GENESIS

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For Anne, Jonathan and Lisa
'Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh' (Gen. 2.23)

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Genesis 37–50:
The Story of Jacob's Family

Genesis 37

This major new block of Genesis begins like the previous one with a *tôl^{e}dōt* formula (25.19; 37.2), fraternal animosity (25.22-23; 37.2b-11), parental favouritism (25.28; 37.3-4), and the prospect of the younger lording it over his elders (25.23d, 29-34; 37.8, 10). In both contexts divine oversight is either stated explicitly (25.23) or implied (37.5-11). Thus while the plot moves on to new scenes it does so in such a manner as to suggest that the episodes beginning here will contain variations on familiar themes.

One difference to strike the reader is its more expansive style than chs. 1-36. The narrative embroiders and dwells upon familiar motifs: the inscrutability of divine involvement; complexity of characterization; ambiguity of human motive; complication of previous expectations and so on. These concerns are seen clearly in Joseph, the dominant character in the story. It is his essentially enigmatic character that casts its shadow over the entire narrative, for much of which he is as unfathomable as God. In addition, the relationship which the ancestral family has with the wider world, a familiar motif in previous narratives as an aside to the main plot, is here brought to the centre.

37.1-11

The story begins with reminders of the land (37.1) and nationhood (37.2a) promises. Both of these elements have been threatened before and this new block begins by promising much the same. The statement that 'Jacob settled in the land ...' (37.1), does not require permanent settlement. The same term (*yšb*) was used to describe Abraham's pauses at nomadic encampments (e.g., 13.18; 20.1; 22.19), and describes Jacob's initial one month sojourn with Laban (29.14). Isaac's blessing on Jacob when he set off to Laban had expressed the wish that Jacob would 'take possession (*yrš*) of the land where you now live as an alien (*māgûr*)' (28.4). But so far

Jacob has done nothing more than Abraham and Isaac before him who 'had lived as an alien (*māgôr*)' (37.1). His hold on the land promises seems to be as tenuous as theirs had been. Indeed, by the end of the chapter, and for most of chs. 39–50, the focus shifts to Egypt. Thus Jacob's status contrasts with that of Esau and his descendants 'in the land that they held' (36.43).

Attention moves immediately from the land to Jacob's progeny (37.2b). Straightaway we see the potential for family discord. While working with some of his half-brothers Joseph brings 'a bad report of them' to Jacob. The content of the report is not given, nor whether it was justified or not. The word for report (*dibbâ*), however, suggests fabrication or slander in the majority of its uses (cf. Num. 13.32; 14.36-37; Ps. 31.13 [14]; Prov. 10.18; Jer. 20.10). On first meeting Joseph, therefore, the reader is alerted to the complexities of his characterization. Does he bring an innocent report of his brothers' bad behaviour, or does he concoct a fib in order to ingratiate himself with the father who already shows him favouritism?

The explanation that Jacob loved Joseph because he was the son of his old age might be true as far as it goes. The full reason, however, is that in his old age the wife he loved gave birth to Joseph as her firstborn (30.23-24). Such favouritism, illustrated elsewhere in Genesis, does not bode well (25.28; 29.30). We sense that open family strife, already intimated by Joseph's 'bad report', and now fuelled by Jacob's outrageous gift of a lordly garment to his favourite, cannot be far off.

Sure enough, hatred bursts on to the scene. The description of the other sons' hatred, like Joseph's 'bad report', is tantalisingly ambiguous. Syntactically, the phrase 'they hated him' (37.4), could refer to Jacob as much as to Joseph, and contextually Jacob's flagrant favouritism could support such a translation. The next verse, however, conveys their hatred of Joseph in such a way as to suggest that he is the focus of attention in 37.4, but the initial ambiguity alerts the reader to the risk that Jacob is taking. Joseph's risk is equally clear. He claims to have had dreams that picture his family bowing before him, and relates these dreams with naive gusto (37.6, 9). His announcement of the dreams drives the wedge more firmly between himself and his brothers.

The two dreams are similar but not identical. The first is transparent in meaning, with the brothers' sheaves bowing down before Joseph's. The second dream reiterates the brothers'

subservience with its image of the 'eleven stars' bowing down. It adds a new element by referring to the sun and moon, which do the same (37.9). Once again, the second dream seems transparent and Jacob's interpretation seems to be the only one possible—that Joseph's brothers (eleven stars), father (sun) and mother (moon) will bow down before him (37.10). The importance of these dreams for the rest of chs. 37–50 can hardly be overestimated. They have the same function in chs. 37–50 as the divine command at creation (1.28), the promises given to Abraham (12.1-3), and the divine oracle (25.23) and Isaac's blessings (27.27b-28; 39-40), have in their respective narratives. Their significance for the rest of the narrative is not diminished by the initial uncertainty of whether these are divine dreams or simply the product of Joseph's own desire (see 38.24-30; 39.1-6; 40.1-23; 41.1-36; 42.1-17, 18-28 and so on). Note that the first dream would be fulfilled if Joseph's brothers bowed down before him, but for the second dream to be fulfilled, brothers and parents must do so (for more detail see Turner 1990a: 143-53).

In light of Jacob's preferential treatment of Joseph one might well wonder whether the first dream predicts the future or reflects the present. One can already see the possible seeds of its fulfilment in the opening scenes of this chapter. The second dream, however, raises far more questions. For brothers to bow down to Joseph might be unusual; for his father to do so almost unthinkable; but for his mother to do so is impossible. For Joseph's mother, Rachel, is dead (35.19). This blatant fact renders the second dream as a whole impossible to fulfil. If nothing else, this bizarre element indicates that there is more to the second dream than meets the eye. Jacob himself underlines this with his expostulation, 'What kind of a dream is this that you have had?' (37.10). No wonder that Jacob 'kept the matter in mind' (37.11). Readers would do well to do the same.

There are other reasons why Jacob should mull over Joseph's dreams. They present in graphic imagery the reversal of primogeniture, the institution which Jacob himself had sought to reverse. It too had been predicted of Jacob that his brother would bow down to him. But that had never occurred (see 27.29; 33.1-20). If Jacob never saw its fulfilment, might Joseph too be disappointed? Thus even those parts of the dreams which are understandable have no guarantee of fulfilment, if previous episodes in Genesis are anything to go by.

The response to Joseph's dreams is hatred (37.8) and jealousy (37.11a) from his brothers, and rebuke (37.11b) from his father. His brothers' hatred is underlined by a wordplay between Joseph's personal name and the brothers' hating him 'even more' (37.5, 8), both of which are formed from the root *ysp*.

37.12-36

The sequel to the scene of fatherly favouritism and brotherly antagonism opens by telegraphing that something nasty is about to happen to Joseph. Jacob sends Joseph off to visit his brothers at Shechem. This is the site of Dinah's rape (34.2), her brothers' bloody revenge (34.24-29), the place where Jacob's name was made odious to the Canaanites (34.30), so that the family required divine intervention (35.5). Why would the brothers choose such a provocative act as to go to Shechem? Is that why Jacob is concerned about their welfare (37.14)? And is it any less provocative of Jacob to send Joseph off in all his finery to his brothers? Was he blind to their animosity? Thus, as young Joseph sets out abroad to make an innocent visit to Shechem, like his sister before him, the negative tone of the opening verses gathers strength. To be found 'wandering in the fields' near Shechem (37.15) is a vulnerable state for a son of Jacob to be in. Jacob had arrived in peace (*šālēm*) at Shechem (33.18), yet his sojourn there resulted in anything but peace. He now tells Joseph to go to Shechem to see if all is well (*šālôm*) with his brothers (37.14), a rather foreboding task, since we know that Joseph's brothers 'could not speak peaceably (*šālôm*) to him' (37.4). Joseph does not find his brothers immediately, but has to continue his journey to Dothan. This delay increases the tension. He and they have survived the dangers of Shechem, but will he survive his brothers?

The very sight of Joseph in his distinctive garb coming into view is enough to raise his brothers' hackles. The reader's worst fears, raised by the memories of Shechem, are confirmed with the brothers' decision to murder Joseph. More than his 'bad report', his father's favouritism or the special robe which advertises his arrival, it is his dreams which trigger their fratricidal designs. The contempt and sarcasm is plain to hear: 'Here comes this dreamer (literally, 'master dreamer')' (37.19). By killing him they will negate the dreams' intolerable image of Joseph lording it over the rest of the family. Their gleeful conclusion summarizes their objective: 'We shall see what will become of his dreams' (37.20). We certainly shall.

Joseph is saved from the clutches of the other brothers by Reuben. Instead of despatching him quickly, Reuben's ploy of throwing him into a dry pit seems even more callous, condemning Joseph to a lingering death. And a poetically appropriate death at that—the depths of the pit forming an ironic contrast with the elevation predicted by the dreams. Yet Reuben has a beneficent intent, divulged only to the reader by the narrator (37.22b). In Reuben's absence, however, the other brothers are persuaded by Judah that Joseph's elimination will merely get rid of the troublesome youth. Far better to make a profit into the bargain (37.26-27). So he is sold to passing merchants (cf. 45.4).

Regardless of whether Joseph is murdered or sold into slavery, the brothers will have to explain his absence to their father. Strife between family members was a feature of chs. 25–36, and has repeatedly been associated with deception (e.g., between Jacob and Esau; Jacob and Laban). Here, the brothers' attempted deception of Jacob echoes in particular that which he himself perpetrated on Isaac (see also 34.1-31). Their sitting down for a meal while Joseph lies naked in the pit seems particularly callous. But Jacob's taking advantage of Esau and his deception of blind, senile Isaac were hardly less callous as he served up a meal for them both (25.29-34; 27.19-29). Distinctive clothing is at the centre of both episodes (27.15, 27; 37.31-33), as indeed are goats (27.9, 16; 37.31). There are contrasts too of course. The brothers had the bloodstained cloak sent to Jacob (37.32), while Jacob had gone into Isaac's tent and faced his father (27.18). Though originally planning to lie to Jacob's face (37.20), the brothers actually allowed Jacob to draw his own conclusion, 'a wild animal has devoured him' (37.33). Jacob it will be recalled, had been willing to tell a blatant lie (27.19). The verb 'to recognize' (*nkr*) is used in both scenes, in the first negatively, 'He did not recognize him' (27.23), and in the second positively, 'He recognized it' (37.33). These details present a picture of sons who have inherited their father's guile, though lacking his naked ambition perhaps. The arch-deceiver, however, is more easily deceived than his senile and decrepit father had been all those years ago. Isaac had at least asked some probing questions (see 27.18-29).

Taken as a group, Joseph's brothers act together to rid themselves of the nuisance of a younger brother. However, while Reuben's words suggest solidarity with his brothers' plans (37.22a), his intention is quite different (37.22b). Reuben is threatened as much as any other brother by Joseph's dreams, so

why should he alone wish to restore him to Jacob? One would have thought that Reuben, the firstborn of Leah, and Joseph, the firstborn of Rachel, would have been natural antagonists. And since Reuben is the firstborn, he has most to lose if Joseph's dreams come to pass. Is it simply that as the eldest he feels that he should act more responsibly, or that he more than the others will be held accountable for Joseph's fate? Or are his motivations more complex than that? Perhaps Reuben's plan is to ingratiate himself with Jacob. If Joseph could not keep quiet about his dreams, he will certainly not desist from telling his father of how his other brothers had intended to kill him, but that Reuben had rescued him. If Joseph is Jacob's favourite son, there are good grounds for thinking that at this time Reuben was the least favoured. He had already staked a claim to Jacob's estate by sleeping with Bilhah (35.22; see 35.16-29). This would not only have alienated Jacob (cf. 49.4), but also Reuben's brothers, by committing incest with the mother of Dan and Naphtali (see 35.16-29). So, by rescuing Joseph, Reuben will restore his relations with Jacob and thus help him to achieve his ends. Unfortunately, the sale of Joseph to the traders scuppers these ambitions. No wonder that he cries, 'The boy is gone; and I, where can I turn?' (37.30). The alliteration, *'ênennû wa'ᵃnî 'ānâ 'ᵃnî-bâ*, graphically conveys Reuben's stuttering emotional response.

There is less doubt about the motives of Reuben's full brother Judah. His pragmatic advice is that they will gain more by selling Joseph than by killing him. His motivation is to line their pockets with 20 pieces of silver (37.28).

So three different courses of action are suggested in quick succession. Immediate death for Joseph (37.20); delayed death (37.21-22); being sold into slavery (37.27-28). This presents a picture of brothers who opportunistically seek to take advantage of the situation, rather than of a well thought out plot coming to fruition.

With such a fate for Joseph being telegraphed by all kinds of factors in the text, one wonders about Jacob's role in all of this. He knows about Joseph's tale-telling and bragging, and his own favouritism towards him. Yet he never seems to suspect the depth of his sons' antipathy towards Joseph. He sends him off to his brothers at Shechem of all places, unaccompanied. Having witnessed first hand the effects of favouritism and brotherly animosity in his earlier life one would have expected keener insight into human nature than this. Yet when he holds the blood

stained cloak in his hands one cannot help but feel sympathy for him. While there might be an element of justice in seeing the arch-deceiver now being duped more consummately than he ever was by Laban, Jacob's mourning is touching (37.33-35). His torn clothes and sackcloth contrast with Joseph's fine apparel that, in part, provoked the brothers' deception. The solidarity shown by his sons in not divulging the truth, but consoling their father in his time of grief with sham concern (37.35), reveals just how much they had reviled Joseph.

There is a neat irony in Joseph being sold to Ishmaelites. Ishmael had been his father's favourite (17.18), but had ended up an outcast (21.10-21). Joseph is his father's favourite, but becomes an outcast. One is sold to the other. The branch of the family which was eliminated from the promised line by God himself, is instrumental in enslaving the one whose dreams had predicted would be the greatest of all. What Joseph makes of his deliverance from death and subsequent sale into slavery is not divulged. He remains silent and passive from the time he asks directions at Shechem until after he arrives in Egypt (though cf. 42.21). He might have escaped murder, but surely his dreams are now dead. Yet, just like his father before him, Joseph has left the promised land as the result of fraternal strife. And Jacob later had to face his brother. Will the same occur here? And as Jacob's meeting with Esau raised once again the predictions of the divine oracle and Isaac's blessing (see 33.1-20), will the dreams once again be brought to mind? (See 42.1-17.)

Genesis 38

This chapter provides an interlude by turning its attention from Joseph in Egyptian slavery to the exploits of Judah. Yet it does more than heighten the suspense regarding Joseph's fate. It builds on what has gone before, and also enriches the reading of Joseph's story once it resumes in ch. 39. For example, just as his sons, including Judah, deceived Jacob, so too in this chapter Tamar deceives Judah, which in turn anticipates how Potiphar will be deceived by his wife. In each case the deception involves presenting evidence that demands a verdict: the sons produce Joseph's bloodied cloak (37.32); Tamar produces Judah's signet, cord and staff (38.25); Potiphar's wife brandishes Joseph's garment (39.13-15, 18). The reversal of primogeniture, a key issue in Joseph's dreams, raises its head again at the birth of Perez and Zerah (38.27-30). There are more specific linguistic

connections. The verb 'to recognize' (*nkr*), which had linked the deception of ch. 37 to that of ch. 27, is now picked up again here, (38.25-26). Yet again a goat is part of the intrigue (38.17 cf. 37.31). Jacob cannot be comforted (*nḥm*) at the supposed death of Joseph (37.35); Judah is comforted (*nḥm*) after the death of his wife (38.12; cf. Hamilton 1995: 431-32). Thus, just as the previous narrative foreshadows ch. 38, ch. 38 itself helps to shape the perspectives of the reader for encountering subsequent episodes.

