstanding my statement above that redactional unity need not a priori invalidate the JEDP Theory, when one considers the evidence of the theme-words, the failings of this traditional approach to source criticism become readily apparent. That is to say, as the examples below will illustrate, if source X uses theme-words a, b, c, d, e, etc., and source Y uses the same items, it becomes clearer and clearer that we must see one hand behind the authorship of the Joseph story and not multiple hands.

Let us use units D and D' as our first illustration. The former is usually ascribed to the Elohist and the latter to the Yahwist. If this is so, however, then we must posit the question as to why *rā'āb*, *lehem*, *tlh*, *šbr*, *qnh*, *'ārām*, *'eres mišrayim*, and *hms* are used in 40:1–41:57, presumably by one author, and then again in 47:13–27, presumably by another author (the items listed are points 1 through 8 in the discussion of C and C' above).

Similarly, most of unit A, especially the first twenty verses, is customarily assigned to the Yahwist, whereas most of unit A', especially from verse 15 on, is typically ascribed to the Elohist. Again we ask: how is it then that presumably one author uses *rā'āh*, *'ābîhem*, *wayyir'û 'ehāw*, *db*, the Hištaph'el of *hwh*, *wayyelēkû 'ehāw*, and *nkl*, and that presumably another author uses *rā'āh*, *'ābîhem*, *wayyir'û 'āhē yôšēp*, *db*, *wayyipplû lēpānāw*, *wayyelēkû gam 'ehāw*, and *klkl* (these are points 3 through 8 and point 10 in the discussion of A and A' above).

I could continue to multiply such examples from among the various units which comprise the Joseph story, but the point is already clear. I contend that there is more source unity in the Joseph story than is generally assumed and I have no problems claiming that one hand is responsible for the whole narrative. The evidence, especially when the total picture is properly assessed, leads me to conclude that the standard division of the Joseph story into J, E, and P strands should be discarded.<sup>40</sup> This method of source criticism is a method of an earlier age, predominantly of the nineteenth century. If new approaches to the text, such as literary criticism of the type advanced here<sup>41</sup> and as pursued by other scholars as well,<sup>42</sup> deem the Documentary Hypothesis unreasonable and invalid, then source critics will have to rethink earlier conclusions and start anew.

Obviously, I would not go so far as to claim that one individual authored all of the Joseph story's constituent parts. It is quite probable that the genealogical list in 46:6–27 and the Testament of Jacob

in 49:1–28 once existed independently, to cite two instances. However, I would hasten to add that the distinction many scholars make between “author” and “redactor/compiler” is a modern one. It is more than likely that an ancient reader would not have recognized this distinction and that to him the individual responsible for the whole of Genesis 37–50 was its single author.

One thing remains certain: the Joseph story, already a masterly woven plot filled with emotion and suspense, is built from a well-conceived blueprint expertly executed by the individual responsible for this classic tale.

At the outset I noted that the Joseph story is the most unified of the four major cycles in Genesis, and I quoted several authorities to that effect. This conclusion has been borne out thoroughly, highlighted through theme-words shared by matching units. Standing at the center is the pivot point, the focus of the entire narrative, Joseph’s disclosure to his brothers. The story begins with only Joseph and his brothers present (A) and ends the same way (A). It is therefore fitting that the midway point should include only these very characters. Recognition of the chiasmic structure, the theme-words, and the pivot point, placed on top of what is already a masterly constructed story filled with emotion and suspense, permits us to reaffirm what earlier readers have already discovered: that the Joseph story is truly *aḥsana al-qaṣaṣi* “the most beautiful of narratives.”<sup>43</sup>

