

# Between Eden and Egypt: Echoes of the Garden Narrative in the Story of Joseph and His Brothers

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BETWEEN EDEN AND EGYPT: ECHOES OF THE GARDEN NARRATIVE  
IN THE STORY OF JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS

by

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ABSTRACT  
BETWEEN EDEN AND EGYPT: ECHOES OF THE GARDEN NARRATIVE  
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Marquette University, 2013

The Joseph story (Gen 37-50) is often recognized for its remarkable literary unity and depth. At the same time, much of its richness derives from its relationship with the rest of Genesis, as the Joseph story's context is an essential aspect of its meaning and message. This dissertation explores the Joseph story's relationship with the beginning of Genesis, by illuminating its connections with the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel (Gen 2:4-4:26). It argues that the Joseph story's allusions to these narratives deepen its literary themes and theological vision by setting it in its proper context for interpretation.

Using the concepts of intratextuality and narrative analogy, this project traces various patterns of correspondence between Gen 37-50 and Gen 2-4. These intratextual patterns are characterized primarily by reversal. The story of Joseph's sale into slavery (Gen 37) mirrors Cain's murder of Abel (Gen 4:1-16), showing an initial parallel between the actions of Joseph's brothers and those of Cain. Subsequent developments in the story, however, illustrate how Joseph and Judah move beyond the primeval impulse to conflict and violence, achieving reconciliation and reversing Cain's failure. Likewise, the account of Joseph and Potiphar's wife (Gen 39) echoes the story of Adam's disobedience in Eden (Gen 3), as Joseph remains faithful to God where Adam violates God's command. Joseph's ability to provide food during the famine circumvents the curse upon the ground, one of the consequences of the humans' disobedience in Eden. Throughout the dissertation, close attention is paid to Joseph's knowledge, which plays an important role in the Joseph story's connections to Gen 2-4.

These intratextual relationships add depth to the Joseph story's theological outlook, casting fresh illumination on its themes of reconciliation, knowledge and perspective, and divine providence. At the same time, they remind the reader that the preservation of Jacob's family in the Joseph story bears significance for all of humankind. They offer a vision of how Jacob and his sons surpass the normal limitations of human life in the post-Eden world.

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## Introduction

### *I. Looking beyond the Joseph Narrative*

The book of Genesis concludes with the story of Joseph and his brothers. This straightforward observation has strong implications for how the Joseph story is to be read and interpreted. To be sure, the sustained narrative in Gen 37-50 is remarkable in its literary unity and cohesion, exhibiting traits that characterize it as a work of art in its own right. Many aspects of the Joseph story, however, suggest that reading it as an isolated unit does not yield a complete understanding of its literary richness or theological depth. It exhibits substantial connections with the preceding narratives of Genesis, drawing the book to a fitting conclusion. The Joseph story's context, in other words, is an indispensable element of its meaning and message. This context includes the beginning of Genesis—the Primeval History that recounts the origins of the world and humankind (Gen 1-11). If the Joseph story aptly brings closure to Genesis, its potential connections with the book's opening must be considered. The goal of the present work is to take up this task, addressing the relationship between the Joseph story at the end of Genesis and the Eden and Cain and Abel narratives at its beginning (Gen 2-4). In the following pages, I explore whether and to what extent allusions to these stories enrich our interpretation of the Joseph narrative itself.

My thesis is that the Joseph story's relationship with the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel contributes to its literary and theological richness, deepening and intensifying its message by setting it in its proper context for interpretation. The Joseph story presents a measure of resolution for the obstacles of human life that begin in Eden and escalate with Cain and Abel. One major theme of the Joseph story is the need for



continual reinterpretation of the past and present, envisioning them from an ever broader perspective. The Joseph story's relationship with the Eden narrative pushes this theme, encouraging the reader to understand the story in the largest possible scope. This, in turn, subverts Joseph's overarching statements about the extent of God's providence (Gen 45:3-13; 50:19-21), while simultaneously affirming God's indescribable, all-encompassing care for the chosen people and the rest of humankind. Finally, the Joseph story exhibits a clear concern for maintaining God's promise to the ancestors, showing how the divine promise of land, descendants, and blessing follows Jacob and his family to Egypt and remains in view as a future hope. Reading these concerns in light of the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel underscores the universal dimensions of this promise as Genesis comes to a close and the Pentateuchal narrative moves into its next chapter with the book of Exodus.

To study the relationship between the Joseph story and the narratives in Gen 2-4, I adopt a literary approach that may be termed *intratextuality*, a self-conscious critical investigation into the relationship between two or more parts of a single text.<sup>1</sup> Whereas the more familiar *intertextuality* examines connections between two or more independent texts, intratextuality instead focuses on distinct units within the same text. Taking the present form of Genesis as the text, I define the parts to be studied as Gen 2:4-4:26 and Gen 37-50. My reasons for doing so are made clear below. In exploring these parts, both individually and in light of one another, I draw heavily on narrative criticism and related forms of literary analysis, engaging in detailed exegesis of each narrative on its own before studying their relationship with one another. Finally, the concept of *narrative analogy* plays an important role in this endeavor as well, since this concept offers a useful

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<sup>1</sup> See below, pp. 39-40, esp. footnotes 155 and 156.

framework for analyzing one biblical text or passage in light of another. Throughout the study, my focus is on the impact of these connections on the Joseph story itself, showing how a relationship with the narratives of Gen 2-4 contribute to a deeper understanding of its meaning. Below, I discuss in detail my methods and the parameters for investigating the Joseph story in this manner.

Before doing so, however, I examine several reasons for exploring connections between the Joseph story and the beginning of Genesis, showing how these connections are significant in light of current biblical research. First, as I observed above, several aspects of the Joseph story show that its meaning in part depends on the context in which it is read. Studying it in the context of the whole book of Genesis—and therefore considering its relationship with the beginning of Genesis—promises to offer new insights into its message and theological significance as a conclusion to the book. Second, previous research has demonstrated the Joseph story's clear connections with the ancestral narratives in Gen 12-36, especially those dealing with fraternal conflict and the preference for younger siblings. The presence of these connections prompts the search for other allusions in the Joseph story, such as those between the Joseph narrative and the stories in Gen 2-4. Finally, recent models of the Pentateuch's composition emphasize a strong literary and thematic break between Genesis and Exodus, which highlights the necessity of reading Genesis as an independent and unified work of literature. Again, this serves as a warrant for exploring the relationship between the conclusion of Genesis—the Joseph story—and the narratives found at its beginning.

## *II. Context, Perspective and Meaning in the Joseph Story*

Read on its own terms, the Joseph story points beyond itself in a way that makes its context significant for interpretation. Knowledge is an important theme in the Joseph story, particularly the main character's knowledge and the way it grows as the narrative progresses.<sup>2</sup> This growth in knowledge emerges alongside Joseph's expanding perspective on his situation in Egypt and God's involvement in his life and within his family. Joseph, the other characters, and the reader frequently recall past events, and they continually reinterpret the past, present, and future from new vantage points.<sup>3</sup> The overarching vantage point includes not only Joseph's opportunity to save lives in Egypt and provide for his family members, but also his ability to preserve and pass along the ancestral promise that God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The proper perspective for interpreting the Joseph story's significance, therefore, extends beyond the Joseph story itself, encompassing the larger narrative of God's dealings with the nascent people of Israel.

There is, therefore, a trajectory of expanding knowledge in the Joseph story, one that goes beyond the boundaries of Gen 37-50. As the story of Joseph itself demonstrates, there is always something more to be uncovered, some greater meaning to be found by viewing the story from a larger perspective. I discuss this trajectory of expanding knowledge in detail in the body of the dissertation, particularly in chapters three and four. If connections can be identified between the Joseph story and the

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981), 159-77.

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Green, "What Profit for Us?" *Remembering the Story of Joseph* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1996), 197.

narratives of Gen 2-4, they will show that this trajectory extends all the way back through Genesis to the creation of humankind.

### ***III. The Joseph Story and the Book of Genesis***

The Joseph story's clear connections with other parts of Genesis constitute a further reason for exploring its relationship with Gen 2-4. The Joseph narrative's use of distinct themes from the rest of Genesis is readily apparent and has long been recognized, especially by scholars noting its links with the stories surrounding Jacob.<sup>4</sup> The Joseph story deals intensely with the motif of God's preference for younger sons and the related theme of conflict between brothers, which are found throughout Genesis. Recognition of this thread running through the book is by no means a new development in scholarship: modern observations and explanations of it occur at least as early as the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, scholars have developed a number of new ways to frame the relationship between the Joseph story and the rest of Genesis, particularly with respect to other brother narratives, and these insights underscore the need to examine its connections with the Eden and Cain and Abel narratives from a fresh perspective.

The themes of fraternal conflict and the divine preference for the younger son in Genesis have long been recognized and discussed by biblical scholars. Everett Fox has given a comprehensive overview of these themes, the various scholarly interpretations of them, and critical evaluations of the various positions. He ultimately suggests a multifaceted approach that takes several such interpretations into account; in doing so he

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Miscall, "The Jacob and Joseph Story as Analogies," *JSOT* 6 (1978): 28-40. Richard E. Friedman, "Deception for Deception," *BR* 2 (1986): 22-31, 68.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, J. Jacobs, "The Junior-Right in Genesis," *ARL* 1 (1888): 331-42. Cf. also Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (trans. Mark E. Biddle; Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), xiv-xxiii.

not only summarizes the major issues but offers a way forward in the discussion.<sup>6</sup> In a monograph on the topic, Frederick Greenspahn offers a thorough investigation of the literary, historical, archaeological, and theological issues involved in interpreting the motif of the favored younger brother.<sup>7</sup> Devorah Steinmetz approaches the issue from the standpoint of conflict resolution, examining not only the enmity between brothers throughout Genesis but also the conflicts between fathers and sons. In her analysis, the ancestral narratives of Genesis portray a multi-generational search for a stable family structure, in which the family neither destroys itself through violence nor dissolves through separation.<sup>8</sup> Other authors approach the motif from the standpoint of political,<sup>9</sup> historical,<sup>10</sup> or psychological perspectives.<sup>11</sup> All of them provide insight into the relationship of the Joseph story to the other brother narratives in Genesis, by analyzing their common development of the themes of fraternal conflict and the preference for younger siblings. These will be discussed in further detail below as I review previous research on the Joseph story's relationship to the Cain and Abel narrative.

Other works illuminate the relationship between the Joseph story and the rest of Genesis on different grounds. Some of these are comparatively specific, addressing the

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<sup>6</sup> Everett Fox, "Stalking the Younger Brother: Some Models for Understanding a Biblical Motif," *JSOT* 60 (1993): 45-68.

<sup>7</sup> Frederick E. Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together: The Preeminence of Younger Siblings in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> Devorah Steinmetz, *From Father to Son: Kinship, Conflict, and Continuity in Genesis* (Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> Joel Rosenburg, *King and Kin: Political Allegory in the Hebrew Bible* (Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Gary Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1986); idem, "Biblical Literature as Politics: The Case of Genesis," in *Religion and Politics in the Ancient Near East* (ed. Adele Berlin; Studies and Texts in Jewish History and Culture; Potomac: University Press of Maryland, 1996), 47-70.

<sup>10</sup> Roger Syrén, *The Forsaken First-born: A Study of a Recurrent Motif in the Patriarchal Narratives* (JSOTSup 133; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> Ilona N. Rashkow, *Taboo or Not Taboo: Sexuality and Family in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 115-57.

Joseph story's shared motifs with particular narratives such as those surrounding Jacob.<sup>12</sup> Some demonstrate how the Joseph story carries the preceding narrative forward, continuing the story of Jacob and his children as well as the larger saga about the family of Abraham.<sup>13</sup> Still others focus on a larger theme that ties the ancestral narratives together and the Joseph story along with them. Jon Levenson, for instance, emphasizes the relationship of these stories to the practices and mythology associated with child sacrifice, regarding them as "narrative sublimations of the mythic-ritual complex of the death of the firstborn son."<sup>14</sup> André Wénin explores the development of proper fraternal relationships throughout the entire book of Genesis and the Joseph story in particular, thereby illuminating the relationships among these narratives from a distinct literary and theological perspective.<sup>15</sup> Joel Kaminsky argues for a renewed appreciation for the biblical concept of election, discussing the stories of fraternal conflict in Genesis from this viewpoint.<sup>16</sup> Matthew Schlimm discusses these narratives in terms of their portrayal of anger, part of his larger project of exploring this emotion in Genesis.<sup>17</sup> These investigations provide a wealth of insights that contribute to our understanding of the Joseph story. Exploring its connections with the narratives in Gen 2-4 will further clarify

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<sup>12</sup> Miscall, "The Jacob and Joseph Stories as Analogies;" Friedman, "Deception for Deception."

<sup>13</sup> Judah Goldin, "The Youngest Son or Where Does Genesis 38 Belong?" *JBL* 96 (1977): 27-44; Gabriel Josipovici, "Joseph and Revelation," in *The Book of God: A Response to the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 75-89; Friedemann W. Golka, "Genesis 37-50: Joseph Story or Israel-Joseph Story?" *CBR* 2 (2004): 153-77.

<sup>14</sup> Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 52, 55-169.

<sup>15</sup> André Wénin, *Joseph ou l'Invention de la Fraternité. Lecture Narrative et Anthropologique de Genèse 37-50* (Le Livre et le Rouleau 21; Brussels: Editions Lessius, 2005); idem, "La fraternité, 'projet éthique' dans les récits de la Genèse," *Foi et vie* 104.4 (2005): 24-35.

<sup>16</sup> Joel S. Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 15-80; idem, "Reclaiming a Theology of Election: Favoritism and the Joseph Story," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 31 (2004): 135-52.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew R. Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness: The Language and Ethics of Anger in Genesis* (Siphut 7; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2011). The book is a published version of the author's doctoral dissertation: idem, "From Fratricide to Forgiveness: The Ethics of Anger in Genesis" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 2008).

the Joseph story's relationship to its context in the book of Genesis, and how this context enriches one's interpretation of the Joseph story itself.

#### ***IV. Genesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch***

A final warrant for studying the Joseph story's relationship with the beginning of Genesis stems from ongoing conversations about the composition of the Pentateuch. An influential movement in Pentateuchal scholarship has called attention to a strong break between Genesis and the ensuing narrative in Exodus-Numbers, arguing that they were combined at a relatively late date. In such an understanding, Genesis developed as a piece of literature relatively independently from the rest of the Pentateuch, which suggests that the book of Genesis should be read on its own as a literary work. If this is the case, one would expect to find thematic coherence and movement from the beginning of Genesis until the end, despite the book's composite nature.

This major school of thought about the Pentateuch's composition calls for the abandonment of the Documentary Hypothesis in favor of a model that recognizes two separate origin stories within the Pentateuch as it now stands.<sup>18</sup> While the Documentary Hypothesis and later refinements of it maintain the general unity of Genesis through Numbers,<sup>19</sup> this alternative view stresses a strong thematic and literary break between the books of Genesis and Exodus. It suggests that the book of Genesis stands as a work of

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<sup>18</sup> The contours of the various issues involved, as well as their implications for Pentateuchal scholarship, are outlined in Thomas B. Dozeman and Konrad Schmid, eds., *A Farewell to the Yahwist? The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation* (SBLSymS 34; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> See especially the work of John Van Seters, who emphasizes this essential unity and attributes the J source to a single, exilic author and historian: John Van Seters, *Der Jahwist als Historiker* (trans. Hans Heinrich Schmid; ThSt 134; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1987); idem, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992); idem, *The Life of Moses: The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus-Numbers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994).

literature largely independent of Exodus and the books that follow; proponents of this view argue that Genesis was joined to Exodus-Numbers at a very late stage in the Pentateuch's formation, likely by the Priestly author or redactor in the post-exilic period.<sup>20</sup> Arguments about the overall literary and theological unity of Genesis generally cohere with the notion of the book's independence; this view would be supported by thematic connections between the Joseph story and the Eden narrative, two units that book-end Genesis in its present form.

This new approach concerning the independence of Genesis has its roots in Martin Noth's investigations into the oral tradition-history underlying the Pentateuch and its source documents. Noth identified various tradition complexes, such as the promise to the patriarchs or guidance out of Egypt, which were joined together prior to the formation of the Pentateuch's source documents.<sup>21</sup> Rolf Rendtorff built upon Noth's work, conducting his analysis at the literary level rather than the pre-literary level as his predecessor had done.<sup>22</sup> He criticized Noth for taking the basic conclusions of the Documentary Hypothesis as a given, which led him to place the development of the various traditions in the oral prehistory of the Pentateuch.<sup>23</sup> Putting aside the Documentary Hypothesis at the outset, Rendtorff argued that the various blocks of tradition were held together by independent themes even at the literary level; those

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<sup>20</sup> Albert de Pury, "Le cycle de Jacob comme légende autonome des origines d'Israël," in *Congress Volume: Leuven, 1989* (ed. J. A. Emerton; VTSup 43; Leiden: Brill, 1991), 78-96; idem, "Osée 12 et ses implications pour le débat actuel sur le Pentateuque," in *Le Pentateuque: Débats et recherches* (ed. P. Haudebert; LD 151; Paris: Cerf, 1992, 175-207; Thomas Römer, *Israels Väter: Untersuchungen zur Väterthematik im Deuteronomium und in der deuteronomistischen Tradition* (OBO 99; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990); Konrad Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel's Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible* (trans. James D. Nogalski; Siphut 3; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (trans. Bernhard W. Anderson; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981).

<sup>22</sup> Rolf Rendtorff, *The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch* (trans. John J. Scullion; JSOTSup 89; Sheffield: JSOT, 1990).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 22-23.



elements that bound the whole Pentateuch together were less intrinsic to the narratives themselves, suggesting that they occurred relatively late in the process of the Pentateuch's composition.<sup>24</sup> This led Rendtorff to reject the Documentary Hypothesis as a model for understanding the Pentateuch's composition, and with it the notion that the whole Pentateuch exhibited a fundamental narrative unity.<sup>25</sup>

A key aspect of Rendtorff's conclusion was his insistence upon the disjunction between the ancestral narratives, including the Joseph story, and the other narrative blocks in the Pentateuch. The promises to the ancestors, he found, were intrinsic to the narratives in Genesis, a central theme that held the patriarchal stories together. The other larger units in the Pentateuch are held together by other themes; while these narratives do mention God's promise to the patriarchs, their references to it are only very loosely incorporated.<sup>26</sup> This suggests, for Rendtorff, a significant break between the ancestral narratives in Genesis and the subsequent blocks of literature in the Pentateuch. Building upon Rendtorff's work, Erhard Blum suggested that the narratives in Genesis and those in Exodus-Numbers developed as bodies of literature independent of one another, which were first joined together in the Priestly source.<sup>27</sup>

Subsequent scholars have continued these inquiries and pushed Rendtorff's argument even further, arguing that the ancestral narratives in Genesis and the exodus

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<sup>24</sup> Rendtorff, *The Problem of the Process*, 94-100. Rendtorff suggests that these elements are consistent with the stage usually understood as "deuteronomistic."

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 178-81.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-94.

<sup>27</sup> Erhard Blum, *Der Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (WMANT 57; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1984); *idem*, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch* (BZAW 189; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990); *idem*, "Die literarische Verbindung von Erzvätern und Exodus: Ein Gespräch mit neueren Endredaktions-hypothesen," in *Abschied vom Jahwisten: Die Komposition des Hexateuch in der jüngsten Diskussion* (ed. J. C. Gertz et al.; BZAW 315; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 119– 56; *idem*, "The Literary Connection between Genesis and Exodus and the End of the Book of Joshua," in *A Farewell to the Yahwist? The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation* (SBLSymS 34; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 89-106.

and wilderness narratives in Exodus-Numbers originally constituted separate traditions about the Israelites' origins in the land of Canaan. One tradition traced Israel's origin to God's promise of the land to Israel's ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, while the other saw it as the result of the Israelites' journey out of Egypt and God's plan to give them a land of their own. Only with the final redactors of the Pentateuch were these two traditions combined into a unified account of Israel's origins. Konrad Schmid has presented this argument in its most detailed form,<sup>28</sup> though he draws on the work of others such as Blum, Albert de Pury, and Thomas Römer.<sup>29</sup> This overall picture of the Pentateuch's composition has its opponents, to be sure; no model of the Pentateuch's authorship has established itself as the leading theory to replace the Documentary Hypothesis, despite its problems.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, the proponents of this theory make a compelling case in the complex and long-standing debate about the literary development of the Pentateuch.

In light of this important trend in scholarship, renewed attention to the Joseph story and its relationship with the rest of Genesis can offer support for the literary unity and relative independence of Genesis. One crucial aspect of the Joseph story in its present form is its role as a transition between the book of Genesis and the book of Exodus; narrating the journey of Jacob's family into Egypt, it sets the stage for the

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<sup>28</sup> Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*.

<sup>29</sup> Blum, *Der Komposition*; idem, *Studien zur Komposition*; de Pury, "Le cycle de Jacob;" idem, "Osée 12;" Römer, *Israels Väter*.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. John Van Seters, "The Report of the Yahwist's Demise Has Been Greatly Exaggerated," in *A Farewell to the Yahwist? The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation* (SBLSymS 34; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 143-57. Others who argue for maintaining the essential contours of the Documentary Hypothesis include Ernest Nicholson, *The Pentateuch in the Twentieth Century: The Legacy of Julius Wellhausen* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), esp. pp. 222-48; Joel S. Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis* (ABRL; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

beginning of the Exodus story.<sup>31</sup> As such, the Joseph story plays a necessarily important role in conversations about the relationship between Genesis and Exodus.<sup>32</sup> This makes it imperative to explore in depth the manner in which the Joseph story draws Genesis to a fitting close. Clarifying the relationship between the Joseph story and the narratives of Gen 2-4 can make an important contribution to this endeavor.

As the foregoing discussion has shown, there are three observations to keep in mind as we explore the Joseph story's allusions to the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel; taken together, these points demonstrate why such investigations are worthwhile. First, the Joseph story itself shows that its meaning in part depends on the context in which it is read. Investigating it within the context of the entire book of Genesis promises to offer new insights into its message and theological significance as a conclusion to the book. Second, studies on the Joseph story's connections with the ancestral narratives prompt us to search for other such connections, such as those between the Joseph story and the Primeval History. Finally, emphasis in Pentateuchal scholarship on the independence and unity of Genesis points to the necessity of studying the Joseph story's relationship with the narratives that stand at the book's beginning.

Previous research has explored the Joseph story's connections with the narratives of Gen 2-4, but these studies also show clear limitations that make further investigation necessary. I turn now to a discussion of this research before clarifying my own methods in reading the Joseph story alongside the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel.

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<sup>31</sup> George W. Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt: Structural and Theological Context for the Joseph Story* (CBQMS 4; Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1976), 54.

<sup>32</sup> Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*, 50.

## ***V. Previous Research***

### **A. The Joseph Story and the Eden Narrative**

Over thirty years ago, Bruce Dahlberg argued that the story of Joseph exhibits a number of allusions to the Primeval History; he is the only scholar who has addressed these connections directly.<sup>33</sup> Drawing on the allusions he identified, Dahlberg made a case for the overall literary unity of Genesis, arguing that the Primeval History and the Joseph story constitute a narrative frame around the rest of the book. In his presentation, Joseph is an antitype to Adam and to Cain as well as a figure of deliverance akin to Noah; the concluding section of Genesis therefore offers a measure of resolution to the problems generated for humankind in the book's earlier chapters.<sup>34</sup> Despite its suggestiveness, however, Dahlberg's thesis has had relatively little impact on studies of the book of Genesis as a whole, and its influence on scholarly understandings of the Joseph story has been still less substantial. Dahlberg's own observations were tantalizingly brief—the entire article is just eight pages long—and their full implications for understanding the Joseph narrative remain to be explored.

Dahlberg's goal, clearly stated in both versions of his essay, was to demonstrate the overall thematic unity of the book of Genesis.<sup>35</sup> His observations were not intended to overturn the source-critical issues underlying the Documentary Hypothesis, which he

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<sup>33</sup> Bruce T. Dahlberg, "On Recognizing the Unity of Genesis," *TD* 24 (1976): 360-67; idem, "The Unity of Genesis," in vol. 2 of *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives* (ed. Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis, James S. Ackerman, and Thayer S. Warshaw; Bible in Literature Courses Series; Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 126-33. The second article is a reprint of the first, containing relatively few variations. In what follows, I cite Dahlberg's earlier article and indicate the page numbers of the later article in parentheses.

<sup>34</sup> Dahlberg, "On Recognizing the Unity of Genesis," 364-5 (129-31).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 361 (126).

readily accepted in its basic contours.<sup>36</sup> Rather, he sought to demonstrate an essential thematic and theological unity to Genesis, visible in its present form even after source critical issues are taken into account.<sup>37</sup> The bulk of his argument relies on identifying a series of thematic connections between the Joseph story and the rest of Genesis, chiefly the Primeval History in Gen 1-11.<sup>38</sup> These connections render the Joseph story and the Primeval History as a literary frame around the entire book, the recognition of which is crucial to interpreting Genesis as a complete literary unit.<sup>39</sup> The first and most overt connection Dahlberg observes is a correspondence between the serpent's words to the woman in Gen 3:4-5 and Joseph's words of reassurance to his brothers in Gen 50:19-20. The serpent promises a God-like wisdom to the woman, saying "You will be like God," while Joseph rhetorically asks his brothers, "Am I in the place of God?" The serpent mentions knowing good and evil, and Joseph discerns between good and evil by saying to his brothers, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." Finally, where the serpent promises that the woman will not die, Joseph sees in God's intentions a desire to preserve life. In Dahlberg's view, this correspondence between Joseph's words and the serpent's renders Joseph's statement as a dramatic and theological reversal of the dilemma raised by the humans' disobedience in Eden.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, Dahlberg follows Coats's view that the Joseph story's two major concerns are to depict an ideal administrator and to explore the reconciliation of a totally fragmented family.<sup>41</sup> He recognizes this as a reversal of the human condition as

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<sup>36</sup> Dahlberg, "On Recognizing the Unity of Genesis," 361-2 (126-7).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 362 (127).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 363-65 (128-32).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 363 (128).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 364 (129).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 364 (129-30); Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 89.

portrayed in the Primeval History, where there is increasing alienation among humankind and repeated failure to achieve the “administrative responsibilities” demanded of humans in the Priestly and Yahwistic creation narratives.<sup>42</sup> Likewise, the first humans’ expulsion from Eden is presented as a movement away from life, since their access to the tree of life is prevented. The general movement toward the preservation of life in the Joseph story amounts to a reversal of this trend in the Primeval History.<sup>43</sup> Dahlberg observes other parallels with the Primeval History as well. First, he argues that the universal, worldwide famine in the Joseph story echoes the worldwide flood narrated in Gen 6-9, thereby sketching Joseph as a new Noah.<sup>44</sup> Next, he observes that the special garment that signifies Jacob’s preference for Joseph is called a **כתנת פסים** (Gen 37:3). Noting that the “garments of skin” (**כתנות עור**; Gen 3:21) that God makes for the first humans is the only other use of the noun **כתנת** in Genesis, Dahlberg sees Joseph’s garment as another deliberate recollection of the Eden narrative.<sup>45</sup> Finally, the reconciliation portrayed between Joseph and his brothers reverses the brotherly conflict that arises between Cain and Abel and reappears in the narratives of Isaac and Ishmael and Jacob and Esau.<sup>46</sup> Drawing on these observations—and allowing that other readers will likely find further connections along the same lines—Dahlberg concludes that Genesis coheres

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<sup>42</sup> Dahlberg, “On Recognizing the Unity of Genesis,” 364 (130). For the Priestly writer, these “administrative responsibilities” are summed up in God’s commandment-blessing to “have dominion” over the whole earth (Gen 1:28), while for the Yahwist they center on man’s purpose of tilling and keeping the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:15).

<sup>43</sup> Dahlberg, “On Recognizing the Unity of Genesis,” 364 (130).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 364 (130).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 365 (131).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 364-5 (130-31).

thematically and theologically, standing as a complete work in itself even as it serves as the opening of the larger Pentateuch.<sup>47</sup>

At this point, two criticisms must be noted about Dahlberg's thesis. The first is that Dahlberg said too little about the significance of the allusions he identified, apart from general observations about the unity of Genesis. On the one hand, one must remember that both of his essays were less than ten pages in length, giving him little space to do anything beyond identifying connections between the Joseph story and the Primeval History. So in a certain sense, this is less a criticism of Dahlberg's work than a desire to see his results carried forward. On the other hand, however, Dahlberg maintained that the literary frame constituted by the Primeval History and the Joseph story is "of major significance to the interpretation of the book."<sup>48</sup> Yet he did little to demonstrate how this bracketing actually affects one's interpretation of Genesis as a whole or the smaller narratives within it. How, exactly, do reversals of the problems generated in the Primeval History lend depth to the Joseph story, altering its meaning and giving it a different perspective than if it were read alone? Does the Joseph story reverse these problems completely, or does it merely offer the beginnings of such reversals as a hope for greater things to come? Does it attribute this reversal to human ingenuity, to divine initiative, or to some combination of the two? And what role do the intervening stories about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob play in moving the narrative forward? Dahlberg's observations are an important first step, but hardly a decisive one or even the most interesting one. Ultimately, they raise more questions that must be answered;

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<sup>47</sup> Dahlberg, "On Recognizing the Unity of Genesis," 365-66 (132-33). Dahlberg compares Genesis to the orchestral overture to a dramatic opera: an introduction connected to what follows, which nevertheless stands as a work of art on its own terms.

<sup>48</sup> Dahlberg, "The Unity of Genesis," 128.

noting the presence of allusions is inadequate until their significance is analyzed.

Dahlberg's articles are effectively an invitation for further study that has yet to be accepted.

My second criticism of Dahlberg's article is more substantial: it lacks methodological precision. Identifying deliberate allusions in ancient literature is a difficult enterprise, containing the inherent possibility that modern interpreters will "discover" connections that the author never intended and the original audience never recognized.<sup>49</sup> This dilemma is exacerbated by the composite nature of much biblical literature, not least the book of Genesis whose history of composition is highly debated. Dahlberg did not distinguish between verbal similarities and thematic ones, nor did he raise the question of other possible reasons for these similarities. Beyond noting that the argument for these allusions is cumulative—that one parallel could be dismissed as a coincidence, but several together point to intentionality—Dahlberg did not offer clear criteria for determining the validity of the allusions he found.<sup>50</sup> Nor did he adopt an approach (such as intertextuality) that would allow him to sidestep issues of authorial intention and history of composition. As a result, Dahlberg raised the possibility that the Joseph story exhibits connections with the Primeval History, but he did not clarify their nature or establish their existence with certainty.

These criticisms must not be understood as reasons to abandon Dahlberg's thesis, which raised a number of intriguing possibilities about the Joseph story's relationship to Genesis as a whole. On the contrary, they are meant to highlight where Dahlberg's

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<sup>49</sup> For a clear assessment of these dangers and the resulting need for methodological clarity, see Paul Noble's forceful criticism of attempts to draw a connection between the story of Judah and Tamar in Gen 38 and the rape of Tamar in 2 Sam. 13: Paul R. Noble, "Esau, Tamar, and Joseph: Criteria for Identifying Inner-biblical allusions," *VT* 52 (2002): 219-52.

<sup>50</sup> Dahlberg, "On Recognizing the Unity of Genesis," 364 (129).



observations need refinement in order to clarify their significance. Reading the Joseph story in light of the Eden narrative does contribute to its meaning in a number of important ways. Dahlberg took several important steps towards this end, but a more thorough and methodologically grounded study is necessary.

Dahlberg's insights into the relationship between the Joseph story and the Primeval History have received too little attention in scholarship on the book of Genesis and still less on the study of the Joseph story. A case in point is Terje Stordalen's comprehensive work on Eden imagery elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>51</sup> Stordalen's massively detailed book explores all overt references and allusions to the garden narrative throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, but contains no discussion of the Joseph story. This is likely due, at least in part, to Stordalen's focus on the garden imagery rather than disobedience or other central aspects of the narrative; he primarily searches for other references to gardens, paradise, the garden of God, or similar concepts. If parallels between Gen 2-3 and Gen 37-50 were widely recognized, however, the Joseph story would have merited at least some mention in Stordalen's work. Genesis commentaries and focused studies of the Joseph narrative likewise give no attention to potential connections between the Joseph story and the Eden narrative.

## **B. The Story of Joseph and the Story of Cain and Abel**

A relationship between the Joseph story and the story of Cain and Abel is more widely recognized, and many studies have explored connections between these narratives. Most common among these investigations are those that analyze the motif of

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<sup>51</sup> Terje Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden: Genesis 2-3 and Symbolism of the Eden Garden in Biblical Hebrew Literature* (CBET 25; Leuven: Peeters, 2000).

the preference for the younger son, a clear recurring theme in Genesis. God's preference for Abel's offering rather than Cain's is the first instance of this theme, while the elevation of younger children can likewise be seen in the stories of Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Rachel and Leah, Joseph and his brothers, Perez and Zerah, and Ephraim and Manasseh. These stories are characterized also by conflict and rivalry, as the success of the younger child is often met with the older child's opposition. And because this motif of sibling conflict and the younger child's success characterizes the story of Joseph and his brothers and the narrative of Cain and Abel, studies of this theme indirectly explore the relationship between these two narratives. Everett Fox has offered a comprehensive overview of the most common approaches to this motif.<sup>52</sup>

One approach is to link the brother narratives with historical circumstances.<sup>53</sup> In the late nineteenth century, Joseph Jacobs suggested that the motif preserved an early Israelite tradition in which the inheritance of a father's estate went to the youngest son. In this view, this tradition of ultimogeniture gave way to primogeniture—giving the estate to the oldest son—as Israel settled in Canaan. The narratives of Genesis contain a literary memory of a previous way of life.<sup>54</sup> There is, however, no evidence outside of these stories that ultimogeniture was ever the norm in Israel or elsewhere in the ancient Near East. Instead, relevant documents point either to primogeniture, equal inheritance,

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<sup>52</sup> Fox, "Stalking the Younger Brother." Fox identifies the following six models for understanding the motif of the younger son: the comparative view, the psychological view, the historical view, the socio-economic view, the view from the house of David, and a structural/ideological view. While Fox prefers the structural/ideological view (p. 65), he ultimately advocates an eclectic approach that draws upon all of the models, thereby accounting for the motif's origins, development, and continuing significance within Israel and Judah (pp. 65-67). In what follows, I draw largely on Fox's categories, though my own organization of the approaches does not match his exactly.