38.1-11

Marrying a Canaanite had been ruled out by Abraham when finding a wife for Isaac (24.3), and Isaac himself commanded Jacob similarly (28.1-2). Esau's foreign wives it will be recalled, 'made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah' (26.35 cf. 27.46). Now Judah marries a Canaanite. This not only marks a worrying departure from the tradition of the promised line, but also carries overtones of disapproval: 'Judah saw (*r'h*) the daughter ... he married (literally 'took', [*lqḥ*]) her' (38.2). This combination of verbs has been used earlier to describe the Woman's eating of the forbidden fruit (3.6); the sons of God cohabiting with the daughters of humans (6.2); the Pharaoh taking Sarai into his harem (12.15) and Shechem's rape of Dinah (34.2; though see 22.13; 30.9). So, can Judah's marriage spell anything but trouble? All of his sons are half-Canaanite and the daughter-in-law he chooses is also presumably a Canaanite. Judah's family is becoming merged with native Canaanite stock.

While Judah's marriage is irregular, his genealogical succession is recorded in reassuringly conventional language. '[Again] she conceived and bore a son' (38.3-4), announces the fertility of Judah's wife in the same words as those of 29.33-35, which described Leah's fecundity, climaxing in the birth of Judah himself. So the promise of nationhood to the ancestral family is not threatened in this generation by barren wives, as it was previously. A threat does arise unexpectedly, however, from God's judgments, first on Er for unspecified reasons (38.7), and then on Onan for practising *coitus interruptus* in order to preserve a larger portion of the family estate for himself (38.10). This leaves only Shelah to continue the line into the next generation. This small family scene might seem to have little to do with any of God's previous judgments on the grand scale. But the announcement that Er 'was wicked (*ra'*),' (38.7) recalls the same judgment

on humanity at the time of the Deluge, whose 'wickedness (*rāʿâ*) ... was great in the earth' and whose thoughts were 'only evil (*raʿ*) continually' (6.5). Lot too had pleaded with the Sodomites not to 'act so wickedly (*rʿ*)' (19.7). Chapter 38 throws up some peculiar points of contact also. What Er and Noah find or do in the sight of the Lord is the inversion of their names. Er (*ʿr*) did evil (*rʿ*) in the sight of the Lord (38.7). Noah (*nḥ*) found favour (*ḥn*) in the sight of the Lord (4.8). Both have three sons (6.10; 38.3-5), are parties to incestuous relationships (9.20 cf. 38.16-18), as also was Lot (19.30-38). Furthermore, God judges the wickedness of their associates (6.5; 8.21; 19.7, 24; 38.7, 10). God's judgment which at first had encompassed the whole world with the Deluge, then narrowed to the communities in the cities of the Plain, is now meted out to individuals in a family.

With the death of his first two sons, Judah concludes that Tamar is 'bad luck'. He banishes her to her father's house. Despite his suggestion otherwise, he obviously has no intention of giving Shelah to Tamar as her husband. If he fears that Shelah will die if married to Tamar (38.11), then he will die regardless of how old he is. Judah is just fobbing her off. Thus Tamar effectively becomes one more barren woman in the Genesis story. Shelah, the son at the centre of this charade, was born at Chezib (meaning 'lie'; 'deceit'). This now seems to be more than an inconsequential detail (38.5).

The demise of Judah's two sons provides the third opportunity for mourning since Reuben's discovery of Joseph's sale. But while Reuben's mourning was plaintive (37.29b-30a), and Jacob's extravagant (37.33-35), Judah's is not recorded. To argue from silence that Judah is being portrayed as more aloof might be pressing the text too far. But one might well wonder when in the next section one sees the ambiguity of 'the wife of Judah ... died; and Judah was comforted' (38.12 literal translation). Was he 'consoled in his mourning for her, or relieved because she had died?' (Gunn and Fewell 1993: 37).

38.12-23

Time passes and Judah's wife dies. He completes the requisite mourning period and travels to the sheepshearing with his friend Hirah. Judah had previously gone down (38.1); now he goes up (38.12b), the contrasting verbs underlining a new departure in the narrative. Tamar now reenters the fray, but her actions are not immediately understandable. When she hears where Judah

is going she removes her widow's clothes, and donning a veil sits by the road, thus adopting the attitude of a common prostitute (38.15). But why is she doing this? It has something to do with the fact that Judah has not given her Shelah as her husband, even though the lad has now grown up (38.14b). But what is the connection? It is only when Judah sees her and approaches her for custom that we realize what her gambit is. She is hatching an audacious scheme to overcome her enforced barrenness (cf. 16.1-2). With Judah away from home and with his wife dead, perhaps he will be open to some sexual adventure.

Judah approaches Tamar at Enaim, meaning 'two wells'. Abraham's servant had met Rebekah and Jacob had met Rachel at a well (24.13-15; 29.9-10). Will Judah's meeting with Tamar at the wells be any less significant? These previous encounters had enabled the ancestral family to continue into the next generation, and this is the very thing that Tamar craves, and Judah prevents by his refusal to give her Shelah. After a brief, not to say brusque, discussion concerning her fee, Judah unwittingly has sex with his daughter-in-law. Tamar does to Judah what his own mother Leah had done to his father (29.23-25). Chapter 37 had replayed Jacob's deception of Isaac. Chapter 38 replays Laban's and Leah's deception of Jacob. Whatever other breaks with convention are made in this chapter, deception continues unabated. There is further irony in the fact that Judah's refusal to give Shelah to Tamar is because he feared that Shelah would die. But now, it would appear, by being duped into having sex with his daughter-in-law they have both committed a capital offence (cf. Lev. 20.12).

Judah emerges with little credit from this episode. Tamar knows her father-in-law well enough to know that she does not have to seduce him in order to get her way. Simply advertising her availability at the roadside will be enough to trap him. Tamar's cleverness highlights Judah's lust. He approaches his daughter-in-law as brusquely as he had previously his wife (38.2 cf. 38.16). He has no intention of honouring the pledge he had given to Tamar (38.11), but expects the 'prostitute' to honour hers. He sends Hirah to retrieve his signet, cord and staff. The fact that he sends a proxy might suggest that he prefers not to do his own dirty work. His interest in redeeming his pledge is consistent with his prior concern with money matters. He it was who suggested that the brothers might as well make some profit by selling Joseph (37.26-27). It is open to question, however,

whether his sexual lust made him pay more than the going rate for Tamar's services. He had agreed to pay a kid, which he sends off with Hirah. Proverbs 6.26 states that a whore's fee was a loaf of bread. This would seem to be more usual, for if a young goat was the usual fee charged, a few weeks' work would have given a prostitute a sizeable flock. The pledge that Tamar forced out of him is hardly less exorbitant than her fee, for his signet, cord and staff amounted to his personal identity—worth far more than the kid he is now sending. Such huge amounts reveal that Judah's sexual drive clouded his judgment. That is why Judah fears he will be laughed at (38.23).

Judah had thought Tamar was a 'prostitute (*zônâ*)' (38.15). Yet Hirah enquires about 'the temple prostitute (*qᵉdēšâ*)' (38.21), apparently a more acceptable occupation than a common whore. Hirah is attempting to bring some respectability to this sordid incident. But the narrator's rare act of divulging Judah's inner thoughts (38.15, 'he thought her to be a prostitute'), means that Hirah's etiquette might fool the townspeople, but not the reader.

38.24-30

In 38.15 Judah approached Tamar precisely because 'he thought her to be a prostitute (*zônâ*)'. Now he is told that 'Tamar has played the whore (*znh*); moreover she is pregnant as a result of whoredom (*zᵉnûnîm*)' (38.24). Judah's swift pronouncement of capital punishment condemns his double standard more devastatingly than it does her. His discovery of her indiscretion also provides a convenient way out of Judah's obligation to give her Shelah. Judah's death sentence on Tamar recalls God's despatch of Er and Onan. But Er was 'wicked' (*raʿ*) and Onan selfish (at least); but by Judah's own admission, Tamar has been 'in the right' (38.26). The disparity between God's and Judah's judgments provides one more condemnation of Judah. Elsewhere, the death of both parties was required if a man lay with his daughter-in-law (Lev. 20.12). Not surprisingly, when Judah discovers the truth, any legal requirements are conveniently forgotten. She has duped him as triumphantly as he and his brothers had Jacob, with the question 'see (*nkr*) now whether it is your son's robe' (37.32), coming back to haunt him in Tamar's words, 'Take note (*nkr*), please, whose these are' (38.25).

Judah and Tamar act in a very distant manner towards each other. News of Tamar's pregnancy is conveyed to Judah by an

intermediary (38.24a), followed by Judah's death sentence in the third person (38.24b), while Tamar sends the incriminating evidence by proxy (38.25). Even Judah's admission of Tamar's integrity is worded, '*She* is more in the right' (38.26). There is never any face to face acknowledgment. At the end they remain as detached from each other as they had been during their impersonal act of sexual intercourse (cf. Gunn and Fewell 1993: 42; see 47.13-28).

Tamar's bearing twins to Judah, nevertheless, provides him with a form of compensation, restoring his two sons previously despatched by Yahweh. Up to this point it appeared that this branch of the ancestral family was facing extinction. Er died, quickly followed by Onan, then Judah's wife. Shelah apparently is not yet married. And Tamar faces the flames without having raised up any progeny for Er. However, whether Tamar's giving birth to twins is all good news is left open to question. The announcement 'there were twins in her womb' (38.27), replicates the announcement regarding Rebekah's pregnancy (25.24), and just as her twins were born in such a manner as to raise the question of who the firstborn was, so too with Perez and Zerah. Rebekah's twins had also struggled in the womb and beyond. Disputes between brothers, and arguments over the rights of the firstborn, seem set to continue. The fact that Esau, the spurned firstborn, had a grandson also called Zerah, adds to this impression (cf. 36.13, 17, 33). It is not only in Joseph's dreams that normal expectations are reversed.

In retrospect, Tamar's significance is clear. Like Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel before her, she has moved from barrenness to childbearing. She too has used deception to get her way, in the line of Rebekah, Jacob, Laban and Rachel (cf. Janzen 1993: 154). She does, however, elicit more sympathy than these earlier Machiavellian characters. Yet she is, quite likely, a Canaanite. If so, then she is yet one more example of a foreigner who betters a member of the ancestral family in the area of sexual/marital mores, as Abraham before Pharaoh (12.18-20) and Abimelech (20.9-10), and Isaac before Abimelech again (26.9-10), have amply demonstrated.

Genesis 39

God is mentioned often enough in chs. 37–50, with the personal name Yahweh found 11 times in chs. 38–39 and 49.18, and the title Elohim occurring 19 times throughout. But he rarely speaks

(cf. 46.2-4), and to observe his actions one requires the insight of the narrator (e.g., 39.2) or Joseph's reflections (45.5; 50.20). As we shall see, however, even these latter examples are open to more than one interpretation. If elsewhere in Genesis human activity has been at the core of the narrative, then even more so here.

Despite this, the narrator is clear at the beginning of this chapter, that 'The Lord was with Joseph' (39.2a). This statement, however, reveals more about Yahweh than it does about Joseph. We should not assume that divine favour indicates a benign acceptance of Joseph's previous or subsequent activity. God's favour had rested on Jacob (e.g., 25.23; 28.10-15), yet this had not been because of any merit on Jacob's part. God's being with Joseph in Egypt, whence he has gone because of fraternal strife, should not be read more positively than God's appearance to Jacob at Bethel when he was running away from his brother's wrath.

39.1-6

When Abraham had gone down to Egypt, the Egyptians had succumbed to the physical beauty (*yāpeh*) of Sarah (12.11, 14). Now one of his great-grandsons is taken down to Egypt (39.1), and he is 'handsome (*yᵉpēh tō'ar*) and good-looking (*yᵉpēh mar'eh*)' (39.6), the very characteristics of his own mother Rachel, who was 'graceful (*yᵉpat tō'ar*) and beautiful (*yᵉpat mar'eh*)' (29.17). We can expect some sexual interest being taken in Joseph before too long.

Abraham's visit to Egypt had raised the issue of how he was going to be a blessing to the nations (12.1-3; cf. 12.10-20). He did not rise to the occasion, but Joseph increases expectations. His presence brings Yahweh's blessing on Potiphar's house (39.5; cf. 30.27).

Seeds of potential discord, however, are sown in the reader's mind. His new master, Potiphar, is described as being an 'officer' (*sārîs*) of Pharaoh (39.1). Elsewhere the term is translated 'eunuch' and on occasions conveys the narrower connotation of one who is castrated (e.g., Est. 2.3, 14-15; Isa. 56.3. On occasions eunuchs were married, see, e.g., Skinner 1930: 457). If that connotation is permitted here in 39.1, then the unit 39.1-6 has an introduction informing us of Potiphar's sexual impotence and a conclusion mentioning Joseph's sexual desirability. The potential for conflict within Potiphar's household is obvious.

Joseph's dreams had juxtaposed his lordship with others' subservience. Once he is in Potiphar's household he experiences

both states himself. He is in control of everything that is Potiphar's (39.4-6); yet Potiphar is his master (39.2b-3). The juxtaposition of these two aspects recalls the motifs inherent to the dreams, reminding us to keep an eye out for their fulfilment, but also registering one more barrier to their realization.

39.7-18

Quite abruptly, Potiphar's wife is introduced, with her brusque demand for sex (cf. 38.16). In contrast to Joseph, no time is spent detailing her age or sexual allure (cf. 37.2; 39.6). She might be in the bloom of youth and ravishingly voluptuous; she might be an aging repulsive hag. So, just how much of a temptation is she to Joseph, whose good looks would suggest that he would not be deprived of female company? The narrative does nothing to criticize Joseph's refusal of course, but it would be good not to be too quick to eulogize him for this one decision.

The comparison with ch. 38 creates a context for further contemplating Joseph's situation. Both chapters present women who take the initiative in having sex with the male of their choice. Tamar, however, is presented more sympathetically than Potiphar's wife. Tamar took her initiative because of Judah's refusal to keep his word. Joseph's mistress on the other hand, with her imperious demand, simply uses her position of power to satisfy her lust. Yet perhaps even she is not presented entirely unsympathetically. If her husband is a eunuch, her desire for sexual relations can at least be understood. So the contrast between the two incidents in chs. 38 and 39 is not as simple as a switch from female justified/male condemned (38.26) to male justified/female condemned (39.7-18). There is little doubt, however, how Judah would have responded to such an approach for easy sex.