### Notes

1. Michael Fishbane, “Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle (Gen. 25:19–35:22),” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 26 (1975): 15–38. A slightly altered version of this article appears as chap. 3 in Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), pp. 40–62.
2. Jack M. Sasson, “The ‘Tower of Babel’ as a Clue to the Redactional Structuring of the Primeval History (Gen. 1–11:9),” in Gary A. Rendsburg et al., eds., *The Bible World: Essays in Honor of Cyrus H. Gordon* (New York: Ktav, 1980), pp. 211–19.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 218.
4. Umberto Cassuto, *From Noah to Abraham* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1964), p. 296.
5. Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), pp. 160–61.
6. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), p. 342.
7. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 211.
8. The technical name for such a literary structure is “palistrophe,” which appears to have been introduced into the scholarly literature by Sean E. McEvenue, *The Narrative Style of the Priestly Writer* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1971), pp. 157–58. Additional examples of such structures may be found in J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975). See also the sources cited by Fishbane, “Composition and Structure,” p. 19, nn. 21–26; and Joann Dewey, *Markan Public Debate* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1980), pp. 34–35, 206–7, nn. 125–53. Many more suggestions may be found in the essays in John W. Welch, ed., *Chiasmus*

in *Antiquity* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981), but as even a brief look at this volume will indicate, many of these posited chiasms lack perfect symmetry.

9. For this grammatical analysis of *hištahāwāh*, etc., see Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967), p. 395.

10. The first to note such nexuses were R. Yohanan, R. Lazar, and R. Samuel bar Nahman, whose comments in *Bereshit Rabbah* 85:2 are most insightful. From the medieval period see the comments of Rashi at Genesis 39:1 and of Ibn Ezra at Genesis 38:1. Among modern scholars see Umberto Cassuto, "The Story of Judah and Tamar," in *Biblical and Oriental Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1973), pp. 30–31 (Hebrew original 1929); Benno Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Tora: Genesis* (Berlin: Schocken Books, 1934), p. 724; Donald B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), p. 18; John Emerton, "Some Problems in Genesis XXXVIII," *Vetus Testamentum* 25 (1975): 347; Judah Goldin, "The Youngest Son or Where Does Genesis 38 Belong," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977): 28–29; and Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), pp. 6–10.

11. See, for example, von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 351; Robert Davidson, *Genesis 12–50* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 224; and E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), p. 299.

12. Redford, *Story of Joseph*, p. 25. See also Bruce Vawter, "The Canaanite Background of Genesis 49," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 17 (1955): 1–18; and J. Coppens, "La Bénédiction de Jacob," in *Volume du Congrès Strasbourg*, Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum* 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1957), pp. 97–115.

13. On the Egyptian coloring of the Joseph story, see most importantly J. Vergote, *Joseph en Égypte* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1959); Redford, *Story of Joseph*, pp. 187–243; and Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, pp. 211–37.

14. Edwin M. Good, "The 'Blessing' on Judah, Gen. 49:8–12," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 82 (1963): 427–32.

15. Calum M. Carmichael, "Some Sayings in Genesis 49," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 439–41.

16. James S. Ackerman, "Joseph, Judah and Jacob," in Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis, ed., *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1982), 2:111.

17. A possible connection between Shiloh and Shelah has been noted earlier by Arnold B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1908), 1:246; Walter Schröder, "Gen. 49:10, Versuch einer Erklärung," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 29 (1909): 194–95; John Skinner, *Genesis* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1910), pp. 520, 524; and Jacob, *Genesis*, p. 907. This interpretation may already have been in the minds of the translator of Targum Yonatan which reads *z'yr bnwy* "his youngest son," and Qimhi and other medieval exegetes who accept this understanding of Masoretic *šylh*.

18. This point is made only by Ackerman, "Joseph," p. 111, who states unequivocally that Timnah "is located in the valley of Sorek ('vineyard')." Ackerman has in mind the Timnah of Judges 14:1, though actually the Timnah of 38:12–13 is probably another Timnah, higher in the Judean hills. See Skinner, *Genesis*, p. 453; S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (London: Westminster, 1910), p. 329; Jacob, *Genesis*, p. 714; von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 354; and Davidson, *Genesis*, p. 228. But this does not mean that the *šōrēqāh*/Timnah parallel between B and B' fails. The Hebrew reader, not conscious to identify every geographic locale specifically, might easily have thought of the Timnah of 38:12–13 as the Timnah in the Soreq Valley. We may even ask whether it is relevant that two of Samson's loves are his unnamed fiancée of Timnah (Judges 14) and Delilah of the Soreq Valley (Judges 16).

19. As such, units B and B' of the Joseph story are similar to units B and B' of the Jacob cycle which also act as interludes. See Fishbane, "Composition and Structure," p. 24.