<sup>53</sup> Fox, "Stalking the Younger Brother," 52-56. Fox here distinguishes between the "Historical View" and the "Socio-Economic View," though both approaches involve an appeal to historical circumstances.

<sup>54</sup> Joseph Jacobs, *Studies in Biblical Archaeology* (New York: Macmillan, 1894), 46-62.

or a father's freedom of choice to designate an heir for special treatment.<sup>55</sup> In addition, the narratives concerning the inheritance in Genesis show that primogeniture was expected, and that ultimogeniture occurred only through the most unusual circumstances. Jacobs's historical reconstruction therefore cannot be upheld. In a different appeal to historical circumstances, another line of thought argues that the brother narratives in Genesis reflect the relationships between Israel and the various peoples with whom their eponymous ancestors are associated. Thus, Isaac's preference over Ishmael speaks to the relationship between Israel and Arab people (Ishmaelites), the conflict between Jacob and Esau echoes complex relations between Israel and Edom, and the displacement of Reuben and Manasseh speaks to the eventual predominance of Judah overall and Ephraim in the northern kingdom.<sup>56</sup> Even the choice of Abel over Cain may speak to a preference for shepherding over agriculture, either in terms of a conflict between the two occupations or as a cultural memory of an earlier, idealized way of life.<sup>57</sup>

Roger Syrén has offered an alternative version of this historical approach.<sup>58</sup> Though his primary goal is a literary study of the motif, he is also keenly aware of the importance of its historical context and meaning.<sup>59</sup> After a detailed literary analysis of the texts involving Ishmael, Esau, Reuben, and Manasseh,<sup>60</sup> Syrén dates the motif to the post-exilic period and concludes that it speaks to the relationship of Judah to the nations

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<sup>55</sup> Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together*, 16-17, 40-48. Cf. also John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 89-91.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Fox, "Stalking the Younger Brother," 52-54.

<sup>57</sup> John Carmody, Denise L. Carmody, and Robert L. Cohn, *Exploring the Hebrew Bible* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1988), 28. Cf. Fox, "Stalking the Younger Brother," 52.

<sup>58</sup> Syrén, *The Forsaken First-Born*.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-139. The texts given the most attention are, for Ishmael, Gen 16:7-17; 17:15-27; 21; and 25; for Esau, Gen 25:19-34; 27; 32-33; for Reuben, Gen 30:14-16; 35:22; 37:19-25, 29-30; 42:21-22, 37; for Manasseh, Gen 41:50-52; 48:5, 8-20. He also includes a chapter on the genealogies of Ishmael and Esau (Gen 25 and 36, pp. 122-29).

around it.<sup>61</sup> Syrén finds within this motif an inclusive tendency—with a counterpart in Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah—in spite of a desire to affirm the uniqueness, national purity, and election of God’s chosen people Israel.<sup>62</sup> His interpretation, however, does not adequately address the repeated preference for the younger son over the older. While this may be due to his focus on the rejected older brothers themselves, he gives little account of why it is always the older son who is rejected. At most, he hints that the choice of the younger son highlights God’s involvement in the election of Israel.<sup>63</sup> His other conclusions do not depend heavily on the presence of fraternal conflict or the fact that the younger son consistently prevails.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, Syrén’s focus on the ancestral narratives largely excludes the story of Cain and Abel from consideration.

Another line of thought sees a connection between the brother narratives in Genesis and the narratives about King David and his family.<sup>65</sup> Such a connection is well-grounded: David was himself the youngest of eight sons (1 Sam 16:10-11), and Solomon was likewise a younger son of David.<sup>66</sup> Conflict among David’s sons is also attested: Absalom orders the death of Amnon (2 Sam 13:28-29), and Solomon has Adonijah put to death as a rival to succeed David (2 Kgs 2:24-25). Perez is an ancestor of David (Ruth 4:18-22), so his birth in Gen 38:27-30 makes a genealogical link between David and the

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<sup>61</sup> Syrén, *The Forsaken First-Born*, 143.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 143-45.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>64</sup> It is not just the fact that Esau, Ishmael, and Reuben are rejected that must be accounted for; it is that these are rejected as the older sons, in favor of their younger brothers. As Fox notes, the peculiarity of this “strange motif of reversal” necessitates explanation as a central feature of Genesis (Fox, “Stalking the Younger Brother,” 46).

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Fox, “Stalking the Younger Brother,” 56-59. Fox identifies this approach as “The View from the House of David.”

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Rendsburg, “Biblical Literature as Politics,” 64. Rendsburg observes that since Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah were all born to David at Hebron (2 Sam 3:2-5), Solomon would have been much younger, being born in Jerusalem after the adultery with Bathsheba.

younger son motif.<sup>67</sup> And outside of Genesis, stories in which the younger son prevails over the older are most heavily concentrated in these narratives about the early monarchical period.<sup>68</sup> Finally, the displacement of Reuben in Genesis involves the ascent of Judah, the kings' ancestor, as a prominent son of Jacob alongside Joseph.<sup>69</sup>

Picking up on these connections, several scholars have seen the conflicts between brothers in Genesis as a means of legitimating the rule of David and Solomon. Gary Rendsburg, for instance, argues that the entire book of Genesis may be understood as political propaganda, written in the 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE to legitimize the reigns of David and Solomon.<sup>70</sup> In his view, the preference for younger sons in Genesis provides a precedent for the status of David and Solomon as younger sons, and the conflict within the patriarchs' families serves as an apology for the conflict among David's sons.<sup>71</sup> Joel Rosenberg makes a similar argument, interpreting the Eden narrative and the Abraham narratives as political allegories that apply to David and his family.<sup>72</sup> Though not dealing with the Genesis brother narratives directly, he does see a pattern at work throughout the Eden narrative, the patriarchal narratives, and the stories of David and his family; several aspects of the pattern correspond with specific elements of the fraternal conflict motif: the preference for the younger son, the threat of death, and exile.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Fox, "Stalking the Younger Brother," 57.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Goldin, "The Youngest Son," 41-43.

<sup>70</sup> Rendsburg, "Biblical Literature as Politics," 47-70. He also sees a concern in Genesis to defend the very concept of kingship, since it was emerging anew in Israel (pp. 50, 53-55). In spite of these arguments, Rendsburg argues that the stories of Genesis have not been invented by its author, but simply presented in a nuanced manner that has the reigns of David and Solomon in view (pp. 68-70). Cf. also idem, *The Redaction of Genesis*, esp. 107-20. In this book, Rendsburg examines evidence for dating the final redaction of Genesis to the time of the united monarchy.

<sup>71</sup> Rendsburg, "Biblical Literature as Politics," 63-65.

<sup>72</sup> Rosenberg, *King and Kin*.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 96, 204-5. In this pattern, Adam and the Patriarchs each do the following: "a. leaves behind homeland and home kin; b. suffers scandal via a woman, and exile from adopted home; c. allows one son to be preferred; d. experiences the "death" of the favored son; e. sees a son exiled" (204). David carries this

Rendsburg and Rosenberg are not alone in linking the brother stories in Genesis with the reigns of David and Solomon. Frederick Greenspahn identifies the origin of the younger son motif with the United Monarchy, though he does not study the Genesis brother narratives solely in these terms.<sup>74</sup> Nor does he date the motif to the reign of Solomon, suggesting instead a date during the eighth century BCE.<sup>75</sup> J. David Pleins highlights the relationship between Genesis and the Samuel-Kings narratives in more general terms, without positing a concrete historical motive behind it as does Rendsburg. Instead, Pleins sees connections between the patriarchal narratives and the stories of Saul, David, and Solomon simply as evidence that the Deuteronomistic History must be read with Genesis in view.<sup>76</sup> Such connections therefore resist attempts to separate the Pentateuch from the Deuteronomistic History too completely. Though several of the parallels Pleins identifies do not deal with fraternal conflict,<sup>77</sup> he does find a parallel between Solomon-Adonijah and Jacob-Esau, noting also the mothers' involvement in each instance.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, the aftermath of the conflict between Solomon and Adonijah—eventual rebellion and the disintegration of the kingdom—is antithetical to what plays out among Jacob's sons, which results in reconciliation.<sup>79</sup>

Still another approach to the Genesis brother narratives avoids associating them with any specific historical context or development, regarding them instead in terms of

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pattern forward, with slight modifications. Parts c, d, and e that Rosenberg identifies correspond respectively to the preference for the younger son, the threat of death, and exile.

<sup>74</sup> Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together*, 141-51.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 151-55. Cf. esp. p. 152.

<sup>76</sup> J. David Pleins, "Murderous Fathers, Manipulative Mothers, and Rivalrous Siblings: Rethinking the Architecture of Genesis-Kings," in *Fortunate the Eyes that See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday* (ed. A. Beck et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 121-36.

<sup>77</sup> Pleins argues for parallels between the Akedah and Saul's attempts to kill Jonathan and David; the affections of Michal/Jonathan for David and the rivalry between Sarah and Hagar; and the administrative policies of Solomon and those of Joseph.

<sup>78</sup> Pleins, "Murderous Fathers," 127-30.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 133-35.

human psychology. Such interpretations find support in the widespread prevalence of this motif—or related ones, such as the triumph of an underdog—in literature across many cultures.<sup>80</sup> One interpretation along these lines has been put forward by Norman Cohen, who reads the sibling rivalries between Jacob and Esau and between Rachel and Leah as the individual's struggle to resolve conflicting aspects of the self.<sup>81</sup> Esau's similarities to Jacob, as well as Leah's similarities to Rachel, suggest that the older siblings may in fact be understood as alternate—i.e., negative and repressed—sides of the younger sibling's personality.<sup>82</sup> Jacob's conflict with Esau then becomes a struggle to integrate and reconcile his more negative characteristics within himself, which he only partially achieves in the end.<sup>83</sup> This reading of the Jacob-Esau conflict has an ancient forerunner in Philo, who sees it as an allegorical representation of the struggle between evil and virtue within the human.<sup>84</sup> While Cohen only directly discusses the sibling pairs of Jacob-Esau and Rachel-Leah, he hints that this understanding likewise holds for the pairs of Abel-Cain, Isaac-Ishmael, and Joseph-brothers.<sup>85</sup> Cohen describes his interpretation as “modern midrash,” a re-creation of the biblical text, acknowledging his own creative involvement in the process.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, his reading demonstrates the potential for understanding the Genesis brother narratives as psychological insights into human nature.

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<sup>80</sup> Fox, “Stalking the Younger Brother,” 49; Goldin, “The Youngest Son,” 30; Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together*, 9-13. Greenspahn also notes correlation in popular thought between birth order and personality type, which lends further appeal to psychological approaches.

<sup>81</sup> Norman J. Cohen, “Two That Are One—Sibling Rivalry in Genesis,” *Judaism* 32 (1983): 331-42.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 336-37, 340-41. Cohen draws on modern psychology, in which the human is made up of both positive and negative characteristics, with the negative aspects tending to be repressed (p. 333).

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 337-39.

<sup>84</sup> Philo, *Sacr.* I, 4. Cf. Fox, “Stalking the Younger Brother,” 50.

<sup>85</sup> Cohen, “Two That Are One,” 335.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 333.

Ilona Rashkow draws upon psychology in a different way to interpret the fraternal conflict in Genesis, seeing these narratives as instances of sibling rivalry as described by Freud.<sup>87</sup> With Freud, she regards sibling relationships as counterparts to parent-child relationships; relations between brothers are therefore a displacement of a boy's relationship to his father, whom the boy sees as a powerful rival. The brother, however, represents a more equal opponent, a rival who may be conquered.<sup>88</sup> Rashkow applies this framework to the conflict between Jacob and Esau, going a step further and analyzing Jacob's wrestling with a mysterious stranger as a dream in which his repressed desires and fears vis-à-vis his brother emerge.<sup>89</sup> She then discusses the interactions between David's children Amnon, Absalom, and Tamar in similar terms.<sup>90</sup> Amnon's desire for Tamar is a displacement of his desire for paternal affection, which leads to sibling rivalry with Absalom and ends in fratricide.<sup>91</sup> Finally, Rashkow interprets the conflict between Cain and Abel as a competition for the affections of their mother or an unnamed sister, citing rabbinic and modern interpretations that posit such motivations behind Cain's jealousy.<sup>92</sup> Rashkow is not alone in bringing Freud's insights to bear upon the Genesis brother narratives; Devorah Steinmetz also draws heavily upon Freud's work, among others in the fields of psychology, sociology, and anthropology.<sup>93</sup> I discuss Steinmetz

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<sup>87</sup> Rashkow, *Taboo or Not Taboo*, 115-57. Rashkow's discussion of sibling rivalry spans two chapters: "Boys Will Be Boys: Sibling Rivalry and the Fear of Castration" (pp. 115-38), and "My Sister, My—Hmmm...: Brother-Sister Incest and Sibling Rivalry" (pp. 139-57).

<sup>88</sup> Rashkow, *Taboo or Not Taboo*, 116-17.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 115-38.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 142-49.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 148-49.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 149-55. For Cain and Abel competing for Eve, Rashkow cites *Gen. Rab.* 22:7, Gabriel Legouvé's *La mort d'Abel*, Wilhelm Hegeler's novel *Pastor Klinghammer*, and William Blake's painting *Adam and Eve Discovering Abel*. For the brothers competing over a sister, she also cites *Gen. Rab.* 22:7, where R. Joshua ben Karhah says that Cain had one twin sister and Abel had two. Both brothers claimed possession of Abel's second sister, Cain because he was firstborn and Abel because she was born with him (p. 154-55).

<sup>93</sup> Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*.



more thoroughly below, since her work goes beyond the application of modern psychology on the Genesis stories.

While these psychological interpretations touch upon key aspects of the fraternal conflict motif in Genesis—such as the binary opposition of the sibling pairs, or the way that rivalry is rooted in human nature—they do little to explain the motif as a literary phenomenon or its particular significance for ancient Israel.<sup>94</sup> Fox suggests that the psychological reading might be applied to the people of Israel as a whole, in which case it would reflect the ancient Israelites' self-consciousness as a developing people in close contact with other nations. Stories that demonstrated the need to reconcile conflicting aspects of oneself, or that gave expression to the attendant hopes and fears of enmity with one's kin, would have spoken to Israelites at the group level during various periods.<sup>95</sup> Fox goes on to mention modern interpretations that see the motif in terms of group conflict, in which Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers offer a model of resolving tension within a community.<sup>96</sup> While less explicitly psychological in nature, this view does account for the progression of the motif across the generations one sees in Genesis; though the conflict between Cain and Abel results in death, by the end of Genesis a model of forgiveness has been established.<sup>97</sup>

Another approach yields a different understanding of the motif in terms of Israel's self-consciousness than the psychological model applied at a group level. Fox identifies this as “a structural/ideological view,” noting that the repeated preference for the younger

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<sup>94</sup> Fox, “Stalking the Younger Brother,” 50.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 50-51.

<sup>96</sup> Arthur I. Waskow, *Godwrestling* (New York: Schocken, 1978). Steinmetz's work, discussed in depth below, may be placed under this category, since she explicitly names conflict and its resolution as her central focus (cf. Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 11). However, as I argue below, her contribution goes beyond describing these narratives in terms of conflict resolution. Steinmetz's analysis results in a number of insights into the development of the fraternal conflict motif throughout Genesis.

<sup>97</sup> Fox, “Stalking the Younger Brother,” 51-52.

son is characterized above all by “the inscrutable nature of God’s choice.”<sup>98</sup> In every instance, the younger brother whom God selects has nothing to commend him at first; if distinguishing qualities emerge at all, they do so only over time and often alongside trials such as exile.<sup>99</sup> This trait remarkably characterizes the people Israel, who likewise saw themselves as God’s chosen people, though inexplicably so. To use Fox’s own words, “The pattern of inexplicable chosenness, morally ambiguous behavior, exile, reaffirmation of divine acceptance, and late difficulty, with the circle turning periodically, certainly mirrors the ups and downs of the narratives of Genesis through Kings.”<sup>100</sup> The preference for the younger son, therefore, reflects Israel’s self-consciousness as God’s chosen people, whose status as such is both inexplicable and precarious. At the most basic level, the choice of the youngest son is based on reversal of expectations, in which God prefers the weaker, less numerous, and least obvious choice.<sup>101</sup> This self-consciousness is confirmed elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Deut. 7:7; 4:37).<sup>102</sup> Read in this way, the motif of the younger son speaks directly to Israel’s identity as God’s people; it would have been especially meaningful during the exile or earlier, during the rise of classic Israelite prophecy in the divided kingdom.<sup>103</sup>

Greenspahn offers a similar interpretation of the brother narratives in Genesis.

Arguing that the term **בכור** is more fluid than its usual translation of “firstborn” allows,<sup>104</sup> Greenspahn regards the concept as a “paternally assigned status of

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<sup>98</sup> Fox, “Stalking the Younger Brother,” 59-64 (quotation from p. 60).

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 61-62.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 60-61.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 63-64.

<sup>104</sup> Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together*, 60. Cf. his extended discussion of the term **בכור** on pp. 59-69.

superiority.”<sup>105</sup> This enabled Israel to understand itself as God’s בְּכוֹר (Exod. 4:22) while still acknowledging its relative youth and weakness as a people compared with surrounding nations.<sup>106</sup> In his literary analysis of the preference for the younger son, Greenspahn observes that it is often associated with other common motifs, in biblical as well as extra-biblical literature. These include the innocence of youth, vulnerability, unlikely success, the barren woman, and the sole survivor.<sup>107</sup> Greenspahn goes on to note the wide diversity among the brother narratives in Genesis; he first shows that the common features are not as uniform as often supposed, then points out that they all have their own separate concerns and interests.<sup>108</sup> He does, however, recognize that many of these narratives revolve around the figure of Jacob, who embodies Israel even in his very name.<sup>109</sup> There is, therefore, a unifying element among them: taken together, they exhibit an interest in Israel’s origins and Israel’s identity as God’s people. In the end, it is the unlikelihood of Israel’s election that the theme of the younger son addresses in narrative form, affirming the trustworthiness of divine favor despite flaws, weaknesses, and insecurities that cast doubt on Israel’s merit.<sup>110</sup> At the same time, this motif demonstrates Israel’s ambivalent attitude toward its neighbors. As portrayed in Genesis, the surrounding nations descend from relatives of Israel’s own ancestors, a view that acknowledges both hostility and familiarity.<sup>111</sup>

The view of Greenspahn and Fox that the Genesis brother narratives offer a reflection on Israel’s identity as God’s inscrutable choice—in a world where there are

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<sup>105</sup> Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together*, 83.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 83, 108-110.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 89-99.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 112-26.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 129-32. Cf. Fox, “Stalking the Younger Brother,” 62.

<sup>110</sup> Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together*, 109-10, 131-32.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 132-40.

also those who are not chosen—captures the relationship of these stories to the people who wrote them and found them meaningful. This understanding makes the most sense of the repeated preference for the firstborn son, the most distinct and consistent feature of these stories. This is not to say that the other interpretations are invalid. On the contrary, they deepen our understanding of the motif when brought to bear alongside the reading that sees it in terms of Israel's self-consciousness. The psychological approaches, for instance, show that the issues taken up in Genesis have deep roots in the human psyche and in human relationships. They can help us clarify precisely what images and emotions are evoked when we see Jacob prevail over Esau, or when Joseph finds success in Egypt after being sold by his brothers. Similarly, interpretations that see connections with the house of David may well touch upon an important historical impetus for the motif. Israel's self-portrait as a nation descended from younger sons would have been affirmed by the knowledge that younger children had founded the ruling dynasty. God's selection of David is every bit as unexpected as the divine favor bestowed upon Jacob. The view of the Genesis brother narratives in terms of Israel's status as God's unlikely, undeserving chosen people is able to account for and draw upon the other views as well. Fox himself recognizes as much, noting that the best understanding of the younger son motif may be one that draws upon a wealth of different approaches.<sup>112</sup>

At the same time, these understandings of the brotherly relationships portrayed in Genesis do not give a satisfactory interpretation of their progression over the course of the book. They do not adequately explain why the first youngest son, Abel, is killed, while subsequent sibling pairs achieve greater degrees of reconciliation. Recently, Matthew Schlimm has studied this progression in terms of anger as an emotion and

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<sup>112</sup> Fox, "Stalking the Younger Brother," 65-67.

human responses to it.<sup>113</sup> Though not addressing conflict among brothers specifically, his work does engage those brother narratives in which anger is involved: the story of Cain and Abel exhibits a prototypical description of anger,<sup>114</sup> while the narratives of Jacob and Esau and Joseph and his brothers portray alternative responses to anger that do not ultimately result in fratricide.<sup>115</sup> The murder that results from Cain's anger develops a desire within the reader for a more satisfactory response to anger than fratricide.<sup>116</sup> This desire is fulfilled partially in the subsequent narratives, where anger's deadliest effects are avoided through humility and separation.<sup>117</sup> It is fulfilled completely, however, in the story of Joseph, where the protagonist forgives his brothers and offers to provide for them. Joseph emerges as a counterpart to Cain, fulfilling the reader's desire for one who will act as his brothers' keeper.<sup>118</sup> The result is togetherness without violence, unprecedented among the families portrayed in Genesis.

Schlimm's work is methodologically well-grounded, and it offers a robust understanding of ethics and the Hebrew concept of anger, both generally and in Genesis. However, it is of limited benefit for the present discussion. Only fifty pages are devoted to sustained exegesis of specific texts, and within these the narratives of Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, and Joseph and his brothers receive no more than ten pages each. Furthermore, Schlimm's interest is in anger rather than the motif of the younger son or fraternal conflict, so his work does not engage this subject directly. Thus, while Schlimm does acknowledge a progression in terms of fraternal relations from the beginning to the

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<sup>113</sup> Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness*.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 140-41.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 165-79. Schlimm also addresses Sarah's anger toward Hagar in Gen 16 and 21 (p. 154-58). Since the conflict between Isaac and Ishmael is played out among their mothers (Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, 33), Sarah's treatment of Hagar touches upon the Isaac-Ishmael relationship.

<sup>116</sup> Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness*, 141-42.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 142, 144-52.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 177-79.

end of Genesis, one must turn elsewhere for a thorough study of this progression specifically in terms of the brother narratives. The central benefit of his analysis for the present discussion lies in his observance of the complex emotional and ethical issues at stake in fraternal conflict. However, he also understands the presence of anger throughout Genesis as a feature of post-Eden life, recognizing many of the connections between the story of Cain and Abel and the Eden narrative that I discuss below.<sup>119</sup> Anger, and by extension the brotherly conflict with which it is often bound up, emerges as a consequence of the first humans' disobedience in Eden. This insight is crucial to the connections between the Joseph story and the Eden narrative via the motif of fraternal conflict and the preference for the younger son.

Jon Levenson takes an alternative approach, focusing less on fraternal conflict and more on the threat of death that looms over the beloved son in each of these narratives. Recognizing child sacrifice and associated myths as a part of Israel's religious background, Levenson notes the presence of "ritual substitutions" that allowed human children to live while maintaining the underlying ideology—the notion that the firstborn (or beloved) son belongs to God.<sup>120</sup> Turning to the narratives in Genesis, where Abel, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Benjamin all face the threat of death, Levenson regards these as "the narrative equivalent of these ritual substitutions—narratives, that is, in which the first-born or beloved son undergoes a symbolic death."<sup>121</sup> He recognizes how extensively the ancestral narratives revolve around the theme of chosenness, noting that this concept

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<sup>119</sup> Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness*, 139-40.

<sup>120</sup> Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 43-52. Levenson identifies five such ritual substitutions for the firstborn son's death: the Paschal lamb, the service of the Levites, monetary ransom, the Nazirite vow, and circumcision.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

is bound up with God's absolute claim on the life of the chosen.<sup>122</sup> Both of these motifs—the threat of death for the beloved son and the question of God's election—are intimately connected with the preference for the younger son in Genesis, since it is always the younger son who is chosen and threatened with death. Ultimately, Levenson interprets this consistent emphasis on younger sons in terms of God's authority and inscrutability, citing the story of Cain and Abel as the prime example of God's mysterious, surprising choice.<sup>123</sup>

André Wénin takes a direct literary approach, focusing on the motif of fraternal relationships in Genesis as a whole and in the Joseph story specifically.<sup>124</sup> Borrowing a phrase from Paul Ricoeur,<sup>125</sup> Wénin regards brotherhood as a “projet éthique,” an “ethical project” in the book of Genesis.<sup>126</sup> Proper fraternal relationships do not exist at the outset—nobody in Genesis is born as a true “brother.” Rather, fraternal relationships are imposed through birth, and as Cain's behavior toward Abel shows, these relationships can be rejected (Gen 4:9). True brotherhood must be forged, constructed as brothers (by birth) in each generation struggle to overcome tendencies to jealousy and violence, which in turn stem from the preferences and actions of their parents.<sup>127</sup> The narrative of Cain and Abel constructs the paradigm for these fraternal difficulties, while the rest of the Genesis brother narratives portray the characters' various attempts to circumvent them.<sup>128</sup> Wénin analyzes the Joseph story in thorough detail, focusing specifically on the theme of fraternity in the context of the book of Genesis. His work is valuable in its attentive

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<sup>122</sup> Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 60.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-75.

<sup>124</sup> André Wénin, “La fraternité,” 24-34; *idem*, *Joseph*.

<sup>125</sup> Paul Ricoeur, “Le paradigme de la traduction,” *Esprit* (1999), 8-19 (13).

<sup>126</sup> Wénin, “La fraternité,” 34; *idem*, *Joseph*, 16.

<sup>127</sup> Wénin, “La fraternité,” 27; *idem*, *Joseph*, 13.

<sup>128</sup> Wénin, “La fraternité,” 25-27; *idem*, *Joseph*, 14-17.

literary analysis, and it contains a number of penetrating insights into the Joseph story's development of this theme.

Finally, Devorah Steinmetz offers a provocative study of the patriarchal narratives, presenting several insights into how fraternal relations change over the course of Genesis.<sup>129</sup> Drawing on the fields of psychology and anthropology, Steinmetz begins by sketching an understanding of kinship directed specifically toward illuminating the book of Genesis.<sup>130</sup> She summarizes this understanding of kinship in Genesis as follows: “In each generation, the family is threatened by the twin dangers of conflict between family members and loss of identity: either the family members remain together and threaten to destroy one another, or they separate and are in danger of being lost to the family's special mission.”<sup>131</sup> In other words, the patriarchal family must continually overcome the tendency toward destructive violence on the one hand and fragmentation on the other. The patriarchal narratives are presented as a quest for a “stable family structure” within which the father's identity—and with it God's blessing, the ancestral promise that holds these narratives together—may be passed on to the next generation without leading to deadly conflict.<sup>132</sup>

Steinmetz illuminates many aspects of the progression that takes place over the course of the patriarchal narratives. She demonstrates how each generation negotiates the dual threat of violence and disintegration, showing that Jacob's sons avoid both pitfalls as they depart the promised land together. Framing the issue in this way, Steinmetz elegantly describes the relationship between three features common to the brother

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<sup>129</sup> Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 11-34.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 30-31.



narratives in Genesis: fraternal conflict, the threat of death, and exile. Conflict among brothers occurs because of competition for the father's identity and its attendant blessing, while exile and death are the two potential outcomes of this conflict. At the same time, Steinmetz's framework offers no solid rationale for the younger son to be chosen in each generation. All that matters is that one son is elected; while reasons are given in each instance, none of these hinges upon the chosen son being the youngest.<sup>133</sup> This is likely due to Steinmetz's emphasis on human action as a determining factor in the narratives she analyzes: the exclusion of certain characters is attributed to their failure to think, act, or speak in a manner consistent with the blessing God promised to Abraham.<sup>134</sup> A reading that places more emphasis on God's choice—and God's penchant for choosing the unexpected and least likely—better accounts for this aspect of the motif.

Furthermore, Steinmetz addresses the connection between the ancestral narratives and the story of Cain and Abel only briefly, acknowledging a typological correspondence between them that underscores the relationship between the ancestral family and the world.<sup>135</sup> She sees a link between them, to be sure, but generally focuses on the narratives in Gen 12-50. This limits the contribution of her valuable insights for the present discussion, although they do play an important role in parts of my analysis.

The foregoing discussion shows a widely recognized relationship between the various brother narratives in Genesis, demonstrating how they develop the common themes of fraternal conflict and God's preference for younger siblings. Few of them, however, have addressed the relationship between the Joseph story and the story of Cain and Abel directly, and fewer still have included the Eden narrative in the investigation.

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<sup>133</sup> Cf. Fox, "Stalking the Younger Brother," 52.

<sup>134</sup> Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 149-51.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-92; 143-47.

My study of the Joseph story will take these other works into account, using them to clarify the thematic continuity that exists between the Joseph story and the story of Cain and Abel. At the same time, my analysis will focus on more direct connections between these two narratives, reading them as narrative analogies on the basis of linguistic and structural parallels. These connections highlight the reversal that takes place from the beginning of Genesis to the end, as the reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers becomes a mirror image of Cain's murder of Abel. Moreover, by taking another step and including the Eden narrative in my study, I explore other aspects of the relationship between the Joseph story and the early chapters of Genesis. These observations are brought to bear on the Joseph story itself, showing how its own theological interests are enriched when it is read with the narratives of Gen 2-4 in view.

## ***VI. Intratextuality: Reading within a Biblical Text***

Since the publication of Dahlberg's articles linking the Joseph story and the Primeval History, scholars have become increasingly aware of connections between biblical texts, ways to identify these connections with the greatest possible certainty, and the proper ways to describe their nature and significance.<sup>136</sup> Much of this development has resulted from the emergence within biblical studies of an understanding of intertextuality. Introduced in the field of literary theory by Julia Kristeva,<sup>137</sup> this method has taken root in biblical scholarship as a conceptual framework for studying and

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<sup>136</sup> For a recent, detailed overview of the phenomenon of inner-biblical interpretation, see Bernard M. Levinson, *Legal Revision and Religious Renewal in Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 95-181.

<sup>137</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (ed. Leon S. Roudiez; trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez; New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); idem, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (trans. Margaret Waller; New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

describing the relationships between the texts of the biblical corpus.<sup>138</sup> Scholars have developed a variety of terms for describing such connections, including “inner-biblical exegesis” (or “inner-biblical interpretation”),<sup>139</sup> “inner-biblical allusion” (or simply “allusion”),<sup>140</sup> “echo,”<sup>141</sup> and “resonance.”<sup>142</sup> Some assign distinct meanings to each of these terms, using them in nuanced ways to differentiate between several types of intertextual relationships.<sup>143</sup> Even the term “intertextuality” itself carries various meanings when applied within biblical scholarship. Some understand it strictly as a synchronic investigation of connections among texts, which need not account for authorial intention or direction of influence.<sup>144</sup> Others, however, use it specifically to describe a later text’s intentional reference to an earlier one.<sup>145</sup>

Despite its usefulness in many facets of biblical scholarship, intertextuality—along with the more narrowly focused approaches under its umbrella—is not the best standpoint from which to examine the relationship between the Joseph story and the Eden and Cain and Abel narratives. This is because Gen 37-50 and Gen 2-4 currently exist within the same text (that is, the book of Genesis), not as independent texts. By

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<sup>138</sup> Cf., for example, Danna Nolan Fewell, ed., *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality in the Hebrew Bible* (Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992).

<sup>139</sup> Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Nahum Sarna, “Psalm 89: A Study in Inner-Biblical Exegesis,” in *Biblical and Other Studies* (ed. Alexander Altmann; Lown Institute at Brandeis University Texts and Studies; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963); 29-46; Yair Zakovitch, “Inner-biblical Interpretation,” in *A Companion to Biblical Interpretation in Early Judaism* (ed. Matthias Henze; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 27-63.

<sup>140</sup> Jeffrey M. Leonard, “Identifying Inner-biblical Allusions: Psalm 78 as a Test Case,” *JBL* 127 (2008): 241-65.

<sup>141</sup> Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

<sup>142</sup> Gershon Hepner, “Verbal Resonance in the Bible and Intertextuality,” *JSOT* 96 (2001): 3-21.

<sup>143</sup> Lyle Eslinger, “Inner-biblical Exegesis and Inner-biblical Allusion: The Question of Category,” *VT* 42 (1992): 47-58; Benjamin Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66* (Contraversions; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 6-31.

<sup>144</sup> Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 7; Eslinger, “Inner-biblical Exegesis,” 56.

<sup>145</sup> Seth D. Postell, *Adam as Israel: Genesis 1-3 as the Introduction to the Torah and the Tanakh* (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick, 2011), 65. Cf. also Mark E. Biddle, “Ancestral Motifs in 1 Samuel 25: Intertextuality and Characterization,” *JBL* 121 (2002): 617-38.

definition, intertextuality properly speaking refers to a text's relationship with other texts, not between separate parts within a single text. Since much biblical literature is composite in nature, intertextuality and related methods are often useful when comparing parts of the same biblical book that clearly have separate origins. Such is the case, for instance, with the relationship between Isaiah 40-66 and Isaiah 1-39, or between Zechariah 9-14 and Zechariah 1-8. In both instances, intertextual investigations have yielded important insights into the ways the later text has drawn upon the earlier one.<sup>146</sup> Intertextuality, however, is misapplied when used to study parts of the same book where a clear distinction cannot be identified or maintained. Such is the case for the book of Genesis, where distinguishing between various "texts" is highly tenuous despite the clearly composite nature of the book itself.<sup>147</sup>

A better approach is to recognize the Joseph story and the narratives of Gen 2-4 as distinct parts of the same text—the book of Genesis—and to explore them from the standpoint of *intratextuality*: an intentional study of the relationship between a text's parts to its other parts and/or to the whole.<sup>148</sup> Though less well established in biblical scholarship than intertextuality, the method of intratextuality offers an important angle for investigating connections such as those we find between the Joseph story, the Eden narrative, and the story of Cain and Abel. These two accounts are part of the book of

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<sup>146</sup> Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*; Mark J. Boda and Michael H. Floyd, eds., *Bringing out the Treasure: Inner Biblical Allusion in Zechariah 9-14* (JSOTSup 370; London: Sheffield Academic, 2003).