Joseph's loquacious rebuff of his mistress (39.8-9) contrasts with her blunt command, 'Lie with me' (39.7). The tenor of Joseph's response in which he rejects such 'great wickedness' (39.9), is reminiscent of Abimelech's moral outrage at Abraham's ruse which would have resulted in 'great guilt' (20.9). This present episode, however, breaks with the pattern established by such previous scenes (e.g., 12.10-20; 20.1-18; 26.6-16). Here, not only is the patriarch himself rather than his gorgeous companion desired, but also in previous sexual encounters between patriarchs and foreigners, the ancestral family has come off second best. But here that has been reversed. Joseph protests

that he cannot have sex with another man's wife—a matter that did not seem to trouble Abraham or Isaac.

Joseph's rejection of her advances is recorded emphatically. First, from the narrator's perspective (39.12b), then from Potiphar's wife's perspective (39.13). She has been unambiguously spurned, and the repetition indicates that there is no point in her repeating yet again the invitation, 'Lie with me!'. The reiteration of her rebuff forms the bridge between her failed seduction and the revenge she now concocts.

Her accusation is phrased so as to give the worst possible impression. She twice says that Joseph 'came in to me (*bā' 'ēlay*)' (39.14b, 17b). The same combination of verb and preposition is used in ch. 38 to mean 'had sexual intercourse with' (38.2, 8, 9, 16, 18; cf. 29.21, 23; 30.3, 4, 16). Thus the initial impression she gives is that she has been raped. Only later is this impression modified, but her opening words to the servants, and then to her husband, are weighted to arouse maximum indignation. This is seen more clearly in a literal translation of 39.17, 'He came into me, the Hebrew slave whom you caused to come among us to mock me'. Her skill as a liar is seen clearly: she reverses the sequence of 39.12b-13 to claim that she cried out as soon as Joseph approached her (39.14); contrary to the narrative she claims that Joseph left his garment 'beside me' (39.15) rather than 'in her hand' (39.13). The former implicates Joseph as the one who removed his garment while the latter would implicate herself.

Her speech, however, accuses more than Joseph. NRSV starts with, 'See, my husband ...' but the Hebrew uses only a pronoun, 'See, *he* has brought among us ...' (39.14). She does not say, 'my husband', nor even 'your master', but impersonally and anonymously, 'he'. She then proceeds to blame Potiphar for the alleged attack, stating that his intention in employing Joseph was 'to insult us!'. Not merely to insult *me*, but *us*. Thus she not only accuses Joseph but also her husband, and attempts to unite her household against them both. Her accusation against her husband recalls Adam's accusation of God, 'The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us' (39.17), cf. 'The Woman whom you gave to be with me' (3.12), where Adam is equally impersonal in referring to his wife. Both speeches reveal strained relations if not outright animosity.

She is equally dismissive of Joseph, whom she refers to not as 'Joseph', nor as 'this Hebrew slave' but merely as 'a Hebrew man'.

The reasons for her animosity to Joseph are plain. But we must speculate as to why Potiphar is also the object of her vitriol. Perhaps, if Potiphar is a eunuch, her disdain for him is because he cannot have sex with her, while her anger towards Joseph is because he will not have sex with her. She is left thoroughly frustrated. The narrative presents her as someone who craves intimacy, conveying this through repeated uses of the prepositions *'el* or *'eṣel*, translated here as 'beside' or 'by': 'he would not consent to lie beside her' (39.10); 'he left his garment beside me' (39.15); 'she kept his garment by her' (39.16); 'he left his garment beside me' (39.18). In her request and accusation, and the narrator's description, her pathetic desire to have Joseph or his garment 'beside her' is revealed.

This is not the first time that Joseph has lost his clothing. He was stripped by his brothers who used his cloak to cover their tracks (37.23, 31-33). Similarly here, Potiphar's wife uses his cloak to deceive her husband (39.16-17). The first occasion marked a major transition in the narrative, where the hopes expressed in Joseph's dreams seemed to be annihilated. Its use again here marks another major development in the plot. The repetition of the garment (*beged*) motif is particularly appropriate here for the root *bgd* is occasionally used to connote adultery (Jer. 3.8; Mal. 2.10-16. Cf. Hamilton 1995: 465). The noun was also used in the previous episode in connection with Tamar's entrapment of Judah (38.14, 19).

39.19-23

Potiphar's reaction to his wife's report is swift and decisive. Some commentators are unconvinced that he fully believed his wife, because he does not order Joseph's execution for his alleged attempted rape (cf. Deut. 22.23-27). In addition, it could be argued that Potiphar's reaction is mild when compared with the bloody revenge of Dinah's brothers (34.25-29), or Judah's summary announcement of capital punishment on Tamar (38.24). It should not necessarily be assumed, however, that imprisonment was all that Potiphar had in mind for Joseph. For example, is Joseph's sojourn in prison merely an interlude before his trial and subsequent execution? Two of Joseph's fellow inmates illustrate the uneasy existence of being a prisoner in this gaol. The chief cupbearer is released to enjoy his freedom, but the chief baker is executed (40.20-22). Either fate conceivably awaits Joseph. Being placed in prison recalls the

earlier act of placing Joseph in the pit, which was part of the brothers' murderous designs (37.22-24). While it is true that the text does not say with whom Potiphar became enraged (39.19), leaving open whether it was with his wife or Joseph, the more natural reading, I believe, is that Potiphar has been hoodwinked by his wife.

The chapter draws to a close by drawing on motifs with which it started. Chief among these is the assertion of Yahweh's presence with Joseph. The Lord's presence had made Joseph 'a successful man' (39.2), something noted by Potiphar also, with the result that Yahweh blessed Potiphar's house too (39.3, 5). We learn now that within prison 'the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love' (39.21) and that the chief gaoler trusted Joseph implicitly because 'the Lord was with him' (39.23). The result of this divine favour is that Joseph returns to the status he had at the beginning of the chapter. The chief gaoler puts (*nātan*) matters into his hand (*yād*, 39.22), just as Potiphar had 'put him in charge (*nātan b^{e}yādô*)' (39.4; cf. 39.8). Previously Joseph had been in charge of the house (*bayit*), now he is in charge of the prison, literally 'the round house' (*bêt hassōhar*).

Much space is devoted to underlining that Yahweh was with Joseph. Yet he was stripped and sold by his brothers, is a slave in a foreign land, was unjustly accused by his master's wife and now finds himself in prison, possibly awaiting a worse fate. What would his lot have been if the Lord had not been with him, we might well wonder. The juxtaposition of Joseph's true position, that is, the divine presence, in addition to the predictions of his dreams, and his now lowly estate might hint that some hidden purpose is being served in all of this.

Genesis 40

Joseph, in prison because of his refusal to 'sin (*ḥṭ'*) against God', (39.9), is joined by two others who have 'offended (*ḥṭ'*) their lord' (40.1). Whether the imprisonment of Pharaoh's officials is any more justified than Joseph's is difficult to determine. The term used for Pharaoh's anger (*qṣp*) can convey human response to a formal offence (Lev. 10.16), as well as a fit of pique (2 Kgs. 5.11; Est. 1.12). The way in which Pharaoh deals with the two later in the chapter provides no rationale for the different treatment he metes out. So miscarriages of justice might afflict more than just Joseph.

All three are confined 'in the house of the captain of the guard (*śar haṭṭabbāḥîm*)' (40.3 cf. 40.4). This same title was used earlier to designate Potiphar (37.36; 39.1). How many captains of the guard are there? If 'the captain of the guard' here is a circumlocution for Potiphar, then Joseph has remained under some form of 'house arrest' at Potiphar's. This is strongly implied by the information that they were all incarcerated 'in his master's house' (*bêt ʾᵃdōnāyw*, 40.7), a term previously used to describe Potiphar's residence (39.2). The captain of the guard's attitude to Joseph certainly recalls that of Potiphar. Joseph had 'attended' (*šrt*) Potiphar who 'made him overseer' (*pqd*, 39.4-5). Now in prison, the captain of the guard 'charged' (*pqd*) Joseph with the other prisoners while he 'waited' (*šrt*) on them (40.4), who like Potiphar are officers/eunuchs (*sārîs*, 40.2, 7). If this captain of the guard is indeed Potiphar, and is to be distinguished from the chief jailer (39.21-23), then Joseph has once again 'found favour in [Potiphar's] sight' (39.4). Is this due to Joseph's sterling values again becoming evident because 'the Lord was with him', or does it suggest that his anger against Joseph is abating because of growing questions about his wife's accusation?

Joseph is serving once again, as he was at the beginning of the previous chapter. People are also dreaming again, which recalls the beginning of the whole story (37.5-11). Those initial dreams had foretold a future far different from Joseph's current state. So the fulfilment of dreams in this chapter raises once again the question of whether Joseph's dreams will be fulfilled. His brothers had sarcastically named Joseph 'the master of the dream' (37.19). And he now fills that role as a dream interpreter. Joseph offers his services with the words, 'Do not interpretations belong to God?'. This is, apparently, a rhetorical question with which all characters agree. His next words are, 'Please tell them to me' (40.8). Thus Joseph is claiming to have access to the mind of God (cf. 40.12, 18). The subsequent fate of the cupbearer and baker confirm Joseph's prowess as an interpreter of dreams (40.21-22). But does it also confirm that Joseph speaks for God? Joseph claims that interpretations come from God, yet in ch. 37 his brothers and father knew intuitively the meaning of Joseph's dreams.

The fulfilment of the dreams not only confirms the accuracy of Joseph's interpretation. It also highlights the uncertainty of Joseph's future. For if imprisoned dreamers can suffer such contrasting fates, one tasting freedom and the other execution,

what does the future hold for 'the master of dreams' himself? Joseph's choice of words in his appeal to the cupbearer is revealing. The term he uses for the dungeon (*bôr*) in which he is imprisoned is the same as that used for the pit into which his brothers put him (37.20, 22, 24, 28-29). It was telling his own dreams that resulted in Joseph being put into that pit. It is his interpretation of dreams that raises the possibility of being released from this dungeon. But such expectations are quickly dashed when the cupbearer simply forgets Joseph. This act of ingratitude marks the nadir of Joseph's experience so far. He has always retained something of a favoured status. The story began with him as favoured son, then he descended to being favoured slave; then to favoured prisoner. But now, he is a forgotten prisoner (40.23).

Genesis 41

Dreams and their interpretation were instrumental in Joseph's descent to Egypt. At the time, the dreams of Pharaoh's servants in prison had seemed to offer no release for Joseph. But now Pharaoh dreams. This initiates a chain of events that links with Joseph's interpretations in prison, and ultimately with those boyhood dreams of lordship.

41.1-36

Joseph is forgotten, in prison and wishes to be released; but he can interpret dreams. Pharaoh has enormous personal freedom and power, but is perplexed by his dreams. Their respective strengths and needs indicate that each has the ability to assist the other. The Pharaoh's second dream, which presents contrasting images of ears of grain recalls Joseph's first dream of prostrated sheaves (37.6-8), and makes his appearance in this chapter all the more likely. It can only be a matter of time before they come together.

These dreams are, presumably, not the only ones that the Pharaoh has had in the last two year. That he employs dream interpreters is evidence of that. So why do these dreams stump them? Their general tenor seems fairly obvious. Whether their inability is due to their incompetence or to their desire not to offend the monarch with bad news (cf. Dan. 2.4-11; 4.7), is of less importance than its function of telegraphing Joseph's imminent involvement. With the Egyptian interpreters sidelined we await the arrival of the master of 'the dream' (37.19).

Events at court finally jog the memory of the chief cupbearer. He remembers his 'faults', from the same root *ḥṭ'* which was used to describe his offence against Pharaoh (40.1). But which faults does he remember—this previous offence or his desertion of Joseph? It would be folly to raise again how he had previously offended Pharaoh, now that the troubled monarch is confronted by professional incompetence to interpret dreams. The reasons for his imprisonment are skipped over lightly, with a quick reference to Pharaoh's anger, and no intimation as to the reason, nor whether it was justified (41.10). His review of the dreams he and the baker had had hints at the transparent import of Pharaoh's dreams. Just as they had dreams with positive (vine and wine cup, 40.9b-11) and negative (cakes and birds, 40.16b-17) images, so Pharaoh's dreams have auspicious (fat cows, 41.2; plump grain, 41.5) and inauspicious (thin cows, 41.3-4; wizened grain, 41.6-7a) images. Pharaoh's dreams are clearly a mixture of good and bad news.

Joseph's arrival at court is delayed only long enough for him to shave and change his clothes. The clothing motif suggests that once again Joseph's status is about to change. When his brothers stripped him it marked his descent from favoured son to slave (37.23). When Potiphar's wife disrobed him it sealed his transition from trusted slave to prisoner (39.12). He can surely descend no lower than he has now. Jacob's initial gift of the robe to Joseph had elevated him among his brothers. His change of clothing in order to come before Pharaoh suggests that the clothing motif has now come full circle.

Pharaoh's speech reveals that he already anticipates the worst. His description of Joseph's ability as an interpreter is generous, going somewhat beyond the cupbearer's report (41.12 cf. 41.15). When he describes his dreams, in comparison to the narrator, he emphasizes their negative aspects. For example, in describing the thin cows he adds, 'Never had I seen such ugly ones in all the land of Egypt' (41.19). Almost all of 41.21, which describes the thin cows remaining thin after gorging themselves, is added. He adds more negative epithets in 41.19, 23 (cf. 41.3, 6). In 41.24 he reduces the two positive epithets of the narrator to one (cf. 41.5). So although Pharaoh has called in the master interpreter, he himself is indulging in some interpretation himself—and it is negative.

In his dialogue with Pharaoh, Joseph once again raises his relationship with God. He has no innate ability to interpret

dreams, 'It is not I; God will give Pharaoh a favourable answer' (41.16). Yet he provides the interpretation immediately after hearing Pharaoh's description of the dreams, without consulting God (cf. Dan. 2.17-23; but see also Dan. 4.19-22). Indeed, he has already decided on his general interpretation before he has heard the dreams. How can he promise Pharaoh a 'favourable (*šālôm*) answer' (41.16), before Pharaoh has related his dreams? In fact, given their respective positions, one wonders whether Joseph's answer is more favourable for him than it is for Pharaoh. His interpretation is straightforward, and simply confirms what a reader could have deduced in broad outline. But Joseph goes far beyond dream interpretation. He also gives advice on the future agricultural policy of Egypt—none of which is suggested in the dreams. If interpretations come from God, have these political suggestions also? (Pharaoh seems to think so, cf. 41.39.) The policy he suggests will obviously require a skilled overseer. While Joseph does not explicitly offer his services, he nudges the Pharaoh in his direction. It will be necessary to appoint a 'discerning and wise (*ḥākām*)' man (41.33). And the only reason Joseph now stands before the throne is because of the inability of Pharaoh's wise men (*ḥ^{a}kāmîm*, 41.8). Joseph suggests that overseers should be appointed (*pqd*), which the reader will recall is what Joseph has been on more than one occasion. Potiphar 'made him overseer (*pqd*)' (39.4-5), while in prison Joseph was 'charged' (*pqd*) to look after the cupbearer and baker (40.4). If Joseph's release from prison was telegraphed in the earlier part of the chapter, his appointment to high position is here also.