20. On this point see Meir Malul, "More on *paḥad yišḥāq* (Genesis XXXI 42, 53) and the Oath by the Thigh," *Vetus Testamentum* 35 (1985): 192–200; and Meir Malul, "Touching the

Sexual Organs as an Oath Ceremony in an Akkadian Letter," *Vetus Testamentum* 37 (1987): 491-92.

21. For this understanding of *lehem*, obvious from a comparison with 39:9, one must consult the medieval Jewish exegetes (Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Qimhi, and others) who derive their knowledge ultimately from Bereshit Rabbah 86:6 and Targum Yerushalmi to Genesis 39:6. None of the modern commentators, save Jacob, *Genesis*, p. 728, mentions this. For another example of *lehem* = "wife, woman," see Exodus 2:20; see also Shabbat 62b and Ketubot 13a in the Talmud.

22. Fishbane, "Composition and Structure," p. 32, has found a similar pivot point, which he calls "the archetechtonic pivot," in the Jacob cycle at 30:22-25.

23. On this as the ideal age limit in ancient Egypt, see J. M. A. Janssen, "On the Ideal Lifetime of an Egyptian," *Oudheidkundige Mededeelingen uit het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden* 31 (1950): 33-44; and Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 226.

24. This point has been duly noted by Skinner, *Genesis*, p. 540; Jacob, *Genesis*, p. 945; and Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 378.

25. Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 347; and Redford, *Story of Joseph*, p. 145.

26. Redford, *Story of Joseph*, p. 246.

27. Skinner, *Genesis*, pp. 504-5.

28. Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 410.

29. Davidson, *Genesis*, p. 294.

30. Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977), p. 452.

31. August Dillmann, *Genesis* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1897), 2:437-38.

32. Redford, *Story of Joseph*, p. 180.

33. Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 347.

34. Davidson, *Genesis*, p. 279.

35. As Redford notes, duplicate episodes are a major literary feature of the Joseph story (*Story of Joseph*, pp. 74-75).

36. I should state here that a literary symmetry of the Joseph story has also been advanced by George W. Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt* (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association, 1976), pp. 7-55 (an expansion of his earlier article "Redactional Unity in Genesis 37-50," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93 [1974]: 15-21). I make no attempt to dovetail my analysis with Coats's, for we differ on one major point. The basis for my study is the finished product, i.e., all of chapters 37-50. Coats, on the other hand, limits himself to 37, 39:1-47:27, considering 38 "not an intrinsic element in the Joseph story" and 47:28-50:26 to be "a framework narrative" and thus exclusive of "the primary structure of the Joseph story" (see *From Canaan to Egypt*, p. 8, n. 3).

The entire cycle has been treated from a literary perspective by Donald A. Seybold, "Paradox and Symmetry in the Joseph Narrative," in Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis, ed., *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narrative* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1974), 1:59-73. I accept many of Seybold's conclusions as well as the entire thrust of his article. It should be pointed out that his study upsets none of my conclusions nor does my study contradict any of his.

37. The JEDP Theory remains the most popular approach to source criticism among biblical scholars. J stands for the Yahwist, E stands for the Elohist, D stands for the Deuteronomist, and P stands for the Priest. These hypothesized strands generally are dated respectively to the 900s, 800s, 600s, and 400s B.C.E. A recent popular exposition of the theory may be found in R. E. Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: Summit, 1987).

38. Fishbane, "Composition and Structure," p. 26, n. 39.

39. Cassuto, *From Noah to Abraham*, p. 294.

40. See the oft-cited article by R. N. Whybray, "The Joseph Story and Pentateuchal Criticism," *Vetus Testamentum* 18 (1968): 522-28; and the recent treatment by Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983), pp. 113-21.

41. For a more extensive treatment, incorporating all of the Book of Genesis, see Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake, Minn.: Eisenbrauns, 1986).

42. See most importantly Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

43. Qur'an 12:4. I hasten to add that a similar chiasmic pattern has been uncovered in the Sura of Joseph in the Qur'an by Mustansir Mir, "The Qur'anic Story of Joseph: Plot, Themes, and Characters," *The Muslim World* 76 (1986): 1-15. See also Gary A. Rendsburg, "Literary Structures in the Qur'anic and Biblical Stories of Joseph," *The Muslim World* (forthcoming).

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