<sup>147</sup> Even in instances where separate redactional hands can be established with relative certainty—e.g., the two creation narratives in Gen 1-3 or the interwoven versions of the flood story in Gen 6-9—it is unclear how the text's layers are related to one another. Are the Priestly passages a supplement to a previous Yahwistic text, which by itself gives the whole book its overall shape? Such a view is upheld by Van Seters, *Prologue to History*. Or do the P and J passages represent two independent documents that have been interwoven, as the classical Documentary Hypothesis argues? This viewpoint has recently been argued afresh by Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch*.

<sup>148</sup> Alison Sharrock, "Intratextuality: Texts, Parts, and (W)holes in Theory," in *Intratextuality: Greek and Roman Textual Relations* (ed. Alison Sharrock and Helen Morales; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1-39. Cf. also Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 201-5.

Genesis in its present shape, making intratextual investigations appropriate for studying the final form of the text. At the same time, there is also substantial evidence for regarding the Joseph narrative and the stories of Gen 2-4 as parts of the same text prior to the final shape of Genesis. This is true for models of the Pentateuch's composition that resemble the Documentary Hypothesis as well as those that seek to replace it with an alternative understanding. Moreover, the nature of the relationship between the Joseph story and the narratives of Gen 2-4 suggests they are part of the same text: this relationship is characterized by narrative analogy and thematic continuity rather than by explicit reference or overt allusion to recall an earlier document. Accordingly, I propose to study this relationship from the perspective of intratextuality.

Strictly speaking, the word "intratextuality" refers quite simply to the internal workings and relationships within a single text.<sup>149</sup> However, the concept has been understood in several different ways in the past, which makes it necessary differentiate my understanding of the term from these other uses. George Lindbeck used it to describe the life of a privileged text within an interpretive (usually religious) tradition, especially with respect to how all subsequent texts are interpreted in light of the privileged text. In this understanding, intratextual analysis refers to one text serving as the textual world within (intra) which all other texts are read.<sup>150</sup> This definition of "intratextuality" is adopted in the edited volume *Reading between Texts*, an exploration of intertextuality in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>151</sup> There are points of agreement between Lindbeck's notion and my

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<sup>149</sup> Chandler, *Semiotics*, 231.

<sup>150</sup> George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 113-24.

<sup>151</sup> Timothy K. Beal, "Glossary," in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Danna Nolan Fewell; Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 21-24.

own, since he begins by taking a religion itself as the “text” and understanding intra-religious discourse as intratextuality.<sup>152</sup> My understanding of the term, however, is more narrowly focused on the relationship between parts within a single text rather than on interpretive faith traditions rooted in exegesis of it. Along different lines, Joseph Grigley uses intratextuality to describe a work of art’s relationship with its textual “others,” such as photographs or other reproductions of the *Mona Lisa*, or various performances of *Hamlet*.<sup>153</sup> Again, this defines intratextuality differently than my own use of the term, which investigates the inner workings among the various pieces of a single text.

The understanding of intratextuality that I shall employ was developed in detail in a volume edited by Alison Sharrock and Helen Morales, designed to outline its theoretical underpinnings in the context of Greek and Roman literature.<sup>154</sup> Broadly speaking, it refers to the exploration of a text’s parts to one another and/or to the text as a whole. The term has been used in similar ways in biblical studies, though not with any strict or systematic definition.<sup>155</sup> Seth Postell, following John Sailhamer, recognizes the inner cohesion of a text’s various parts as “inner-textuality,” thus exploring the same

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<sup>152</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 113-15. Cf. also David Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 12-22.

<sup>153</sup> Joseph Grigley, *Textualterity: Art, Theory, and Textual Criticism* (Editorial Theory and Literary Criticism; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 156. Grigley devotes a whole chapter to intratextuality defined in this way (pp. 155-81).

<sup>154</sup> Alison Sharrock and Helen Morales, eds., *Intratextuality: Greek and Roman Textual Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>155</sup> Stefan Alkier, “Intertextuality and the Semiotics of Biblical Texts,” in *Reading the Bible Intertextually* (ed. Richard B. Hays, Stefan Alkier, and Leroy A. Huizenga; Waco, Tx.: Baylor University Press, 2009), 3-21 (8-9); Alain Gignac, “A Translation that Induces a Reading Experience: Narrativity, Intratextuality, Rhetorical Performance, and Galatians 1-2,” in *Translating the New Testament: Text, Translation, Theology* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and Mark J. Boda; McMaster New Testament Studies; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 146-66 (esp. 158-61); Kathleen P. Rushton, *The Parable of the Woman in Childbirth of John 16:21: A Metaphor for the Death and Glorification of Jesus* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2010), 51-57; Patrick E. Spencer, “Narrative Echoes in John 21: Intertextual Interpretation and Intratextual Connection,” *JSNT* 75 (1999): 49-68; R. Alan Culpepper, “The Narrator in the Fourth Gospel: Intratextual Relationships,” *SBL Seminar Papers, 1982* (SBLSP 21; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982), 81-96.

phenomenon under a different name.<sup>156</sup> In order to clarify this understanding of intratextuality, it may be helpful to compare the approach with the better known term, intertextuality. There are many points of similarity between the two, but there are also important differences that make intratextuality especially appropriate for the present investigation.

In its strictest sense within literary theory, “intertextuality” functions within a broader understanding of semiotics and the way that texts produce meaning.<sup>157</sup> It originates from the insight that every text exists alongside other texts, and a given text is only meaningful in relation to these others. This insight is essentially a recognition that, to use Danna Fewell’s words, “no text exists in a vacuum.” As Fewell continues, she explains that texts are inevitably connected to one another by virtue of their common existence: “All texts are embedded in a larger web of related texts, bounded only by human culture and language itself. Intertextual reading is inevitable. We cannot, in fact, understand any text without some appeal to other texts.”<sup>158</sup> In this conceptual framework, “intertextuality” therefore notes the relationship of a text to all other texts within a given culture or for a given reader, and investigations of such relationships do not necessarily require accounting for historical priority, direction of influence, or

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<sup>156</sup> Postell, *Adam as Israel*, 71-72; John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 206-15. Sailhamer and Postell distinguish between various levels of intra- and inter-textual relationships: in-textuality refers to the inner cohesion of a small passage or textual unit; inner-textuality refers to relationships among parts of a whole book; intertextuality refers to connections between books; con-textuality refers to the arrangement of books and their contextualization within the canon of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. Cf. also G. T. M. Prinsloo, “Daniel 3: Intratextual Perspectives and Intertextual Tradition,” *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 16 (2005): 70-90. Prinsloo discusses the inner workings of Dan 3 as an “intratextual analysis” (p. 71-74), thus taking a view of intratextuality that corresponds to the “in-textuality” of Sailhamer and Postell. This illustrates the lack of precise terminology for studying the relationships among parts of a biblical text.

<sup>157</sup> Alkier, “Intertextuality,” 4-11.

<sup>158</sup> Danna Nolan Fewell, “Introduction: Writing, Reading, and Relating,” in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Danna Nolan Fewell; Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 11-20 (17).

authorial intent. Rather, as Miscall points out, “‘Intertextuality’ is a covering term for all the possible relations that can be established between texts.”<sup>159</sup> As such, an intertextual approach can validly explore the relationship between a biblical narrative and a twentieth-century text, since both exist alongside one another in modern American culture.<sup>160</sup> It looks outward from the text being considered, or rather looks toward that text from an outside standpoint, going beyond the text’s own boundaries to see how its meaning is affected by connections with other texts.

Intratextuality, by contrast, looks inward, remaining within the boundaries of the text and exploring the relationship between its various parts and/or between the parts and the whole. It can likewise study the effects of gaps (real or apparent) in the text. In other words, it investigates “how parts relate to parts, wholes, and holes” in a text, to borrow a phrase used by Sharrock.<sup>161</sup> Where intertextuality is characterized by the insight that all texts exist alongside other texts, intratextuality stems from the recognition that all texts contain an inherent tension between partition and wholeness. Readers divide texts into chunks, a move that is not only natural but necessary for the reading process, but in doing so they implicitly view these pieces in terms of larger textual unity.<sup>162</sup> An intratextual approach explicitly acknowledges and exploits this tension, observing the effects of meaning generated by various negotiations and renegotiations of the parts in relation to one another and/or to the whole. In doing so, it involves a variety of critical moves. One can examine the narrative line that holds the text together, with attention to how parts fall

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<sup>159</sup> Peter D. Miscall, “Isaiah: New Heavens, New Earth, New Book,” in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Danna Nolan Fewell; Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 41-56 (44). Cf. also Alkier, “Intertextuality,” 3-21.

<sup>160</sup> See, for instance, Tina Pippin, “Jezebel Re-Vamped,” *Semeia* 69-70 (1995): 221-33.

<sup>161</sup> Sharrock, “Intratextuality,” 5.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.



along this narrative line or digress from it. One can also read together two parts of the text that on the surface have no clear relationship to one another, either finding unity on a deeper level or meaningful disparity. Alternatively, one can reexamine apparently natural divisions in the text, read the text “out of order,” or uncover irony and subversion by reading parts of the text together.<sup>163</sup>

This conception of intratextuality holds much in common with other approaches to literature in general and biblical literature in particular. Examining form, structure, internal coherence, and other aspects of unity or disunity are important aspects of intratextuality, and these have long been a part of biblical studies. In many respects, intratextuality covers old ground, as those employing the method acknowledge.<sup>164</sup> In doing so, however, it gives direct attention to the processes involved and the effects of meaning generated by these processes. Intratextuality makes explicit a part of the reading process that readers naturally perform: breaking texts into parts rather than taking in a monolithic whole, and reading these parts as parts rather than independent entities. It is not a new, but a newly self-aware way of reading texts. In this respect, it is comparable to intertextuality, which makes explicit the notion that readers make sense of one text in light of all other texts and offers critical reflection on this process and its interpretive effects. A quotation from Sharrock nicely captures the potential usefulness of intratextuality as a critical method, comparing it with the proven contribution of intertextuality:

If we are to impose critical limits on relational activity of texts (and of theory), internally and externally, it is crucial for our critical, epistemological, and historical exegesis that we also examine those limits. What intertextuality offers to the reading of texts together is a more sophisticated, more explicit, and more

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<sup>163</sup> Sharrock, “Intratextuality,” 8-13.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 5.

suggestive critical vocabulary for ways of thinking about and appreciating external textual relationship, and for seeing what difference it makes. This book on intratextuality seeks to make a similar move—not to invent the idea that parts relate, but to put their relationship more firmly on the critical map, and so to offer, by theory and example, a more explicitly self-conscious ‘grammar’ of the contribution of internal textual relationship to reading.<sup>165</sup>

As Sharrock acknowledges, many of the strategies involved in intertextual reading have long been available, but focusing them within that methodology has opened various new avenues of meaning. The same is true for intratextuality—it brings familiar processes and older critical strategies to bear in new ways and with sharper precision.

As an example of this approach, one may cite Robert Alter’s analysis of the story of Judah and Tamar in Gen 38, which explores its close connections with the surrounding story of Joseph and his brothers.<sup>166</sup> Beginning with a passage widely regarded as an unnecessary digression, Alter points out linguistic and thematic resonances with the rest of the Joseph narrative before demonstrating the episode’s contribution to the overall story. Alter used the critical strategies of narrative criticism to achieve his insights, but I would argue that his reading is a strong example of the type of analysis envisioned by intratextuality. As Sharrock states, “a classic intratextual move is the relating of apparent disparate parts of the text, in order to enhance the reading of each.”<sup>167</sup> Alter’s work on Gen 38 within the Joseph story is certainly an example of such an endeavor. Another example, more directly related to the present discussion, would be an analysis of the various points of contact between the Joseph story and the story of Cain and Abel. From the perspective of the whole book of Genesis, these are parts of the same text. Assessing

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<sup>165</sup> Sharrock, “Intratextuality,” 6.

<sup>166</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 3-12.

<sup>167</sup> Cf. Sharrock, “Intratextuality,” 10. A similar goal is achieved for a work of classical literature in Carole Newlands, “Connecting the Disconnected: Reading Ovid’s *Fasti*,” in *Intratextuality: Greek and Roman Textual Relations* (ed. Alison Sharrock and Helen Morales; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 171-202.

the relationship between these parts reveals an extensive pattern of correspondence between them. Both portray intense sibling rivalry and a preference for the younger son, while also interweaving the motifs of exile and death. There are elements of parallel and reversal, suggesting progression between the beginning and the end of Genesis with respect to fraternal relationships. This progression emerges even more clearly when the pattern is recognized also within the intervening stories of fraternal relationships, other “parts” of Genesis. The intratextual relationship between these narratives will be discussed at length in chapter two. Suffice it for now to say that reading Genesis intratextually can enrich our understanding of the book in a number of ways. More importantly for the present discussion, such a reading offers new insights into the Joseph story as one of the book’s “parts.”

Intratextuality can draw upon many other methods of studying biblical literature. As the above example from Alter’s reading of Gen 38 shows, narrative criticism and other literary approaches to the Bible are particularly well suited for this purpose, since they address questions of structure, theme, repetition, and the contribution of shorter episodes to overall plot. As I read the Joseph story with the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel in view, I draw heavily on the insights these approaches offer, both in my own application of them and in the work of previous scholars with whom I interact. One important branch of these types of investigations is the study of narrative analogy, in which the reader is encouraged—whether through natural relationships, juxtaposition, verbal resonance, or other aspects of the text—to recognize similarities or contrasts

between episodes, scenes, or characters.<sup>168</sup> I discuss the concept of narrative analogy in greater detail below, since it very often describes the relationship that exists between aspects of the Joseph narrative and the stories of Cain and Abel and the Garden of Eden. In addition to these approaches, studies along the lines of intertextuality are often helpful as well, since its focus on reading beyond the text can be reoriented towards reading beyond a specific section within a text. At the same time, intertextuality often relies on specific verbal correspondence between texts being compared, in ways that an intratextual approach need not do. Intratextuality can read a text's parts together on the basis of their context within a single text, focusing on continuity in terms of character, plot, or location, or their common development of a shared theme or themes.

Intratextuality offers a framework for bringing these insights together to examine how the Joseph story relates to the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel. Its express purpose is to understand how parts relate to the whole, how they relate to other parts, and especially how such relationships themselves contribute to a text's meaning.<sup>169</sup> In reading the Joseph story alongside the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel, I focus my attention on how its relationship to these narratives enriches one's interpretation of the Joseph story itself. How does its presence within the same text as these others—and at the end of a text where they stand at the beginning—cast the Joseph story in a new light and open up fresh avenues of meaning? What additional dimensions does this relationship bring to the complex characterization of Joseph, and how does it nuance the overall family dynamic among Jacob and his sons? Most importantly, how does this

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<sup>168</sup>Cf. Moshe Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies, and Parallels* (Ramat Gan: Revivim, 1985), 18-28. Garsiel discusses various strategies that can draw attention to such analogies and encourage comparison.

<sup>169</sup> Sharrock, "Intratextuality," 6-7.

relationship enrich, redirect, or subvert the Joseph story's own major themes and theological emphases? Implications for interpreting the whole book of Genesis—seeing how the relationship between these “parts” influences the whole—are a secondary concern of the present study. I explore some of these results, chiefly in the concluding chapter, but my central focus is on the Joseph story itself.

### ***VII. Narrative Analogy***

One important standpoint from which to study the relationship between biblical passages, whether in the same text or different texts, draws on the concept of “narrative analogy,” introduced into biblical studies by Robert Alter.<sup>170</sup> This idea refers to two or more characters, stories, scenes, or other aspects of the biblical text that bear a significant amount of resemblance to one another, inviting comparison between the two. This comparison sheds new light on both aspects of the text, highlighting parallels, foreshadowing, reversal, progression, or various other effects generated by their mutual resemblance and difference. Through this device, to quote Alter, “one part of the text provides oblique commentary on another.”<sup>171</sup> Alter recognized this feature of biblical literature as a counterpart to the Bible's propensity for meaningful repetition, suggesting that parallel structures, characters, and other repeated patterns encourage the reader to explore these relationships and seek out their interpretive potential. Seen in this way, the concept of narrative analogy becomes an important tool for intratextual investigation, since it can clarify the relationship between connected parts of the text or call attention to

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<sup>170</sup> Robert Alter, “A Literary Approach to the Bible,” *Commentary* 60 (1975): 70-77; idem, “Biblical Narrative,” *Commentary* 61 (1976): 61-67.

<sup>171</sup> Alter, “Literary Approach,” 73.

such relationships that are not readily apparent. This concept is particularly significant for exploring the connections between the Joseph story and the Eden narrative, since it aptly describes the relationship between them in a number of instances.

Subsequent scholars have built upon Alter's development of this concept, providing examples of narrative analogy and showing how these devices influence meaning. Jon Levenson, for instance, demonstrates how the story of David, Nabal, and Abigail in 1 Samuel 25 may be understood as an analogy with David's subsequent career, especially his murder of Uriah, marriage to Bathsheba, and the subsequent downfall of his family.<sup>172</sup> David's near-murder of Nabal is sufficiently similar to his actual murder of Uriah to encourage reading the latter in light of the former. The ultimate effect is one of foreshadowing, giving the reader a "proleptic glimpse" of his downfall in the account of his rise to power.<sup>173</sup> Levenson's work is instructive, showing how narrative analogy can tie distant passages together and how recognition of this feature can elucidate the biblical text.

Another author whose work clarifies the concept of narrative analogy is Meir Sternberg, who refers to "analogy" rather than Alter's "narrative analogy."<sup>174</sup> As does Alter, Sternberg elaborated on the notion of analogy alongside the Bible's propensity for repetition. For Sternberg, analogy is defined in terms of similarity and dissimilarity:

Analogy is an essentially spatial pattern, composed of at least two elements (two characters, events, strands of action, etc.) between which there is at least one point of similarity and one point of dissimilarity: the similarity affords the basis for the spatial linkage and confrontation of the analogical elements, whereas the

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<sup>172</sup> Jon D. Levenson, "1 Samuel 25 as Literature and History," *CBQ* 40 (1978): 11-28, esp. pp. 23-24.

<sup>173</sup> Levenson, "1 Samuel 25," 24.

<sup>174</sup> Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature; Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1985), 365-68.

dissimilarity makes for their mutual illumination, qualification, or simply concretization.<sup>175</sup>

In Sternberg's view, this principle of analogy can occur on various levels, from repetition of single words to similarities of plot or theme. In terms of their significance, the presence of analogies can impact meaning in any number of ways: drawing contrast between characters or events, encouraging unity, giving alternative viewpoints, or promoting thematic coherence. Analogous units can vary in size, from a single sound to an entire story's plot. They can also vary with respect to their distance from one another, ranging from "immediate juxtaposition" to "book-length chiasm." Notably, Sternberg lists "the younger brother's ascendancy" as an example of a thematic analogy.<sup>176</sup> These last two insights demonstrate the relevance of narrative analogy for the present work, which examines brother narratives and encompasses the whole book of Genesis.

Also applicable is the work of Peter Miscall, who uses Alter's concept to understand the stories of Jacob and Joseph as narrative analogies.<sup>177</sup> Miscall clarifies the notion of narrative analogy, understanding it to describe "texts which have enough in common in terms of plot, characters, themes, etc. to be considered analogous and which must therefore be analysed in conjunction to explicate more fully the Biblical text under study."<sup>178</sup> He notes the following "analogous" elements between the two large narratives of Jacob and Joseph: 1) a three-part plot structure involving treachery among brothers, deception of a father, extended separation of the brothers, and their eventual reunion; 2) the development of deception, conflict, and reconciliation as major themes; 3) the interaction of the divine and human realms; 4) the hasty, emotionally wrought reactions

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<sup>175</sup> Sternberg, *Poetics*, 365.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 365-66.

<sup>177</sup> Miscall, "Jacob and Joseph Stories," 28-40.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 29.

of the characters, especially in the early scenes; and 5) several direct correspondences between the scenes of reconciliation.<sup>179</sup> Reading the two stories in light of one another lends depth of meaning to both, as Miscall's analysis demonstrates. The interpretive effects generated by narrative analogy do not provide a "key" to the meaning of these narratives, but they do enrich this meaning through alternative perspectives, added emphasis, and other subtle nuances that they bring forth.<sup>180</sup>

Moshe Garsiel explores a number of other parallels that exist throughout the book of 1 Samuel, likewise using the term "analogy" to describe many of them.<sup>181</sup> Garsiel draws attention to comparison as a natural human cognitive process, discussing comparative structures and parallels in literature within this framework. Because humans frequently use comparison to interpret the world around them, parallels and analogies in literature exploit this to impart meaning within a text.<sup>182</sup> Furthermore, he identifies several different "linkage strategies" that serve as the foundation for such comparisons between characters or events in a narrative. Some of them are natural, and they readily invite comparison: sons are compared to their fathers, brothers are compared to one another, and an earlier stage of one's life is compared to a later stage.<sup>183</sup> Other passages are linked by their relationship to the plot: passages that are juxtaposed, or that develop a specific theme, invite comparison between them.<sup>184</sup> Finally, passages that are otherwise unconnected—or only very loosely connected—may be associated more strongly by verbal cues, instances of linguistic similarity that bolster the link between them.<sup>185</sup> In his

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<sup>179</sup> Miscall, "Jacob and Joseph Stories," 32-39.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>181</sup> Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel*.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 16-18.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 18-20.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 21-28.



study of 1 Samuel, Garsiel underscores these comparative structures as evidence of the book's overall unity, as well as important structural devices that highlight its message.

A number of other scholars have similarly affirmed the value in recognizing narrative analogy and closely related devices within biblical literature. Drawing upon the work of Garsiel, Alter, Sternberg, and others, Joshua Berman has studied a particular type of analogy that he calls the "metaphor plot." This refers to analogies between narratives of clearly different subject matter; specifically, Berman examines biblical battle narratives and their analogous non-battle stories.<sup>186</sup> Yair Zakovitch has called attention to another specific type of analogous relationship, in which the primary emphasis falls on inversion or reversal rather than parallel. What he terms "reflection stories" refer to instances where one character or event is portrayed as the antithesis of another.<sup>187</sup> This portrayal leads to comparison between the two inverted elements, causing each to be evaluated in light of its "reflection."<sup>188</sup> Linguistic parallels or similarities of plot and/or subject matter are among the devices that may highlight such an inverted correspondence.<sup>189</sup> Along similar lines, Judy Klitsner has noted the presence of "subversive sequels" to biblical narratives—later stories that undermine earlier passages by echoing them and introducing a subsequent element of reversal.<sup>190</sup> The observations of Klitsner and Zakovitch on the importance of reversal are particularly applicable in the present work, since the Joseph story emerges as a reversal of the Eden narrative and story

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<sup>186</sup> Joshua A. Berman, *Narrative Analogy in the Hebrew Bible: Battle Stories and Their Equivalent Non-battle Narratives* (VTSup 103; Leiden: Brill, 2004).

<sup>187</sup> Yair Zakovitch, "Through the Looking Glass: Reflections/Inversions of Genesis Stories in the Bible," *BibInt* 1, 2 (1993): 139-52; idem, *Through the Looking Glass: Reflection Stories in the Bible* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1995) [Hebrew].

<sup>188</sup> Zakovitch, "Through the Looking Glass," 139.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>190</sup> Judy Klitsner, *Subversive Sequels in the Bible: How Biblical Stories Mine and Undermine Each Other* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2009).

of Cain and Abel in many respects. And as Sternberg recognizes, dissimilarity is often just as important as similarity between analogous narratives. While similarity leads to comparison, it is the difference that provides nuances of meaning this comparison evokes.<sup>191</sup>

The concept of narrative analogy will be important as we explore the connections between the Joseph narrative and the stories of Eden and Cain and Abel, since an analogous relationship may be discerned between these narratives. As stated above, Miscall has highlighted the analogous relationship between the Joseph and Jacob narratives.<sup>192</sup> Similarly, Moberly uses the term narrative analogy to describe the relationship between the story of Cain and Abel and the account of Jacob and Esau.<sup>193</sup> Likewise, Joseph's sale into slavery by his brothers may be understood as an analogy with the story of Cain and Abel, a relationship that is reinforced by linguistic resonances and several parallel plot elements. In the same way, Joseph's resistance to the advances of Potiphar's wife is analogous to the humans' disobedience in Eden, as elements of parallel and reversal emerge when Gen 39 is compared with Gen 3. I explore both of these analogies in chapter two. On a larger level, the relationships between knowledge, life, and reconciliation in the Joseph story constitute a broad analogy with these relationships in the Eden narrative and story of Cain and Abel. These analogies will be investigated in chapters three and four. While narrative analogy does not fully describe the intratextual relationship between these parts of Genesis—or the meaning to be

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<sup>191</sup> Sternberg, *Poetics*, 365.

<sup>192</sup> Miscall, "Jacob and Joseph Stories."

<sup>193</sup> R. W. L. Moberly, *The Theology of the Book of Genesis* (Old Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 93, 94, 98.

gleaned from exploring this relationship—it does offer an important standpoint from which to compare them.

### ***VIII. Parameters of the Investigation: Defining the Text and Its Parts***

Studying the relationship between the Joseph story and the Eden narrative from the standpoint of intratextuality requires identifying them as parts of the same text, which in the case of Genesis and the Pentateuch requires also answering the question, “which text?” Are we to understand the Joseph story and the Eden narrative as two decisive episodes within the Pentateuch as a whole, or as narratives that stand near the beginning and the end of the book of Genesis? Alternatively, should we consider them as parts of an earlier form of these texts, either an independent, pre-Priestly form of Genesis or the J or JE corpus of the whole Pentateuch?

Once these questions are answered, it is necessary to define the boundaries of the Joseph story and the Eden narrative—along with the story of Cain and Abel—as individual “parts,” to understand them clearly as parts and to set the limits for reading these sections of the text together. Since intratextuality recognizes, exploits, and occasionally subverts such boundaries within texts, one’s initial identification of these boundaries is an important step in the process. Below, I first define the text to be studied as the book of Genesis in its present form. I then identify the “parts” to be compared as Gen 2:4-4:26 and Gen 37-50.

## A. Defining the Text: The Book of Genesis

In their present shape and context, the Joseph story and the Eden narrative are part of the same text: though separated by more than thirty chapters, they both exist within the book of Genesis. Genesis itself, however, is part of a larger structure, the Pentateuch (or Torah); Exodus begins as a continuation of the Genesis narrative, and longstanding Jewish and Christian traditions recognize Genesis as part of this larger corpus.<sup>194</sup> The first issue that must be settled, therefore, is how one defines the “text” that the Joseph story and the Eden narrative are a part of: it is either the Pentateuch as a whole or the book of Genesis. The second issue is whether to study the text in its final form, or to attempt to identify an earlier form through source analysis. These issues are closely related, since there are intense discussions within Pentateuchal scholarship over the original relationship between Genesis and the ensuing biblical books. Does the pre-Priestly source discernible in Genesis (whether J, JE, or some other document) span the entire Pentateuch, or is it largely confined to Genesis alone?<sup>195</sup> In other words, if we do attempt to study the Joseph story and Eden narrative as two parts of a Pentateuchal source text, does this text end with the conclusion of Genesis, or does it continue through the exodus from Egypt and wilderness wandering?

How one defines the boundaries of the text to be studied has a clear effect on one’s interpretation of the relationships between its parts; it matters whether the Joseph story stands at the end of the text (Genesis) or simply at a turning point in the larger narrative (the Pentateuch). Alternatively, Dahlberg uses the image of an orchestral

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<sup>194</sup> The continuity between Genesis and Exodus in the Pentateuch’s canonical shape is indicated by the conjunctive waw that begins Exodus: וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת.

<sup>195</sup> As stated above, these issues are explored in Dozeman and Schmid, *A Farewell to the Yahwist*.

overture to an opera to suggest that Genesis can do both. Complete in itself, the overture (Genesis) provides a sweeping overview and introduction to the larger opera (the Pentateuch).<sup>196</sup> In this view, the decision about where to define the text's limits is in some ways a subjective one, despite characteristics that strengthen the case for certain limits over others. Good reasons can be offered for defining the "text" as the Pentateuch or the entire Primary History (Genesis – 2 Kings).<sup>197</sup> One would not be incorrect to read the Joseph story and the Eden narrative intratextually as two parts within either of these broadly conceived texts, and doing so would no doubt give rise to several important insights.<sup>198</sup> Nevertheless, there is ample rationale for defining the text as the book of Genesis and understanding the Eden narrative and the Joseph story as two parts that bookend this text. And as I demonstrate throughout this dissertation, reading them in this way has its own contribution to make for understanding the Joseph story.

As I discussed above, a growing trend in Pentateuchal scholarship over the past few decades has emphasized a break, both literary and conceptual, between the books of Genesis and Exodus. This position is supported by external evidence—such as de Pury's interpretation of Hos 12<sup>199</sup>—but it is based on the internal unity of Genesis and several aspects of discontinuity with Exodus. One of the major themes of Genesis, the promise to the ancestors, is subdued in the rest of the Pentateuch. It is present, to be sure, but only

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<sup>196</sup> Dahlberg, "On Recognizing the Unity of Genesis," 366-67.

<sup>197</sup> Thus, the canonical arrangement in Jewish and Christian tradition, where Genesis is part of the Pentateuch, would argue for reading the Pentateuch as the overarching "text." Alternatively, Schmid calls attention to redactional arrangement spanning all of Genesis-2 Kings, suggesting that the division of the Pentateuch from the Deuteronomistic History was a later development. In this case, the "text" could arguably be considered the entire Primary History (Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*, 16-46).

<sup>198</sup> For a provocative analysis of the Joseph story in light of the primary history, see Josipovici, *The Book of God*, 85-89. Josipovici sees a "final irony" that emerges when the Joseph narrative is read within the primary history, since it is Judah, not Joseph, who becomes the ancestor of Israel's kings. This undermines any authoritative perspective that can be found in the Joseph story.

<sup>199</sup> de Pury, "Osée 12."

on the surface; it is not integrated within the narrative as intimately as one finds in Genesis.<sup>200</sup> This is likewise true for the motif of the preference for the younger child in Genesis, which manifests itself conspicuously in the narratives of Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Rachel and Leah, and Joseph and his brothers. Again, the motif can be discerned in later narratives: Moses is younger than Aaron and Miriam, which gives rise to some conflict (Num 12:1-15), and David and Solomon are both younger sons who rise to power (1 Sam 16:11-13; 1 Kgs 1:28-37). Yet nowhere in biblical literature is this motif as pronounced as we find in Genesis, and nowhere else does it drive the plot so directly. Finally, the final form of Genesis is structured around various genealogies intermixed with narratives, introduced as the “family stories” (תולדות) of significant individuals.<sup>201</sup> This structuring element of Genesis is not found within the rest of the Pentateuch, giving further warrant for reading Genesis as an independent text. The book of Genesis, therefore, will serve as the “text” within which I will conduct my intratextual study of the Joseph story and the Eden narrative.

As to the issue of whether to study Genesis in its final form or in an earlier form, again a case can be made for either. This is especially true in light of the strong arguments mentioned above for the literary independence of Genesis during much of its compositional history.<sup>202</sup> If a pre-Priestly version of Genesis existed alone and contained both the Eden narrative and the story of Joseph, it would be a valid enterprise to study them as a part of this earlier text. On the other hand, if either of these assumptions proves false, then such an intratextual reading breaks down—it amounts to a reading of a “text”

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<sup>200</sup> Rendtorff, *The Problem of the Process*, 43-94.

<sup>201</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, “Genealogies, Seed, and the Compositional Unity of Genesis,” *TynBul* 44 (1993): 255-70; Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (vol. 1 of Genesis; WBC 1; Waco: Word, 1987), xxi-xxii. See the further discussion of this arrangement, below.

<sup>202</sup> Dozeman and Schmid, *A Farewell to the Yahwist*; Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*.

that has never actually existed. While such an exercise could be both possible and valid from the standpoint of pure theory, practically speaking it offers little to aid our understanding of the literature in the Hebrew Bible. The validity of such an intratextual reading—that is, analyzing a reconstructed prior text—is tied to the validity of the reconstruction itself. I generally agree that an earlier version of Genesis existed independently, finding this a convincing position in Pentateuchal scholarship. It is another matter, however, to identify the precise contours of this earlier text; previous attempts to do so have proven difficult and uncertain. Given these challenges, it is preferable to analyze the book of Genesis in its present form, which broad scholarly consensus dates to the Persian period.<sup>203</sup>

My intratextual study of the Joseph story and the Eden narrative will therefore take the book of Genesis in its present form as a starting point. The Joseph story will be understood as one part of this text, while the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel will be treated as a separate part. Below, I discuss the precise boundaries of these episodes, providing my rationale for selecting these for intratextual analysis.

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<sup>203</sup> Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*, 254-57. Schmid posits a significant redaction of the entire Pentateuch and Deuteronomistic History in the Persian period. Moreover, P is widely considered post-exilic, so that the book of Genesis with Priestly material included would date to this period as well. This is not to deny that some form of Genesis existed in the pre-exilic period, or that certain changes occurred after the Persian period (as manuscript variations indicate). It is to say, however, that the present shape of Genesis as a whole—minor variations excepted—can be confidently dated to the Persian period. Cf. Jonathan Huddleston, “The Beginning of the End: The Eschatology of Genesis” (PhD diss., Duke University, 2011), 34-40.