Joseph states that the doubling of Pharaoh's dreams means that 'the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about' (41.32). If that is so, then what about Joseph's own doubled dreams? And are the numerous intimations that Joseph's status is about to change, harbingers of the fact that we shall soon 'see what will become of his dreams' (37.20)?

41.37-57

Joseph's promotion occurs without delay. The Egyptian court is remarkably compliant when Pharaoh elevates Joseph to second in the kingdom. The incompetence of the court has just been demonstrated. An unknown Hebrew slave who has been paroled from prison shows his skill and is then promoted over their heads. This would normally be a situation tailor-made to produce professional jealousy (cf. Dan. 6.1-5). In addition, the Pharaoh

does not investigate the reasons for Joseph's imprisonment, nor the seriousness of his crime. Thus Pharaoh is presented as an absolute monarch who can release prisoners on a whim (cf. the cupbearer and baker). He is, however, also capable of being manipulated by Joseph's interpretations and subtle suggestions (see above). One might well ask why the Pharaoh and his court assume that Joseph's interpretation is correct when 14 years must pass before it can be verified. Is this further evidence that the Lord is with Joseph?

Previous hints that Joseph's declining status is about to change are confirmed here. Prior to imprisonment Potiphar had placed him over his house (*'al bêtô*, 39.4); now Pharaoh puts him in charge over his house (*'al bêtô*, 41.40). Just as Potiphar appointed Joseph over everything except his food and wife (39.6, 9), so Pharaoh places Joseph over everything except his throne (41.40). It seems to be Joseph's destiny to be placed over (*'al*) most things: over his brothers (37.8), Potiphar's house (39.4), Pharaoh's house (41.40), the whole land of Egypt (41.33, 41, 45). All except the first of these have been accomplished. And it is the manner of his promotion which brings his relationship to his brothers back into focus. Pharaoh treats him like a prince, giving him a signet ring, a gold chain and 'garments of fine linen' (41.42). The story has returned to its starting point when Joseph was dressed by his father in lordly garb with long sleeves (37.3). Should we now expect Joseph to act as he had before when so attired—as an insensitive braggart, milking the favouritism he held in the eyes of the one with power, giving 'bad reports'? Or have the passing years and experience of injustice knocked those traits out of him? (See 42.1-17.)

Joseph is drawn increasingly into Egyptian society. He is given an Egyptian name (cf. Dan. 1.7), and an Egyptian wife, the daughter of an Egyptian priest. Like Judah before him, Joseph marries a foreigner. The ethnic purity of the ancestral family, of such importance to Abraham (24.3-4) and Isaac (28.1-2), is beginning to unravel. The corollary of being drawn increasingly into Egyptian society is a growing alienation from his family. At the birth of Manasseh he announces that God has made him 'forget all my hardship and all my father's house' (41.51). By mentioning his father's house he has obviously not forgotten it in the same way that the cupbearer forgot him. But he now sees his destiny as lying elsewhere. Since being in Egypt he has been in the house of Potiphar (e.g., 39.2, 4, 5, and so on), incarcerated in the 'round

house' (e.g., 39.20-23), and now elevated to Pharaoh's house (41.40). But his father's house, in which this story began and to which his dreams referred, is far from him. Throughout seven years of plenty and into the famine, Joseph, second in power only to Pharaoh himself, makes no attempt to contact his family in Canaan. But then, 'all the world' came to Egypt (41.57). Can Joseph and his family be kept apart much longer? And what then? (See 50.1-14.)

Genesis 42

In chs. 12–36 the barrenness of matriarchs was in the foreground (e.g., 11.30; 25.21; 29.31). We are now reminded of the barrenness of the land. While mentioned briefly before (e.g., 12.10; 26.1-2), the occasional inadequacy of the promised land to support the ancestral family now comes sharply into focus. More and more of Joseph's family leave the land to which Abraham had migrated.

42.1-17

Jacob realizes that 'there was grain in Egypt' (42.1). If only he knew what else, or rather who else, was in Egypt! His reason for not sending Benjamin with his brothers is not because he is too young to travel, nor solely because he loves him more than any of his other sons (42.38). Rather, he fears that harm might befall him (42.4). While harm could come to Benjamin from the Egyptians, Jacob might well fear more than foreigners. Catastrophe had struck Benjamin's brother when he had left home. But Joseph had been killed by a wild animal when he was separated from his brothers, rather than when he was with them. Or so it seemed. Does his reluctance to send Benjamin suggest that he has harboured suspicions about the cause of Joseph's death? He had kept Joseph's dream in mind (37.11); has he also kept Joseph's death in mind?

The last chapter presented Joseph as the master of dreams, and saw him enlisted as master of grain distribution. In this chapter his brothers arrive in Egypt. The necessary elements have been assembled to recall Joseph's first dream in which his brothers' sheaves of grain bowed down to his. Now as Joseph stands amid the grain his brothers prostrate themselves before him (42.6 cf. 37.7). Yet Joseph's behaviour is most peculiar. Though he recognizes his brothers he does not greet them or introduce himself. Rather, he acts as if they were total strangers, and in so

doing evokes earlier episodes. When his brothers had deceived Jacob with Joseph's blood-soaked cloak, they requested their father, 'see (*nkr*) now whether it is your son's robe or not. He recognized (*nkr*) it' (37.32). Similarly Tamar returned Judah's pledge and asked him to 'Take note (*nkr*), please, whose these are ... Then Judah acknowledged (*nkr*) them' (38.25b-26a). Here, when Joseph saw his brothers 'he recognized (*nkr*) them, but he treated them like strangers (*nkr*)' (42.7). The obverse of this situation is then stated, 'Although Joseph had recognized (*nkr*) his brothers, they did not recognize (*nkr*) him' (42.8). In the previous incidents Jacob and Judah publicly acknowledged the evidence presented. Here, by contrast, Joseph's recognition is only internal; his actions deceive his brothers. Previously, it was the deceived who acknowledged the evidence. Here, Joseph deceives by his refusal to acknowledge publicly his brothers. Joseph's action is peculiar enough, but when contrasted with Jacob's and Judah's is doubly so (see 41.37-57).

Why does Joseph behave in this way? The narrative provides only hints. Previously, Joseph had 'forgotten' his father's house (41.51), but when he meets his brothers he 'remembers'—not their throwing him in the pit, nor their selling him into slavery—but specifically his dreams (42.9). The narrative links Joseph's remembrance of his dreams with his peculiar behaviour: 'And Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed about them and he said to them, 'You are spies' (42.9, literal translation). Thus it is in his dreams that we must seek a rationale for his bizarre actions. Note, however, that the prostration of Joseph's brothers has not fulfilled his dreams. The imagery of his first dream pictured his brothers' sheaves bowing down to his (37.7). But only 10 of his brothers are present in Egypt. And the second dream includes not only all 11 brothers but also Joseph's parents doing the same (37.9-10). Thus if Joseph has remembered his dreams, he must realize, as he sees his brothers prostrate before him, that his dreams have not yet been fully realized. His behaviour might well be motivated by this realization.

His accusation that his brothers are spies is unexpected and serious. His allegation carries the reader back to Joseph's dreaming youth at home. As a lad, Joseph had acted like a spy in bringing back a bad report of his brothers to Jacob. The term (*dibbâ*) used to describe Joseph's action in 37.2 is also used to describe the spies' report in Num. 13.32; 14.36-37. So Joseph accuses his brothers of doing what he had once done, even though

he knows that they are innocent. His brothers' reply, 'your servants have never been spies' (42.11), is an assertion that Joseph could never truthfully make about himself. They also protest that they are 'honest men'. Yet the reader, unlike Joseph, is aware of how they deceived Jacob concerning Joseph's supposed death. But their protestation of honesty raises the question of how honest Joseph himself is being, by falsely accusing them of a serious offence. On this point there seems little to choose between the brothers. The 10 protest, 'We are all sons of one man' (42.11). They certainly are—all 11 of them.

Despite their denials, Joseph continues to turn the screw. The men claim to be 10 brothers, with a father and younger brother at home and another 'who is no more' (42.13). Joseph disputes this and announce a test that will prove 'whether there is truth in you' (42.16). They must produce their younger brother. But there is no logical connection between this test and the dispute it is supposed to settle. The men might well have a younger brother, but they could still be spies. Even if they parade another younger male before their accuser, how is Joseph to know whether this is indeed their brother? Readers know that the accusation is unfounded and the nature of the test confirms that this is just a ruse. And with a little reflection the brothers too could have seen this. But Joseph's motives for acting like this are nowhere explicitly stated. Since, however, Joseph's manipulation of his brothers was triggered by his remembering his dreams, a motivation for seeing Benjamin is hinted at. Benjamin's arrival will create the possibility for his prostration, and with it Joseph's dreams will be one step nearer fulfilment (see 37.1-11). The extent to which he will go to achieve this is seen in his swearing by Pharaoh (42.16)—no other Israelite character in the Bible swears by anyone other than Elohim/Yahweh (cf. Deut. 6.13; Josh. 23.7).

In addition, the seriousness of Joseph's intent is shown when he imprisons them for three days. Imprisoning his brothers could be seen as revenge, replicating their previous imprisonment of him in the pit (37.24). But a more telling connection exists between Joseph's imprisonment of his brothers on trumped up charges with his own imprisonment on the slanderous word of Potiphar's wife (39.14-20). In each case the accusers know that their accusations are lies. Indeed, their allegations are partly analogous. Potiphar's wife accused Joseph of attempted rape. Joseph claims that the brothers wish 'to see the nakedness (*r'h 'erwâ*)' of Egypt (42.9, 12). The same phrase is used elsewhere in

the context of sexual offences (e.g., 9.22-23; Lev. 20.17). Thus Joseph's accusation contains sexual innuendo. In his position of power, Joseph appears to be as manipulative and vindictive as his former mistress was.

42.18-28

Joseph's behaviour becomes increasingly enigmatic. He now softens his demand and requires that only one brother remain in Egypt while the rest go to get Benjamin. Is he lowering his guard and showing evidence of genuine concern for his brothers beneath his austere exterior? Or does his move from a harsh to a more lenient approach simply replicate his brothers' decision not to murder him but to sell him into slavery (37.26-27)? On the other hand it is worth considering that oscillating from harshness to gentleness is an age-old ploy of hostage takers. A brutal confrontation followed by kinder words dispose the victim to please the interrogator at all costs.

One possible motivation for Joseph's behaviour, however, can be safely eliminated. A common suggestion is that Joseph is merely testing his brothers to see whether they have reformed, will confess their sins against him and demonstrate their love for Jacob and Benjamin. If this is Joseph's motivation, it is a mystery why he has suddenly become obsessed with the welfare of his father and brother when he has lived for years in Egypt without making any attempt to discover anything whatsoever about his family. If the whole world, including his brothers, can come to Egypt (41.57), then the Egyptian potentate could certainly go to Canaan (cf. 50.4-7). In Egypt he has cared nothing about his family, as he himself confesses (41.51). An equally fundamental objection is that Joseph has no grounds for believing that Jacob and Benjamin would be badly treated by his brothers. Joseph was not sold into slavery because, like Benjamin, he was the son of Rachel, but because he was a tale-telling brat who boasted of his dreams, in which all family members, not just his 10 older brothers, were destined to bow down. And as 42.22 states, not all brothers were in favour of mistreating Joseph (cf. 37.22). As far as Jacob is concerned, the reader knows that he was cruelly deceived by his sons, but Joseph does not. By the time his stained cloak was spread out before Jacob, Joseph was in Egypt (37.28). So Joseph has no grounds for suspecting that his brothers would mistreat Jacob. Additionally, if he requires a confession of guilt from his brothers, then they provide one: 'We

are paying the penalty for what we did to our brother' (42.21). Joseph's behaviour induces their confession, but the fact that he continues as if nothing had happened, merely stepping aside for a while to weep (42.24), indicates that such a confession is not his aim. His private weeping is as enigmatic as his public speech and action. As 42.9 indicated, Joseph's behaviour is motivated by his dreams, not by concern for family welfare.

Before Joseph sends his brothers on their way, he selects Simeon as hostage. Joseph's choice might well be arbitrary, but could be caused by Reuben's speech in which he reminds his brothers of how he had pleaded for clemency toward Joseph (42.22). Perhaps Joseph learns here for the first time of Reuben's pleas, and thus passes over Reuben as the firstborn and chooses the next in line, Simeon. Whatever the reason, Leah's second son is held as the bait to catch Benjamin, Rachel's second son (Sternberg 1985: 291).

There is yet one more enigma when Joseph replaces the money in the brothers' sacks. If he had handed the money over openly and declared that the grain was a gift, it would have been unusual but unambiguous. But what does this surreptitious refund signify? Is it an act of generosity, suggesting Joseph's overarching motives in this puzzling episode? Or is it one more sadistic trick which will enable him to imprison all of them for theft when they return? The reader is in the same quandary as the brothers who were 'bewildered' (42.28, NEB) at this turn of events.

Joseph's reunion with his brothers has a precedent which brings it into sharper focus. Esau had also come face to face with a brother who had wronged him (ch. 33). Like Joseph he too had been separated from his brother(s) for 20 years (31.38, 41; 37.2; 41.46, 53). When he met Jacob he was in a position of power, surrounded by 400 men, just as Joseph is surrounded by the might of the Egyptian empire. But Esau acted in sharp contrast to Joseph. Esau had wept as he and Jacob embraced each other (33.4). Joseph weeps, but in private, not on his brothers' necks, while they are terrorized by his charade of self-concealment and false accusation. Esau's response to meeting Jacob is to welcome and forgive a brother who had seriously wronged him and to offer the hand of reconciliation. Joseph's response does not have to duplicate Esau's. But the contrast with Esau's treatment of Jacob makes Joseph's actions appear all the stranger.

Joseph's allusion to God (42.18), and his brothers' panic-stricken cry, 'What is this that God has done to us?' (42.28), brings into focus once again God's role in this story. With no explicit words or acts from God, like the brothers, we as readers are left to ponder God's involvement, which at this stage at least, is as enigmatic as Joseph's actions.

42.29-38

The bemused brothers arrive back home without Simeon. When Joseph had disappeared, they had left Jacob to draw his own conclusions from the bloodied cloak. But here they must face him and give an explanation for Simeon's absence. In recounting their experience in Egypt they deviate slightly from the account in 42.1-28. Some details are realigned, but the most striking differences are the omissions and additions. For example, they do not tell Jacob that they were all imprisoned for three days, nor that their lives are at risk if they do not return with Benjamin (cf. 42.20). Naturally, they report nothing of their own conversation in which they deduced that their dilemma is retribution for their previous maltreatment of Joseph. Also, they make no mention of their discovery of money in one of their sacks. On the other hand they seem to invent a promise that they will be allowed to trade in Egypt if they do return with Benjamin (42.34). Thus they minimize the negative and accentuate whatever positive there is. Their report, therefore, underestimates the gravity of the situation. It is hardly surprising that Jacob does not agree to allow Benjamin to return with them (see Wenham 1993: 410).

If their doctoring of the evidence was an attempt to shield Jacob from the full implications of the situation, then they are only partially successful. For when they open their sacks they discover that the problem of the returned money is greater than they thought. Previously they were only aware that one brother had the money (42.28). But now, with Jacob looking on, they discover that each of them has money in his sack. None of them understands what is happening. But none suggests that this is a good omen—they are all 'dismayed' (42.35). Jacob judges the money in the sacks to be an omen that Simeon has joined Joseph in oblivion, soon to be joined by Benjamin should he go to Egypt (42.36). Thus it is not surprising that Jacob spurns Reuben's irrational suggestion that if anything goes wrong, Jacob can kill his two grandsons (42.37)!

Jacob's final words indicate the pecking order that still prevails in this family. He bewails the fact that Joseph is dead and that Benjamin 'alone is left' (42.38). He is the only son of Rachel left, of course. Yet Jacob has nine other sons standing before him. But they are of a different order. If Benjamin were in an Egyptian prison and Simeon was required for his release, there can be little doubt that he would already have been on his way.

The story has turned full circle: a brother failing to return (cf. 37.29-31); the father remembering only Joseph's demise (42.36 cf. 37.33-34); showing favouritism (42.38 cf. 37.3); once again anticipating a journey to Sheol (42.38 cf. 37.35). The difference this time is that Jacob is not alone in being deceived. And overarching all this, the bewilderment of the brothers and mental anguish of Jacob, is the fact that Joseph has remembered his dreams (42.9).

Genesis 43

43.1-15

While the family eke out their existence, Simeon remains in prison. Finally the Egyptian grain runs out and Jacob must face the inevitable. Despite telling his sons to return and buy more food (43.2), Jacob knows that the task is more complex than that. If Benjamin does not go, there will be no more food. The heated discussion with Judah and his brothers simply rehearses what they all know. There is little point now in telling his sons that they should have given the Egyptian evasive answers (43.6). They had unfortunately presented themselves as 'honest men' (42.11), a virtue lost on Jacob. Jacob is portrayed as a dithering aged patriarch who will not accept his sons' counsel. Judah says as much in 43.10, 'If we had not delayed we would now have returned twice'. Chapter 42 had seen a shift in Jacob's mood from decisive (42.1-2) to diffident (42.38), a posture picked up at the beginning of ch. 43. It is not only Joseph who can present two faces.

Just as in the report they gave to their father in 42.30-34, Judah here presents a diluted account of their conversation with Joseph. Nowhere does he tell Jacob that if Benjamin does not accompany them then they will be executed (cf. 42.20), nor the implication that if they do not return, Simeon will be executed (42.19-20). These omissions are probably designed to prevent Jacob becoming even more agitated. But it is a reminder that for

all kinds of reasons, some laudable, some not, neither Jacob, nor Joseph, nor his brothers find telling the truth easy. There is, however, more than a hint that Judah's character is in the process of change. He offers himself as surety (*'rb*) for Benjamin. Previously he had given a pledge (*'ērābôn*, 38.17-18) to Tamar. With Tamar, he himself had admitted his wrong (38.26), but in ch. 43 his concern for his father shines through.

Reuben had previously made a rash suggestion in an attempt to persuade Jacob to send Benjamin (42.37), but to no effect. Simeon, of course, is not present. So Judah now takes the initiative. Rather than Reuben's strategy of offering his sons, Judah puts himself forward as being personally responsible should anything happen to Benjamin. He chooses his words carefully, 'so that we may live and not die' (43.8), the very words used by Jacob when he sent them to Egypt in the first place (42.2 cf. 47.19). The echo of his earlier words must surely convince Jacob that Judah's advice makes sense.

Finally persuaded, Jacob decides to send a gift to the Egyptian. Jacob had previously sent a gift (*minḥâ*) to assuage the anger of Esau (32.13, 18, etc.), and everything had worked out well on that occasion. He appears to be using the same tactic here, though the huge contrast between Joseph's and Esau's response to meeting long lost brothers makes such an approach questionable (see 42.18-28). Sending such choice produce (43.11) is a favour indeed in the middle of a famine. Giving this present also unwittingly replays Jacob's former preferential treatment of Joseph. Such favouritism had been one of the contributing factors to Joseph going to Egypt in the first place. Also, ironically the gifts he sends include gum, balm and resin—items that the Ishmaelite traders had carried down to Egypt along with Joseph (43.11 cf. 37.25). An increasing number of motifs from the opening episodes of the narrative are now recurring, suggesting that the problems which began there could possibly be nearing some sort of resolution (see 42.29-38).

In the end Jacob acknowledges that he has no choice in the matter. The omnipotent Egyptian can manipulate them in whatever manner he sees fit. He sends his sons on their way resigned to the fact that 'if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved' (43.14).

43.16-34

Once Joseph sees that Benjamin has arrived, his attitude to his brothers moves into a new phase. Previously he had adopted a

harsh and belligerent stance towards them, before becoming more lenient (42.7-17 cf. 42.18-20). He now appears to be positively generous, inviting them to eat with him. Not surprisingly, the brothers are suspicious. They must have expected some form of inquisition and interrogation of Benjamin, rather than generous hospitality. The money in their sacks defied explanation and now this! They fear the worst: the Egyptian will accuse them of stealing his silver and enslave them (43.18). Yet it was Joseph himself whom they sold for silver into slavery (37.28). Thus one more echo of the opening movements of the narrative foreshadows an impending resolution. But what form that resolution will take is far from clear at this point. And the issue of the money they found in their sacks is an example of this. Fearing the worst, the brothers tell the truth about the matter, (though see the slight discrepancy between 43.21 and 42.27-28). Yet the matter is dismissed by Joseph's steward as being of no consequence. No money has been reported as stolen, and the occurrence is put down to the inscrutability of divine intervention. Does the steward utter more than he realizes, or is he stabbing in the dark? The reader, who knows that Joseph ordered the placing of the silver in the sacks, is as nonplussed as the characters. Why does he never raise the matter with his brothers? If it is simply an act of generosity, then why does he return it in a manner designed to cause unease to his family?

As if to underline that his accusation of spying was just a ruse, Joseph releases Simeon before meeting his brothers (43.23). One would have expected interrogation of Benjamin before Simeon's release, if Joseph had been serious in his claims.

When the brothers present their gift to Joseph they bow before him. Benjamin is with them, and so here we have the true fulfilment of Joseph's first dream. All of his brothers are now present (see 42.1-17). The gift they bring, however, was brought on Jacob's initiative (43.11), and his sons refer to him as Joseph's servant. So there is a hint that this is some form of tribute from Jacob, and that he is in some way present by proxy among his prostrate sons. Thus, there are hints that the fulfilment of the second dream, which predicted subservience of all family members, cannot be far away.

When he meets his brothers he goes through the formal pleasantries of inquiring after their welfare and that of their father. Their reply, 'Your servant our father is well; he is still alive' (43.28), is true up to a point. He is certainly alive, but suffering

mental anguish because of the trauma he is going through (42.38; 43.14). The brothers themselves were responsible for causing their father grief in the past, when they pretended that Joseph had been killed. But Joseph himself is causing just as much now by refusing to reveal that he is still alive. But surely his reticence must now end. Benjamin has arrived. Yet with just a hurried word of greeting he rushes out to weep. His previous weeping was difficult to fathom, but here it is caused by 'affection for his brother' (43.29). With such positive emotions, surely an open reconciliation must be imminent.

The feast that Joseph serves to his brothers would be an ideal opportunity for him to reveal the truth to them. But the only thing revealed is his favouritism for Benjamin who receives five times more than the rest. If by this Joseph is trying to drive a wedge between the brothers, he fails. For despite such flagrant favouritism, they all 'drank and were merry with him' (43.34). If he wants one final demonstration of his brothers' honesty and integrity, then he has it. Surely, the reader thinks, he will tell them *now*. But he does not; the charade continues.

Genesis 44

44.1-13

Joseph once again sends his brothers on their way without divulging his identity. As before he replaces their money in their sacks. This time, however, he puts his silver cup in Benjamin's sack. When he had placed money in their sacks before it had been, apparently, an act of generosity. The matter had exercised the brothers but it was never raised by Joseph. Presumably he is being generous again. Putting his silver cup in Benjamin's sack is consistent with his favouritism already displayed (43.34). In this light, his command to his steward to apprehend his brothers and charge them with theft (44.4) is quite startling. Joseph orders his steward to ask the men, 'Why have you returned evil for good?'. That question could well be asked of Joseph. His brothers have shown themselves to be decent men. They acknowledged their previous discovery of money in their sacks (43.21) and brought him a gift (43.26). If Joseph did not accuse them of theft before, why does he do so now?

Not surprisingly, the brothers are taken aback by such accusations. Their stunned reply, 'Why does my lord speak such words as

these?', is certainly understandable. But is it a little hasty? They know that money has inexplicably turned up in their sacks before (42.28, 35). If that has occurred, then the discovery of a silver cup would not be implausible. Their indignation leads them to make the rash suggestion that if any of them is guilty, that person should be executed and the others enslaved (44.9). Their protests and offer recall Jacob's when accused of stealing Laban's teraphim (31.32). But Rachel's subterfuge saved him on that occasion (31.34.35). The brothers are more naive and vulnerable. Strangely, the steward dilutes their offer. He is content with slavery for the culprit. The rest may go free. Does the steward have a more balanced view of justice, or is it because he feels uneasy, knowing that they have the cup because he put it there (cf. 44.1)? The speed with which they unload their sacks and open them up, eager to demonstrate their innocence, shows just how defenceless they are, totally at the mercy of Joseph's whims.

The incident only makes Joseph's character all the more baffling—he hides the cup to ensnare Benjamin; yet his silence over the money suggests that once again he is being generous to his brothers. Surely one would have expected the opposite, since he has already shown favouritism to Benjamin above the other brothers (42.34). Grief stricken at the discovery of the cup, they return to meet their tormenter. Will Joseph ring any more changes in his bizarre toying with his brothers?

44.14-34

Once again his brothers bow down before him. He has already witnessed partial and complete fulfilments of his first dream (37.10 cf. 42.6, 43.26). While these have been the result of Joseph's peculiar behaviour, his motivation must surely be more than to keep replaying this scene repeatedly. He accuses them using extreme terms, 'What deed is this that you have done?' (44.15). This is similar to previous accusations of gross wrong: the Lord God to the Woman (3.13); Pharaoh to Abram (12.18); Abimelech to Isaac (26.10) and Jacob to Laban (29.25). In these examples the accuser knows that a wrong has been committed. Joseph, however, knows that the accused are innocent, and this contrast merely underlines the sadistic nature of Joseph's charges.

Are we to take Joseph's claims concerning his practice of divination at face value? (It is prohibited in, e.g., Lev. 19.26; Deut. 18.10; cf. 2 Kgs. 21.6). Previously he has claimed that the interpretation of dreams comes from God (40.8; 41.16, 25), rather

than through 'secret arts'. Is he simply telling one more lie in order to terrorize his brothers? He has already thoroughly disoriented them by making money and a silver cup mysteriously appear in sacks of grain, and even exhibited knowledge of their respective ages (43.33), and being hostile, hospitable and generous towards them in quick succession. He now claims to have access to secret powers. If true, this would only add to their confusion and sense of helplessness, for 'if the foreigner can divine, then he should know that they are not guilty' (Westermann 1986: 133).

Judah's stuttering reply (44.16), graphically conveys the brothers' sense of powerlessness before this unfathomable potentate. What indeed can they say? One thing he does say is, 'God has found out the guilt of your servants'. Obviously Judah and his brothers know that they are not guilty of Joseph's accusation. Is Judah simply expressing resignation to events, since this incident lies beyond the realm of human understanding? Does he feel that a plea of guilty, though unwarranted, is more likely to result in clemency than if they engage in heated debate with the damning evidence before them? Or, in the background can a confession of their previous offence against Joseph be detected? Regardless of how his words are understood, the utter bewilderment of the brothers is clear.

Judah's offer of imprisoning all the brothers (44.16b) is refused by Joseph, who asks for only Benjamin, with the rest going free. His intended parting line, 'go up *in peace* (*šālôm*) to your father' (44.17), can hardly be anything but mocking, in light of the situation he has created, and a striking contrast to the apparent concern he had shown earlier when asking, 'Is your father well (*šālôm*)?' (43.27; see Janzen 1993: 174). In response to this, Judah steps forward and delivers one of the longest monologues in Genesis. The amount of narrative space devoted to this speech (44.18-34), and its content, which provides a summary of the action in Egypt and Canaan from 42.6 up to this point, demonstrate its significance and hint that a turning point in the narrative has been reached. Joseph's response will tip the whole story one way or the other.

In essence, Judah's speech is a plea to Joseph not to imprison Benjamin because it would bring about the death of his father (44.22, 29, 31 cf. 44.34). To prevent this, Judah offers himself to be imprisoned (44.33). His speech is usually taken to show how much the brothers have reformed, their present concern contrasting with their previous enslavement of Joseph and

deception of Jacob. But Judah's speech raises additional contrasts. His compassion for Benjamin and Jacob contrasts with Joseph's indifference. He never contacted his family during all his years in Egypt. As a slave he could not; as a potentate he did not. Also, the contrast between the brothers' previous and current behaviour could be explained by the differences between Joseph and Benjamin, rather than by a presumed reformation of the brothers. That is to say, Benjamin is not a braggart like Joseph was. The contrast in the brothers' attitude to Joseph and Benjamin could demonstrate just how insufferable Joseph had been.

On the other hand, Judah's speech reveals the brothers acting as they had at the beginning of the story. Judah reports Jacob's words concerning Joseph, 'one left me, and I said, "Surely he has been torn to pieces" ' (44.28). But only Jacob believes that. Judah and *Joseph* know that he was not torn to pieces. So by recording his father's delusion, Judah continues the masquerade.

As in the brothers' reports given to Jacob (42.29-34; 43.3-7), Judah's recollection of their initial meeting with Joseph is rather benign. For example, he omits the accusation of spying (42.9-14), his temporary imprisonment of all of them (42.16-17), his imprisonment of Simeon for a considerable time (42.19, 24). The implied threat of execution (42.20) is diluted to not seeing Joseph again (44.23 cf. 43.5). And Judah appears to think it wiser not to mention anything about the mysterious appearance of the money in their sacks. Thus Judah's speech plays down the aggressively hostile tone of Joseph's previous behaviour. But he accentuates the picture of Jacob's grief. For example, he reports words by Jacob which emphasize how precious Benjamin is—the only remaining son of Jacob's (favourite?) wife (44.27). Twice he mentions the potential death of Jacob. First by claiming that Joseph was told this at their first meeting (44.22), although the narrative is silent on that, and then at the end of his monologue repeating the certainty of Jacob's death. Judah's speech is thus a model of diplomacy: the negative aspects of Joseph are downplayed and the case for clemency is subtly strengthened. Judah presents himself as a man of integrity, which puts pressure on Joseph to equal him. And in all of this Judah makes no appeal for his own welfare, or for his brothers generally, or for Benjamin in particular, but specifically for his father. Just how will Joseph respond to this?

Judah's monologue was prompted by a disagreement with Joseph over the appropriate punishment for Benjamin's 'crime'.