## B. Defining the Parts

### 1. The Eden Narrative and the Story of Cain and Abel

Typically, interpreters define the Eden narrative as Gen 2:4b-3:24, regarding 2:4a as the conclusion of the Priestly creation account.<sup>204</sup> However, Terje Stordalen and others make a case for reading 2:4 as a “redactional bridge” that transitions from the first creation account to the second; the Eden narrative proper would therefore begin at Gen 2:5.<sup>205</sup> The strongest argument in favor of this position is the use of the **תולדות** formula elsewhere in Genesis. Besides Gen 2:4a, this formula normally introduces the story that follows it (Gen 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2); its use in 2:4a should therefore be expected to have a similar function, in which case it would not act as the conclusion to the Priestly creation account in 1:1-2:3.<sup>206</sup> Another difficulty is the mention of the earth and heavens in Gen 2:4b, with neither actually being created in the story that follows.<sup>207</sup> Furthermore, traditional divisions of the creation narratives emphasize the use of **ברא** in 2:4a and **עשה** in 2:4b, as well as the reversed order of

<sup>204</sup> To cite a few of the most prominent: Gunkel, *Genesis*, 4-40; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11* (vol. 1 of *Genesis*; trans. John J. Scullion; CC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984), 178-278; Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (trans. John H. Marks; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 73-102; Phyllis Trible, “A Love Story Gone Awry,” in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Overtures to Biblical Theology; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 73-143.

<sup>205</sup> Terje Stordalen, “Genesis 2,4: Restudying a *Locus Classicus*,” ZAW 104 (1992): 165-77. As an early proponent of this view, Stordalen cites Sven Tengström, *Die Toledotformel und die literarische Struktur der priesterlichen Erweiterungsschicht im Pentateuch* (CBOTS 17; Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1981), 54-59. Cf. also Trygve N. D. Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative: A Literary and Religio-historical Study of Genesis 2-3* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 13. Mettinger agrees wholly with Stordalen’s position. Others proponents of this view include: Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 49; Isaac M. Kikawada and Arthur Quinn, *Before Abraham Was: The Unity of Genesis 1-11* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 60; Eckart Otto, “Die Paradieserzählung Genesis 2-3: Eine nachpriesterschriftliche Lehrerzählung in ihrem religionshistorischen Kontext,” in A. A. Diesel et al. (eds.), “*Jedes Ding hat seine Zeit...*” *Studien zur israelitischen und altorientalischen Weisheit. Diethelm Michel zum 65. Geburtstag* (BZAW 241; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996), 167-92.

<sup>206</sup> Stordalen, “Restudying a *Locus Classicus*,” 169-73. Cf. also Howard N. Wallace, *The Eden Narrative* (Harvard Semitic Monographs 23; Atlanta: Scholars, 1985), 23 n. 1. Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative*, 13.

<sup>207</sup> Stordalen, “Restudying a *Locus Classicus*,” 169.



שמים and ארץ in 2:4b. Stordalen, however, demonstrates that these arguments are not as strong as strong as previous scholars have supposed: the words ברא and עשה are often used interchangeably, even within Genesis 1, and the reversal of שמים and ארץ might well be a chiasm.<sup>208</sup> While it remains conventional to begin the Eden narrative at Gen 2:4b, the argument that the passage begins at 2:5 is convincing. And recognizing the structural importance of the תולדות formula within the book of Genesis, I prefer to recognize this as the beginning of the Eden narrative, despite Stordalen's understanding of 2:4 as a redactional bridge. I thus understand the Eden narrative to go from Gen 2:4 through 3:24.

Closely related to the Eden narrative is the story of Cain and Abel, found in Gen 4:1-16. There are a number of linguistic connections between this story and the Eden narrative, suggesting that the former should be read as a continuation of the latter. First, the statement in Gen 3:20 that the man named his wife Eve, since she was the "mother of all the living," highlights the woman's role as a mother and foreshadows her fulfillment of this role when Cain and Abel are born to her. Walsh sees a stronger connection between Gen 3:20 and Gen 4 than between Gen 3:20 and the rest of the Eden narrative.<sup>209</sup> Furthermore, the story of Cain and Abel begins with the statement that "the man knew his wife, Eve" (4:1), explicitly recalling the name given in 3:20 as well as bridging the two narratives through these characters.

<sup>208</sup> Stordalen, "Restudying a *Locus Classicus*," 174-75.

<sup>209</sup> Jerome T. Walsh, "Genesis 2:4b-3:24: A Synchronic Approach," *JBL* 96 (1977), 161-77 (169).

The word “ground” (אֲדָמָה) recurs as a key word in the Eden narrative, and this continues in Gen 4. The ground receives Abel’s blood (דָּם) and cries out to YHWH to implicate Cain, himself a tiller of the ground (4:10).<sup>210</sup> God’s punishment for Cain likewise involves the ground: he is cursed from the ground (מִן־הָאֲדָמָה), and the ground itself will withhold its fruit from Cain (4:11-12). The Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel are linked through the use of this key word in both passages. There is further shared vocabulary between them as well. Some of these could be incidental, since they are common Hebrew words: שָׁמַר, שָׂדֶה, עֶבֶד, אֲרֶץ, אֲדָמָה. However, both narratives also share less common words and phrases, which suggests an intentional connection between them. These include מָוֶה עֲשִׂיתָ, מָשַׁל, תְּשׁוּקָה, and אָרֹר.<sup>211</sup> Finally, a number of structural similarities exist between Gen 3:1-24 and Gen 4:1-16: both passages contain the account of an offense, followed by a trial conducted face-to-face between God and the offender, then a pronouncement of punishment in terms of a curse.<sup>212</sup> The notion of exile likewise contributes to both narratives, as God casts the humans out of Eden (Gen 3:22-24) and Cain departs from God’s presence (Gen 4:16). All of these similarities suggest that Gen 4:1-16 should be understood as a continuation of Gen 3, relating how the consequences of the first humans’ disobedience and expulsion from Eden carry over into the next generation.

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<sup>210</sup> There is a possible word play between the blood and the ground: Abel’s דָּם is received by the אֲדָמָה. If so, this recalls the wordplay between אֲדָם and אֲדָמָה in the Eden narrative.

<sup>211</sup> Beverly J. Stratton, *Out of Eden: Reading, Rhetoric, and Ideology in Genesis 2-3* (JSOTSup 208; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 213.

<sup>212</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 285-86. Stratton, *Out of Eden*, 213.

The genealogy of Cain and the birth of Seth (Gen 4:17-26) continue the story of Cain and Abel, and the next *תולדות* formula begins in Gen 5:1. This means, therefore, that one may include all of Gen 4 alongside the Eden narrative, understanding them together as a single “part” within the text of Genesis. While these could be read as separate parts, reading them together neither ignores a firm boundary nor forces together two disparate episodes. Rather, taking both together gives a complete account of sin and its consequences, as these negative results characterize the humans’ post-Eden existence and carry over into the next generation. Furthermore, understanding the story of Cain and Abel as a continuation of the Eden narrative presents an important entry point for reading the latter alongside the Joseph story, which in its own way is driven by fraternal conflict and its effects. Accordingly, I understand this part of Genesis to be Gen 2:4-4:26, including the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel. It is the first of the *תולדות* in Genesis.

## 2. *The Story of Joseph and His Brothers*

The story of Joseph and his brothers is typically recognized as Gen 37-50, making it one of the largest and most complex sustained narratives in the entire Bible. It begins with an introduction that identifies it as the “family story of Jacob” (*תולדות יעקב*) in Gen 37:2, moving on to an exposition in verses 2-4.<sup>213</sup> It ends with the death of Joseph in

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<sup>213</sup> W. Lee Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family: A Literary Study* (Studies on Personalities of the Old Testament; Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 33-34. Cf. also Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 8-11. Coats identifies Gen 37:1 as the beginning, noting that its statement of Jacob’s dwelling in Canaan corresponds to the statement of Israel’s settlement in Egypt in 47:27, constituting a frame around the entire Joseph story. Nevertheless, he also recognizes 37:2 as a beginning statement, precisely because the *toledot* formula typically stands at the beginning of a major unit (p. 8).

Gen 50:26, the end of the book of Genesis. Insofar as it begins with Joseph's youth and ends with his death, the entirety of Gen 37-50 is a single unit.<sup>214</sup> The general coherence of these fourteen chapters, however, does not necessarily indicate that they should be understood in their entirety as a single "part" of Genesis for the purpose of intratextual analysis. Many features of Gen 37-50 evidence a "redactional unity" rather than tight literary continuity, despite the presence of such consistence throughout many of these chapters.<sup>215</sup> This raises the possibility of isolating a smaller block of narrative within Gen 37-50 as the Joseph story, treating the rest as a separate part or parts of Genesis. Many scholars have offered solutions for doing precisely this, but their results have been varied.

George W. Coats argues that the Joseph story proper ends in Gen 47:27, with Gen 47:28-50:14 as a "framework narrative" that combines tribal sayings with an account of Jacob's death.<sup>216</sup> The material in Gen 50:15-26 constitutes a conclusion and appendix that are likewise not a part of the Joseph story itself, though they are dependent upon it.<sup>217</sup> In addition to this excised material, Coats excludes Gen 38 and Gen 47:13-26 as insertions into the Joseph story, arguing that they contribute nothing to the narrative itself.<sup>218</sup> Accordingly, Coats recognizes Gen 37:1 through Gen 47:27 as the Joseph story, with the exception of Gen 38 and Gen 47:13-26. Humphreys, however, recognizes the latter section as an important episode in the Joseph story, assigning it to the earliest "kernel" of the narrative. This kernel centers on Joseph's rise to power in Egypt,

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<sup>214</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis 37-50* (vol. 3 of *Genesis*; trans. John J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 22.

<sup>215</sup> Coats, "Redactional Unity in Genesis 37-50," *JBL* 93 (1974): 15-21.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-20.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>218</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 8, 52-53.

sketching him as a wise courtier.<sup>219</sup> The episode where Joseph enslaves the Egyptians (Gen 47:13-26) contributes to this story because it depicts Joseph faithfully serving his master, Pharaoh. Humphreys notes linguistic as well as thematic links, bolstering his identification of this episode with the wise courtier narrative.<sup>220</sup> The conclusion of that story ends in Gen 50:26 with the death of Joseph, the logical end to an account of a wise courtier's career; Humphreys cites Egyptian parallels in support of this claim.<sup>221</sup> Humphreys recognizes these two episodes—the enslavement of the Egyptians and the death of Joseph—as part of the Joseph story's most basic layer, despite Coats's argument for their exclusion.

Humphreys recognizes all of Gen 37-50 as the present Joseph novella, but he does argue for an earlier form that existed independently and grew from the kernel in Gen 40-41, 47:13-26, and 50:26.<sup>222</sup> He regards Gen 38, 46:1-4, 48, and 49 as additions that were made when this independent story was incorporated into the Pentateuch that was still taking shape.<sup>223</sup> Redford likewise regards these passages as subsequent additions to the Joseph story proper, along with Gen 37:1-2, 46:5-27, and 50:22-26. He makes this judgment on the basis that they do not contribute to the Joseph story's plot, but rather incorporate it within its context at the end of Genesis.<sup>224</sup> Longacre, by contrast, understands Gen 48 as part of the Joseph story, though he excludes Gen 38 and 49-50.

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<sup>219</sup> Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 136-53.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 145-47. Elsewhere, I have argued that the story of Joseph's enslavement of the Egyptians contributes positively to the narrative of Gen 46-50, by showing the famine's negative consequences for the Egyptians in contrast to the positive conditions under which Jacob's family entered Egypt: Brian Sigmon, "Shadowing Jacob's Journey: Gen 47:13-26 as a Sideshadow," *BibInt* 19 (2011): 454-70. Cf. also Peter Weimar, "Gen 47,13-26—ein irritierender Abschnitt im Rahmen der Josefsgeschichte," in U. Schorn and M. Beck (eds.), *Auf dem Weg zur Endgestalt von Genesis bis II Regum* (Festschrift Hans-Christoph Schmitt; BZAW 370; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 125-38.

<sup>221</sup> Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 147.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 199-200.

<sup>224</sup> Donald B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50)* (VTSup 20; Leiden: Brill, 1970), 1-27.

Beginning with all of Gen 37-50, Longacre divides the last fourteen chapters of Genesis into fourteen distinct sections, some of which is the Joseph story and some of which belongs to the **תולדות** of Jacob. In his view, sections 1 and 3-11, corresponding to Gen 37 and 39-48, comprise the story of Joseph; chapters 38 and 49-50 are additional material within the larger story of Jacob (Gen 37-50), which includes the story of Joseph as its largest part.<sup>225</sup>

Westermann agrees with Coats about the “redactional unity” of Gen 37-50, acknowledging the basic coherence of the narrative that begins with Joseph’s youth (Gen 37:2) and ends with his death (Gen 50:26).<sup>226</sup> Nevertheless, he recognizes divisions within it that suggest an isolated Joseph story, what he calls “Joseph story in the stricter sense.”<sup>227</sup> In his view, this isolated Joseph story has been combined with additional material to form the conclusion to Genesis and the narratives about Jacob. Westermann argues that most of Gen 37, 39-45, and parts of 46-50 comprise the “Joseph story in the stricter sense,” while other parts of Gen 46-50 and pieces of Gen 37 comprise the conclusion to the Jacob story. Genesis 38 and 49 are two “late insertions” into this conclusion of the Jacob story.<sup>228</sup> For Westermann, traditional source division along the lines of the Documentary Hypothesis applies in the case of Gen 37 and in Gen 46-50, making it possible to distinguish Priestly and pre-Priestly passages in these chapters. Source division in the Joseph story proper, however, does not hold, since this was an independent narrative.<sup>229</sup> In this way, Westermann attempts to resolve the tension

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<sup>225</sup> Robert E. Longacre, *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence: A Text Theoretical and Textlinguistic Analysis of Genesis 37 and Genesis 39-48* (2d. ed; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 21-24.

<sup>226</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 22.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 22-25.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 23.

between arguments for source divisions and evidence of literary unity in the Joseph story.<sup>230</sup>

This discussion by no means exhausts the arguments for isolating a smaller Joseph narrative within Gen 37-50, but it does give a sense of the variety of proposals that are available. Despite much agreement that a smaller Joseph story can be identified within Gen 37-50, the various arguments about the precise contours of this narrative are in conflict. Coats ends the story at Gen 47:27 and excises two other passages, the story of Judah and Tamar in Gen 38 and Joseph's enslavement of the Egyptians in Gen 47:13-26. Humphreys includes one of these, Gen 47:13-26, as he extends the originally independent Joseph novella through the end of Gen 50. Longacre sees the conclusion of the story at Gen 48:22, recognizing unity in the text prior to that point (again with the exception of Gen 38).<sup>231</sup> Westermann, by contrast, finds evidence of interwoven material in Gen 37 and 46-50, some of which belongs to the Joseph story proper and some of which does not. The resulting picture of the Joseph story is one in which significant "redactional unity" prevails, to borrow Coats's phrase, to the point that distinguishing well integrated redaction from actual literary unity becomes unfeasible. While the Joseph narrative can readily be divided into structural subsections—see, for example, the extended outline offered by Humphreys<sup>232</sup>—each of these subsections in some way resists being removed from the Joseph story.

This is true for the story of Judah and Tamar in Gen 38 as well, which all of the above interpreters regard as an addition to the Joseph story proper. To be sure, it presents itself as a digression from the central narrative line of the Joseph story, detracting

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<sup>230</sup> Cf. R. N. Whybray, "The Joseph Story and Pentateuchal Criticism," *VT* 18 (1968): 522-28.

<sup>231</sup> Longacre, *Joseph*, 21-39.

<sup>232</sup> Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 57-67.

attention from the main character and the unfolding plot. Furthermore, it interrupts an instantaneous transition—from Joseph sold as a slave to Joseph bought by Potiphar—with a story that takes place over many years. And given that the book of *Jubilees* places the story of Judah and Tamar in a different location in the overall story, after Joseph has made the preparations for the famine (*Jub.* 40-41), there is warrant among ancient interpreters for this modern practice of dislocating this chapter.<sup>233</sup> If any part of Gen 37-50 is to be excised from the Joseph story proper, the narrative of Gen 38 is the most likely candidate.

At the same time, Alter has demonstrated a number of linguistic connections between Gen 38 and the surrounding Joseph story, showing that the narrative of Judah and Tamar is well integrated into its context.<sup>234</sup> The statement that Judah “goes down” (יֵרֵד) from his brothers at the beginning of Gen 38 echoes Joseph’s departure from his brothers into Egypt, since he is taken down (הוֹרֵד) to Egypt at the beginning of Gen 39.<sup>235</sup> Jacob’s statement at the end of Gen 37 that he will “go down” (אֵרֵד) to Sheol mourning Joseph (Gen 37:35) evokes a similar connection with Joseph’s descent into Egypt and Jacob’s eventual journey there.<sup>236</sup> The verb יָרַד occurs frequently in the Joseph story to describe movement from Canaan to Egypt;<sup>237</sup> other occurrences, such as Jacob’s repeated claim that he will “go down” in mourning, pick up on this theme of

<sup>233</sup> Goldin, “The Youngest Son or Where Does Genesis 38 Belong,” 27-28.

<sup>234</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 3-12.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 4. Alter notes the irony in Jacob’s statement that he will “go down to Sheol,” in light of the fact that Jacob will eventually “go down” to Egypt to be with Joseph.

<sup>237</sup> Gen 37:25; 39:1; 42:2-3, 38; 43:4-5, 7, 11, 15, 20, 22; 44:21, 23, 26; 45:9, 13; 46:3-4.



downward motion.<sup>238</sup> The fact that the story of Judah and Tamar opens with a similar statement shows it to be at home in the Joseph story. Furthermore, Tamar's request that Judah "please recognize" (הִכְרִינֵנִי) his personal effects as evidence that he is her child's father (Gen 38:25) echoes the manner in which Joseph's brothers deceived Jacob. They ask him to "please recognize" (הִכְרִינֵנִי) whether or not the bloody garment is Joseph's (Gen 37:32).<sup>239</sup> The verb נִכַּר also comes into play elsewhere in the Joseph story, as Joseph recognizes his brothers, who do not recognize him in Egypt (Gen 42:7-8).<sup>240</sup>

Additionally, the events of Gen 38 have important implications for the resolution of the Joseph story, since Judah plays a pivotal role in the reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers (Gen 44:18-34). Judah changes over the course of this chapter, coming to recognize not only his guilt and Tamar's righteousness, but also the necessity of risking a beloved child so that the family line may continue.<sup>241</sup> This change enables him to move events forward later in the Joseph story, first by convincing Jacob to send Benjamin (Gen 43:8-10) and then by offering to be a slave in Benjamin's place (Gen 44:18-34).<sup>242</sup> The importance of Judah is further highlighted by the strange circumstances of the birth of Tamar's children Perez and Zerah at the end of Gen 38. The birth of Perez prior to Zerah presents the familiar Genesis theme of the preference for the younger son. As Judah Goldin argues, portraying this among Judah's sons confirms the fact that Judah will be a key role-player in the narrative that follows.<sup>243</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>238</sup> Gen 37:35; 42:38; 44:29, 31.

<sup>239</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 10. Cf. also *Gen. Rab.* 84:11-12.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 10, 163.

<sup>241</sup> Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 161-64.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 162-63; Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 46-49, 117-20; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50* (vol. 2 of *Genesis*; WBC 2; Waco: Word, 1994), 364.

<sup>243</sup> Goldin, "The Youngest Son or Where Does Genesis 38 Belong," 42-43.

Judah's act of sleeping with Tamar, whom he thinks is a prostitute, contrasts with the virtue of Joseph in Potiphar's house, as he refuses his mistress's sexual advances.<sup>244</sup> This forms yet another connection between Gen 38 and the larger Joseph story in which it occurs. Thus, while the story of Judah and Tamar may have an independent origin, in its present form it is verbally and thematically integrated with the context in which it now stands.<sup>245</sup>

Even Gen 38, the most obvious candidate for removal from a narrowly defined Joseph story, cannot be taken from the narrative without diminishing some of its richness. In light of this observation, the Joseph story's overall unity comes sharply into focus. This unity may be redactional rather than compositional, but it is thorough. Reviewing the various arguments for isolating a smaller Joseph story within Gen 37-50 has revealed this to be an unfeasible task. Certain interpreters find unity where others recognize disunity, with the result that more and more material is shown to comprise part of the present Joseph story. For the purposes of my analysis, therefore, it is preferable to acknowledge this unity and treat all of Gen 37-50 as a single "part" of Genesis. I am not alone in doing so, as many have offered compelling interpretations of this whole narrative.<sup>246</sup> This is not to say that I will treat the Joseph story as a single, undivided narrative: it is itself comprised of many parts, some of which invite comparison with the Eden narrative or the story of Cain and Abel more strongly than others. What I mean, however, is that I will understand Gen 37-50 completely as one "part" of the book of Genesis, a part that focuses on the story of Joseph and his brothers. It is this large part

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<sup>244</sup> Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis* (NCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 325.

<sup>245</sup> Cf. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18-50* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 431-32.

<sup>246</sup> Barbara Green presents an especially beautiful, rich interpretation of Genesis 37-50: Green, *What Profit for Us*.

that I shall read with a view towards the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel. It is the last of the תולדות of Genesis, further inviting comparison with the first such section, the narratives in Gen 2:4-4:26.

### ***IX. Procedure***

Detailed exegesis of the two parts in question is crucial for an intratextual analysis of the relationship between the Joseph story and the narratives of Gen 2-4. My procedure focuses on close readings of various aspects of the Eden narrative, the story of Cain and Abel, and the Joseph story, using narrative and other literary analysis to highlight aspects of plot, characterization, and central themes. These detailed readings form the basis for comparing the narratives to uncover intratextual patterns of correspondence.

In chapter one, I conduct a close reading of the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel, focusing particularly on the Eden narrative in Gen 2:4-3:24. While it is impossible to do justice to the full range of scholarship on this narrative—it is, to be sure, one of the most popular and frequently interpreted texts in the Bible—it is necessary to outline the central issues surrounding its interpretation. To do otherwise would be to risk reading meaning into it, distorting it as we search out its parallels and analogies with the Joseph narrative. As will be seen, an important part of this task is to clarify its relationship with the story of Cain and Abel, which serves as a continuation of the story by narrating further consequences of the humans' disobedience in the garden.

In chapter two, I identify intratextual patterns between these narratives and two small episodes within the Joseph story, both of which may be described in terms of the concept of narrative analogy. First, the account where Joseph's brothers sell him as a

slave (Gen 37) exhibits a number of parallels with the story of Cain and Abel, as well as linguistic connections between these two narratives. The hostile actions Joseph's brothers take against him constitute a narrative analogy with Cain's murder of Abel, showing how Joseph's brothers repeat Cain's crime. Second, the account of Joseph's temptation by Potiphar's wife (Gen 39:1-20) mirrors Adam's disobedience in Eden, as Joseph's faithfulness to God and resistance to temptation contrasts with Adam's failure in this regard. The episode in Gen 39 is an analogy with the Eden narrative, but it is characterized by reversal rather than by parallel.

In chapters three and four, I trace the intratextual patterns between Gen 2-4 and the Joseph story as a whole, focusing my attention on close exegesis of the Joseph story itself before comparing it with the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel. In chapter three, I discuss the relationship between Joseph's knowledge and his ability to preserve life during the famine, tracing the theme of knowledge in general and specifically Joseph's own knowledge exhibited in Gen 37-50. I also explore the role of the famine within the plot of the Joseph story, demonstrating the ambiguous attitude the narrative exhibits towards it. I argue that both Joseph's knowledge and the famine recall aspects of the Eden narrative: the knowledge of good and evil and the curse upon the ground that occurs when the humans acquire this knowledge. Finally, I show how Joseph's knowledge enables him to mitigate the famine, demonstrating how this dynamic may be understood as a broadly conceived narrative analogy with the Eden story. Again, this is characterized by reversal: while Adam's acquisition of knowledge led to death and a curse upon the ground, Joseph's knowledge leads to life and his ability to circumvent this curse.

Chapter four continues this analysis of Joseph's knowledge, exploring a distinct dimension of it that changes over time. This aspect of Joseph's knowledge centers on his ability to discern God's activity in his life and the divine purposes for the past, present, and future. Unlike Joseph's practical wisdom and skill, this element of Joseph's knowledge changes as the story moves forward. By the end, Joseph understands how God has been involved in his life, but it coincides with his own growth in perspective that enables him to envision God's plan for his whole family and the rest of the world. I first trace this development of Joseph's knowledge, showing how it is bound up with Joseph's relationship with his brothers and his decision to reconcile with them. I then compare this with the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel, showing how Joseph's knowledge leads to greater life for Jacob's family as well as reconciliation among his sons. This constitutes a further reversal of what we see in Gen 2-4, where the knowledge of good and evil leads to death and violence among brothers. The dynamic between Joseph's knowledge and the life and reconciliation that stems from it again may be read as a narrative analogy with Gen 2-4, exhibiting some parallels but also important reversals.

Chapter five summarizes the exegetical observations of the preceding chapters, further clarifying the intratextual relationship between the Joseph story and the narratives of Gen 2-4. In this chapter, I focus on several major themes of the Joseph story, showing how these are enriched when one reads the Joseph narrative in light of the beginning chapters of Genesis. One of these themes centers on knowledge and perspective, particularly the relationship between one's interpretation of the past, present, and future and the perspective from which one views these things. A different, more all-

encompassing perspective emerges when the Joseph story is situated in the context of the Eden narrative, altering one's interpretation of the significance of Joseph's life. Another major theme is God's unseen providence, specifically the relationship between human action, divine action, and human knowledge of God's purposes. Again, this theme becomes more complex when the story is examined in light of the narratives in Gen 2-4. Other aspects of Gen 37-50 affected by this intratextual relationship include reconciliation, the ambivalent portrayal of Egypt, and the continuation of the ancestral promise. By clarifying how the Joseph story acquires deeper significance when its context is expanded, I aim to demonstrate the value of reading it intratextually alongside the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel.

## **Chapter One: Eden and Its Aftermath**

Before discussing potential allusions to the Eden narrative in the story of Joseph, it is first necessary to give attention to the Eden narrative itself, following its literary movement and highlighting key themes and motifs. Once specified, they can serve as the basis for comparison with the Joseph story. Furthermore, because the Eden narrative is a distinct, but not isolated, literary unit in Genesis, it sets the stage for several developments over the course of the Primeval History. The story of Cain and Abel that immediately follows the Eden narrative embodies the persistent estrangement between God and humanity, the increase of wickedness in the world, and the deterioration of human relationships that result from the disobedience of Gen 3. Exploring the Eden narrative's continuation in the story of Cain and Abel will clarify how fraternal conflict results from the humans' disobedience and their acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil. Conflict between brothers continues throughout the patriarchal narratives of Genesis, reaching a turning point in the story of Joseph and his brothers. This motif provides the strongest link between Gen 37-50 and the rest of Genesis, serving as a point of entry for studying the Joseph story's intratextual relationship with the narratives of Gen 2-4.

Accordingly, the present chapter offers a close reading of the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel, demonstrating their connections with one another and their place within the book of Genesis. My purpose is not to offer a new interpretation of these narratives, but simply to read them closely in conversation with the most important scholarship on them. This will serve as a preparation for investigating their relationship to the Joseph story.

## ***I. Introduction***

The Eden narrative tells the story of how death and the difficulties of life entered the world, portraying them as the consequences of the first humans' violation of a divine command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It asserts that human life as we know it—a life of difficulty and toil that finally ends in a return to dust—is not human life as God<sup>1</sup> intended it. The first section of the story, Gen 2:5-24, narrates God's creation of the first humans and offers a sketch of life in the utopian Garden of Eden, characterized by harmony in human relationships with one another, with the earth, with the rest of the created world, and with God. The story's conclusion, Gen 3:8-24, presents the harsh realities of the present world, with its difficulties in relationships and in survival. The unhappy transition from the former to the latter occurs as the result of a single crucial event that stands the center of the narrative: the humans disobey God, eat from the forbidden tree in the midst of the garden, and obtain the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:25-3:7).

An analysis of the structure and plot of Gen 2-3 reveals an implicit opposition between life and knowledge that underlies the story's narrative logic, in which the acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil leads to the loss of life. At the same time, this must not be made to obscure the significance of the divine command and the humans' disobedience of it for the meaning of the story. Following the plot analysis, I explore three themes that lie at the heart of the Eden narrative's meaning: life and death, disobedience, and human knowledge. I then discuss the consequences of the humans'

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the Eden narrative, the deity is generally referred to as יהוה אלהים, "YHWH God." For the sake of simplicity, I will use "God" in my analysis, unless the precise divine name is especially relevant to the discussion.



disobedience and acquisition of knowledge, namely the curses narrated in Gen 3:14-19 and the further responses of the humans and God in 3:20-24. Taken together, these describe some of the fundamental harsh realities of human life, giving the Eden narrative a generally etiological character. Finally, I address the relationship between the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel in Gen 4, which demonstrates the continued fracturing of human relationships by portraying fraternal violence. Such conflict extends even into the patriarchal narratives as well; the aftermath of Eden is felt across generations.

## ***II. Structure***

The structure of the Eden narrative can be deduced on the basis of changes in action, location, or characters.<sup>2</sup> Recognizing that Gen 2:4 is an introductory statement incorporating what follows into the תולדות structure of Genesis, I begin my analysis at Gen 2:5.<sup>3</sup> In 2:5-24, the primary actor is God, who forms the man from dust (2:7), plants a garden in Eden and puts the man there (2:8-9), commands the man concerning the garden (2:15-17), and creates the animals and the woman in an effort to make a partner for the man (2:18-24). There is a narrative excursus in 2:10-14 describing the river that comes out of Eden and its branches, but continuity of character and action between 2:8-9 and 2:15-17 warns against seeing a change of scene at this point.<sup>4</sup> Stordalen draws a division between 2:7 and 2:8 on a supposed change of action, seeing 2:5-7 as one scene

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<sup>2</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 218-19; Walsh, "Genesis 2:4b-3:24," 161.

<sup>3</sup> See my discussion of the Eden narrative's textual boundaries in the Introduction.

<sup>4</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 219. Stordalen regards these verses as a "parenthetical contemplation upon the nature of the garden," including them within the single scene from 2:8-17. Cf. also Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 215; von Rad, *Genesis*, 79-80. Westermann and von Rad see these verses as an interpolation.

in which God creates the man and 2:8-17 as another in which God plants the garden and puts the man there.<sup>5</sup> However, Jerome Walsh notes the lack of vegetation, water, and man in 2:5 and the presence of all three in 2:17, an element of continuity that suggests one should read all of 2:5-17 as a single scene.<sup>6</sup>

There is a change of action beginning with 2:18, however, as God begins creating animals and eventually creates the woman in an effort to find a counterpart for the man. There is a unity of purpose behind the creation of the animals and the creation of the woman, both being motivated by God's recognition that it is not good for the man to be alone and the desire to make a suitable companion for him.<sup>7</sup> This continuity of purpose unites all of 2:18-24 as a single scene, despite a change of action that could otherwise warrant a division of 2:18-20 and 2:20-24.<sup>8</sup>

A clear change of characters occurs at 3:1, as the serpent is introduced for the first time and God is absent from the scene until 3:8.<sup>9</sup> This suggests that 3:1-7 stands as a distinct scene.<sup>10</sup> The mention of nakedness in 2:25, however, warrants the inclusion of this verse along with 3:1-7, since nakedness figures prominently in these verses. Defining the scene as 2:25-3:7 does not disturb the change in characterization, since God is absent in 2:25 as well. Moreover, doing so allows for the lack of shame in 2:25 to

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<sup>5</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 219.

<sup>6</sup> Walsh, "Genesis 2:4b-3:24," 163.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 163-64.

<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, Tribble sees the creation of animals in 2:18-20 and the creation of human sexuality in 2:21-24 as two distinct episodes within the first scene (2:4b-24) of her three-scene structure (Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 88-105).

<sup>9</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 111; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 50-51.

<sup>10</sup> *Contra* Walsh, "Genesis 2:4b-3:24," 164-66 and Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 50-51. Both see 3:1-5 and 3:6-8 as two separate scenes.

form an inclusio with the recognition of nakedness and attempt to cover it in 3:7.<sup>11</sup> The third scene therefore runs from 2:25-3:7.<sup>12</sup>

Beginning with 3:8, God returns as a character and again takes over as a primary actor. Scholars frequently see a division between 3:8-13 and 3:14-19, with the former narrating a trial or inquiry as God questions the man and woman and the latter containing God's judgments on the basis of this hearing.<sup>13</sup> There is, however, no change of characters, time, or location between 3:13 and 3:14, and a triad of man-woman-snake serves as an organizing principle in 3:8-13 and 3:14-19.<sup>14</sup> Such unity pushes for all of 3:8-19 to be read as a single scene, albeit with two distinct parts; the poetic nature of God's words in 3:14-19 warrants setting them off somewhat from the dialogue in 3:8-13.

The encounter between God and the humans ends at 3:19, with new actions taking place in 3:20-24. The man names his wife Eve in 3:20 and God makes garments of skin (כְּתֹנִית עֹר) for the couple in 3:21, two actions that are seemingly unrelated to one another or to what follows.<sup>15</sup> They are related, however, insofar as they are both continuing responses to what has already occurred. The name the man gives to his wife may signify her subordination to him as described in 3:16, while the clothes that God makes rectifies their earlier, apparently inadequate, attempt to cover their nakedness.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 219-20; Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 105-7.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 191. Westermann states that 2:25 must be understood in conjunction with what follows, not with the preceding narrative; he sees the verse as a transition between chs. 2 and 3.

<sup>13</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 220; Walsh, "Genesis 2:4b-3:24," 166-67; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 50-51.

<sup>14</sup> Walsh, "Genesis 2:4b-3:24," 168. Cf. also Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 220. Stordalen notes a connection between 3:8-13 and 3:14-19, distinguishing them as two scenes on the basis of their change in action from inquiring to punishing.