It is instructive to see how the brothers and Joseph differ over this matter. Several possibilities are canvassed (44.9-10, 16, 17, 33), but consistent differences emerge. The brothers have advocated either permanent separation of all brothers from Jacob (through either execution or enslavement), or freedom for all brothers except Judah. On the other hand, Joseph has consistently advocated slavery for Benjamin and freedom for the rest. The brothers' suggestions would mean that Jacob would never come to Egypt. If they never returned home, Jacob would assume the worst and die thinking that all of his sons had suffered Joseph's fate. And if Judah alone was enslaved, Jacob would not return to rescue him. When Simeon had been imprisoned, the only reason the brothers returned was because the food ran out—not concern for Simeon. Only Joseph's consistent stance of Benjamin remaining and the rest returning would bring Jacob to Egypt, together with his sons, prostrating himself before Joseph and pleading for Benjamin. He had kept Simeon on false charges of spying, saying that if they wanted to see Simeon again they would have to return with Benjamin (42.19-20). One can see Joseph working towards the next contrived concession: 'If you want to see Benjamin again then you must return with your father'. For the prostration and subservience of all the family is necessary for the fulfilment of Joseph's second dream (37.9-10). When Joseph had first met his brothers at the granary he 'remembered the dreams that he had dreamed about them' (42.9). Apparently, he has not subsequently forgotten them.

His brothers, however, consistently resist leaving Benjamin in Egypt. How will Joseph deal with this refusal?

Genesis 45

The narrative has been building up to this scene. Joseph's pretence is put to one side and some tensions are resolved. But the essentially enigmatic nature of Joseph's character continues.

45.1-15

Joseph has wept before, but has hidden or controlled it (42.24; 43.30). Judah's speech achieves something that neither hearing his brothers' confession (42.24) nor seeing Benjamin again (43.30) could achieve. Thus, the reasons for his open weeping here must be found in the content of Judah's speech. Judah's transparent concern for Jacob stands in stark contrast to the games Joseph has been playing with his father's life. Judah's speech prompts

Joseph not merely to reveal his identity, 'I am Joseph', which in itself would bring the charade to an end, but to continue, 'Is my father still alive?' (45.3). In fact the latter question is more important than the former statement, but the question makes no sense without the former revelation of who was asking it.

Not only has Joseph wept before, he has also asked whether Jacob is still alive (cf. 43.7), and enquired generally about his welfare (43.27). He does so once again here in response to Judah's speech. The repeated enquiries indicate that Jacob's death or survival is a key issue for Joseph. So why has Joseph acted in a way which has threatened to kill Jacob (e.g., 44.31)? I would suggest that previously he had wanted to know whether his father was still alive in order to ascertain whether one more detail in the second dream could be fulfilled. In other words, his questions about Jacob were not motivated simply by genuine concern but largely by a desire to fulfil his destiny. Now, having heard Judah's graphic description of Jacob's anguish, he asks the question because he is motivated by true compassion for his father: 'your father' (43.27; 44.17) becomes 'my father' (45.3). It is often asserted that Judah's speech reveals that the brothers have changed. What is more likely, is that the speech produces a change in Joseph.

The stunned silence of his brothers (45.3b) contrasts with Judah's prolonged speech. It is now Joseph's turn to launch into a lengthy monologue. He begins by absolving his brothers of blame for his enslavement, seeing in the course of events God's plan to preserve life and the ancestral family (45.5b, 7). But since this is the first time such an explanation has been offered, for how long has Joseph believed this? Presumably not from the beginning, during his service in Potiphar's house and subsequent imprisonment, nor even when he met his brothers again. He remembered his dreams (42.9), but received no further insight. The dreams, the fulfilment of which can plausibly be seen as motivating Joseph's subsequent behaviour, contained no revelation concerning divine plans for saving the family from famine. In addition, it is after he has interpreted Pharaoh's dreams that he announces that he has 'forgotten' his family (41.51). Thus his assertion here has all of the hallmarks of an idea that has only now dawned on him. Joseph is searching for a reason that will bring coherence to the jumble of events and finds it in the inscrutable will of God. His realization here contrasts with what he has been doing previously. He states that 'God sent me before

you to preserve life' (45.5b). It is thus ironic in the extreme that Joseph should have acted in a manner which threatened the life of Jacob, as Judah has now forcefully shown him (45.22, 31). The contrast confirms that Joseph's conclusion about the preservation of life is not what has been motivating him in his scenes with his brothers.

Only now does Joseph embrace and weep over his brothers. Esau had done this the moment he had been reunited with Jacob (33.4). Joseph does it only after a long delay of deception and self-concealment. Again, the contrast indicates that Joseph's actions were not necessary. It is difficult to see what the entire charade of false accusations, imprisonment and threatened enslavement has got to do with preserving life (45.5b). Joseph's pious words are uttered only after Judah has boxed him in. They give an explanation for why his brothers sent him to Egypt. But they provide no explanation for his maltreatment of them. Previously, the brothers knew neither the identity nor the motivation of the bizarre Egyptian. The only thing he reveals here is his identity (see 46.28-34).

Nevertheless, some form of closure is provided by the statement, 'his brothers talked with him' (45.15). The complications of this narrative began when they 'could not speak peaceably to him' (37.4).

45.16-28

As soon as Pharaoh and his court hear that Joseph's brothers have arrived they are pleased. Pharaoh immediately orders what one would have expected Joseph to have done the first time he met his brothers, if the welfare of his family had been close to his heart. Pharaoh commands them to return to Canaan and bring their father and belongings and live in luxury in Egypt (45.18-20).

When Joseph sends them on their way he decks them out in fine garb, but cannot resist showing flagrant favouritism once more to Benjamin. He provides him with five times as many garments and a present of silver. This recalls the unfortunate precedent set by Jacob in giving Joseph his distinctive clothing at the beginning of the story. The clothing motif has occurred at crucial points in the twists and turns of this unpredictable story, indicating a decisive shift in each episode (e.g., 37.23; 38.14; 39.12; 41.14). Thus as the story seems to be heading to a natural resolution, elements which were part of the earlier complications

raise their heads once again. One more might be implied in Joseph's remarks to his brothers, 'Do not quarrel (*rgz*) along the way' (45.24). The term he uses, however, has a range of meanings, including fear, tremble, rage, etc. (cf. 1 Sam. 14.15; 2 Sam. 7.10; Isa. 28.21). These connotations could also be appropriate here. They might well fear what Joseph would do to them when they all returned. They have already seen his emotions fluctuate wildly, and just as importantly, Joseph has not provided any explanation for his odd actions. As a result, Joseph might well wonder whether they might harbour animosity for the way in which he has treated them and be consumed with rage on the journey.

When they reach home and tell Jacob the news, it is not surprising that 'he was stunned; he could not believe them' (45.26). What the text does not spell out is what Jacob *has* believed all these years: that Joseph was dead, torn to pieces by beasts, on the evidence presented by his sons. He still does not know that they deceived him, for they had simply presented the evidence. Perhaps he is deceived into thinking that they too were misled. Or, perhaps this news strengthens doubts that he might have about their involvement (see 42.4). Whether Jacob realizes the truth about these matters or not, the reader can see that the arch-deceiver has been out-deceived. Jacob had previously bettered Isaac, Esau and Laban. But in his old age he has been deceived by his own sons. There might well be elements of retribution in Joseph's treatment of his brothers. But with Jacob hardly less so. Joseph has presented a false persona before his brothers and father in order to claim the promise of his dreams, just as Jacob had masqueraded as Esau before his father in order to receive the blessing (27.18-29).

Genesis 46

46.1-27

Jacob set off 'with all that he had' (46.1), just as Abraham had done when travelling in the opposite direction (13.1 cf. 31.21). Stopping at Beer-sheba he offers sacrifices and God speaks to him in a night vision. Previous movements into and out of the promised land have been accompanied by visions (e.g., 12.1-3; 28.12-15), though not in every case (12.10). So such a vision is not surprising in itself, but this is the first unambiguous and direct involvement of God since the narrative began in ch. 37.

Previously, there have been dreams which required interpretation (e.g., 37.5-10), or assertions by characters or narrator that God was involved (e.g., 39.2; 45.5). But here, God himself speaks directly and unequivocally. The rarity of such an utterance in this narrative, coupled with its content which sanctions the abandonment of the promised land until after the death of Jacob (46.4), highlights its significance. This is especially so when one recalls God's appearance to Isaac with its directive, 'Do not go down to Egypt' (26.2). In addition, the present divine revelation is made to a character who has not occupied centre stage in the narrative. As its major character one might have expected Joseph to have received any explicit divine insight. Yet so far, while he has certainly spoken about God, it is arguable whether God has spoken to him. Not even his dreams are unambiguously divine. On the other hand, Jacob has had several communications from God (28.13-15; 31.10-13[?]; 35.9-12). What Jacob's dream here shows, however, is that Joseph's assessment of God's involvement in the story (45.5, 7) is correct. Joseph had told his brothers that God had engineered events so that life generally and his family in particular would be preserved. Here God tells Jacob that in Egypt he will make him into a great nation, as promised to his ancestors. God's opening and closing discourses with Jacob, as with Abraham, concern various aspects of the ancestral promises (12.1-3; 22.15-18; 28.13-15). But true to form, God's revelation to Jacob also shows that the fulfilment of the promises will be anything but straightforward: the promised nation will arise but not in the promised land (46.3 cf. 15.13).

The ancestral story had started with Abraham setting out with no seed, and now Jacob moves on with comparatively numerous seed. Thus while the nationhood promise has not arrived, it is on its way to fulfilment. The catalogue of descendants emphasizes the number seven, tying it in with other genealogical information in Genesis. The total number of Jacob's descendants who either went down to Egypt or were born there is 70 (46.27). The list includes the number of sons each son fathered. The seventh son is Gad, who fathers seven sons. In addition, the numerical value of the consonants in his name is seven (see Sasson: 1978: 171-85). Other multiples might be noted: Rachel and her maid Bilhah have 21 (7 x 3) children. Leah and Zilpah between them have 49 (7 x 7) descendants. Such numerical preoccupations were frequent in the genealogies of chs. 1–11 (see 2.1-4a; 4.17-25; chs. 5, 10). The enumeration of Jacob's

family here echoes the listing of the world's 70 nations in ch. 10 and thus telegraphs that Israel is on the way to nationhood. In recalling the genealogies of the primaeval history, it suggests that just as there the predictability of genealogical succession indicates divine oversight. The Lord was not only with Joseph (39.2, 23), but is also with Israel.

46.28-34

Jacob commissions Judah to lead the family to their rendezvous with Joseph in Goshen. This is fitting, since Judah's speech (44.18-34) had induced Joseph's self-revelation. In addition, Judah's role here produces a balance where the son who suggested Joseph's enslavement (37.27), and thereby separated father from son, should be the one who leads the way to their reunion. On the other hand, the choice of Judah is surprising, because the entire ancestral family has just been listed, in which Judah was only fourth in order of priority. So the way in which Judah has gained ascendancy among the brothers, despite the Tamar incident, shows that it is not only Joseph's lordship over his brothers that challenges the usual conventions of primogeniture (see 49.1-28).

The situation is set up for the fulfilment of that element of Joseph's dream which predicted Jacob bowing before Joseph (37.9-11). Joseph is the eleventh of 12 sons, yet has become 'lord of the land' (42.30), and 'like Pharaoh himself' (44.18), to whom Egyptians and brothers alike bow the knee (41.43; 42.6; 43.26). Yet Jacob does not bow the knee. Joseph 'presented himself' (46.29) to Jacob, who retains all the prestige of family patriarch. Jacob has been involved in two reunion scenes, the first with his brother, the second with his son, both of which refuse to fulfil narrative predictions. Rebekah's divine oracle had predicted that Esau would serve Jacob (25.23), and Isaac's blessing that Esau would serve him and bow (*ḥwh*) before him (27.29, 40). Yet when the two meet again, it is Jacob who comes bowing and scraping before Esau, seven times no less (33.3). Jacob had interpreted the dream of 37.9-10 to predict that he would bow (*ḥwh*) before Joseph. But be never does. Thus, in reunion scenes, Jacob's actions invert the expectations set up at the beginning of the narratives (see 45.1-15). One can make a good case for saying that the failure of the expectations is caused by characters' insistence on forcing their fulfilment (for more detail on this recurring aspect of the Genesis narrative, see Turner 1990a: 177-80).

Jacob has anticipated death without Joseph more than once before (37.35; 43.14). Now that they are reunited, he can anticipate it with peace. There will, however, be a delay. Joseph lived with Jacob in Canaan for 17 years (37.2). As if to balance the books, Jacob will live in Egypt with Joseph for 17 years (47.28).

Once the weeping and embracing are over, Joseph instructs his family on how to approach the Pharaoh, so that they will be able to settle in Goshen. His advice is rather surprising given the fact that he has already promised them Goshen (45.10). Pharaoh himself had said as much with his offer of 'the best of the land' (45.18), which is Goshen (47.6). But now, it appears, this concession will have to be wheedled out of the Pharaoh. Joseph's advice, however, comes from a master strategist who had been promoted to his present position by giving Pharaoh broad hints, rather than outright demands (41.25-36). His brothers would do well to listen to him.

Genesis 47.1-28

47.1-12

When meeting Pharaoh, Joseph's brothers go one step further than he suggested. Joseph had hoped that the mere mention of his brothers' occupation would result in their being settled in Goshen (46.33-34; cf. 45.10), as the Pharaoh's own words seemed to indicate (45.18, 20; 47.6). They leave nothing to chance, however, and request settlement in that area, which is granted with alacrity by Pharaoh. Thus true attitudes are concealed beneath the diplomatic niceties. What appears to be royal generosity, is actually a manifestation of Egyptian social prejudice. The brothers' request saves Pharaoh the embarrassment of explaining why he has chosen Goshen for them. Goshen is the 'best part of the land' for shepherding, and as a result is peopled by social undesirables (cf. 46.34).

The migration from Canaan to Goshen raises once again the land promise that has been a major motif throughout the ancestral history. An alternative name for Goshen, the land of Rameses, is used in 47.11, underlining that this land is not their land. It is not the land promised to Abraham (cf. 13.14-17; 15.18-21; 17.8). Yet it is, ironically, the first land that they have been *given* (*ntn* 47.11). Their only possession in the true land of promise is a grave and a small plot of land, and even they had been purchased (23.13-16; 33.19).

Jacob enters Egypt as the head of his household and Joseph presents him as such to Pharaoh (47.7). As if to thank the Egyptian potentate for his benevolence, Jacob blesses him. This is the first example of Jacob giving a blessing. Previously, he has received blessings (e.g., 28.3-4, 13-15; 32.26-29), or failing that, stolen them (27.18-29). It has been a long time coming, but even Jacob in the end obeys the original Abrahamic command 'be a blessing' (12.2). Yet despite such an obsession with blessings, Jacob's words to Pharaoh reveal a disillusioned old man. His assessment of his life is 'few and hard have been the years of my life' (47.9). By comparison with his forefathers his years have hardly been 'few'. His 130 years compare favourably with Abraham (175), Ishmael (137) and Isaac (180), and Jacob has not yet died, by which time he is 147 (47.28). But his words reveal a sadness of tone. The accumulation of blessings has not impacted on his life in a positive way. He sounds disenchanted, and on that note exits from Pharaoh's presence. The reader surmises that his death notice cannot be long in coming.