<sup>15</sup> Walsh sees 3:20-21 as having no real connection with the scene in which they are contained, their main function being to look forward to the new narrative that begins in 4:1 (Walsh, "Genesis 2:4b-3:24," 169). Stordalen regards these verses as "a brief and opaque interplay," suggesting they belong to "subscenic plots" rather than to any single scene of the narrative (Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 220).

<sup>16</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 132-34. Tribble sees both the man's naming of the woman and God's gift of clothing as evidence of human sexuality in disarray. In addition to this, the name given to the

Both manifest fundamental ruptures that now exist in the humans' relationships: between the man and the woman and between the animal kingdom and humanity.<sup>17</sup> In 3:22-24, God responds to the humans' acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil by sending them out of Eden, so that they may not eat from the tree of life. There is, then, a common thread holding the actions narrated in 3:20-24 together as a single scene; they are various responses to the effects of the humans' eating from the forbidden tree.

Based on the foregoing discussion, changes of action, characters, and/or location at 2:18, 2:25, 3:8, and 3:20 suggest the beginning of a new scene within the Eden narrative. Other changes are present at 2:9, 2:15, and 3:14, but these are not strong enough to override greater unity within each scene. We therefore arrive at the following five-scene structure for the Eden narrative in Gen 2:5-3:24, which follows textual divisions that are widely acknowledged in biblical scholarship:

Scene 1. 2:5-17

Excursus within scene 1: 2:9-14

Scene 2. 2:18-24

Scene 3. 2:25-3:7

Scene 4. 3:8-19

Scene 4 part 1. 3:8-13

Scene 4 part 2. 3:14-19

Scene 5. 3:20-24

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woman, Eve, "Mother of All the Living," recalls the role of motherhood mentioned for her in 3:16. These verses are connected to the preceding ones insofar as they narrate continuing responses of both the humans and God to the disobedience and acquisition of knowledge that takes place in 2:25-3:7.

<sup>17</sup> The creation of clothes out of animal skins implies the death of animals and violence toward them. Animal life is given up so that the humans may be clothed.

### ***III. Plot***

The structure outlined above gives some clue as to the overall plot of the Eden narrative. The central scene, 2:25-3:7, serves as the turning point of the story.<sup>18</sup> The rest of the narrative (3:8-24) is largely a reaction to what takes place in scene three, as God questions the man and woman about their nakedness, punishes them for eating, and sends them out of the garden because they have acquired knowledge. Much of what precedes 2:25 sets the stage for it: the description of the garden in 2:9-14 mentions the two crucial trees (2:9), and the creation of the animals and the woman in 2:18-24 proves to be of importance for what takes place in the pivotal scene, where the man is a decidedly passive character.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, 3:8-24 describes changes in the created world that correspond to the initial state of things in 2:5-24. The humans' act of eating from the forbidden tree and their resultant acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil in the third scene gives rise to these changes, which are altogether negative. Hinging on the central scene, the Eden narrative is one of descent and deterioration, from an initial state of bliss and harmony to a state characterized by struggle, toil, and fractured relationships.

The entire plot of the story cannot be deduced from its structure alone, however. Other cues in the narrative give a sense of the causality governing Gen 2-3, the motivations and reactions that drive the narrative forward. With this in mind, Stordalen identifies four "announced plot segments" that describe the story's movement: a human tiller to the world, a counterpart for the human, prohibition test, and human knowledge.<sup>20</sup> These plot segments are introduced respectively in 2:5, 2:18, 2:16-17, and 2:25; the first

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<sup>18</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 105-7; Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative*, 16-17.

<sup>19</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 108-9.

<sup>20</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 221-33.

two identify something lacking, which the ensuing narrative will remedy.<sup>21</sup> The third introduces a test, which Stordalen recognizes as a “common plot signal” throughout ancient Near Eastern literature.<sup>22</sup> The fourth arouses curiosity, stating the lack of shame in the naked couple and looking forward to their acquisition of knowledge that will result in shame in 3:7.<sup>23</sup> Taken together, these announced plot segments account for nearly all of the action in the Eden narrative.<sup>24</sup>

Stordalen’s first two announced plot segments cover the first two scenes, Gen 2:5-17 and 2:18-24. First, Gen 2:5 reports a lack of vegetation on the earth and the twofold reason for this lack, the absence of rain and the absence of a man to till the soil.<sup>25</sup> God’s creation of the human and the water that springs up from the earth begin to remedy this lack, though they do not immediately result in vegetation on the earth. God places the human in the Garden of Eden to till it and to keep it (לַעבְדָּהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ; 2:15). Unless the garden is explicitly identified with the soil/earth (אֲרֶץ/אֲדָמָה)—and there is

<sup>21</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 221.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 221, 226-27.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 221, 227-29.

<sup>24</sup> For an alternative approach to the Eden narrative’s plot, cf. Robert C. Culley, *Themes and Variations: A Study of Action in Biblical Narrative* (SBL Semeia Studies; Atlanta: Scholars, 1992), 122-26. An earlier version of this analysis appeared in idem, “Action Sequences in Gen 2-3,” *Semeia* 18 (1980): 25-33. Analyzing the story in terms of individual “action sequences” and combinations of them, Culley saw four primary sequences at work: a punishment sequence, in which the human couple commit a wrong and are punished; an achievement sequence, in which the couple desire the knowledge of good and evil and obtain it; a rescue sequence, in which God sees a difficulty (the humans have obtained knowledge) and escapes it (he sends them out of Eden); and an announcement sequence, in which God creates the man, woman, animals, and garden. These correspond somewhat to Stordalen’s “announced plot segments”: the achievement sequence roughly lines up with the human knowledge plot segment, while the punishment sequence covers much of the same ground as the prohibition test plot segment. The announcement sequence corresponds to the first two plot segments, a human tiller to the world and a counterpart for the human. Finally, the rescue sequence may relate to Stordalen’s emerging conflict, “life, but not life and knowledge” (see below). Cf. also the arrangement of Julie Galambush, “□āḏām from □āḏāmā, □iṣṣā from □îṣ: Derivation and Subordination in Genesis 2.4b-3.24,” in *History and Interpretation: Essays in Honor of John H. Hayes* (ed. M. Patrick Graham, William P. Brown, and Jeffrey K. Kuan; JSOTSup 173; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 33-46 (36-37). Her four-part structural arrangement largely follows the plot segments identified by Stordalen.

<sup>25</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 222.

evidence to suggest it is not<sup>26</sup>—then the man’s activity does not yet involve tilling the soil of the earth, only the garden.<sup>27</sup> If this is the case, then only at the end of the end of Gen 3 does the earth receive its tiller, as God sends the man out of Eden “to work the ground from which he was taken” (לעבד את־האדמה אשר לקח מִשָּׁם; 3:23). And yet, the planting of the garden in 2:8-17 foreshadows the cultivation of plants upon the earth: there is a man to till the garden (2:15), and God causes trees to grow (וַיַּצְמַח) in the garden (2:9) where no bush or herb of the field had previously grown on the earth (וְכָל־שִׁיחַ הַשָּׂדֶה טֶרֶם יִהְיֶה בָאָרֶץ וְכָל־עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה טֶרֶם יִצְמַח) (2:5).<sup>28</sup> There is water in the garden as well, since a river flows through Eden (2:10-14). By the end of 2:17, the garden contains vegetation, water, and a man to till the soil, which the earth lacks in 2:5.<sup>29</sup> The first announced plot segment, therefore, accounts for nearly all of the action of the first scene.<sup>30</sup>

In the second announced plot segment, God recognizes the lack of a counterpart for the man and expresses a desire to create one (2:18). God creates all of the animals, forming them from the ground just as he had formed the man (2:19). The man names all of the animals, demonstrating his superiority to them in the created order;<sup>31</sup> in the end, however, a suitable partner is not found (2:20). The partner which God seeks to create,

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<sup>26</sup> God “takes” (לָקַח) and puts him in the garden (2:15); later, the man is sent from the garden to till “the ground from which he was taken” (הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר לָקַח מִשָּׁם; 3:23). Stordalen interprets this to mean that the garden and הָאֲדָמָה are two separate locations (Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 222-23).

<sup>27</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 222-23.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>29</sup> Walsh, “Genesis 2:4b-3:24,” 163.

<sup>30</sup> The final two verses of scene one, 2:16-17, belong more to the “prohibition test” plot segment than the “human tiller to the world” segment.

<sup>31</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 92. Cf. also Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 228. Westermann offers an alternative explanation of the naming of the animals: by giving the animals names, the man gives them a place in his world. This is a minority viewpoint, with the majority of interpreters seeing this as an indication of the man’s superiority.

which is not found among the animals, must be a “companion corresponding to him” (עֶזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ), a phrase which suggests equality and mutuality rather than inferiority; “companion” is therefore a more suitable translation of עֶזֶר than “helper.”<sup>32</sup> Such a companion is found when God creates the woman from a part of the man’s own body; just as the man (אָדָם) was formed from the earth (אֶרֶץ), the woman (אִשָּׁה) was built from part of the man (אִישׁ). Again, the woman’s formation from part of the man demonstrates a deep connection between them, but not necessarily a hierarchical relationship. The man is not subordinate to the ground from which he was formed, suggesting that the woman is likewise not subordinate to the man.

The endeavor to create a counterpart for the man is successful; the man recognizes the woman as a suitable companion, and celebrates her creation in a poetic statement, naming the connection between them and acknowledging her as flesh from his flesh and bone from his bones (2:23).<sup>33</sup> The inadequacy of the animals as partners for the man (2:20) anticipates the arrival of a companion that will be adequate, making their creation in 2:19-20 a foil against which the creation of the woman stands out.<sup>34</sup> The etiological statement about marriage in 2:24 confirms the narrator’s positive attitude toward the creation of the woman and her union with the man; the narrator agrees with

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<sup>32</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 90. Cf. also Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 224-25, and Lyn M. Bechtel, “Genesis 2.4b-3:24: A Myth about Human Maturation,” *JSOT* 67 (1995): 3-26 (15). This is against David J. A. Clines, “What Does Eve Do to Help? And Other Irredeemably Androcentric Orientations in Genesis 1-3,” in *What Does Eve Do to Help? And Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament* (JSOTSup 94; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990), 25-48 (30-37). Clines argues that Gen 2-3 does, in fact, portray the woman as the man’s “helper” and inferior.

<sup>33</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 97-98.

<sup>34</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 225.



God that it is not good for the man to be alone.<sup>35</sup> By the end of the second scene, therefore, the second announced plot segment is resolved: the human has a suitable companion. Furthermore, the existence of animals in the created world has been explained; they were made in an effort to create a counterpart for the man, which the creation of the woman ultimately fulfilled.

The first two plot segments correspond generally with the action contained in the first two scenes; together, they narrate the emergence of the world as a creation of God, complete with plant, animal, and human life.<sup>36</sup> This world is characterized by a hierarchy with humankind at the top; the garden was planted for the man's dwelling and enjoyment, and the animals were created as the man's companions. The subordination of the animals to the man is underscored by the man's naming the animals, a clear indication of superiority. Yet the woman occupies a place equal to that of the man; humankind together occupies the top place within the world's hierarchy, not the man alone.<sup>37</sup> This hierarchy, however, is one of mutual benefit rather than oppression or competition. The man cooperates with God in the creation of the animals, since it is the man who determines their names (2:19-20).<sup>38</sup> And the man is placed in the garden "to till it and to keep it" (לַעבֹדָה וּלְשָׁמְרָה; 2:15), suggesting that his duty involves looking after the garden's vegetation.<sup>39</sup> With the first two plot segments completed, the world exists largely as God intended it; the man God formed dwells in the garden God has planted,

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<sup>35</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 225-26.

<sup>36</sup> Animal, plant, and human life correspond to the four episodes in Tribble's opening scene (2:4b-24): human life begins with the formation of the earth creature (2:7-8) and reaches its completion with the advent of human sexuality (2:21-24). Plant life is created in 2:9-17, while animal life is made in 2:18-20 (Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 79-105).

<sup>37</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 92.

<sup>38</sup> R. W. L. Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right?" *JTS* 39 (1988), 1-27 (17).

<sup>39</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 84.

and the only remaining lack has been supplied with the creation of the woman. The Garden of Eden is a place of harmony and life.<sup>40</sup>

The blissful world does not endure, however; the third and fourth plot segments present complications that undo the harmony of Eden and give rise to life as we know it in the present, full of struggle and overshadowed by death.<sup>41</sup> The third plot segment is identified as a “prohibition test,” which Stordalen regards as a common motif in ancient literature; it is a test of obedience, faithfulness, and trust.<sup>42</sup> The prohibition is declared in 2:16-17 when God commands (וַיֹּצַו) the man, allowing him to eat freely from the trees of the garden and prohibiting only the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The prohibition test plot segment is not confined to a single scene as were the first two plot segments. It is introduced in 2:16-17, includes the failure of the test in 3:1-6, and concludes with God’s judgments in 3:14-19.<sup>43</sup> It thus spans four of the five scenes identified above, although it is not explicitly in view in scene two, where the animals and the woman are created.<sup>44</sup>

As to the fourth plot segment, which Stordalen identifies as “human knowledge,” it begins with the statement of the humans’ lack of shame at their nakedness in 2:25. This lack of shame rouses curiosity within the reader, since shame would accompany

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<sup>40</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 104. Tribble speaks of this in terms of *Eros*, in opposition to *Thanatos* that characterizes her final scene (3:8-24); 2:4b-24 narrates the emergence and development of *Eros* under the direction of God. Stordalen likewise notes the harmony and blissfulness of the world that God creates in 2:5-24, calling it a utopia (Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 247-48).

<sup>41</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 105.

<sup>42</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 226-27. Stordalen cites Stith Thompson’s motif index: Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folk-tales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-books, and Local Legends* (Rev. ed.; Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press 1955-58).

<sup>43</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 226.

<sup>44</sup> Note, however, that the serpent is introduced as one of the animals that God had created (3:1), and that the serpent and the woman are the primary actors and dialogue partners in 3:1-6. Scene two therefore narrates the creation of two central characters for Stordalen’s prohibition test plot segment.

nakedness under normal circumstances.<sup>45</sup> Within the story it indicates human ignorance, which eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil removes. This is demonstrated by the fact that the humans become ashamed after eating from the tree (3:7), hiding themselves from God (3:8-10). When God eventually gives them clothing (3:21), it suggests that the humans have responded appropriately to their newly discovered nakedness; this further confirms that they have received knowledge.<sup>46</sup>

The main action of Stordalen's fourth plot segment occurs in scene three, the central scene of the Eden narrative. At the beginning of the scene the humans do not have the knowledge of good and evil, as indicated by their lack of shame (2:25). By the end they have acquired it: their eyes are opened, and they realize their nakedness (3:7). The effects of this development extend beyond 3:7, as the humans' shame prompts them to hide from God (3:8-10), allows God to realize what they have done (3:11), and leads God to make clothing for them (3:21). Yet the human knowledge plot functions largely within the third plot segment; it illustrates how and why the humans eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which in the third plot segment becomes the crucial act of disobedience on which the story hinges.

For reasons that will become clear below, I think it best to rename Stordalen's third plot segment as "disobedience," which better describes the nature of God's command and the humans' actions than "prohibition test." There is ample reason to regard this plot segment as the main plot of the entire Eden narrative, as it encompasses much of the story's action, spanning four of the five scenes identified above. The divine command figures prominently in the central scene (2:25-3:7), as well as in the following

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<sup>45</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 227-28.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

scene where God pronounces judgment (3:8-19). It is quite common to regard disobedience as the main plot or theme of the Eden story, reading the narrative as one of descent or collapse.<sup>47</sup>

The “disobedience” segment cannot account for everything within the Eden narrative, however; it does not explain why God sends the humans out of Eden in order to prevent their access to the tree of life, for instance. Indeed, none of Stordalen’s announced plot segments account for all of the action of Gen 2-3.<sup>48</sup> He therefore identifies an “emerging conflict” that becomes apparent only at the end of the narrative, but which nevertheless functions as the framework for interpreting the four announced plot segments and thus the entire story. Stordalen names this conflict “life, but not life and knowledge,” and it refers to an opposition between life and knowledge that underlies the story’s movement. They represent two divine prerogatives, one of which God grants to the humans (life) while holding back the other (the knowledge of good and evil). When the man and woman violate the prohibition of 2:17 and take knowledge for themselves, God casts them out of the garden so that they may not have eternal life. Accordingly, humans may have either life or knowledge, but not both.<sup>49</sup> In Stordalen’s view, this opposition between life and the knowledge of good and evil exposes the logic underlying God’s commandment in 2:15-17, as well as the humans’ expulsion from Eden in 3:22-24.

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<sup>47</sup> To cite just a few examples: Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*; Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative*, 21-28; Culley, *Themes and Variations*, 125; Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 193.

<sup>48</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 229.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 229-33.

Stordalen regards this “emerging conflict,” not disobedience and its consequences, as the overarching plot of the Eden narrative.<sup>50</sup> In doing so he goes too far, underemphasizing the significance of the divine command and its transgression to the movement of the story. Nevertheless, this opposition between life and the knowledge of good and evil recognizes an important dimension of the Eden narrative that those who focus on the disobedience plot alone risk overlooking, namely, the crucial aspect of knowledge.<sup>51</sup> It is not simply disobedience that leads to the consequences described in the final two scenes, which include estrangement from God, cursed soil, difficult childbearing, enmity with creation, and broken human relationships (3:8-24). These things are the result of the humans’ acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil. Neither knowledge alone nor disobedience alone results in God’s reaction, and therefore in the conditions of human life for which the Eden narrative offers an explanation. It is the knowledge of good and evil, acquired through disobedience, that leads to death.

The foregoing plot analysis has revealed three important aspects of the Eden narrative that warrant further investigation: the flourishing of life and the emergence of death; the knowledge of good and evil; and disobedience and its consequences. Below, I discuss each of these in turn. As subsequent chapters demonstrate, all three bear upon the intratextual relationship between the Eden narrative and the story of Joseph and his brothers.

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<sup>50</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 232.

<sup>51</sup> Moberly, “Did the Serpent Get It Right,” 4; Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 87, 118-19. Moberly states that the meaning of “knowledge of good and evil” is less important within the narrative than the fact that this tree was prohibited. It is the fact of disobedience, not the acquisition of knowledge, that drives the story. Tribble argues this position more strongly, referring to the forbidden tree as “the tree of divine command” (119).

#### *IV. Life and Death in Eden*

Even a surface reading of Gen 2-3 reveals that life and death occupy a place of importance in this narrative about the creation of the first humans and their eventual expulsion from the Garden of Eden. The story begins with an absence of life, the earth being devoid of rain, humans, plants, and animals (Gen 2:5), and the creation of the human is incomplete until he receives the breath of life (נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים) and becomes a living being (נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה; Gen 2:7). By the middle of the story, the end of the first two scenes and the first two plot segments, the Garden of Eden is occupied by every type of living thing: God creates the human, plants the garden, and finally creates the animals and the woman as the man's counterpart.<sup>52</sup> Even if the fulfillment of life within the garden does not immediately remedy the barrenness of the earth, it nevertheless foreshadows the abundance of life on the earth; what is lacking on הָאָרֶץ is supplied in הַגֶּן.<sup>53</sup> The gradual emergence and flourishing of life is narrated in detail over the course of Gen 2:5-24, culminating in the creation of the woman as a suitable counterpart for the man.<sup>54</sup>

The life that is described in the first two scenes is different from life as we normally experience it. Characterized by harmony and ease, it is utopian in nature.<sup>55</sup> The man may eat freely from any tree in the garden (2:16), all of which are pleasing to look at

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 208. Westermann remarks that the plants of the garden are created for the human's nourishment rather than for their own sake. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the fact that plants, as well as animals and humans, exist by the end of Gen 2. Whatever the purpose behind it, life flourishes.

<sup>53</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 223.

<sup>54</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 104.

<sup>55</sup> Yairah Amit, "Biblical Utopianism: A Mapmaker's Guide to Eden," *USQR* 44 (1990): 11-17; Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 248.

and good for food (2:9). Not only does he enjoy an extraordinary amount of freedom, only one tree being restricted, but the man presumably finds it easy to eat the fruit of these trees; there is no apparent difficulty in getting fruit from the forbidden tree (3:6), and the curse upon the ground in 3:17-19 suggests that difficult labor is a new development in the man's existence. Furthermore, the man and the woman enjoy a relationship of equality and mutuality, since they are one flesh (2:23-24); the woman is not a subordinate helper, but a counterpart whose creation fulfills and completes the man.<sup>56</sup> And although the humans do sit above the plants and animals in the garden's hierarchy, the hierarchy is one of benefit rather than exploitation; the human's superiority to the animals stands alongside his identity with them as creatures of God.<sup>57</sup> The man gives names to the animals in seeming cooperation with God,<sup>58</sup> and his own existence in the garden involves tilling it and keeping it.<sup>59</sup> Finally, the mention of the tree of life in 2:9 raises the possibility of immortality; even if its meaning is ambiguous at the beginning, God's words in 3:22 show that eating from it will result in everlasting life. Though the humans had most likely not yet eaten from this tree, they had access to it.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 90.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>58</sup> Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 17.

<sup>59</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 84-85; Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 220-22. Westermann argues that work (i.e., tilling and keeping the garden) is foundational aspect of proper human existence.

<sup>60</sup> Contrary to much traditional exegesis, in which the humans were immortal before being expelled from the garden, biblical scholarship tends to hold that the humans had not yet eaten from the tree of life when God sent them out. This is the most straightforward way to understand the meaning of God's words in 3:22: the formulation *פְּנֵי־שָׁלָה יָדוּ וְלֶקַח גַּם מִעֵץ הַחַיִּים וְאָכַל וְחַי לְעֹלָם* most likely expresses a fear or concern over something that has not yet occurred. So Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 14-15; Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative*, 20; James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality: The Read-Tuckwell Lectures for 1990* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 58. This argument goes back to Paul Humbert, *Études sur le récit du paradis et de la chute dans la Gènes* (Mémoires de l'Université de Neuchâtel 14; Neuchâtel: Secrétariat de l'Université, 1940), 131-33. For a contrary view, cf. Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 230-231. Stordalen argues that one must understand God to mean "lest he keep stretching out his hand..." implying that God fears the human continuing to eat from the tree of life after he has eaten from the tree of knowledge.

Contrary to present human life, therefore, the life described in Eden could potentially have endured indefinitely.

Though the emergence of life dominates the first two scenes of the Eden narrative, death quickly arrives on the stage as an opposing force. The potential for death is present already in Gen 2:17, as God identifies it as the prescribed punishment for eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.<sup>61</sup> In spite of the serpent's contradiction of God's warning—the serpent convinces the woman that “you will not surely die” (לֹא-מוֹת תָּמֹתוּ; Gen 3:4)—potential becomes reality after the humans eat from the tree of knowledge. The humans do not die immediately, so the serpent is proven right on the surface.<sup>62</sup> However, death is first mentioned as a reality for the human in 3:19 when God pronounces the words of judgment on the man; because the earth is cursed, the man will toil over it all his life and finally return to the dust, since he was taken from it. The reference to death cannot be missed; though the root (מֹוֹת) is not used, the notion of returning to the dust (עָפָר) in 3:19 evokes the human's creation from the dust (עָפָר) in 2:7. The process by which the human was made is reversed, and his end corresponds to his beginning.<sup>63</sup> Death enters the human world as a reality at this point, or they become aware of it for the first time.<sup>64</sup> Either way, over the course of Gen

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. Galambush, “Derivation and Subordination,” 37.

<sup>62</sup> Moberly, “Did the Serpent Get It Right,” 9. Moberly sees the apparent truth of the serpent's statement, along with the apparent falsehood of God's statement that the human would die when they ate from the forbidden tree, as the key interpretative issue of the whole Eden narrative.

<sup>63</sup> Galambush, “Derivation and Subordination,” 41-42.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Lyn M. Bechtel, “Rethinking the Interpretation of Genesis 2.4b-3.24,” in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis* (ed. Athalya Brenner; The Feminist Companion to the Bible 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 77-117 (88-90). Bechtel argues that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil does not bring about death, but only the awareness of death, as part of the growing awareness that the humans attain as they mature over the course of the Eden narrative.



3 death emerges in opposition to life as the basis of reality for the humans.<sup>65</sup> Life does continue—the man gives the woman the name Eve, “the mother of all the living,” highlighting the continuity of human life through parenthood—but it is life tempered by death. The story ends with God denying the humans access to the tree of life (Gen 3:22-24), preventing their lives from extending forever. Death, not life, has the final word in Gen 2-3.

The notion that death is a central concern of the Eden narrative has long been recognized by interpreters. Phyllis Tribble, for example, sees the story in terms of the emergence of life (*Eros*) and death (*Thanatos*) in opposition to one another, with death prevailing in the end as a result of human disobedience.<sup>66</sup> James Barr comes to a quite different conclusion than Tribble about the subject matter of the Eden narrative, arguing that it tells the story of how humankind almost gained immortality, but ultimately lost that chance. Death nevertheless remains a key feature of Gen 2-3 in Barr’s interpretation, as the central thrust of the entire story is about the thwarted, though nearly successful, possibility of eluding death; its continued presence in the human world is therefore affirmed.<sup>67</sup>

Moberly likewise regards death as a central issue in the Eden narrative, albeit in a different manner than in the interpretations of Tribble or Barr. The key issue for him is the apparent truthfulness of the serpent when he contradicts God’s claim that the humans would die upon eating from the tree of knowledge. The humans do not die; Moberly

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<sup>65</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 115.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 73-74. In understanding life as “*Eros*,” Tribble draws upon the work of several authors, including Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1961); Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955); and Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1959). Cf. Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 139 n. 2. She understands life/*Eros* to mean “unity, fulfillment, harmony, and delight” (74).

<sup>67</sup> Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality*, 4.

wonders, therefore, “did the serpent get it right?”<sup>68</sup> The story’s overall significance lies in its implicit claim that the humans do, in fact, die; they die a metaphorical death insofar as their existence takes on a death-like quality.<sup>69</sup>

Stordalen understands the opposition between life and death in terms of a conflict between life and knowledge. Life and knowledge, in this view, are two divine attributes that God jealously guards. God grants the humans access to one of these, life, and reserves the other for himself. When the humans take knowledge, however, God is forced to prevent them from obtaining life so that the boundary between the divine and human realms may be maintained.<sup>70</sup> Stordalen’s interpretation is discussed in greater detail below; at the moment, it suffices simply to point out how life and death are key issues in his interpretation. There is a fundamental opposition between life and knowledge; because the humans chose the latter, they are denied the former, and death becomes a reality for the humans.

The interplay between these two fundamental opposed forces, with life emerging only to give way to death, is far from a secondary feature of Gen 2-3; it stands at the very center of the Eden narrative. Quite different scholarly approaches and conclusions all recognize life and death as a significant aspect of the story. There is a discernible purpose underlying the Eden story’s treatment of life and death. The narrative is overtly etiological, serving as an explanation for the why our world is the way it is. The story tells the reader why death is a part of our world—why our lives are filled with hardship, struggle, and ruptured relationships. Gunkel regarded the curses found in 3:14-19 as the climax of the Eden narrative, the purpose and goal behind the whole story. These

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<sup>68</sup> Moberly, “Did the Serpent Get It Right,” 9.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>70</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 229-33.

describe the world as it exists now, with its enmity between humans and snakes, difficulty in childbearing and in human relationships, and hardship in gaining food from the earth. In leading up to these, the Eden story portrays them as the result of the humans' disobedience and their acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil; the narrative is an etiology for present human life.<sup>71</sup>

### ***V. Disobedience and Its Consequences***

The motif of disobedience plays a critical role in the Eden narrative. It is no coincidence that many interpreters regard it as the overarching plot or central theme of the story. The theme of disobedience closely follows Stordalen's third announced plot segment, which he understands as a "prohibition test."<sup>72</sup> He is largely alone in regarding this plot segment as a "test," though he has been followed by Tryggve Mettinger, who draws heavily on Stordalen's analysis.<sup>73</sup> Stordalen seems to see the prohibition as a test in order to identify the plot segment with a narrative device found in other ancient Near Eastern works; he presents the test of a hero as "a typical way of introducing narrative tension in traditional literature."<sup>74</sup> Mettinger further develops this aspect of Stordalen's work, citing a number of biblical examples of individuals being tested<sup>75</sup> and regarding the "test" as a Deuteronomistic element that is present within Gen 2-3.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Gunkel, *Genesis*, 20.

<sup>72</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 226-27.

<sup>73</sup> Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative*, 23, 52-55.

<sup>74</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 226.

<sup>75</sup> Gen 22:1; 2 Chr. 32:31; Ps. 26:2; Job. 1:8-9.

<sup>76</sup> Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative*, 52-58.

Understanding God's command in 2:16-17 as a test is puzzling; nowhere in Gen 2-3 does the Hebrew word for test (נִסָּה) appear.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, the humans are unaware that they are being tested; they are simply presented with a command and expected to obey it. Mettinger cites both Gen 22 and Job 1:8-9 as other instances in which God tests humans without their knowledge; however, both of these narratives make clear to the reader that a test is taking place.<sup>78</sup> The reader receives no such statement in the Eden narrative. It is also unclear what Mettinger's interpretation gains by such a heavy emphasis on the notion of "test." His reading centers on the humans' disobedience and the effects of it, and he states the narrative's overall theme in terms of disobedience and its consequences.<sup>79</sup> Regarding the disobedience as the failure of a test adds nothing significant to the interpretation.

Stordalen's understanding of this plot segment as a "test" strengthens his identification of it, since it allows him to find parallels with other "traditional literature."<sup>80</sup> This is unnecessary, however; the plot segment may be identified on the basis of textual evidence alone. God's command governs much of the narrative from the time it is issued (2:16-17) until the judgments are completed (3:19). The woman and the serpent discuss the command in 3:1-5, and God explicitly mentions the command when he questions the man (3:11) and when he pronounces judgment (3:17). Furthermore, this entire plot segment centers on eating: the man is commanded about what he can and cannot eat, and his act of disobedience is described by the terse statement "and he ate"

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<sup>77</sup> Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative*, 23.

<sup>78</sup> Genesis 22:1 explicitly states that God is testing Abraham, while in Job. 1:6-12 the reader is made privy to the conversation between God and Satan where the test is arranged.

<sup>79</sup> Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative*, 57.

<sup>80</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 226.

(וַיֹּאכַל; 3:6). Moreover, God punishes both the serpent and the man with respect to the food that they eat (3:14, 17-19). The verb “to eat” (אָכַל) occurs 21 times in the Eden narrative, and each occurrence bears directly on the prohibition test plot segment.<sup>81</sup>

Rather than seeing this plot segment as a “test,” it is preferable to read God’s command in 2:16-17 as just that, a command that the human is expected to obey. The significance of divine commands elsewhere in the Pentateuch and the Hebrew Bible as a whole determines how the command in 2:16-17 should be understood. Commandments from God characterize the general picture of ancient Hebrew life as portrayed in the Hebrew Bible, in which one is given freedom, responsibility, and limitation, all defined by the Torah, with explicitly stated commands and consequences for transgressing the boundaries that they establish. All three of these, freedom, responsibility, and limitation, characterize the human’s life in Eden as outlined in Gen 2:15-17: the man must “till and keep” the garden—responsibility—and he may eat from any tree within it—freedom—with the exception of one—limitation. If one understands the prohibition in 2:16-17 in this way, then the Eden narrative sketches a universal picture of humanity that corresponds with the particular self-understanding of the ancient Israelite. Just as the Israelite’s life is defined by commands in the Torah, so the first humans’ lives in Eden

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<sup>81</sup> Additionally, the noun form מֵאֲכָל occurs twice, in 2:9 and 3:6, and both verses are related to Stordalen’s “prohibition test” plot segment. The woman and man both eat in 3:6, disobeying God’s command. Verse 2:9 is not directly related to the command itself, but it does name the crucial tree of the knowledge of good and evil along with every other tree in the garden that is “pleasant of appearance and good for food” (נֶחֱמֵד לְמִרְאָה וְטוֹב לְמַאֲכָל). Cf. Stratton, *Out of Eden*, 166. Stratton sees 23 occurrences of אָכַל, presumably including the noun form in her count. Cf. also Patrick D. Miller, *Genesis 1-11: Studies in Structure and Theme* (JSOTSup 8; Sheffield: JSOT, 1978), 28-30. Miller argues that the emphasis on eating highlights a correspondence between wrong and punishment. Since the violation involved eating, the judgment likewise involves eating.

were defined by God's command narrated in 2:16-17.<sup>82</sup> The command does not initiate a test, which implies curiosity on the part of God as to whether or not the human will pass. Instead, the command defines a limitation, a boundary or regulation defining the human's role in the world that God has created. Instead of "prohibition test," this plot segment should rather be identified as "disobedience."

There is ample reason for regarding disobedience and its consequences as the main plot of the entire Eden narrative. Between God's initial command in 2:16-17 and the punishment for eating from the tree of knowledge in 3:14-19, the disobedience plot segment stretches across the first four scenes of the story, encompassing much of the narrative's action.<sup>83</sup> The story's first scene builds up to the command that God issues to the human in 2:16-17, as the creation of the human and the garden culminates with God's established boundaries for the human as he lives there. The central scene, on which the story hinges,<sup>84</sup> begins with a discussion about the veracity of God's command, and culminates with the action that violates the command: "and he ate" (וַיֹּאכַל; 3:6). The punishments of 3:14-19 are a response to the humans' disobedience and the serpent's participation within it. Even scene two, which has no direct bearing on the disobedience plot segment, is involved in it. The woman and the serpent, one of the animals that God created (3:1), were both made in scene two; the second scene, therefore, narrates the creation of the characters that will figure prominently in scene three, where the man is a decidedly passive character.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 4-5.

<sup>83</sup> Amit, "Biblical Utopianism," 11-17.

<sup>84</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 105-107; Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative*, 16-17.

<sup>85</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 108.

The interaction between God and the man in 3:8-19 strongly emphasizes the human's disobedience. The man and woman become aware of their nakedness (3:7), then they both hide from God whom they hear in the garden (3:8). The recognition of their nakedness provides evidence that they have eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, as God immediately infers that they have done so when the man mentions his nakedness (3:11). God is not chiefly concerned with the fact that the man is naked, or that the man is aware of his nakedness, or that he has now acquired the knowledge of good and evil. In addressing the man, God does not ask, "have you eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Instead, God inquires, "have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?" (3:11). Similarly, when God pronounces judgment on the man, it is not because he has acquired knowledge or eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but "because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten from the tree which I commanded you, saying, 'you shall not eat from it'" (3:17). Knowledge of good and evil are not mentioned at all in the inquiry (3:8-13) or in the curses (3:14-19), and nakedness is only mentioned insofar as it provides evidence that the humans have disobeyed (3:10-11). The transgression of God's command drives the entire action of the story from its introduction in 2:16-17 through the conclusion of the punishments in 3:19.

Recognition of the centrality of disobedience has led Mettinger to identify disobedience and its consequences as the main theme of the Eden narrative.<sup>86</sup> The introduction of the prohibition creates suspense, built around the question of "to eat or not to eat," which equates to "to obey the divine commandment or not to obey."<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative*, 49-57.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

Mettinger even goes so far as to summarize this theme in a single statement, which he argues lies behind the Eden narrative as its main thesis: “Obedience to the commandment leads to life, disobedience to death. All evil—death and the human condition at large—is seen as being due to this ultimate sin, disobedience against the divine commandment.”<sup>88</sup> As argued above, such a characterization of the Eden narrative’s theme holds true even without identifying the main plot segment as a “test.”

Trible likewise regards disobedience as the main crux of the narrative. In the central scene, the story’s turning point, human, animal, and plant life all participate in disobedience; this leads to the unraveling and dissolution of *Eros* and gives rise to the ruptured relationships that characterize the present world.<sup>89</sup> For Tribble, the importance of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil lies in God’s commandment concerning it, especially whether or not the humans will obey. We might well regard it less as the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” and more as the “tree of divine command.”<sup>90</sup>

Tribble’s interpretation highlights the role of disobedience and its consequences particularly well; in her view, the disobedience recounted in 2:25-3:7 is the decisive event that leads to the unraveling of *Eros*/Life and brings about the opposing force of *Thanatos*/Death. Tribble’s view of the Eden narrative’s structure (see above) highlights the significance of disobedience, which lies at the heart of the entire story and serves as the narrative’s turning point.<sup>91</sup> Her understanding of Gen 2:25-3:7 as the narrative’s hinge stems from the change that occurs between scenes one and three, and how things go awry by the end of the story. This change is expressed most clearly in God’s words to

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<sup>88</sup> Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative*, 57.

<sup>89</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 75.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 119. Cf. also Moberly, “Did the Serpent Get It Right,” 4.

<sup>91</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 105.



the serpent, woman, and man in 3:14-19. These curses or judgments are not punishments, designed to prescribe how the world must be; rather, they are consequences—evidence of the disintegration of life that has resulted from the couple's decision to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.<sup>92</sup>

Trible devotes to the disobedience scene roughly one-third the space that she uses to discuss each of the other two scenes. At the same time, she shows how the disobedience lies at the center, the cause of the change between scenes one and three that occupies the majority of her essay.<sup>93</sup> God decides both life and death, but the decision for the latter is a reaction to the disobedience in which the whole created world of life participates: “separating these two movements dominated by God is the participation of the plant, animal, and human worlds in disobedience. The plant world supplies the symbol of disobedience; the animal world provides the temptation; and the human world disobeys.”<sup>94</sup> For Trible, the disobedience of the first humans to God's command is the decisive, tragic event that leads to the disruption of the harmony and unity that characterized the initial divine movement of life. Disobedience leads to death.

Moberly likewise argues that disobedience of God's command in Eden leads to death, but he takes a different approach than does Trible. Moberly notes the discrepancy between God's predicted consequence for eating from the tree of knowledge—“when you eat from it, you shall surely die” (ביום אכלך ממנו מות תמות)—and the actual result, which is not death for the humans, but the acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil (3:22). It is true that the humans eventually do die, since they are sent out of

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<sup>92</sup> Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 123.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 105-115.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

Eden and denied access to the tree of life (3:22-24). However, Moberly rejects this as the fulfillment of God's threat of death in 2:17, saying that the expectation would have been immediate death upon eating from the forbidden tree.<sup>95</sup> In disobeying God, the humans come to know good and evil and do not die right away. This is what the serpent had predicted for the humans (3:4-5), such that the serpent appears to be right and God wrong about the effects of eating from the forbidden tree.<sup>96</sup> In Moberly's view, this seeming failure of God's word is the interpretative issue that lies at the heart of the Eden narrative. The story's meaning lies in its response to the question, "did the serpent get it right?"<sup>97</sup>

For Moberly, the answer is a firm, though nuanced, "no." Based on evidence from the rest of the Hebrew Bible, he concludes that the serpent would have been regarded by contemporary readers of the Eden narrative as a creature who was hostile toward humankind; the biblical reader, therefore, is not predisposed to trust the serpent, whatever connotations it might have in ancient Near Eastern literature.<sup>98</sup> By contrast, the reader would certainly have been predisposed to trust God, whose word is proven faithful time and again throughout the Hebrew Bible.<sup>99</sup> The words and commandments of God are never proven false; the only way in which the prediction of death for the human can be averted, therefore, is if God changes his mind. Examining instances where God does change his mind in the Hebrew Bible, Moberly concludes that the Eden narrative is not such an instance. The reader of the Eden narrative, therefore, concludes that God was

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<sup>95</sup> Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 4, 14-15.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 17.

<sup>97</sup> Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 9.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 13. Cf. also Gunkel, *Genesis*, 15-16.

<sup>99</sup> Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 9-13.

right. The humans in Eden do, in fact, die; the only question is how their death comes about.<sup>100</sup>

Since Moberly does not see the expulsion from Eden (3:22-24) as the execution of the humans' death sentence,<sup>101</sup> the answer for him lies in the ruptured relationship between the humans and God, and in the fractures that exist within all of humans' relationships after their disobedience. The alienation from God results in an existence that is not life—not as the Eden narrative portrays it in its fullness. The effects of disobedience—estrangement between the humans and God, hierarchy in which the man rules over the woman, enmity between the humans and the serpent, and difficulty in the basic activities of life—together become the death that the humans experience.<sup>102</sup> What seems beneficial for the humans, knowing good and evil, actually turns out to be harmful, insofar as it leads to the consequences recounted in 3:14-19. In answering the question this way, the Eden narrative responds to life's injustices—to the fact that often, disobedience and disregard for God's commandments lead to prosperity and ease of life. The Eden narrative portrays that these things only seem to be true on the surface; in reality, these things which seem like life are death.

As these interpretations show, the Eden narrative broadly tells the story of how disobedience to God leads to death. The story revolves around the command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the central scene narrates how this command is disobeyed. Finally, God's inquiry in 3:8-13 and judgments in 3:14-19 respond to the fact of disobedience rather than to the humans' acquisition of knowledge.

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<sup>100</sup> Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 13-14.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 16-19.

For the majority of the Eden narrative, the disobedience plot is dominant; disobedience leads to death.

## ***VI. The Knowledge of Good and Evil***

Despite its prominence within the Eden narrative, the disobedience motif does not totally govern the story. An investigation that solely focuses on the disobedience theme cannot account for parts of the final scene (3:20-24). This is particularly true when we examine God's reason for sending the humans out of Eden. They are sent away not because they have disobeyed, but in order to prevent them from eating from the tree of life and living forever after they know good and evil (3:22). Furthermore, the disobedience theme leaves unanswered the question of the rationale behind God's command in 2:15-17. Out of all the trees in the garden, why is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil forbidden? If the tree's significance lies solely in the fact that God commanded the humans not to eat from it, any other tree would serve this purpose just as well. Why are the humans permitted to eat from the tree of life, but not from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? A reading that overemphasizes the centrality of disobedience risks seeing God's choice of the forbidden tree as arbitrary. Finally, the desire for knowing good and evil serves as the motivation by which the serpent persuades the woman to eat and disobey (3:5-6). One cannot, therefore, reduce the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to the "tree of divine command" as Tribble suggests.<sup>103</sup> Within the narrative, it matters that the knowledge of good and evil, rather than something else, was forbidden for the first humans. This knowledge must be upheld as a

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<sup>103</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 119.

key aspect of the Eden narrative alongside the theme of disobedience and its consequences.

There are several possible explanations for the exact nature of the knowledge that the humans acquire in Eden. One viewpoint sees it as a supernatural or godlike knowledge, regarding the phrase “good and evil” as a merism that indicates knowledge of everything.<sup>104</sup> Others see the knowledge of good and evil in terms of sexuality; such interpreters typically focus on the humans’ nakedness and the presence of sexual symbolism throughout the narrative.<sup>105</sup> There are also those who see the knowledge of good and evil to speak of ethical knowledge, so that it represents a desire for moral autonomy.<sup>106</sup> A number of other interpreters have argued that we should understand the knowledge bestowed by the tree simply as normal human knowledge, which allows humans to live in the world and in society. This viewpoint emerges from considerations about Gen 2-3 and the role of knowledge in the Hebrew Bible and in other ancient Near Eastern mythological literature.<sup>107</sup>

Knowledge in general is a good and desirable thing elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. And even within the text of Gen 2-3, the humans are not completely without knowledge before they eat from the forbidden tree; the woman is able to evaluate the tree in terms of its beauty and desirability,<sup>108</sup> and the man is able to name the animals and

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<sup>104</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 81.

<sup>105</sup> Ronald A. Veenker, “Forbidden Fruit: Ancient Near Eastern Sexual Metaphors,” *HUCA* 70 (1999): 57-73; Jacob Milgrom, “Sex and Wisdom: What the Garden of Eden Story is Saying,” *BR* 10.6 (1994): 21, 51.

<sup>106</sup> Moberly, “Did the Serpent Get It Right,” 24; von Rad, *Genesis*, 89. Von Rad sees it as autonomy in general, arguing that “knowledge of good and evil” refers to a knowledge of everything, not just moral knowledge.

<sup>107</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 242.

<sup>108</sup> Stratton, *Out of Eden*, 46. This, of course, assumes that the woman evaluates the tree correctly. It may be the case, however, that the woman’s lack of knowledge (or incomplete knowledge) leads her to evaluate the tree incorrectly, i.e., to see the forbidden fruit as good to eat when it actually was not.

recognize the woman as a suitable partner (2:19-20, 23).<sup>109</sup> This suggests that the man and woman were created by God with some degree of knowledge, which in turn implies a positive view of knowledge in the Eden narrative, at least so long as it is limited. It is only the knowledge *of good and evil* that is prohibited—it becomes problematic when the human desire for knowledge transgresses the boundaries established by God.<sup>110</sup>

The key issue, therefore, is to determine what is meant by the term “the knowledge of good and evil” (הדעת טוב ורע). There are similar expressions elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. In 2 Sam. 19:36 (19:35 Eng.), Barzillai laments the fact that he no longer has the ability to discern between good and evil, a fact that underscores the loss of his youthful vigor. Isaiah refers to the time when a child will know to refuse the evil and choose the good (מֵאֵס בְּרָע וּבָחַר בְּטוֹב; Isa. 7:15-16), and Deuteronomy mentions children who do not know good from evil (לֹא־יָדְעוּ הַיּוֹם טוֹב וָרָע; Deut. 1:39). There is nothing about these examples to suggest a sort of knowledge that is illicit or forbidden to normal humans. Rather, they suggest that “knowledge of good and evil” can refer to adult human knowledge or awareness, which young children do not yet have and which the elderly have lost.<sup>111</sup> This possibility is supported by the association between the knowledge of good and evil and the humans’ nakedness. Prior to eating from the tree, the man and the woman are naked and unashamed (Gen 2:25); after they eat from it, they are ashamed and attempt to cover themselves. As Gunkel argues, nakedness without shame characterizes the behavior of children, while shame at one’s

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<sup>109</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 236.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 246-47.

<sup>111</sup> Moberly, “Did the Serpent Get It Right,” 22.

nakedness is a sign of adulthood. The humans' change in this regard therefore represents arrival at sexual maturity.<sup>112</sup>

An important line of thought draws upon these observations to see the Eden narrative as a story primarily about human maturation. This viewpoint is exemplified in the interpretation given by Lyn Bechtel.<sup>113</sup> Bechtel draws the same conclusion as Gunkel about the meaning of the humans' nakedness and its relationship with the knowledge of good and evil. Yet she goes beyond Gunkel in recognizing a distinctly social dimension to the emergence of shame, which Bechtel sees as a key element of socialization among the ancient Israelites.<sup>114</sup> For Bechtel, the acquisition of knowledge from the forbidden tree is not an isolated aspect of human growth.<sup>115</sup> Rather, it is one of several stages of human development that she discerns in the Eden narrative, arguing that the maturation motif is built into the very structure of Gen 2-3.<sup>116</sup> Bechtel also points to a number of symbols throughout the Eden narrative that suggest the general theme of growth and maturation, including the snake, the garden, the water in the garden, and the two trees of life and knowledge.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, her recognition of a distinctly cultural aspect to the knowledge of good and evil resonates with evidence from other ancient literature, where the emergence of human culture is expressed in similar terms. Most notable is the case of Enkidu in the Epic of Gilgamesh, in which the wild, animalistic man becomes wise after having intercourse with a prostitute. This begins his transition from the animal world

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<sup>112</sup> Gunkel, *Genesis*, 14-15.

<sup>113</sup> Lyn M. Bechtel, "Rethinking the Interpretation," 77-117; idem, "A Myth about Human Maturation," 3-26.

<sup>114</sup> Bechtel, "Rethinking the Interpretation," 84; idem, "A Myth about Human Maturation," 5-7. This goes against the negative evaluation of the first humans' shame held by von Rad, *Genesis*, 91.

<sup>115</sup> I.e., it cannot be equated with merely sexual knowledge, as argued by Veenker, "Forbidden Fruit" and Milgrom, "Sex and Wisdom."

<sup>116</sup> Bechtel, "Myth about Human Maturation," 7-8.

<sup>117</sup> Bechtel, "Rethinking the Interpretation," 86-95.

into the human world, completed when he becomes clothed and enters full human society.<sup>118</sup> Bechtel's work suggests that the "knowledge of good and evil" should be understood to mean the full range of human knowledge; not merely moral, or sexual, or practical, or any other partial knowledge, but the totality of what humans may know.<sup>119</sup>

In such a view, however, it is difficult to account for why God seems jealously to guard the knowledge of good and evil, first forbidding the humans to eat from it and then sending them out of Eden once they have done so. If knowledge is a good and desirable thing, how is it that acquiring it in Eden leads to the dire consequences described in 3:14-24? According to Bechtel, the Eden narrative actually presents the act of eating and the resulting consequences in a positive light. She interprets the experience of the first humans at this point as a rite of passage, a symbolic death of their immature selves and awakening into a more mature phase of life. From this symbolic perspective, God's warning that they would die when they ate from the tree of knowledge was true. The snake, then, becomes not a tempter or seducer, enticing the humans to disobey God; rather, the snake is simply one who knows about the world, who has mature knowledge about the binary oppositions of life and imparts these to the humans.<sup>120</sup> And the act of eating from the tree is not a sin or rebellion that alienates the humans from God; they are actually brought closer to God by their increased knowledge about the world.<sup>121</sup> The curses in 3:14-19 are not punishments for disobedience, nor are they even a change in the

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<sup>118</sup> E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 1; Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), 26-27. Cf. also Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 22-23.

<sup>119</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 247.

<sup>120</sup> Bechtel, "Myth about Human Maturation," 19-20. Bechtel sees the serpent as an ambivalent, but essentially positive, symbol of wisdom and the oppositions of life (Bechtel, "Rethinking the Interpretation," 90-92). Moberly, however, argues that the serpent would have been seen as hostile to humankind for a reader of the Old Testament, citing a number of biblical examples outside of Genesis. These examples include Isa 14:29; 27:1; Exod. 4:3; Jer. 8:17; Amos 9:3 (Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 13).

<sup>121</sup> Bechtel, "Myth about Human Maturation," 20.



conditions of the humans' lives. They are, instead, a change in perception, brought about by the humans' newfound mature knowledge of the good and the bad, the potential and the limitation, of human life.<sup>122</sup> Finally, Bechtel concludes that the prohibition itself—in which God commands the human not to eat from the tree of knowledge—is a provisional command, analogous to a parent forbidding a child from crossing the street. It is bad, dangerous even, for the immature human to overstep his boundaries before he is ready. Yet there comes a time when such commands are no longer binding, when the child reaches the stage of being a mature adult.<sup>123</sup>

At this point, Bechtel's interpretation falls short. Her assertion that acquiring knowledge brings the humans closer to God is difficult to reconcile with the fact that the humans are sent away from Eden, where they had been close to God, or with the fact that God and the humans appear fearful of one another (Gen 3:8-10, 22). Furthermore, the argument that God's command (2:16-17) is provisional goes against the grain of much of the Hebrew Bible, where God's commands are given the utmost importance and meant to be followed absolutely. It is inadequate to see the situation narrated in 3:8-24 in such a thoroughly positive light. At best, the end of the Eden narrative is bittersweet, upholding the benefit of mature human knowledge but recognizing that it comes at a heavy price. Gunkel, who similarly views the knowledge of good and evil in terms of human maturation, nevertheless evaluates the humans' actions negatively. He regards the Eden narrative as a tragic story that laments the unhappy lot of humanity in the world, struggling to eat, survive, and procreate. The narrative does not address why God kept the knowledge of good and evil from humans, so that their acquisition of it was a

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<sup>122</sup> Bechtel, "A Myth about Human Maturation," 21-25.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

violation of God's command. It is simply a presumed fact of the narrative, yet it is consistent with much of the Hebrew Bible's view of God, in which God stands alone above all created things.<sup>124</sup>

The interpretations of Gunkel and Bechtel illustrate the difficulty of reconciling this interpretation of the knowledge of good and evil—i.e., that it envisions human maturation—with the story's emphasis on divine prohibition and the humans' disobedience of it. This suggests that the knowledge of good and evil means something different in Gen 2-3 than it does in the biblical passages mentioned above. A review of other biblical passages that discuss the knowledge or discernment of good and evil shows that it does not have a uniform meaning. The wise woman of Tekoa, for instance, says to king David that “my lord the king is like the angel of God, discerning good and evil” (כמלאך האלהים כן אדני המלך לשמע הטוב והרע; 2 Sam 14:17). Her words describe the king's ability to issue wise judgments, comparing his wisdom to that of God's very messenger. Subsequently, she makes a similar statement about David's wisdom “to know all things that are on the earth” (לדעת את-כל-אשר בארץ), again comparing the king to the angel of God (2 Sam 14:20). Solomon likewise mentions an ability to discern good from evil, again in the context of royal judgment. He asks God to grant him an understanding mind, to better judge God's people and “to discern between good and evil” (להבין בין-טוב לרע; 1 Kgs 3:9). These instances show that knowledge of good and evil can refer to profound, judicial, or even divine wisdom. Furthermore, while the ability to know good from evil in Deut 1:39 emphasizes adult as opposed to childlike knowledge, the context there suggests that it has a moral dimension

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<sup>124</sup> Gunkel, *Genesis*, 31-32.

as well.<sup>125</sup> This means that one cannot determine the precise meaning of the knowledge of good and evil in the Eden narrative solely on the basis of its usage elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Instead, the context and the manner of its usage in the Eden narrative must play the decisive role.

As Moberly has demonstrated, the context favors moral autonomy as the proper interpretation for the knowledge of good and evil in the Eden narrative. This explains why such knowledge is prohibited for humans: God has placed them in a relationship of dependence on their creator. It is God's prerogative to determine what is right and what is wrong; by obtaining such knowledge, the humans overstep their limitations and assume this ability for themselves rather than relying on God through obedience.<sup>126</sup> It also coheres with the serpent's words—echoed by God—that this knowledge will make the humans "like God" (Gen 3:5, 22). Acquiring this knowledge will allow them to take on for themselves the divine role of determining right from wrong. Moreover, it explains the intimate connection between the knowledge of good and evil and the question of obedience or disobedience. The knowledge of good and evil is central to the story because of God's command concerning it (Gen 2:16-17). The command, in turn, directly concerns the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Seen as moral autonomy, the knowledge of good and evil and the disobedience of God's command become one and the same. By disobeying the command, the humans judge for themselves what is right—eating from the forbidden tree—rather than relying on God for this determination—obeying God's command. The act of eating—disobedience—and the effect of eating—the knowledge of good and evil—are identical: both constitute the humans' assumption

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<sup>125</sup> Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 22.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24.

for themselves of the ability to determine right from wrong, overstepping their creaturely limitations and seeking equality with God.

This understanding does not totally preclude associating the knowledge of the Eden narrative with human maturation—the mention of nakedness suggests that it is appropriate to some degree. Moberly recognizes as much, raising the possibility that an earlier Eden myth did envision human maturation, but this myth has been reworked to reflect a distinctively Israelite understanding.<sup>127</sup> It does, however, mean that understanding the knowledge of good and evil in terms of moral autonomy makes better sense of the narrative as it presently stands, in which it is intimately linked with the divine command and the humans' disobedience of it. The punishments described in Gen 3:14-19 are due to the humans' violation of God's command (3:11, 17). The knowledge of good and evil plays a significant role in both the content of the command—it is this tree, not another, that is forbidden—and the act of disobedience—the woman eats because she desires knowledge (3:6), and the acquisition of knowledge proves that the humans have disobeyed (3:7, 11). If one interprets the knowledge of good and evil to mean moral autonomy, this close relationship between it and the divine command is preserved. Taken together, these describe the limitation set on the humans' existence in the garden. The humans' disobedience, which grants them the knowledge of good and evil, is a transgression of this limit. Their attempt to be like God and independent from God leads both to the curses of Gen 3:14-19 and the expulsion from Eden in 3:22-24. The knowledge of good and evil leads to death.

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<sup>127</sup> Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 23.

## *VII. The Consequences*

The final two scenes of the Eden narrative portray the consequences of the humans' disobedience and acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil. What starts as the creation of a perfectly good world—initially characterized by unity, harmony, and mutuality—takes a disastrous turn, with the good created order giving way to a world full of struggle and dominance.<sup>128</sup> This is portrayed chiefly in the curses that God pronounces in 3:14-19, though it is felt also in 3:8-13 and 3:20-24; the curses correspond both to the intended created existence of the man, woman, and serpent and to the offense of disobedience that takes place in 2:25-3:7.<sup>129</sup> The loss of life described in 3:8-24 is best understood as the breakdown of relationships; the Eden narrative portrays the fracturing of every relationship in which the human is involved. Life in the human world after Eden is characterized by enmity between the humans and the animals, hierarchy between the man and the woman, non-cooperation between the man and the soil, and alienation between the man and God.

The curse that God pronounces upon the serpent contains an etiology for why snakes crawl upon the ground, explaining their strange mode of locomotion as a punishment for tricking the woman (3:14).<sup>130</sup> Yet it also states that the serpent will forever be at odds with humankind, and vice-versa. The prediction that enmity will not only be between the woman and the serpent, but also between her offspring and its offspring, highlights the perpetuity of the conflict between serpents and humans; their

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<sup>128</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 115.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Galambush, "Derivation and Subordination," 40-41; Stratton, *Out of Eden*, 166. This is against Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 256-57. Westermann states that the punishments of 3:14-19 have little correspondence with the offense and therefore concludes that the original story had the expulsion from Eden (3:22-24) as the sole punishment.

<sup>130</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 92; Gunkel, *Genesis*, 20.

relationship will henceforward be one of mutual opposition.<sup>131</sup> Such opposition, however, is not limited to the relationship between humans and serpents; it signals the end of harmony between the humans and animal world as a whole. The serpent is introduced as one of the animals that God had created; it is only set apart from the other animals by its cleverness (3:1).<sup>132</sup> In the proper order of things, the humans rule over the animals, since the man's privilege of naming the animals points to their subordination to him.<sup>133</sup> But the serpent broke this hierarchy by deceiving the woman and causing both her and the man to disobey God's command. Rather than helping the man in his task of tilling and keeping the garden, the serpent became an agent of disobedience, making the whole animal world complicit in the humans' violation of God's command.<sup>134</sup> By leading the humans to disobey, a member of the animal world opposed them and led to their loss of life. As a result, human and animal relations will now be characterized by opposition and struggle rather than harmony.<sup>135</sup> This is further indicated by the garments of skin (כְּתֹנֶת עוֹר) that God makes for the humans (Gen 3:21). Though subtle, the hint that animals were killed to make the humans' clothing underscores the loss of harmony between the human and animal worlds.

God's words to the woman in 3:16 highlight a separation and dissolution of unity between man and woman. Despite pain in childbearing, the woman will desire her husband, but he will rule over her. The harmony and equality of their original relationship, celebrated in 2:23-24, has given way to hierarchy in which the man has dominion over the woman: "The man will not reciprocate the woman's desire; instead,

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<sup>131</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 125.

<sup>132</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 87.

<sup>133</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 108.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 108, 111.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 124-25.

he will rule over her. Thus she lives in unresolved tension. Where once there was mutuality, now there is a hierarchy of division. The man dominates the woman to pervert sexuality.”<sup>136</sup> This division between man and woman is evidenced before 3:16, however; the reader sees it already when they respond to God’s questions about the forbidden fruit. The man passes the blame along to the woman, for whom he had been grateful before. He differentiates her from himself in order to implicate her in his disobedience. She, for her part, ignores the man in her own reply to God. Together, their actions signal the disintegration of life in their relationship before God even pronounces the words of judgment for the man, woman, and snake.<sup>137</sup>

Beyond the rupture of her proper relationship with the man, the woman will also experience difficulty in childbearing. Several different proposals have been made for how this part of 3:16 should be understood. Literally, **הרבה ארבה עצבונך והרנך** reads “I will greatly increase your pains and your pregnancies.” Often, **עצבונך והרנך** is understood as a hendiadys, so the sentence means “I will greatly increase your pain in childbearing.”<sup>138</sup> However, Carol Meyers rejects such a translation, understanding the phrase **עצבונך והרנך** more literally. In her interpretation, the two words refer to agricultural labor and bearing children, respectively; she understands this to refer to the two main roles of the woman in Israelite society.<sup>139</sup> The multiplication of both—intense agricultural work and many pregnancies/births—would have been crucial for survival as the Israelites carved out a living in the hill country during the pre-monarchical period.

<sup>136</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 128.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 119-20. Cf. also von Rad, *Genesis*, 91-92.

<sup>138</sup> Speiser, *Genesis*, 24. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 262.

<sup>139</sup> Carol L. Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 101-9.

The man's punishment, the curse upon the earth in 3:17-19, is similarly understood, such that 3:14-19 serves as an etiology for the difficult work confronted by the early Israelite settlers in the hill country.<sup>140</sup>

While Meyers' reading makes good sense of the Hebrew, her explanation of the significance of 3:16 is closely tied to her reconstruction of the role of the Israelite woman during the Iron Age, which she argues included agricultural labor as well as pregnancies. Even if this reconstruction is accurate, however, the text itself gives little evidence that agricultural work is in view for the woman.<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, Meyers' interpretation involves positing an independent origin for the etiological material in 3:14-19, arguing that it was inserted into the Eden narrative.<sup>142</sup> Apart from the poetic nature of these verses, there is no strong reason for doing so, particularly in light of the connections between the curses and the events leading up to them.<sup>143</sup>

Maggie Low has recently built upon Meyers' work and argued for a novel interpretation of 3:16. Noting with Meyers the parallel between the woman's עֲצָבוֹן (3:16) and the man's (3:17), along with the strong desire of women to have many children elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, Low argues that God's words to the woman refer to "a broad spectrum of challenges related to procreation. Such problems include the

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<sup>140</sup> Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, 118-21.

<sup>141</sup> Tzvi Novick, "Pain and Production in Eden: Some Philological Reflections on Genesis iii 16," *VT* 58 (2008): 235-44 (240); Maggie Low, "Eve's Problem (Gen 3:16): Pain, Productivity, or Paucity of Birth" (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the SBL, Atlanta, Ga., November 2010), 10-11.

<sup>142</sup> Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, 119.

<sup>143</sup> The curse upon the ground (3:17-19) recalls the connection between the man and the ground, as well as the man's origin from the dust. A similar argument may be made for the serpent, who is condemned to eat and crawl upon the ground from which it was made (3:14). And the punishment of both the man and the serpent involve eating, highlighting the manner in which they did wrong. Finally, the punishments of the man, woman, and serpent all involve their origins: the man and serpent are punished with respect to the ground, while the woman is punished with respect to the man from whom she was made. Cf. Galambush, "Derivation and Subordination," 40-41.



difficulty of conceiving, miscarriages, still births, maternal and infant mortality.”<sup>144</sup>

Warrant for this understanding of עֲצֹבֹן derives from the frequent occurrence of its root,

עֲצַב (which also occurs in Gen 3:16), in contexts where it connotes physical and/or

emotional hardship rather than pain. Citing Meyers, who argues that עֲצַב is centered in

the heart rather than in the body, Low also notes that the LXX translates both עֲצֹבֹן and

עֲצַב with λύπη, a word that often connotes grief or sorrow.<sup>145</sup> The woman, therefore,

will experience hardship and distress in reproducing; just as the man will have difficulty

in producing food from the soil, so the woman will have difficulty producing children

from her womb. This accords with the portrayal of the matriarchs throughout Genesis,

who conceive after great difficulty and only with the help of God.<sup>146</sup> Low’s argument is

convincing; because of the woman’s role in disobeying God and acquiring knowledge,

she will have difficulty in conceiving and bearing children, only doing so after much

anguish and often—at least through the remainder of Genesis—with divine assistance.

Her role as mother and her relationship with her husband, her two most fulfilling roles in

life, are both impeded.<sup>147</sup>

In 3:17-19, God pronounces judgment upon the man, declaring a curse upon the

ground (אֲדָמָה) that will make it produce thorns and thistles (קִיץ וְדֹרֶדֶר) and cause

<sup>144</sup> Low, “Eve’s Problem,” 12.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 7-9; Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, 104. Cf. Luke 22:45; John 16:6; Rom 9:2. This interpretation is further supported by the modern Hebrew meaning of עֲצֹבֹן, which is “sad” or “sorrow.”

<sup>146</sup> Low, “Eve’s Problem,” 13. Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel are all barren (Gen 11:30; 25:21; 29:31), and even Leah ceases having children after a while (Gen 29:35). In light of this, it is interesting that Tamar also experiences hardship in conceiving a child (Gen 38). Though she is not barren, Tamar goes through much in order to become pregnant and bear children to carry on Judah’s line (Gen 38). One wonders if Gen 38 means to portray her in terms similar to Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel.

<sup>147</sup> Moberly, “Did the Serpent Get It Right,” 17. von Rad, *Genesis*, 93-94; Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 263.

the man to labor for his food. The effects of the curse for the man correspond to his offense: because he ate from the forbidden tree, he must now eat in toil (בַּעֲצָבוֹן; 3:17).<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, the use of עֲצָבוֹן in 3:17 repeats its occurrence in 3:16, where it referred to the woman's sorrows in bearing children. This suggests a parallel between the man's struggles and those of the woman.<sup>149</sup> The main function of the curse, however, is to highlight the ruptured relationship between the man and the ground. It is significant that God does not curse the man directly, as he does the serpent, instead cursing the substance from which the man was made. The close connection between the man and the ground has been evident from the beginning of the narrative via word play: God's creature is אָדָם from אֲדָמָה.<sup>150</sup> As were all other relationships in Eden initially, this one was characterized by harmony and mutual benefit. At God's charge, the man tilled and kept the garden (2:15), and the ground produced every kind of tree that was pleasing to the eye and good for food (2:9).<sup>151</sup> This suggests that the man had an easy time acquiring food from the earth's produce. He was taken from the earth, and it nourished him.

Through the man's disobedience, however, that relationship has been forever altered. The very ground from which God produced (וַיַּצְמַח; 2:9) trees for food will now produce (תַּצְמִיחַ) thorns and thistles, inedible plants that will grow alongside and threaten the plants that the man eats (וְאָכַלְתָּ אֶת-עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה; 3:18).<sup>152</sup> This will make

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<sup>148</sup> Miller, *Genesis 1-11*, 28-31.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. Low, "Eve's Problem," 12.

<sup>150</sup> Speiser, *Genesis*, 16; Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 77.

<sup>151</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*; Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 208. Tribble notes the man's service to the garden, while Westermann emphasizes the garden's benefit to the man; the garden was planted specifically for his nourishment.

<sup>152</sup> Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 264-65.

acquiring food from the earth a laborious task; he will receive bread only by the sweat of his face (בִּזְעָת אָפִיךָ), and the easy work (עֲבָד; 2:15) that fulfilled the man's existence in the garden<sup>153</sup> now becomes toil (עֲצָבוֹן; 3:17). In the garden, the earth produced only things that were beneficial to the man. Now its cooperation has ceased. The man will find the earth to be an enemy as well as an ally; he must work through things that the earth produces not for his benefit. Finally, the man's life of toil will end with death. Just as the man was taken from the ground (2:7), he will return to the ground (3:22). Initially, the earth was the man's origin; now it is his destiny.

The curse upon the ground has an etiological function; it explains life as it is for the ancient Israelite, who often found it difficult to produce food from the earth.<sup>154</sup> Though the curse mentions thorns and thistles explicitly, it has in view all those things that make agriculture difficult: poor soil, droughts, crop failures, unpredictable weather, and other things that are beyond the control of the farmer but nevertheless threaten his livelihood. This curse envisions the harsh realities of human life, the struggles necessary for simple survival. In portraying them as a penalty for primal disobedience and the price to pay for acquiring knowledge, the Eden narrative views the present world as something less than its creator intended it to be.

In addition to the curses that describe the consequences of the humans' disobedience, a further result is alienation between the humans and God. Within the Eden narrative, the relationship between the man and God is conceived primarily in two ways: first, the man is a creature in relationship to God, his creator.<sup>155</sup> The reader is told

<sup>153</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 220-22.