As the family settles down in Goshen Joseph busies himself over their welfare (47.12). At last, the favouritism that has bedevilled this family seems to be at an end, with Joseph distributing provisions to his brothers 'according to the number of their dependants'. But then, one might recall, Benjamin has 10 sons (46.21), more than any of his brothers. Thus once again Joseph gives his full brother Benjamin more than he does to any of the rest (cf. 45.22).

47.13-28

The famine hits Egypt and Canaan and we now see how Joseph's wisdom works in practice. Joseph collects revenue from both countries (47.14) in exchange for grain. So he not only saves his family who leave Canaan, but also Canaanites who remain there and come to Egypt to buy grain. But it is difficult to maintain an entirely benevolent reading of Joseph's actions. In 47.15a, we read that all of the money in Egypt and Canaan had been spent on Joseph's stockpiled grain, and that the Egyptians came to Joseph, offering first their livestock (47.16-17) and then themselves in slavery (47.18-19). Both of the variant readings of 47.21, 'he made slaves of them' (Samaritan and LXX) and 'he removed them to the cities' (MT), make abundantly clear that whatever Joseph did, he separated them from their land. It is now state property (47.20).

It is not clear whether Canaanites, like Egyptians, are reduced to slavery once their assets are exhausted. If they are, then the only groups to escape this fate are Joseph's family and the priests into whose line he has married (47.22, 26; 41.45, 50; 46.20). If only the Egyptians are enslaved, then what of the Canaanites? Presumably once their money was gone, they would starve to death. Either scenario questions the predictions in the ancestral narrative that Abraham's descendants would be a blessing to the nations (12.3; 18.18; 22.18; 26.4; 28.14). Forfeiture of one's land and forced enslavement might be preferable to starvation, but they are hardly blessings. A moment's reflection on Joseph's own experience of enforced emigration and enslavement is enough to establish this.

Life might be bleak for most, but not apparently for Joseph's family. Their vocation as keepers of livestock ensured their settlement in Goshen (46.6, 32, 34; 47.6). We now see Joseph removing livestock from the Egyptians and Canaanites. But who receives these livestock? Pharaoh had previously told Joseph to put the most capable of his brothers in charge of the royal livestock (47.6). The dispossessed themselves acknowledge to Joseph that 'the herds of cattle are my lord's' (47.18). Is this the way that Joseph's family 'gained possessions' (47.27) in Goshen? And if the ancestral family are profiting at the expense of the dispossessed and enslaved, this is a most surprising turn of events. In 15.13 God told Abraham that his descendants would find themselves in a foreign land, where they would be enslaved and oppressed. We now see Abraham's descendants in a foreign land, but it is Abraham's descendant Joseph who enslaves its inhabitants and oppresses them. That is to say, Joseph does to foreigners what the reader had anticipated foreigners would do to Israel. Once again, expectations raised by the narrative have been turned on their heads. In ch. 15 no motivation for the enslavement and oppression of Abraham's descendants was given. Should the divine prediction ever be fulfilled, perhaps Joseph's treatment of the Egyptians provides one.

Joseph's motivation for his actions is presumably 'to preserve life' (45.5; cf. 47.15, 19, 24). He is not the first to find himself confronted with that task. Judah's actions in denying Tamar a husband were similarly motivated. Yet his actions are condemned from his own lips (38.26). One function of ch. 38 therefore, might well be not only to contrast Judah and Joseph, but also to highlight their similarities (see 38.24-30; Wildavsky 1994).

This section draws to a close by anticipating Jacob's death. The length of his Egyptian sojourn and his age at death are given before his actual death is recorded. Just as Joseph had lived 17 years in Canaan before going to Egypt (37.2), so Jacob lives for 17 years in Egypt after leaving Canaan. This chronological inclusion telegraphs that the action of this story, and with it that of the book of Genesis as a whole, is coming to a conclusion.

Genesis 47.29–48.22

47.29–48.7

Jacob requests Joseph to make a solemn oath by placing his hand under his thigh. Only two such oaths are made in the Bible, both in Genesis, and in each case it is connected with being inside or outside the land of Canaan. In 24.2-9 Abraham made his servant swear that Isaac's wife would come from outside of Canaan. Here Jacob makes Joseph swear that he will be buried inside Canaan. In making that oath, Joseph grasps the very thigh/hip (*yārēk*) that was put out of joint when Jacob last entered Canaan (32.26, 32-33). These two oaths highlight the importance of the land in the ancestral promises, a point that needs to be reemphasized now that the entire family are living beyond its borders.

Jacob takes a long time to die. In his speech to Pharaoh he had intimated his imminent demise (47.9). The narrator has already given him a brief obituary notice (47.28). His approaching death is once again anticipated (47.29), which provides the occasion for his request to Joseph to make the oath about his final resting place. News then comes to Joseph that his father is ill. Anticipations of his death have divested it of any tension, and the reader must surely be impatient to see the end of him. Isaac too had lingered on the edge of the grave (27.2; 35.27-29), but Jacob is much more active, and as the chapter proceeds indulges consciously in some actions that he had previously perpetrated on an uncomprehending senile Isaac. Isaac had been unaware that primogeniture was being overturned before his fading eyes. Here, as we shall soon see, it is Jacob's intention from the outset.

After summoning Joseph and his two sons to his bedside, Jacob recalls the blessing he received from God at Luz (Bethel). It is not a comprehensive summary of either incident in chs. 28 or 35, but limits itself to the two elements of nationhood and

land. These are the two issues of greatest interest to Jacob at this time. He has just extracted an oath from Joseph that he will bury him in Canaan (47.29-30). His aim here in summoning Joseph and his sons, it appears, is to ensure genealogical succession within the embryonic nation living in Egyptian exile.

However, the logical connection between his remembrance of former blessings and his subsequent action is not clear at first sight. What connections are there between the blessing delivered at Luz/Bethel (48.4), the adoption of Joseph's sons (48.6-7), and the death of Rachel (48.7)? Perhaps the elements of nationhood and land found in these former blessings provide a clue. Joseph's sons relate to both of these elements. They had been born to an Egyptian wife (41.50-52) beyond the borders of Canaan. Their legitimacy as descendants of Abraham is thus open to question. By formally adopting them as Jacob's own sons, not simply grandsons, their status is affirmed. They are counted as Reuben and Simeon, the first two sons of Leah (48.5). But since they are Joseph's children, they will be counted as sons of Rachel. It seems, therefore, that by this means Jacob has posthumously increased Rachel's offspring. If this is the reasoning behind his actions, then one can understand why he then moves on to recall the death of Rachel (48.7), who died in childbirth, and was thus prevented from having more sons.

48.8-22

The parallels between this blessing scene and that in ch. 27 cannot be missed. Isaac and Jacob are drawn together by their questions, 'Who are these?' (48.8) and 'Who are you?' (27.18); their desires, 'that I may bless them' (48.9) and 'that I may bless you' (27.4); their visual impediments, 'Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, and he could not see well' (48.10a) and 'his eyes were dim so that he could not see' (27.1); and their intimacies, 'he kissed them and embraced them' (48.10b) and 'he came near and kissed him' (27.27). But more striking than any of these similarities of detail is the main action of the scene in which Jacob reverses primogeniture. Isaac had done this unwittingly, but Jacob does so deliberately.

As Jacob's intentions become clear, we see that his earlier reversal of the son's names when he announced their adoption was not an oversight (48.5 cf. 48.1). Yet just how effective his actions will be is open to question. The scene in ch. 27 showed how Isaac was duped into blessing the wrong son. But the rest of the narrative challenges the view that Jacob was blessed as the

reader was led to believe he would be, or that Esau was not blessed (see, e.g., 33.1-20; ch. 36). Will Jacob's attempt to reverse primogeniture be any more successful?

This question is raised forcefully with the reversal of expectations contained in Joseph's second dream (37.9-10). The dream had predicted that father and mother would bow before their son, but here the son prostrates himself before his father (48.12). Coming hard on the heels of the reminder of Rachel's death (48.7), which occurred before that dream was dreamed, thus rendering its image of his mother bowing down impossible, the reader can feel justified in casting a quizzical eye on any statements that purport to predict family relationships.

Not only does Jacob show partiality to Ephraim over Manasseh, but also to Joseph over the rest of his brothers. His gift to Joseph of a portion of the land of Canaan is more than a reminder to his exiled son that Canaan is his true home. It singles Joseph out from his brothers (48.22), and reveals the same favouritism working at the end of the story as was present at the start (cf. 37.3). The fact that Jacob announces this in the absence of Joseph's brothers suggests his awareness that old animosities might not have died. It also shows that despite the hardships that have made the years of his life 'few and hard' (47.9), he cannot help himself from showing the same favouritism that contributed to his hardships. It signals that true peace and reconciliation might not yet have arrived for this family (see 50.15).

The blessing of his grandsons show Jacob's face set against the conventions of primogeniture. Here, however, unlike the situation between himself and Esau, the reversal of expectations is not presented as being God's will. However, neither God's silence nor Jacob's speech lessens the enigma of the act. Why, just for once, cannot the firstborn be promised precedence?

Genesis 49

Jacob's obsession with obtaining blessings at the beginning of his story (27.18-29; 28.20-22; 32.26 and so on), is balanced by his dispensing blessings to Pharaoh (47.7), Joseph and his sons (48.8-20), and now to his 12 sons at its end. Yet as one considers Jacob's words in this chapter, one wonders whether 'blessing' is altogether the correct word. His words run the full gamut from fulsome blessing to virtual curse. Jacob's assessment of his sons' past and future puts him in the position of power, isolating past actions for praise or censure and predicting future destiny. But

one might well speculate what kind of blessing Jacob himself would receive from an independent observer.

Just how efficacious will these blessings be? The respective blessings on Jacob and Esau were shown to be anything but predestinarian (see, e.g., 27.18-29; 33.1-20.) He summons his sons telling them to 'hear' (49.2), using the same term as Joseph's 'listen' (*šim'û*, 37.6), when he divulged his dreams to his brothers. And those dreams have similarly only been fulfilled in part. No matter how precisely humans attempt to mould future events, and no matter how precise divine prognostications sound, there is always room for surprise.

The difficulty of categorizing Jacob's pronouncements as blessings is illustrated by his words to his firstborn Reuben (49.3-4). Jacob pronounces him to be 'excelling in power' (49.3b), yet as 'unstable as water' (49.4a). Thus positive and negative statements are juxtaposed. Jacob's negative words are occasioned by Reuben's having gone 'up on to your father's bed', presumably a reference to the incident where Reuben lay with Bilhah. Jacob's reaction to this outrage has been long delayed. At the time, the only reaction recorded was that 'Israel heard of it' (35.22). While Reuben might well be receiving his just deserts, it also reveals a somewhat vindictive side of Jacob, who waits until his deathbed (cf. 49.29) to vent his spleen on his son. In addition, Jacob's assessment is hardly evenhanded. Since this is supposedly a chapter of blessings (49.28), one might have expected some positive aspects of Reuben to be recalled. He was the one, after all, who saved Joseph's life (37.21-22, 29; cf. 42.22). While this matter might be unknown to Jacob, he had witnessed Reuben's magnanimous if somewhat impulsive gesture, when trying to persuade Jacob to send Benjamin to Egypt (42.37). One gets the impression that Reuben is being treated somewhat unfairly. One reckless act of sexual impropriety, ignored by Jacob up to this point, appears to outweigh any virtue he might possess.

Jacob displays a similar attitude to Simeon and Levi. He condemns their violence outright here. Presumably, this is a reference to their actions at Shechem (ch. 34). Jacob's attitude to their violence seems to have changed, however. At the time his only concern was fear for his life (34.30). He did not bring forward any moral objections to the act itself. Yet here, he condemns their violence and anger apparently as a matter of principle. Additionally, he has no good word to say about either of them,

yet when Simeon was imprisoned by Joseph he affected deep emotional trauma (42.36). The effect of Jacob's blessing on Reuben was to remove him from his status as firstborn. If we expected the next sons in line to take over that role, then we are disappointed. Both Simeon and Levi are cursed, with the hope that they will be divided and scattered (49.7).

Jacob's treatment of Reuben and Simeon in the first two blessings, throws his comments in the preceding chapter regarding Ephraim and Manasseh into sharp relief. There he pronounced that Ephraim and Manasseh will be his, just as Reuben and Simeon are (48.5). Yet when he comes to these two sons in this chapter, the negative far outweighs the positive. Does this indicate that Reuben and Simeon are being removed to make way for Ephraim and Manasseh? If so, then it will not be clear to the assembled brothers, who were not privy to the events of ch. 48. Or does it suggest that being 'just as Reuben and Simeon are' (48.5), is not in fact such a blessing as Ephraim and Manasseh were led to believe? Jacob might be as devious at the end of his life when he is dispensing blessings as he was at the beginning when he was acquiring blessings by deception.

Reuben, Simeon and Levi, the three eldest sons, have in turn been removed from the preeminent position by Jacob's miserly 'blessings'. The preeminent position to the family is now taken by Judah, the fourth in line (see 46.28-34). Indeed, Jacob blesses him with almost identical words to those that he himself had stolen from Isaac, 'your father's sons shall bow down before you' (49.8 cf. 27.29). Such a detail merely highlights the nagging question that a reader might legitimately ask about the efficacy of these blessings (49.26a notwithstanding). Isaac's prediction concerning the subservience of Esau to Jacob was reversed in 33.3-15. And Jacob himself has never bowed down to Joseph, as his dreams had predicted (see 42.8; 43.26-28), but again the prediction was reversed (see 48.12). Joseph's dreams had predicted, in part, subservience of his brothers, and this has been fulfilled more than once. But now Jacob predicts that Judah's brothers, a grouping which necessarily includes Joseph, will bow before Judah. In addition, images of royal authority more appropriate to Joseph's status in Egypt (49.10), are applied to Judah. It reads like an attempt to reverse Joseph's dreams. What will have precedence, boyhood dream or deathbed blessing?

Compounding such reservations is Jacob's remarkably one-sided appraisal of Judah. He receives unqualified praise,

yet the narrative has more than once dwelt on his failings. When the brothers had plotted Joseph's fate it is true that Judah had counselled against killing him, but not in order to release him, rather to enslave him (37.26-28). His assignation with Tamar had forced from him the confession that, 'She is more in the right than I' (38.26). While it could be argued that Jacob did not know about the former incident, the latter public display and subsequent birth of children (38.27-30) could hardly have been kept from him. While Judah is not presented as an unqualified villain (cf. 44.18-34), Jacob's blessing brackets out all censure. Yahweh's inscrutable attachment to Jacob is replicated in Jacob's treatment of Judah. (For a counter-reading see, e.g., Good 1981: 111.)

There now follows a series of brief blessings on Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher and Naphtali. This series begins promisingly with a positive blessing on Zebulun, containing images of protection (49.13). Issachar had been conceived when his mother Leah had 'hired' Jacob for the night (30.18). Issachar's name (containing *śkr*, hire) had originally referred to the mode of his conception, telling us more about the father than the son. Here, however, the concept of 'hire' is transferred to the son who will become 'a slave at forced labour' (49.15). God had told Abraham that his descendants would be slaves for a limited period (15.13), but Jacob's pronouncement seems to suggest his perpetual destiny. The image of Issachar as a 'strong donkey' (49.14a), a beast of burden, emphasizes his role as servant.