<sup>154</sup> Gunkel, *Genesis*, 22; Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 263; Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, 118.

<sup>155</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 220.

explicitly that no man existed initially, since there was no one to till the earth (Gen 2:5). In this world uninhabited by humans, God acts to remedy this lack, forming the man from dust and breathing the breath of life into him (Gen 2:7).<sup>156</sup> The man, therefore, owes his very existence to God. The man is clearly superior to the animals, yet a close correspondence between them is suggested by their creation from the same material—God formed (יִצֵּר) both from the אֲדָמָה (2:7, 19).<sup>157</sup> The man is superior to the animals, but he remains a creature like one of them.<sup>158</sup>

The man's relationship with God is also governed by the divine command that God issues in 2:15-17, which is related to the man's status as God's creature.<sup>159</sup> The man is placed in the garden—seemingly planted for the man's own benefit<sup>160</sup>—for the purpose of working it and protecting it (לְעִבְדָּהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָה; 2:15). God has a purpose for the man, which means the man has a responsibility to God; the man must fulfill his purpose.<sup>161</sup> This purpose is accompanied by a command, to the effect that the man may eat from any tree in the garden except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The command therefore carries both freedom and limitation—God allows much, but sets a firm boundary that the man must not cross; to do so will mean death (2:17). As discussed above, this position of responsibility in the world, accompanied by a command

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<sup>156</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 222-24.

<sup>157</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 91. Tribble also notes that both the man and the animals are referred to as “living nephesh” (2:7, 19), further highlighting their common identity as creatures of God (92).

<sup>158</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 202. Westermann suggests that the Hebrew word אָדָם connotes humankind's status as a created being, such that the prominence of this term within the Primeval History may emphasize this aspect of humankind.

<sup>159</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 223.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>161</sup> Moberly, “Did the Serpent Get It Right,” 3; Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 84-86.

to follow and a limitation to recognize, characterizes the place of humankind in the world and their relationship to God throughout the Old Testament.<sup>162</sup>

With the violation of the commandment, however, this relationship between the human and God becomes fractured. In fact, the rupture of this relationship occurs in the very act of the transgression itself, when the man eats the fruit he was commanded not to eat. By disobeying God's command, the human failed on his side of the divine-human relationship. God was the one who gave the command, who provided the garden and gave the human the charge to keep it and to till it, and forbade the human from eating from one tree alone. The human was the one who had to obey, and he did not. He ate from the tree from which he was commanded not to eat; he listened to the voice of the woman rather than to the command of God (3:17). By transgressing the command, the man took the first step in skewing the relationship between himself and God.

The effects of this fractured relationship extend beyond the violation of the commandment. The transgression carries consequences which are both overtly stated by God and implied in their interaction. The most obvious consequence is the one explicitly stated along with the prohibition itself, namely that eating from the tree of knowledge will result in death (3:17). As discussed above, the narrative understands the consequences recounted in 3:8-24 as death for the humans.<sup>163</sup> If such is the case, then all of the consequences—including the man's ruptured relationships with the woman, the animals, and the earth—are related to and stem from the man's ruptured relationship with God. Because the man disobeyed, the consequences of disobedience go into effect. The

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<sup>162</sup> Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 4-5.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-18.

man's disposition before God is not that of an obedient creature before a beneficent creator; now, after Gen 2:25-3:7, it is that of a disobedient creature.

The man's reaction upon hearing God in the garden (3:8) further demonstrates the nature of the ruptured divine-human relationship after the act of disobedience.

Presumably, when God walks through the garden in 3:8, it is not the first time the humans have encountered him there. God had at least spoken to the man before, when he gave the command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:16-17). And God's question to the man, "where are you?" (3:9), suggests that God was likewise accustomed to encountering the man in the garden. The narrative thus implies close familiarity between the humans and God in Eden. And as Moberly points out, God and the man worked together: as God created the animals, it fell to the human to give them names. Such harmony of action suggests cooperation between God and the man whom he had placed over the garden.<sup>164</sup> In 3:8, however, the man and the woman have no other recourse than to hide from God, attempting to escape the divine presence because of their nakedness. The relationship between the humans and God is now disrupted by fear, where before there was none (Gen 3:8).<sup>165</sup>

The humans' fear and hiding highlights the distance that now exists between them and God. This distance is already apparent in the act of disobedience itself, as God is entirely absent from the scene.<sup>166</sup> Furthermore, the serpent and the woman speak about God in the abstract, using the word אֱלֹהִים rather than the more familiar יְהוָה; eliminating the divine name further removes God from the humans as they are tempted to

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<sup>164</sup> Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 17.

<sup>165</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 91.

<sup>166</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 111.

disobey.<sup>167</sup> On the other side of that relationship, God increases that separation by casting the man and woman out of Eden (3:22-24). When the humans acquire the knowledge of good and evil, they threaten to become fully like God if they eat from the tree of life as well.<sup>168</sup> God responds to this threat by sending the man and the woman out of the garden, barring access to the tree of life (3:22). They will no longer dwell in the garden, where God could walk and speak directly to them, but will live away from Eden, with cherubim and a flaming sword preventing their return. While the relationship between the humans and God had been one in which they could work together, after the disobedience in 2:25-3:7 that relationship now entails distance and separation.

The final two scenes of the Eden narrative depict hierarchical relations between men and women, conflict between humans and nature, difficulty bearing children and cultivating the soil, and alienation between humans and God. These things characterize not only the world as the ancient Hebrews knew it, but also mark the world we know today—the Eden narrative is largely an etiology for why humans, made by a benevolent Creator, find life so painful and difficult. It portrays the presence of death and the difficulties of human life as the consequences of the first humans' disobedience of God's command, by which they acquired the knowledge of good and evil.

### ***VIII. Further Consequences: The Deterioration of Family Relationships after Eden***

The negative effects of the first humans' disobedience extend beyond the Eden narrative, as subsequent stories portray the deterioration of family relationships. An analysis of the Eden narrative that ends with 3:24 will not have such relationships in

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<sup>167</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 109.

<sup>168</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 231-32.

view, since the Eden narrative proper contains only the man and his wife. However, the story of Cain and Abel immediately follows the Eden narrative, beginning in Gen 4:1, and it has a number of linguistic connections with Gen 2-3. In this story, fractured relationships between brothers emerges as a primary concern, and its connections with the Eden narrative sketch the first fratricide as a continuing effect of the first humans' disobedience. Narratives that similarly portray brothers and other family members at conflict with one another throughout Genesis carry this theme forward. This will be a crucial starting point in discussing Joseph story's relationship to the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel, since fraternal conflict and reconciliation emerges as a central issue in Gen 37-50.

A number of connections between Gen 2-3 and Gen 4 demonstrate a relationship between the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel. First, the statement in Gen 3:20 that the man named his wife Eve, since she was the "mother of all the living," highlights the woman's role as a mother and foreshadows her fulfillment of this role when Cain and Abel are born to her. Indeed, Walsh sees a stronger connection between Gen 3:20 and Gen 4 than between Gen 3:20 and the rest of the Eden narrative.<sup>169</sup> Furthermore, Gen 4 begins with the statement that "the man knew his wife, Eve" (4:1), explicitly recalling the name given in 3:20 as well as bridging the two narratives through these two characters.

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<sup>169</sup> Walsh, "Genesis 2:4b-3:24," 169.



The significance of the ground (אֲדָמָה) in the Eden narrative (see above) continues in Gen 4, as the ground receives Abel's blood (דָּם)<sup>170</sup> and cries out to God to implicate Cain, himself a tiller of the ground (4:10). The punishment God declares for Cain also involves the ground: he is cursed from the ground (מִן־הָאֲדָמָה), and the ground itself will withhold its fruit from Cain (4:11-12). There is further shared vocabulary: in addition to words that could be incidental due to their frequency (אֲדָמָה, עֶבֶד, אֲרִיץ, שָׂדֶה, שָׁמֶר), both narratives also share less common words that suggest a close correspondence between them (אֲרֹר, מָה עֲשִׂיתָ, מִשָּׁל, תִּשְׁוֶקָה).<sup>171</sup> Finally, a number of structural similarities exist between Gen 3 and Gen 4: both passages contain the account of an offense, followed by a trial conducted face-to-face between God and the offender, then a pronouncement of punishment in terms of a curse.<sup>172</sup> All of these similarities suggest that Gen 4 should be understood as a continuation of Gen 3, relating how the consequences of the first humans' disobedience and expulsion from Eden carry over into the next generation.

Within Gen 4, the relationship between one human being and another comes sharply into focus. As Westermann recognizes, this is above all a story about Cain. Abel is a passive character, neither receiving any etymology for his name nor partaking in any dialogue within the story.<sup>173</sup> Furthermore, his birth is narrated almost as an afterthought,

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<sup>170</sup> There is a possible word play between the blood and the ground: Abel's דָּם is received by the אֲדָמָה. If so, this recalls the wordplay between אֲדָם and אֲדָמָה in the Eden narrative.

<sup>171</sup> Stratton, *Out of Eden*, 213.

<sup>172</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 285-86; Stratton, *Out of Eden*, 213.

<sup>173</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 285.

with no prior statement of his parents' sexual relations or conception (4:2).<sup>174</sup> Much interpretation of the story has centered on the reason for God's rejection of Cain's offering, or the enigmatic way in which God responds to Cain's anger in 4:6-7.<sup>175</sup> But the story does not primarily hinge upon these questions, however significant they might be. Instead, the story turns on the way Cain treats his brother, Abel. The fact that he kills his brother ultimately determines his fate, not his rejected offering. Whatever else it is about, Gen 4 deals first and foremost with Cain's relationship with his brother.

The fraternal relationship between Cain and Abel is emphasized repeatedly throughout Gen 4.<sup>176</sup> Abel is introduced as Cain's brother in 4:2, with his relationship to Cain appearing even before his name. In the crucial scene of the story, when the murder takes place, Abel is twice named as "Abel, his brother"—first when Cain speaks to him, and again when Cain rises up and kills him (4:8). The repetition of אָחִיו, "his brother," calls attention to the relationship between Cain and Abel—it highlights the fact that Cain is dealing with his own flesh and blood. God's inquiry to Cain likewise mentions their fraternal bond, as God asks "where is Abel, your brother" (אֵי הֵבֶל אָחִיךָ; 4:9). And Cain's response to God shows his own callous disregard for that relationship, as he tries to distance himself from responsibility for his brother by asking, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (הֲשֹׁמֵר אָחִי אֲנִכִּי; 4:9). Finally, in his response to Cain's challenge, God also refers to Abel only as Cain's brother; the blood crying out from the ground is called "the blood of your brother," not "Abel's blood" (4:10-11). Abel is also called a shepherd

<sup>174</sup> This is in contrast to the births of Cain (4:1), Enoch (4:17), and Seth (4:25).

<sup>175</sup> Westermann notes the prominence of the first question in the history of exegesis (Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 296). John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* demonstrates the rich interpretative possibilities of these aspects of the narrative.

<sup>176</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 285.

(רעה צאן; 4:2), and he is often said to have brought God a more acceptable offering than Cain, as implied by the statement that he brought “of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions” (מבכרות צאנו ומחלבהן; 4:4).<sup>177</sup> Yet the repeated emphasis on the relationship between Cain and Abel effectively reduces Abel’s identity within the story to “Cain’s brother,” particularly since Cain is the primary subject of the narrative.<sup>178</sup>

This fraternal relationship between Cain and Abel is destroyed when Cain kills his brother. Reacting to Abel’s acceptance by God and his own rejection, Cain murders his brother out of jealousy. Indeed, this is suggested by word play in Cain’s very name; though Eve names her son קין based on the root קנה, “to get, acquire” (4:1),<sup>179</sup> the name also evokes the similarly sounding root קנא, which means “to envy, be jealous.” Cain’s suggestion that the brothers go out to the field (4:8) implies an element of deceit as well, as if he lured Abel to the field for the purpose of killing him. The first story after Eden, involving just the second generation of humans, is one of fratricide. The fact that Cain kills his brother is a direct reflection of the human condition after the consequences of narrated in Gen 3; it illustrates how relationships among humans and among family members, are broken in the world of disobedience to the divine command.

Strained family relationships continue in the ancestral narratives and in the Joseph story, as evident in the recurring motif of sibling rivalry and the preference for the younger son throughout Gen 12-50. The story of Cain and Abel is the first instance of this motif, as God inscrutably prefers the offering of the younger Abel, which leads Cain

<sup>177</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 296. Westermann ultimately rejects this idea, however, ascribing God’s rejection of Cain’s sacrifice to fate and immutability.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>179</sup> This is a popular etymology rather than a linguistic one.

to kill him. Other instances include the preference of Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph and Benjamin over their brothers, and Ephraim over Manasseh. Jacob's preference of Rachel over Leah should also be included as an instance of this motif. The curious birth of Tamar's twins at the end of Gen 38 confirms this pattern; initially Zerah was being born first, but withdrew his hand (with the crimson thread, attached by the midwife, intact) so that Perez was the firstborn (Gen 38:27-30). Competition or rivalry, even up to the point of death, characterizes these narratives as well. Though murder actually occurs only in the narrative of Cain and Abel, it is threatened in the other instances: Esau plans to kill Jacob, prompting Jacob to flee to Paddan-Aram (Gen 27:41), and Joseph's brothers initially intend to murder him before they decide to sell him as a slave (Gen 37:18). As in the story of Cain and Abel, both instances are prompted by jealous anger. Esau is jealous of Jacob for having stolen his blessing, and Joseph's brothers are jealous of their father's favoritism of Joseph and of the young man's lofty dreams. Even among Isaac and Ishmael, where no direct conflict can be discerned, intense rivalry is played out between their mothers. This rivalry leads ultimately to the banishment of Hagar and Ishmael from Abraham's household.<sup>180</sup>

Other similarities between these narratives include the exile of the older brother and the preference of the younger brother. Abel, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph are all younger sons, and all receive divine preference. God looks with favor on Abel's offering, not Cain's (Gen 4:4-5), God explicitly states that Isaac, not Ishmael, will be the child of the covenant (Gen 17:19-21); and Jacob, not Esau, receives Isaac's blessing that confers divine favor (Gen 27:27-29). Jacob's favored status is foretold even before he is born, as Rebekah receives an oracle concerning the twins in her womb that states, "the greater

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<sup>180</sup> Wénin, "La fraternité," 27.

will serve the younger” (Gen 25:23). Joseph’s favored status is manifested both by Jacob’s overt paternal preference and by the boy’s own dreams (Gen 37:3, 5-11). Just as the younger son is constantly favored in these narratives, the older brother is always forced into exile. God banishes Cain to be a wanderer on the earth, while Abraham sends away Ishmael and his mother at the demand of Sarah, confirmed by God. Esau likewise leaves the land of Canaan promised to his fathers, to settle in the region of Seir. The situation with Joseph’s older brothers is more complicated. Initially Joseph is the one who must leave, since he is sold into slavery in Egypt. Eventually, however, Joseph’s brothers join him, and the entire family is reunited outside of the land. Jacob’s entire family remains intact because they all together experience an exile in Egypt.<sup>181</sup>

All these similarities suggest that the brother narratives in Genesis are part of a recurring motif: over and over again, strained family relationships are portrayed through brothers in conflict with one another. As divine preference sides with the younger brother, the older responds with jealousy and murderous anger. This motif has often been noted, and it will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. At present, it is enough to establish that the rupture of family relationships emerges as a consequence of the disobedience and the acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil in Eden, as the story of Cain and Abel demonstrates. Furthermore, this motif extends throughout Genesis, as sibling rivalry resurfaces among the sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The story of Joseph and his brothers, in which unearned favor and sibling rivalry are thoroughly explored, has deep connections with these other brother narratives in Genesis. These must be understood alongside the echoes of the Eden narrative that lie within the Joseph story as well.

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<sup>181</sup> Cf. Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 126-28.

### ***IX. Summary and Conclusion***

At its root, the Eden narrative is about life and death. More specifically, the story of the first humans in the garden is primarily an etiology for death and the harshness of our world, affirming that present human life, with difficulties and struggles that finally end at death, is different from human life as God intended it to be. In doing so, the narrative portrays these things—fractured human relationships, enmity between humans and animals, difficulty in procreation, and toilsome survival—as the consequences of disobeying God and acquiring the knowledge of good and evil. Both disobedience and knowledge are central themes of the Eden narrative; both contribute to the story’s significance as a portrayal of universal human life under God.

The story of the first humans in the garden is governed by God’s command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It is this command that sets the limits for human life and establishes the humans’ relationship with their creator. It is this command that the serpent discusses with the woman in the pivotal scene, and it is the disobedience of this command that God punishes when he judges the man, woman, and serpent. Yet the command itself concerns one specific tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and no other. In this context, the knowledge of good and evil refers to the ability to judge good from bad, to determine right from wrong. This knowledge properly belongs only to God, whom the humans are to obey. By eating from the tree and knowing good and evil for themselves, the humans assume moral autonomy and overstep the limitations that God has set for them. This disobedience must be punished: the knowledge of good and evil leads to death.

The death that the Eden narrative envisions is more than literal, physical death, though this is in view as well. The story portrays difficulty working the soil, struggle in bearing children, conflict with nature, and general disharmony in the world as a type of death. These things are deathlike insofar as they represent a loss of life in its fullness as the humans enjoyed in Eden. Because of the humans' actions, the earth is cursed, and it will be an enemy in their struggle to survive as often as it is an ally. The woman will conceive with difficulty and will find that her husband rules over her, such that her roles as wife and mother are both adversely affected. And the serpent is cursed to crawl on its belly and eat dust, forever at enmity with humanity. The Eden story portrays the world as it is now, but envisions something better that has been lost—not through the fault of the creator, or even of chance, but through the humans' own failure to obey God and their desire for moral autonomy.

The chapter following the Eden narrative tells the story of how one of the first couple's children killed his brother, further exemplifying the fractured nature of relationships after Eden. Correspondences in structure, characters, and vocabulary sketch a close connection between the story of Cain and Abel and the Eden narrative that precedes it. The actual events that unfold for Cain and Abel, involving inscrutable preference, jealousy, death, and exile, are all taken up in subsequent narratives in Genesis, as Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph all have relationships with their older brothers that resonate with the experience of Cain and Abel. The effects of Eden extend into present human life, and they are felt in the narratives of Israel's patriarchs as Israel moves forward. In the Joseph story, the lengthy novella that concludes Genesis, echoes of the garden narrative contribute to the way in which Jacob's family is portrayed in relation to

the rest of the world. As the following chapters show, what happens in this family affects not just this family alone, but has significance for all of humankind.



## **Chapter Two: Privilege, Temptation, Innocence, and Guilt: Eden and Its Aftermath in Gen 37-39**

### ***I. Introduction***

The close reading of the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel in chapter one sets the stage for exploring their relationship with the Joseph story in the chapters that follow. In the present chapter, I discuss two brief episodes within the Joseph story, demonstrating that each one may be read as a narrative analogy with the narratives in Gen 2-4. First, the account of Joseph's sale into slavery in Gen 37 mirrors the story of Cain and Abel, since both portray jealousy, sibling rivalry, and either the death or the near death of the favored younger son. Linguistic echoes, combined with thematic continuity, depict the actions of Joseph's brothers as a parallel to Cain's fratricide. Second, Joseph's temptation by Potiphar's wife in Gen 39 describes an eerily similar scenario to that of Adam in the garden: both are characterized by freedom, limitation, and an opportunity to transgress that limitation through the agency of a woman. This connection, however, is governed by reversal, since Joseph resists his mistress's temptations and thereby succeeds where Adam fails. The analogous relationship between these stories recalls the first human as a foil to Joseph, while also hinting that Joseph's righteousness will lead to different consequences than the negative ones emerging at the end of the Eden narrative.

The parallels exhibited between these episodes of the Joseph story and the narratives of Gen 2-4 stimulate a search for more comprehensive connections throughout the rest of Gen 37-50. One such connection exists in the thematic use of clothing in the Joseph narrative, which is particularly strong in Gen 37-39 but also present as the Joseph

story continues. More specifically, the Joseph story employs clothing to explore the motifs of deception and innocence versus guilt, echoing the Eden narrative's use of garments and nakedness for similar purposes. I explore this aspect of the relationship between the Joseph story and the Eden narrative at the end of the present chapter, before moving on to broader analogies and thematic connections in chapters three and four.

## ***II. Thematic Continuity: Fraternal Conflict in Genesis***

At the end of chapter one, I argued that the story of Cain and Abel (Gen 4) has a number of linguistic and structural connections with the Eden narrative that precedes it (Gen 2-3). As a result, the jealousy and conflict that emerges among these brothers is presented as a further consequence of the first humans' disobedience in Eden.

Furthermore, I showed that conflict and strained family relationships, particularly among siblings, continue throughout Genesis. Though the narratives in which this conflict occurs are distinct, there are a number of striking similarities among them, most notably the repeated success of the younger son. This suggests that the stories in Genesis involving brothers (and sisters)<sup>1</sup> develop a theme of fraternal violence, characterized by jealousy, rivalry, murderous intent, and the preference for the younger son. The motif begins in Gen 4 with the story of Cain and Abel, and it ends with the story of Joseph and his brothers in Gen 37. Rivalry and the threat of death occur repeatedly, but by the end of Genesis the primeval impulse toward fratricide gives way to forgiveness and reconciliation.<sup>2</sup> The Joseph narrative is therefore linked with the story of Cain and Abel

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<sup>1</sup> The rivalry between Rachel and Leah, as well as Jacob's preference for the younger Rachel, should likewise be considered part of this motif.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness*, 169-79.

through this theme; together, they make up the beginning and end of its development in Genesis.<sup>3</sup> This connection is an important aspect of their intratextual relationship.

The motif of the preference for the younger son surfaces a number of times in Genesis, unfolding throughout the ancestral narratives as well as in the stories of Cain and Abel and Joseph and his brothers.<sup>4</sup> In addition to Joseph and Abel, Isaac, Jacob, and Ephraim are likewise younger sons who are elevated above their older brothers. Furthermore, Jacob prefers Rachel to Leah, evidencing how the motif occurs also among women.<sup>5</sup> The curious birth of Tamar's twins Perez and Zerah confirms the pattern, demonstrating that the prevalence of younger sons continues among Judah's offspring as well.<sup>6</sup> Over and over again, Genesis exhibits a clear interest in younger siblings. While the genealogies of Cain, Ishmael, and Esau are preserved, it is their younger brothers—Seth, Isaac, and Jacob—through whom the central line of Israel's descent is traced from beginning to end. This consistent preference for the younger son in Genesis is especially distinctive, given the way in which it overturns expectations for the older son to inherit.<sup>7</sup> And while stories of younger children prevailing over their older siblings occur in a wide

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<sup>3</sup> Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 143.

<sup>4</sup> This motif has been widely discussed and variously explained. For a concise yet thorough discussion of the different approaches and schools of thought, see Fox, "Stalking the Younger Brother," 45-68.

<sup>5</sup> The relative ages of Leah and Rachel undoubtedly play a role in the way in which Laban's deception of Jacob serves as recompense for Jacob's deception of Isaac. The younger Jacob deceives his father by substituting himself for Esau, while the reverse of this substitution—the older for the younger—deceives Jacob (Friedman, "Deception for Deception," 22-31, 68). This need not mean, however, that the motif of the preference for the younger over the older is not present in this narrative. Indeed, Frederick Greenspahn has observed that many of the instances of this motif revolve around the figure of Jacob, including the preference for Joseph over his brothers and the elevation of Ephraim over Manasseh. Cf. Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together*, 129.

<sup>6</sup> Goldin, "The Youngest Son or Where Does Genesis 38 Belong," (42-43).

<sup>7</sup> On the expectation for the older son to inherit in Genesis, cf. Fox, "Stalking the Younger Brother," 48, Gary N. Knoppers, "The Preferential Status of the Eldest Son Revoked," in *Rethinking the Foundations: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Bible: Essays in Honor of John Van Seters* (ed. S.L. McKenzie, T. Römer, and H.H. Schmid; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000). 115-26 (120-21); Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together*, 14-15.

range of literature (e.g. Cinderella), the high concentration of these stories seen in Genesis is rare.<sup>8</sup>

These two narratives, however, do more than represent the theme of the younger brother's success that recurs throughout Genesis; the theme is more strongly developed and more highly concentrated in the Cain and Abel narrative and the Joseph story than in the rest of Genesis. The birth of Perez before Zerah (Gen 38:27-30) and the elevation of Ephraim over Manasseh (Gen 48:13-20) both occur within the Joseph story. Regardless of source-critical issues that might suggest an alternative origin for these narratives, in their present context they occur within the story of Joseph and his brothers and cannot be excised from it easily.<sup>9</sup> The preference for the younger son is therefore a recurrent motif within the Joseph narrative itself; it occurs not only with respect to Joseph and his brothers, but also with respect to the sons of Judah and the sons of Joseph. Outside this narrative and the story of Cain and Abel, the preference for the younger brother occurs only in the success of Jacob over Esau and Isaac over Ishmael. Yet as Greenspahn has shown, the triumph of the younger brother is not as clear-cut in these narratives as interpreters often suppose.<sup>10</sup> Jacob and Esau are twins, and their story centers more on the conflict between them than on their birth order.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, Isaac's status as Ishmael's younger brother receives little emphasis in the text, appearing instead to be a

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<sup>8</sup> Goldin, "The Youngest Son," 30. Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together*, 4-5. The books of 1 and 2 Samuel evidence this theme as well, to the point where the Genesis motif is often explained in terms of its connection to the royal house of David (cf. Fox, "Stalking the Younger Brother," 56-59). Even there, however, the theme is not as squarely at the center of attention as it is in the brother narratives of Genesis. Only in Genesis do we find direct prophecies about the younger brother surpassing the older (Gen 25:23; 48:19), as well as a birth narrative devoted solely to this motif (Gen 38:27-30).

<sup>9</sup> With respect to Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh, Westermann argues that the blessings in Gen 48-49 all have an independent origin, and bear more directly on the continuing narrative of Jacob rather than the Joseph story proper, confined to Gen 37, 39-45 (Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 193-94). As for Gen 38, see the discussion below for the arguments regarding its separate origin as well as its present integration into the Joseph story.

<sup>10</sup> Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together*, 112-26.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 116-17. Cf. also Syrén, *The Forsaken First-Born*, 1993.

byproduct of Sarah's barrenness and the struggle to produce an heir for Abraham.<sup>12</sup> The story of Cain and Abel and the story of Joseph and his brothers are therefore crucial to the theme of the younger son's success in Genesis; excluding these narratives leaves scarcely any such theme to be discussed. The fact that they occur at the beginning and end of Genesis—introducing and concluding the book's interest in younger sons—further strengthens their connection.

### ***III. Cain and Abel Revisited: The Betrayal and Sale of Joseph***

Alongside this thematic continuity between the story of Joseph and the narrative of Cain and Abel, a more direct connection is also established through linguistic echoes and parallel plots. When these links are recognized, the episode of Joseph's sale into slavery emerges as a narrative analogy with the account of Abel's murder. Joseph's brothers repeat elements of Cain's fratricide in many respects, despite the fact that Joseph's actual death is avoided. This sets the stage for the further development of the theme of fraternal conflict—and its ultimate resolution among Joseph and his brothers—as the Joseph story continues. By paralleling the relationship of Cain and Abel directly at the outset, the Joseph narrative prepares the reader for its reversal by the end of the story.

Even on the surface, there are a number of striking parallels between the story of Joseph and the story of Cain and Abel. Both portray extraordinary sibling rivalry that escalates to the point of fratricide; Cain actually kills Abel, while Joseph's brothers consider and only narrowly avoid killing him (Gen 37:18-20). As shown above, both

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<sup>12</sup> Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together*, 113-15.

stories also show a preference for the younger son: Abel is Cain's younger brother,<sup>13</sup> and Joseph is the second youngest of Jacob's many children, the long awaited son of Rachel, Jacob's favored wife and rival to her older sister.<sup>14</sup> Finally, both the Joseph story and the story of Cain and Abel focus on the jealous feelings of the older sons in view of the preference for their younger brother. Cain becomes jealous in response to God's reception of Abel's offering—his very name (קַיִן) is a pun on the Hebrew word for “jealousy” (קִנְאָה)<sup>15</sup>—and Joseph's brothers react similarly to the clear favoritism Jacob shows toward Joseph (Gen 37:4; 11).

Jealousy becomes an important linguistic connection between the account of Joseph's sale into slavery (Gen 37) and that of Abel's murder (Gen 4): Joseph's brother become jealous (וַיִּקְנְאוּ) of his dreams (Gen 37:11), which serves as their motivation for selling him (cf. Gen 37:19-20). Other verbal similarities strengthen the link between these passages. Most apparent is the repeated occurrence of אָח, “brother,” in both narratives. This word occurs seven times in the story of Cain and Abel<sup>16</sup> and twenty-one times in Gen 37.<sup>17</sup> This highlights the fraternal relationship between the characters in both narratives. Abel's identity is largely reduced to “Cain's brother” in Gen 4, since the

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<sup>13</sup> Cain and Abel may be twins, since a separate conception of Abel is not narrated: Eve conceives and gives birth to Cain (וַתֵּהוֹר וַתֵּלֶד אֶת־קַיִן; Gen 4:1), and later goes on to bear Abel (אֶת־אָחִיו אֶת־הָבֶל; Gen 4:2). In any case, however, Cain is the one to come out first, so Abel must be regarded as the younger.

<sup>14</sup> Given Benjamin's largely passive role in the Joseph narrative—he is not even mentioned directly until Gen 42:4, when Jacob keeps him at home when he sends the rest of his sons to Egypt—Joseph effectively acts as the youngest among the brothers with whom he primarily interacts.

<sup>15</sup> Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness*, 136.

<sup>16</sup> Gen 4:2, 8 (2x), 9 (2x), 10, 11.

<sup>17</sup> Gen 37:2, 4 (2x), 5, 8, 9, 10 (2x), 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 19, 23, 26 (2x), 27 (2x), 30.

story is above all about Cain and Abel is a passive character.<sup>18</sup> Throughout the Joseph story, Jacob's sons are designated collectively as "Joseph's brothers" or some variant thereof (e.g., "his brothers"). Both narratives, therefore, underscore the relationship between brothers through the repeated use of the word **אָנ**. In the Joseph story this emphasis is not confined to its opening chapter: the word **אָנ** occurs exactly one hundred times throughout Gen 37-50, highlighting the brotherhood as a central theme of the entire Joseph narrative.<sup>19</sup>

Another verbal echo is the word **דָּם**, "blood," used in reference to fratricide in both stories. In Gen 4, God says to Cain that Abel's blood is crying out from the ground (Gen 4:10), and Cain's punishment is to be cursed from the ground "which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand" (Gen 4:11). Cain's murder of Abel is portrayed as the spilling of his brother's blood, and Abel's blood functions as the means by which God knows of Cain's act. Similarly, in Gen 37, Joseph's brothers speak of his potential murder as shedding their brother's blood: Reuben exhorts them not to shed blood (Gen 37:22), and Judah asks what profit it will be if they kill Joseph and conceal his blood (Gen 37:26).<sup>20</sup> Later, Reuben speaks of Joseph's blood in relation to their guilt over selling him as a slave (Gen 42:22). Blood likewise functions as a way of suggesting to Jacob that Joseph is dead; the brothers put a goat's blood on Joseph's

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<sup>18</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 285. Cf. also Wénin, "La fraternité," 25. Wénin observes that the fraternal relationship between Cain and Abel is largely one-sided. Abel is described as Cain's brother, but Cain is never called the brother of Abel. The one point where Cain calls Abel "my brother" is his own denial of any special responsibility in this relationship, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen 4:9).

<sup>19</sup> Wénin, *Joseph*, 11-12.

<sup>20</sup> In both instances, Hamilton makes a connection between the brothers' intentions and the story of Cain and Abel (Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 418, 421). The guilt Cain bears for murdering Abel serves as an example of what will result from spilling innocent blood. The plans of Reuben and Judah seek to avoid this blood guilt.

special garment and let their father draw conclusions from it (Gen 37:31-33). Though this “evidence” is presented deceitfully,<sup>21</sup> it does employ blood to suggest that Joseph has died. Both the Joseph story and the story of Cain and Abel portray fratricide as the shedding of blood, and both use blood as evidence that death has taken place.

Finally, a less obvious linguistic connection between the two narratives is the use of a setting “in the field” (בִּשְׂדֵה) to call attention to the younger brother’s isolation and vulnerability. The murder of Abel takes place in the field (בִּשְׂדֵה; Gen 4:8), in which the two brothers are alone and unseen.<sup>22</sup> Cain lures his brother to the field where he may successfully kill him and keep the matter hidden. Immediately before Joseph’s brothers consider killing him, the reader encounters the puzzling episode in which an unnamed man finds Joseph wandering in the field (בִּשְׂדֵה) near Shechem and directs him to his brothers’ location at Dothan (Gen 37:14-17). Joseph’s encounter with this man has been variously interpreted,<sup>23</sup> but one function of the episode is to highlight the isolation and vulnerability of Joseph away from his father.<sup>24</sup> This scene does not echo the murder of Abel directly, and Joseph’s sale into slavery does not even take place at this location.

The episode does, however, use the field to emphasize the fact that Joseph is alone and

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Green, *What Profit for Us*, 52. Green shows how the brothers deceive Jacob with a “misleading question”—does the garment belong to Joseph?—which prompts Jacob to draw an erroneous conclusion that the brothers do not correct. In Green’s own words, “They imply something and Jacob infers something, with a crucial gap between the two parts of the transaction.” This is tantamount to a lie, though it is achieved in an indirect manner.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Arnold, *Genesis*, 79-80. Arnold relates the “presumption of hiddenness” conveyed by the location in the field to the man and woman hiding from God in the Eden narrative (Gen 3:8).