The blessings on Dan, Gad, Asher and Naphtali (49.16-21), children of the concubines Bilhah and Zilpah, are appropriately brief. Their exact connotations are elusive. For example, is Dan's biting at horses' heels (49.17), a continuation of his positive function as judge in Israel (49.16), or does the image of 'snake/serpent' carry more negative overtones (cf. 3.14-15)? Are Asher's rich food and delicacies (49.20), an indication of material blessing or a rebuke for inordinate luxury? The blessing on Naphtali contains major problems of translation that are beyond the scope of this commentary. The most transparent is the blessing on Gad, but even here the most that this son has to look forward to is that he will give as good as he gets (49.19).

The most enigmatic verse in this section is, however, 49.18, an abrupt outburst by Jacob as he completes Dan's blessing. Is it a statement of quiet confidence in Yahweh? Or might it suggest, rather, a sense of frustration? Prior to this point only Judah has

received true commendation, with the emphasis decidedly toward the negative, or enigmatic. Thus Jacob's statement, 'I wait for your salvation, O Lord', registers his awareness that his sons and the blessing he had fought for so hard himself, have brought more problems than actual blessing.

Not surprisingly the blessing on Joseph is the longest (49.22-26). Its imagery is no less elusive than any of the others. The general positive stance it takes is, however, quite clear. Note that this is the only blessing to invoke God (49.24-25). The reference to those who attacked Joseph is striking (49.23). Within the context of the Joseph story the attackers must surely be the brothers. Thus 49.24 which depicts how Joseph repulsed such an attack with the help of God, would refer to how he trumped his brothers by rising to high office in Egypt. This context shows that Jacob believes that Joseph 'was set apart from his brothers' (49.26) by divine decree.

The final blessing, that on Benjamin (49.27), continues the flow of short blessings which began with Zebulun's and which was interrupted by Joseph's. As with elements in the blessings on Dan (49.17) and Gad (49.19), it is not clear whether Benjamin's 'devouring' and 'dividing' as a wolf is intended to be positive or negative.

The concluding remark by the narrator indicates that these blessings are related to the lives of the tribes (i.e., descendants), of Israel/Jacob and not just to individuals (49.28). What the tribes might make of them lies beyond the narrative framework of Genesis. However, how might we expect Jacob's sons to leave his presence after hearing such an outline of their respective destinies? Presumably not with the same sense of elation with which Jacob had emerged from his father's tent all those years before when he had fooled Isaac into giving him the blessing. The blessings might well be 'suitable' (49.28), but the majority of them are hardly desirable. The 'blessings' on Jacob's sons, as embryonic tribes, do not bode well for the promise of nationhood originally given to Abraham. Numerically they are edging slowly towards becoming a nation. But if Jacob's 'blessings' bear any relation to reality, what kind of nation will they be? Even allowing for obscurities in the language used, a loose coalition of divided (49.7b), oppressive or subservient (49.8b, 15b) and warring tribes (49.17, 27), it would seem. This is hardly the fulfilment of God's promise that Abraham would become 'a great nation' (12.2). But then, how many other predictions made in

Genesis have had simple confirmations? Whether Jacob's words will be ratified or not is one item to occupy the reader who moves on beyond the confines of Genesis.

Despite the fact that Jacob had claimed Manasseh and Ephraim to be his sons (48.5), when he calls his sons together and blesses them in this chapter, not only are they not present, but he makes no mention of them. The private confidences transacted between Jacob, Joseph and his two sons in ch. 48 remain a secret. This is just as well, if Jacob's assessment of the characters of his sons in this chapter is accurate.

The blessings are followed quickly and briefly by Jacob's demise. Jacob's request to be buried with his ancestors in the family grave at Machpelah is understandable. In burial he will be reunited with his parents and grandparents. Yet ironically his corpse will lie there with Leah, the less-favoured wife. Rachel, the wife he loved, died and was buried 'on the way to Ephrath' (48.7). Thus the ongoing division within the ancestral family is registered once again. The brothers Jacob and Esau lived and died separately, and the sisters Rachel and Leah cannot even share a common grave with their husband.

Genesis 50

50.1-14

Joseph mourns at Jacob's deathbed just as God had promised (46.4). At that same time God had also promised that Jacob would return from Egypt, and now the narrative turns its attention to this.

Joseph waits until the end of the embalming and mourning period. This period is probably to be construed as lasting 110 days (40 plus 70, 50.3), thus anticipating Joseph's own death notice where we are informed that he died aged 110 years (50.26). Joseph's request to Pharaoh to take his father's body to the family burial plot in Canaan is couched in court diplomacy. Jacob had indeed requested Joseph on more than one occasion to bury him in Canaan (47.29-30; 49.29-32). In recounting Jacob's desire to Pharaoh, Joseph mentions only Jacob's desire to be buried with his kin, rather than the stark statement, 'Do not bury me in Egypt' (47.29), which could easily be taken as an anti-Egyptian sentiment.

Jacob's funeral arrangements reiterate where 'home' is for this family. But his burial demonstrates just how Egyptianized

the family has become. The Canaanites who observe the funeral cortege comment, 'This is a grievous mourning on the part of the *Egyptians*' (50.11). They are unable to distinguish between the Egyptians and Jacob's family in the entourage (cf. 50.7-8). Jacob's burial passes ironic comment on the progress of the patriarchal promises. First, the promise of land is recalled. Jacob's insistence on burial in Canaan underlines where the land of promise is. But while Jacob's return is permanent—he is in a coffin—the rest of the family return to Egypt once Jacob is entombed. Also, the comment on the naming of the place of mourning, 'it is beyond the Jordan' (50.11), emphasizes that the patriarchal family and the promises have now moved on, beyond the land of promise. As far as the nationhood promise is concerned, the fact that the entire group are taken to be Egyptians calls attention to the precariousness of national identity. In the last few chapters the term 'Israel' has been used increasingly to designate the nation rather than the individual (e.g., 47.27; 48.20; 49.16, 24, 28). But now that this 'nation' returns to its promised land, it is indistinguishable from the Egyptians. The threat of assimilation is noted.

The burial of Abraham and Isaac had brought together their respective sons to show their final respects (25.9; 35.29). Such reunions had, however, only been temporary. All of Jacob's sons are present at his burial too. Like Isaac and Ishmael, and Jacob and Esau before them, the brothers had been living separately, with Joseph at the court while they resided in the land of Goshen. With Jacob now deceased, will the fractures in the family get wider? And with Joseph in a position of power, what might the brothers expect from him?

50.15-26

The facade of brotherly unity is revealed for what it really is as soon as the brothers return from the funeral. The brothers fear that with Jacob out of the way, Joseph's true animosity for them will be revealed (50.15). Their anxiety shows that the reconciliation achieved in ch. 45 did nothing more than paper over the cracks. Perhaps their journey to Canaan and back refreshed their memories of how they had travelled that road before, on their trips to Egypt to buy grain, and of how Joseph had toyed with them and their father mercilessly. Their suspicions of Joseph's attitudes toward them recalls their demeanour toward him at the beginning of the story. Just as they had once 'hated'

Joseph (37.4-5, 8) they now wonder whether he 'still bears a grudge' (50.15) against them. Strained relationships are just as evident at the end of the story as they were at the beginning, in Jacob's presence or in his absence.

Not only does the account come to a close with reminders of the familial tension that has run throughout, but also a reminder of how well accomplished this family is in the art of deception. The brothers claim that their recently departed father had instructed them to ask forgiveness from Joseph for their previous actions (50.16). There is no record of this in the previous narrative and it is intrinsically implausible. They cannot claim that Jacob had said that Joseph must forgive them, for this command would have been directed to Joseph himself and not the brothers. In addition, the narrative never records whether Jacob had been told what the brothers had done. One thing that their devious report does, however, is to underline that Joseph has never formally forgiven his brothers. The closest he came was to announce that his sufferings were part of God's will (45.5-8). On the other hand, his brothers have not yet formally confessed or asked for forgiveness. Their present approach falls short of this also. They are motivated by self-preservation, not contrition. The full extent of the brothers' desperation can be seen in their bowing before Joseph with the confession 'we are here as your slaves' (50.18). Previous prostrations were done when they did not know Joseph's identity (42.6, 36; 43.28; 44.14). They now know who he is, and they know that this action fulfils to the letter the dream that predicted their subservience. They might be 'your brothers' (50.17), but are now 'your slaves' (50.18), a contrast in designation which plots the move that has occurred in the story as a whole. Such self-conscious grovelling speaks volumes concerning their genuine feeling of terror.

Joseph's weeping in reaction to his brothers' speech is just as enigmatic as his weeping when he 'tested' them (42.24; 43.30; 45.2, 14-15). The difficulty in assigning a single convincing motive for Joseph's weeping here at the end of the story, confirms his status as the most complex and mysterious character in Genesis. Does he take their report at face value and is he upset that his father has misunderstood him? Or, that his father has rightly surmised what his plans are and scotched them? Or does he see through his brothers' ruse and recognize it for the deception that it is, and weeps that his brothers can still misunderstand him? (cf. Hamilton 1995: 704). Is he simply relieved that his

brothers have finally confessed the wrong that they did, and is overcome with relief? Or does he weep when forced to confront the fact that he has not yet formally forgiven his brothers? In fact it is striking that not even in this scene does Joseph respond by saying 'I forgive you'. He tells them not to be afraid and reassures them (50.19, 21), but on the basis of God's overriding plan 'to preserve a numerous people' (50.20), not on the basis of his forgiveness. Invoking the divine will supplies a reason for the brothers' treatment of him, but not for his treatment of them. Indeed, nowhere does Joseph ever request forgiveness for his treatment of his brothers and father. His statement, 'Am I in the place of God?' (50.19), is somewhat equivocal in this context. It could be reassuring—namely, they need not fear Joseph because matters of vengeance can be left to God. On the other hand it is also a way of avoiding an act of forgiveness, for forgiveness ultimately can come from God alone (cf. 39.9). Jacob spoke similarly to Rachel (30.2) to convey the idea that he was being asked to do something he could not do. It is perhaps worthwhile recalling the reconciliation between Jacob and Esau (33.4). Esau also did not intone the words 'I forgive', but his spontaneous reaction to seeing Jacob again spoke louder than words. Joseph's playing cat and mouse with his family continues to sour their relationships and leaves them unsure of his true motives. He assures them that they are safe but provides no unambiguous proof that they are forgiven. The fraught relationships between Joseph and his brothers are thus left unresolved at the end of the story.

His words are notable when read against the larger context of the whole book. Some have suggested that Joseph at the end of Genesis corresponds to Adam at the beginning. For example, just as Adam was created in God's image and ruled over God's domain with his wife given to him by God, so Joseph is dressed in royal attire by Pharaoh and placed over all the land of Egypt and given a wife from the priestly family. (1.27-28; 2.22 cf. 41.40, 42, 45). (See Dahlberg 1976: 363-64, for a rather different interpretation; cf. Sailhamer 1992: 215.) If such points of contact are suggestive, then perhaps one more could be put forward. Just as Adam overreached himself in wanting to become 'like God' (3.5, 22), Joseph too has succumbed to the same temptation in his role as Egyptian potentate, summed up in his pregnant rhetorical question, 'Am I in the place of God?' (50.19).

Other aspects of the patriarchal story are also left unresolved. On the one hand Joseph marks continuity with his ancestors.

This is underlined by being told twice that he died aged 110 years (50.22, 26). It has often been noted that Joseph's age at death has a neat mathematical relationship to the lives of the previous three generations:

Abraham:	$175 = 7 \times 5^2$
Isaac:	$180 = 5 \times 6^2$
Jacob:	$147 = 3 \times 7^2$
Joseph:	$110 = 5^2 + 6^2 + 7^2$

Thus Joseph's age is the sum of the squares of the ages of the preceding generations. He brings this section of the family history to a neat conclusion that can be expressed numerically.

Yet the story as a whole cannot be set out with such precision. For example, the progress of the ancestral blessings and promises has taken a tortuous route, rather than an inexorable linear unfolding. There is a hint of this even in Joseph's death notice. For while Joseph is the youngest but one of the brothers, he is the first to die (50.24 cf. Exod. 1.6). This is a rather jarring note to read just a little while after Jacob's fulsome blessing of Joseph 'who was set apart from his brothers' (49.26). And the final note of the book of Genesis, 'he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt' (50.26), hardly brings to a satisfying resolution the promises of nationhood, land and blessing that have sustained much of the story line since 12.1-3. The story of Genesis obviously has unfinished items on its agenda which the reader will take forward into Exodus.

Indications of what some agenda items will be for the next book, and the way in which they will be developed, are hinted at, however, in the final words of Genesis. As far as the promise of land is concerned, there is a recognition that they are all in the wrong land and that God will take them back to where they all know they belong—Canaan (50.24-25). This is significantly the only place in the story where Joseph has given any hint of knowing the land promise (though see 40.15). Even Joseph who has lived 93 out of his 110 years out of the land, knows that he does not belong in a coffin *in Egypt*. The nationhood promise is also to the fore in this concluding section. Indeed, Joseph sees this as bound up with the divine will that lies behind his coming to Egypt (50.20). The 'numerous people' that God is preserving obviously includes the emergent nation comprising Jacob's family, but is not confined to that. For the story makes it clear that Egyptians, and probably Canaanites, have also been

preserved (47.13-28). Thus some aspect of Abraham's descendants being a blessing to the nations surfaces (cf. 12.2). It must also be conceded, however, that Joseph's 'blessing' of the Egyptians included their enslavement (47.18-21). And the return to Canaan will see Canaanites dispossessed of their land (15.13-16). Thus the three main strands of the ancestral promise which started the story—land, nationhood and blessing, are present at the end, but they remain as complex as ever and their fulfilment as far away as ever. The delay is illustrated in the contrast between Jacob's and Joseph's funeral. Why is Joseph not buried with Jacob and his ancestors at Machpelah? Because the family must wait for God to act. Or rather, God is waiting for the family to become a great nation in Egypt before he can bring them out of Egypt, with Joseph's corpse, and enter the land of Canaan (15.13-16; 46.3-4).

The first and last words of Genesis begin with the Hebrew preposition *bᵉ* ('in'). The first word concerns time: 'in the beginning' (*bᵉrēʾšît*, 1.1). The last word concerns space: 'in Egypt' (*bᵉmiṣrayim*, 50.26). The time and space created by the story of this text between those two points has a complexity that belies the seemingly simple surface texture. But those two points map the extent of Genesis' interests, from the breadth of creation to the minutiae of family squabbles and bereavements. The contrast between Joseph's corpse, embalmed and lying in state in Egypt, with the thrust of the ancestral story—that this family will become a great nation in a land far away, and will be a blessing—clearly emphasizes one thing. This story will continue. The strangely downbeat conclusion to the book highlights that fulfilments of promises await the future. If the future of the ancestral family in Exodus and beyond replicates in any way the journey taken in Genesis, it will be a complex and captivating one.