<sup>23</sup> Coats argues that this episode’s primary function is to delay the story in order to create suspense prior to Joseph’s encounter with his brothers (Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 16). Humphreys sees it as a transition from Joseph’s place with his father, marked by love, to Joseph’s place with his brothers, marked by hostility (Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 103). Green recognizes this transitional function, but also notes how the providential direction of Joseph encapsulates a major theme of the Joseph story as a whole. Even alone and lost, away from both his father and his brothers, Joseph finds his way due to the aid of God and others (Green, *What Profit for Us*, 45).

<sup>24</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 353. Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 40. von Rad, *Genesis*, 347-48.



vulnerable as he journeys toward his brothers who wish him harm. In this way, Joseph's wandering in the field just before finding his brothers resonates with the journey of Abel into the field with Cain, from which he never returned.<sup>25</sup>

These verbal parallels strongly suggest a direct relationship between the Joseph narrative and the story of Cain and Abel, beyond their mutual development of the theme of fraternal conflict. This connection is best expressed as a narrative analogy, a relationship that is often (though not always) highlighted via linguistic echoes.<sup>26</sup> The analogy may be recognized in their common plot, which begins with jealousy and ends with (near) fratricide. Through the use of this device, Joseph's sale into slavery is depicted as a repetition of Cain's crime against Abel, showing how the story of Joseph and his brothers begins in much the same way as the account of the first brothers in Genesis.

Both narratives begin with the younger son in a position of special favor. In the story of Cain and Abel, the preference for Abel is expressed through God's acceptance of his offering. God "has regard for" (שָׂעָה) Abel and his offering, but not for Cain and his offering (Gen 4:4-5). Preference for Cain's younger brother continues even after Abel is killed. Cain's genealogy is given (Gen 4:17-24), but the main line of Adam's offspring is traced through Seth (Gen 5:1-32), the son God gives Eve "in place of Abel" (תַּחַת הַבֶּל);

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 108-9. Levenson suggests a connection with between Joseph's wandering in the field (Gen 37:15) and Hagar's wandering in the wilderness of Beer-sheba (Gen 21:14). Both present the characters wandering (תָּעָה) after being sent away (שָׁלַח) by the patriarchal figure (Gen 21:14; 37:14). More significantly, both deal with potential danger to the patriarch's son. If this connection is present, it contributes to the manner in which Joseph's sale into slavery echoes not only the Cain and Abel narrative, but the other stories dealing with fraternal conflict in Genesis as well.

<sup>26</sup> Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel*, 21-28.

Gen 4:25).<sup>27</sup> In the Joseph narrative, the preference for Joseph over his brothers manifests itself through Jacob's open favoritism and through Joseph's dreams. Admittedly, Benjamin is Jacob's youngest son, not Joseph. One may argue that Benjamin was not yet born at the beginning of the Joseph narrative, since Joseph's dream of celestial bodies seems to envision his mother, who died giving birth to Benjamin (Gen 35:18-19).<sup>28</sup> However, Joseph's reaction upon seeing Benjamin in Egypt suggests that he had known his brother before being sold as a slave; it is a response based upon recognition (Gen 43:29-30).<sup>29</sup> And the imagery in Joseph's dream may be taken as a reference to the family as a whole rather than to Joseph's own biological mother.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Benjamin is not mentioned in the Joseph narrative until Gen 42:4, and he is always a passive character. The entire story focuses on the relationship between Joseph and his ten other brothers, so that Joseph is effectively the youngest son throughout the narrative. The statement that Jacob loved Joseph because he was "a son of his old age" further emphasizes Joseph's youth in comparison to his brothers (Gen 37:3). Moreover, we note that Jacob's gift of the special garment (Gen 37:3) shows that Joseph holds the place of the favored younger son—a position he occupies until Jacob believes he is dead. Only subsequently does Jacob turn his favoritism to Benjamin.

In both of these stories, the preference for the younger son is closely tied to the favor that the younger son receives and the older brother(s) do not. As stated above, for

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<sup>27</sup> Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 78. Levenson regards Seth as "Abel redivivus," noting Eve's recognition of God's providence in giving her another son to replace Abel.

<sup>28</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 347. Von Rad also notes that Benjamin was likely still a boy when he journeys with his brothers to Egypt, citing references to him as "the lad" (נער) in Gen 43:8 and 44:22, as well as the fact that Joseph addresses him as "my son" (בני) in Gen 43:29 (*Genesis*, 381, 384).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 41. The notion that Joseph's response is one of recognition is implied in Coats's interpretation rather than argued outright, but Coats elsewhere supports the view that Benjamin is alive already at the beginning of the Joseph narrative (p. 14).

<sup>30</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 14. Here Coats notes that "the general assumption in the story seems to be that the mother of Joseph was dead."

Cain and Abel this is expressed through God's acceptance of Abel's offering rather than Cain's (Gen 4:4-5). Exegetes have long searched for a reason behind God's rejection of Cain and his offering, and various interpretations have been proposed. Wenham lists five different views:<sup>31</sup> 1) God preferred shepherds over farmers.<sup>32</sup> 2) Animal sacrifices are superior to offerings of vegetables.<sup>33</sup> 3) God's thoughts and motivations are unknown and inscrutable.<sup>34</sup> 4) Abel's attitude or motivation in sacrificing was superior to Cain's.<sup>35</sup> 5) Cain offered an inferior portion of his produce to YHWH, while Abel offered the best portions of his flock. This is the reason most often given, and the one which Wenham himself supports.<sup>36</sup> There is support for such an interpretation in the text: Cain simply brings "from the fruit of the ground" (מִפְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה; Gen 4:3), whereas Abel brings "from the firstlings of his flock, from their fat portions" (מִבְּכֹרוֹת צֹאנוֹ וּמִחֻלְבֵּהוּ; Gen 4:4). If this does underlie God's acceptance of Abel but not of Cain, however, it is implicit rather than directly stated. Neither the narrator nor God offers a direct explanation for why Cain is not accepted. To Cain, at least, God's acceptance of Abel and not of him is inscrutable.<sup>37</sup> The history of interpretation shows that readers have likewise struggled to understand God's actions in this regard. The best understanding of God's actions, then, is that God's reasons are unknowable. This does not render God

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<sup>31</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 104.

<sup>32</sup> Gunkel, *Genesis*, 43. According to this interpretation, the ancient Israelites valued shepherding over agriculture and embedded this preference in the story. Cf. Fox, "Stalking the Younger Brother," 52, and J. Carmody, D. Carmody, and R. L. Cohn, *Exploring the Hebrew Bible*, 28. Speiser likewise sees the story of Cain and Abel in terms of a conflict between pastoral and agricultural ways of life, played out between two individuals (*Speiser*, *Genesis*, 31).

<sup>33</sup> John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (2d. ed.; ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1930), 105-6.

<sup>34</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 101. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 297.

<sup>35</sup> Wenham notes that this view is prompted by the New Testament view that Abel offered a better sacrifice out of faith (Hebrews 11:4).

<sup>36</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 104. Arnold, *Genesis*, 78. Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together*, 91-92.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. von Rad, *Genesis*, 101; Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 297.

capricious or arbitrary, but instead emphasizes the human struggle to come to terms with divine actions that resist comprehension. Indeed, it is Cain's failure in this regard that leads to the story's tragic ending.<sup>38</sup>

The story of Cain and Abel largely focuses on Cain's reaction to God's treatment of him and his brother, regardless of whether or not God's rejection of Cain is deserved. As noted in chapter one, Abel is largely a passive figure. His only action in the narrative is to bring an offering to YHWH (Gen 4:4), and its purpose is to contrast with Cain's unaccepted offering.<sup>39</sup> Frequently in the narrative, Abel is referred to as Cain's brother (Gen 4:2, 8-11); the emphasis therefore falls on his relationship with Cain and the way Cain treats him.<sup>40</sup> Cain's reaction to perceived injustice is anger and jealousy, which he fails to master. His response is described as follows: "Cain became very angry, and his face fell" (ויחר לקין מאד ויפלו פניו; Gen 4:5). Jealousy may be inferred, however, since this response occurs because Abel has something that Cain wants—divine acceptance. And as stated above, Cain's name (קין) is likely a pun on "jealousy" (קנאה).<sup>41</sup> Moreover, jealousy is frequently associated with anger, in Hebrew as well as in English thought, further confirming its likely occurrence here.<sup>42</sup> The story of Cain and Abel is a story of inscrutable divine favor that leads to jealousy, anger, and murder.

A similar portrayal of jealousy in response to inequitable favor occurs in the Joseph narrative, as Joseph's brothers react with hostility toward Joseph in Gen 37. In

<sup>38</sup> Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 74-75.

<sup>39</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 285.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>41</sup> Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness*, 136.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 65-67. Schlimm notes that one-third of all occurrences of the roots קנא, קנאה, or קנוא are in verses that also contain a word for anger (p. 65). Schlimm attributes this association in Hebrew thought to the fact that anger typically results from perceived wrongdoing, while jealousy is a specific type of perceived wrongdoing (p. 66-67).

this case, however, the issue at stake is paternal rather than divine preference.<sup>43</sup> The opening chapter of the Joseph story portrays an unequal family dynamic, with a number of factors motivating Joseph's brothers to hate him.<sup>44</sup> These factors all center on Jacob's favoritism. First, Joseph brings a "bad report" (רעה רבתם) concerning his brothers to their father (Gen 37:2). While this undoubtedly sparked some of the brothers' ill will toward Joseph, their reaction at this point is unstated.<sup>45</sup> It does, however, associate Joseph with Jacob over against Joseph's brothers. The first reaction mentioned by the narrator comes in response to Jacob's overt preference for Joseph, shown in the special garment that Jacob gives to him (Gen 37:3). This garment at the very least indicates Jacob's favoritism for Joseph; it may do more, assigning to Joseph the status of Jacob's chief heir through a symbolic investiture.<sup>46</sup> In either case, Joseph's brothers react with hostility to Jacob's clear preference for Rachel's son: they hate Joseph and are unable to speak peaceably to him (וַיִּשְׂנְאוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ דַבֵּר לְשָׁלָם; Gen 37:4). Joseph's brothers respond with hatred to Jacob's overt paternal favoritism and inequitable love.<sup>47</sup>

Their hatred escalates when Joseph has two dreams which seemingly predict that he will rule over them. After Joseph relates his first dream to his brothers, they rebuke him for having it and despise him more than they did before (וַיּוֹסֶפוּ עוֹד שְׂנֹא אֹתוֹ; Gen 37:5, 8). Their hatred is directly attributed to Joseph's dreams and his words (Gen

<sup>43</sup> Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 146.

<sup>44</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 35-39.

<sup>45</sup> Green notes that this piece of information is conveyed quickly and with little comment, such that the characters seem to have more knowledge about the cause and result of Joseph's bad report than the reader receives. Nevertheless, it helps to develop "the potential for family strife" (Green, *What Profit for Us*, 37).

<sup>46</sup> Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 57. In support of this possibility, Levenson cites the special garments worn by Aaron and his offspring (Exod 28:40-41) and Elijah's use of his mantle to designate Elisha as his successor (1 Kgs 19:19). In both instances, clothing designated the recipient's special status. In the latter, it specifically refers to a successor.

<sup>47</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 37-38.

37:8). When Joseph declares his second dream to them, the rebuke comes from Jacob rather than from the brothers (Gen 37:10). However, the brothers' reaction to this dream is given as well; they become jealous of Joseph (וִיקְנְאוּ-בּוֹ אֶחָיו; Gen 37:11). Joseph's two dreams make his brothers envious, compounding the hatred that they already feel toward him. It is the dreams, moreover, that the brothers mention as they contemplate killing him and eventually sell him as a slave. When they see him walking towards them, they refer to him as "this lord of dreams" (בַּעַל הַחֲלֻמֹת הַלְזָה; Gen 37:19), and conclude their plot to kill him by saying "then we will see what will become of his dreams" (וְנִרְאֶה מַה-יְהִי חֲלֻמָּתָיו; Gen 37:20). They make no direct reference to Jacob's favoritism, speaking only of the dreams that raise their jealousy to its breaking point and drive them to the brink of fratricide.<sup>48</sup>

These dreams, however, manifest the favor shown to Joseph in their own way. One possible reading of the dreams is to understand them as a reflection of Joseph's desires and aspirations to rule over his brothers.<sup>49</sup> This would account for the absence of direct divine speech in the dreams, such as we find elsewhere in Genesis (Gen 15:12-17; 20:3-7; 28:12-15). A better understanding of them, however, recognizes Joseph's dreams as a description of the present. As Barbara Green has shown, the dreams symbolically depict the current situation within Jacob's family: by virtue of his father's favoritism, Joseph is already exalted above his brothers.<sup>50</sup> In this interpretation, Joseph's dreams are further expressions of his father's favor, confirming the inequitable family dynamic that raises him above his brothers. Subsequent events in the Joseph story suggest that the

<sup>48</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 46-47.

<sup>49</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 346.

<sup>50</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 39, 43.

dreams come from God: they are fulfilled as predictions of the future (cf. Gen 42:6), and the two other sets of dreams apparently have divine origins as well (Gen 40:8; 41:25, 28).<sup>51</sup> In this case, the dreams likely manifest divine as well as paternal favor.<sup>52</sup> In either case, the dreams are further indicators that Joseph is favored above his brothers. The dreams exert an enormous influence over the whole Joseph story, resurfacing again and lending the whole plot a sense of providence and determinacy.<sup>53</sup> Within Gen 37, however, the dreams express the favor given to Joseph as the episode's major complicating factor. They are analogous to the favor shown to Abel through God's acceptance of his offering.

In both narratives, the favor shown to the younger brother generates hostility, which escalates to the point of fratricide. This need not be argued for the story of Cain and Abel, since Cain actually goes through with the act and kills his brother (Gen 4:8). In the Joseph narrative, however, Joseph is not killed; the efforts of Reuben and Judah prevent this from occurring. Nevertheless, murder is explicitly considered. The narrator states that the brothers conspired to kill Joseph (וַיִּתְנַכְּלוּ אֹתוֹ לְהַמִּיתוֹ; Gen 37:18), and the brothers themselves say "let us kill him" (וְנַהַרְגֵהוּ; Gen 37:20). This remains in view as Reuben and Judah present their plans as an alternative to direct fratricide. Reuben tells his brothers not to take Joseph's life, but to throw him into the pit without spilling his blood (Gen 37:21-22). The implication is that the elements will do the

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<sup>51</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 39-40. Green argues that it is a "biblical truism" to say that dreams are sent by God.

<sup>52</sup> Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 154.

<sup>53</sup> Green, *What Profit For Us*, 196. Green compares the dreams to the tides of the ocean, which subtly but irresistibly affect everything that lives in them. Likewise, the dreams exert an invisible yet undeniable influence on everything that happens in the Joseph story and the lives of its characters. Cf. also Hugh C. White, "The Joseph Story: A Narrative Which 'Consumes' Its Content," *Semeia* 31 (1985): 49-69.

brothers' dirty work, killing Joseph without them having to do it directly.<sup>54</sup> This is confirmed if the lack of water in the pit is taken to mean that Joseph will die of thirst (Gen 37:24).<sup>55</sup> Judah likewise formulates the idea of selling Joseph as an alternative to killing their brother, suggesting that they should not kill Joseph because he is their flesh and blood (Gen 37:26-27). The brothers agree to the plan presented in this way, showing that they recognize killing Joseph as a wrong that ought to be avoided.<sup>56</sup>

Despite this recognition, however, the brothers do wish Joseph gone, and their plans and eventual actions are oriented towards this goal.<sup>57</sup> When they sell him as a slave, they render Joseph effectively dead. Jacob's lament over Joseph suggests as much—from Jacob's perspective, Joseph is dead and must be mourned (Gen 37:34-35).<sup>58</sup> The brothers' statement to Joseph in Egypt that one of their brothers "is no more" (אֵין נֶחָדָר) may be understood as a euphemism for death, though in fact it leaves his fate ambiguous (Gen 42:13).<sup>59</sup> The phrasing maintains their truthfulness—they do not, after all, know what has become of Joseph since they sold him as a slave<sup>60</sup>—but simultaneously allows them to imply that their other brother is dead. Selling Joseph into Egypt has allowed the brothers—indeed, the whole family—to act as if he is dead. Furthermore, the life of a slave was difficult and could have led to death easily enough. For all the brothers knew,

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<sup>54</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 16.

<sup>55</sup> Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 150.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 421. Hamilton shows how Judah's plan, as well as Reuben's, derives in part from the fact that it is wrong to murder one's brother. Judah wishes to avoid the guilt of spilling his brother's blood, in addition to turning a profit.

<sup>57</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 47.

<sup>58</sup> von Rad suggests that the brothers' use of Joseph's garment to deceive Jacob would have had legal implications. Citing Exod. 22:13, he claims that Jacob's recognition of Joseph's garment would have served as legal proof and confirmation of Joseph's death (von Rad, *Genesis*, 349). If he is correct, then the brothers' actions render Joseph legally dead in Jacob's eyes. Cf. also Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 18. In support of this legal dimension to Jacob's acknowledgment of Joseph's garment, Coats cites David Daube, "Law in the Narratives" in *Studies in Biblical Law* (New York: KTAV, 1969), 3-10.

<sup>59</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 407.

<sup>60</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 521-22.



selling Joseph as a slave was tantamount to a death sentence. Finally, when the brothers understand their misfortunes in Egypt as recompense for what they did to Joseph, Reuben tells them that “now his blood is sought out” (וּגַם־דָּמוֹ הִנֵּה נִדְרָשׁ; Gen 42:22).

Reuben at least regards their actions as analogous to murder, even if they initially viewed selling Joseph as a lesser crime than taking his life directly.

Moreover, Levenson has argued that Joseph’s sale into slavery may be understood as a symbolic death, showing that the brothers’ actions are more closely related to fratricide than might be thought initially.<sup>61</sup> The pit (בֹּר) into which they throw Joseph (Gen 37:18-24) symbolizes the grave, as it does at other points in the Bible (e.g., Ps 30:4, 10).<sup>62</sup> This descent into the pit is the first in a series of three downward movements, the others being his sale into slavery and his descent into the prison in Egypt. Joseph’s descent into Egypt is indicated directly through use of the verb יָרַד to describe his journey (Gen 39:1; cf. 37:25). It is also associated with death through Jacob’s insistence that he will “go down” (יָרַד) to Sheol mourning Joseph (Gen 37:35).<sup>63</sup> These various clues suggest that Joseph’s sale into slavery is a type of metaphorical death, making his subsequent rise to power and reconciliation with his family a symbolic resurrection.<sup>64</sup> If this is the case, then Joseph’s brothers bring his symbolic death about, making their actions a metaphorical fratricide that echoes Cain’s crime without literally repeating it.

Reading Joseph’s sale into slavery in light of the story of Cain and Abel reveals an analogous relationship between these two narratives. Both develop the motif of the

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<sup>61</sup> Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 149-52.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

preferred younger son, the jealous response of the older brother(s), and hostility that leads to the younger brother's elimination. Linguistic connections reinforce this relationship, encouraging these stories to be read together. Once this is done, this episode of the Joseph story emerges as a parallel to the Cain and Abel narrative. One must be cautious not to overemphasize this relationship; the Joseph story is complex and develops many of its own distinct interests. Nevertheless, one of these interests is the theme of fraternal conflict developed throughout Genesis, and the Joseph story's treatment of this theme connects it to the story of Cain and Abel. At the same time, the Joseph story echoes the narrative of Cain and Abel directly, deliberately recalling Cain's murder of Abel as it portrays the conflict between Joseph and his brothers in Gen 37. Joseph's brothers react to the divine favor shown upon him with jealousy and hatred; though they do not actually kill him, they come very close to doing so, rendering him effectively and symbolically dead by selling him as a slave. The actions of Joseph's brothers echo the crime of Cain.

At the same time, the brothers do not repeat Cain's offense exactly. Judah and Reuben appeal to the brothers' collective sensibility that killing their brother, their own flesh, would be wrong (Gen 37:21-22, 26-27).<sup>65</sup> Admittedly, both Judah and Reuben act with self-interest rather than complete good will toward Joseph. Judah wishes to make a profit, while Reuben wants to redeem himself in Jacob's eyes.<sup>66</sup> But their arguments are received; the brothers do avoid killing Joseph, in part because they recognize the severity and gravity of that offense.<sup>67</sup> Ultimately, Joseph survives, and though his brothers

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<sup>65</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 418, 421.

<sup>66</sup> Reuben, after all, was at odds with his father since he had slept with Jacob's concubine, Bilhah (Gen 35:22; 49:4). His attempt to rescue Joseph and return him to Jacob may well have been motivated by a desire to regain his father's favor (Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 354).

<sup>67</sup> Cf. von Rad, *Genesis*, 348-49. Von Rad argues that the moral distinction between selling one's brother and actually killing him would have been great indeed, noting the great magnitude of bloodguilt and the accompanying recognition that it should be avoided at all costs.

commit a crime analogous to that of Cain, they avoid actual fratricide. Instead, Joseph is sent away; separation or exile serves as an alternative to death.<sup>68</sup> Joseph's brothers revisit Cain's crime, paralleling his fratricide through their own desire to profit and get rid of Joseph. And yet, the survival of Joseph opens the door to an alternative ending, instilling hope within the reader that the conflict among Jacob's sons may ultimately play out differently than that which arose between Cain and Abel. The sale of Joseph into slavery parallels Cain's murder of Abel, but this episode is not the end of Joseph's relationship with his brothers. This relationship resurfaces as Joseph's brothers travel to Egypt in Gen 42, largely picking up right where it left off.<sup>69</sup>

#### ***IV. A Return to Eden: Joseph and Potiphar's Wife***

After a digression about Judah and Tamar (Gen 38), the Joseph story continues by narrating Joseph's experiences after being sold as a slave into Egypt. The events of Gen 39-41 constitute a distinct unit within the Joseph narrative, focusing solely on Joseph and

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<sup>68</sup> Separation/exile and death are presented as alternatives to death in the other brother narratives in Genesis as well. Steinmetz shows how in every generation, the chosen family avoids deadly violence through the sending away of one brother. Ishmael and his mother are sent away from Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac, and Jacob's return to Canaan from Paddan-Aram coincides with Esau's departure from it. The family constantly faces a dual threat of destruction (conflict, death) and dissolution (separation, fracturing); until the Joseph story, the former is only avoided through the latter (Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 11). Schlimm makes a similar case, framing the issue in terms of the human response to anger in Genesis. He notes that Cain represents one extreme response to anger—murder. Others in Genesis, notably Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, avoid this response by separating from the ones with whom they are in conflict. Separation, therefore, represents an alternative response to anger and conflict than murder (Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness*, 144-53). Both Schlimm (p. 169-79) and Steinmetz (p. 130-33) uphold the eventual resolution of the Joseph story as a different response altogether, noting that the forgiveness and reconciliation with which the narrative ends is unprecedented in Genesis.

<sup>69</sup> Wénin, "La fraternité," 32. As Wénin rightly observes, twenty years of separation is insufficient to repair the relationship between Joseph and his brothers, as it was in the case of Jacob and Esau. Instead, Joseph's harsh treatment of his brothers (Gen 42:7) indicates that reconciliation still needs to be worked out.

his rise to authority with little mention of his family.<sup>70</sup> Within this section of the novella, Joseph's encounter in Potiphar's house (Gen 39:1-20)<sup>71</sup> stands out as a unique episode, portraying his initial rise to prominence, the temptations of his master's wife, and the consequences of resisting her advances. It is typically understood as a paradigmatic example of Joseph's righteousness, both in ancient and modern interpretations. Even readers who are otherwise highly critical of Joseph's character nevertheless recognize his steadfast faithfulness to God and Potiphar in the house of his master.<sup>72</sup> And as a key link in the chain of events that moves Joseph to his position of power in Egypt, his resistance of Potiphar's wife constitutes a significant plot element as well. As I argue below, the significance of Joseph's behavior in this episode is enriched by reading it in light of the Eden narrative, specifically the scene of the man's disobedience in the garden. Like the connection between Gen 37 and the story of Cain and Abel, the relationship between Gen 39 and the Eden narrative is best characterized as a narrative analogy. Both involve temptation through a woman, and both emphasize visual appeal as the basis of forbidden desire. Most significantly, both narratives portray a general scenario in which the protagonist enjoys great freedom and responsibility, with one crucial object withheld. This time, however, the analogous relationship between these episodes is characterized

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<sup>70</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 60; Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 38-41; Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 19; Lindsay Wilson, *Joseph, Wise and Otherwise: The Intersection of Wisdom and Covenant in Genesis 37-50* (Paternoster Biblical Monographs; Waynesboro, Ga.: Paternoster, 2004), 95-97.

<sup>71</sup> On this delimitation of the passage's boundaries, cf. Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 29. Coats argues that Gen 39:21-23 is the beginning of the story of Joseph in prison, which continues into Gen 40. This establishes a parallel between the beginning of Joseph's time in Potiphar's house (Gen 39:1-6) and the beginning of his time in the prison (Gen 39:21-23). This parallel is important for the overall structural unity of Gen 39-41. I discuss this in further detail below.

<sup>72</sup> Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*, 104; Aaron Wildavsky, *Assimilation Versus Separation: Joseph the Administrator and the Politics of Religion in Biblical Israel* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1993), 57.

by reversal rather than parallel. Joseph succeeds where Adam fails, refusing to sin against God where the first man disobeyed God by eating from the forbidden tree.

Both the Eden narrative and the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife present an opportunity to disobey God, a temptation that occurs through the agency of a woman. Modern scholarship rightly identifies the difficulty of seeing Eve solely as a "temptress" in the Eden narrative; during the central scene in Gen 2:25-3:7, the man is a passive character whose only action is to eat what the woman gives him, neither hesitating nor reflecting as one would expect from someone being enticed by his wife.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, it is difficult to regard the man's attempt to pass blame to the woman in Gen 3:12 as anything but just that—an effort to deflect blame away from himself rather than accept responsibility for his actions.<sup>74</sup> As Tribble has shown, interpreters often go too far in assigning a tempting role to the woman in the Eden narrative, seeing her primarily in terms of how she incites the man to disobedience. This is particularly the case for early Christian interpretation, dating all the way back to the New Testament (1 Tim 2:14).<sup>75</sup> The woman's actions, as well as her relationship with the man, are more complex than the history of interpretation of this narrative has typically allowed.

Nevertheless, denying the woman any role in the man's disobedience goes too far the other way, giving too little account for the patriarchal values behind the text. Eve is the major actor in the scene of disobedience, taking center stage as she speaks with the serpent, concludes that the tree is good for food, eats from the tree, and gives its fruit to

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<sup>73</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 113.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 119. Tribble notes that the man's words in Gen 3:12 are an accurate report of what happened in 3:6. The man reluctantly accepts responsibility, but only after implicating both the woman and YHWH God in his guilt. Cf. also Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 17. Both Tribble and Moberly regard the man's passing of blame to the woman as evidence of the rupture in their relationship as a result of their disobedience.

<sup>75</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 72-73.

the man.<sup>76</sup> At the same time, the overall narrative is concerned more directly with the man: it is the man whom God questions first (Gen 3:11), and it is the man's punishment that culminates God's judgments in Gen 3:17-19. Furthermore, it is the man's acquisition of knowledge that God names as the reason for casting the humans out of Eden; while both humans are driven from the garden, only the man (אָדָם) is directly named in Gen 3:22-24 as the object of God's concern.<sup>77</sup> All this coheres with the initial command itself, which was given to the man before the woman was created (Gen 2:16-17). This means that Eve plays a central role in a story that otherwise focuses on Adam's disobedience. Her agency is recognized in God's words to the man, which proclaim a curse upon the ground "because you listened to the voice of your wife and ate from the tree..." (Gen 3:17). The text does, therefore, portray Adam's temptation through his wife. This is not to place undue responsibility on Eve—it is the man who disobeyed, as both he and God acknowledge (Gen 3:12, 17). Nor is it to reduce her role in the story to one who entices the man. But recognizing that the man is tempted by the woman acknowledges the role she plays in his disobedience, which fits within a biblical worldview that is often "irredeemably androcentric."<sup>78</sup>

Potiphar's wife plays a similar role for Joseph in Egypt, where she tempts Joseph repeatedly to sleep with her. Joseph, well-built and handsome, draws the attention of his master's wife who demands that he lie with her (Gen 39:6-7). She invites Joseph not

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<sup>76</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 105.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 137. Tribble notes that in these verses, as in the beginning of the narrative, אָדָם refers to all of humankind and not the man alone. However, she says that a change has occurred; where before it indicated "the sexually undifferentiated earth creature," in Gen 3:22-24 it indicates "the generic man who renders the woman invisible."

<sup>78</sup> I borrow this phrase from Clines, "What Does Eve Do to Help," 25. Clines does not discuss the relationship between the woman and the man's disobedience, but such a view as I have described certainly concurs with his overall thesis that the Eden narrative is androcentric, and it is anachronistic to read sexual equality into it.

only to commit adultery, but to betray his master's great trust (cf. Gen 39:8-9) and overstep the boundaries that have been set for him.<sup>79</sup> Interpreters have long argued for a connection between this narrative and the warning against the strange woman prevalent in wisdom literature, with many seeing Joseph as a wisdom figure on account of his ability to resist his mistress's advances.<sup>80</sup> Donald Redford has suggested that Gen 39 has more in common with the ancient motif of the spurned wife rather than the foreign woman of wisdom literature.<sup>81</sup> Coats, however, has made a strong case for regarding Gen 39-41 as a distinct unit with a wisdom focus, suggesting that Potiphar's wife does recall the strange woman of wisdom literature.<sup>82</sup> In either case—and there is no reason to rule out the possibility that both motifs have influenced Gen 39<sup>83</sup>—temptation from a woman is an important aspect of the connection. The spurned woman reacts out of anger because the young protagonist refuses her sexual advances (e.g., the *Story of Two*

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<sup>79</sup> Joseph has been given control over everything in the household, with only Potiphar's wife kept back from him. She constitutes the sole limitation on his freedom and authority, so that by tempting him to lie with her she tempts Joseph to overstep his boundaries. Furthermore, Alter comments that Potiphar's wife is implicitly inviting Joseph to usurp Potiphar's role in the house by sleeping with her (Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 109). Elsewhere in the Bible, sleeping with the wife of a superior is associated with usurpation (cf., for instance, 2 Sam. 16:21-22). I discuss Joseph's respect for his limitations in greater detail in chapter three.

<sup>80</sup> Gerhard von Rad, "The Joseph Narrative and Ancient Wisdom," *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (trans. E. W. Trueman Dicken; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 292-300; Wilson, *Joseph, Wise and Otherwise*, 108; Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 86. Von Rad is the first modern writer to have drawn a direct connection between the Joseph story and wisdom literature (cf. Wilson, *Joseph, Wise and Otherwise*, 8-9, and Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 26). For a summary of the debate regarding the presence and degree of wisdom influence on the Joseph narrative, see Wilson, *Joseph, Wise and Otherwise*, 7-27. Wilson himself allows for the possibility of wisdom influence in the form of "wisdom-like elements" present in the Joseph narrative (p. 35-37), while conceding that the Joseph story does not belong to the genre of wisdom literature per se.

<sup>81</sup> Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*, 91-93. Redford later concedes the possibility of a connection between ch. 39 and wisdom literature, but attributes this to a later reworking of the original spurned woman motif: "This leads to the suspicion that the motif in chapter 39 has merely been utilized by someone, imbued with the spirit and style of a Wisdom writer, as an 'object lesson'" (p. 104).

<sup>82</sup> George W. Coats, "The Joseph Story and Ancient Wisdom: A Reappraisal," *CBQ* 35 (1973): 285-972. *From Canaan to Egypt*, 19-32, 86-89.

<sup>83</sup> Coats allows for the possibility of influence from the motif of the spurned woman or something very similar (Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 30). Likewise, Redford acknowledges that there may be a connection with wisdom literature (Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*, 104).

*Brothers*),<sup>84</sup> while the strange woman of wisdom literature entices young men to sleep with her (e.g., Prov. 7). The narrative of Gen 39 centers on the protagonist's temptation to sleep with a woman, his master's wife. The role of Potiphar's wife is more directly "tempting" than the role of the woman in the Eden narrative, but both portray a woman at the center of a story concerned broadly with the obedience or disobedience of a man.

Another similarity between these two narratives lies in their emphasis on the visual appeal of a desired object—the fruit of the forbidden tree in Eden, and Joseph himself in Gen 39. When the serpent suggests that the woman may eat from the forbidden tree, he tells her that doing so will open her eyes and make her like God, in that she will know good and evil (Gen 3:5). The woman, however, sees not only that "the tree is good for food" (טוב העץ למאכל) and that it is "desirable to make one wise" (תאוה-הוא לעינים), but also that "it is a delight to the eyes" (ונחמד העץ להשכיל), (Gen 3:6). An emphasis on what the woman sees (ותרא האשה) highlights the fact that the tree is visually pleasing.<sup>85</sup>

In the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, there is a similar emphasis on the visual appeal of Joseph. Joseph is the object of Potiphar's wife's sexual desire, and he is described as "beautiful of form and beautiful of appearance" (יפה תאר ויפה מראה); (Gen 39:6). The sense of this phrase is likely that his body is well-built and his face is handsome.<sup>86</sup> Elsewhere in the Bible, such a description occurs only once, in reference to

<sup>84</sup> "The Story of Two Brothers," translated by John A. Wilson (*ANET* 23-25).

<sup>85</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 112-13.

<sup>86</sup> Thus, Wenham translates the phrase as "a fine figure and a handsome face" (Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 371), while Speiser renders it as "handsome of figure and features" (Speiser, *Genesis*, 301). Speiser translates the same phrase in Gen 29:17 to describe Rachel as "shapely and beautiful" (p. 224), showing that he understands the description to convey both pleasant figure of body and beauty of the face.



Rachel, whose appearance attracted Jacob's love (Gen 29:17-18).<sup>87</sup> Joseph, therefore, possesses his mother's outward beauty.<sup>88</sup> His physical attributes received heavy emphasis from early biblical exegetes, who noted not only Joseph's great beauty but also the strong reaction Potiphar's wife had to his appearance.<sup>89</sup> The text itself suggests that Joseph's appearance was visually pleasing to Potiphar's wife, as it says: "His master's wife lifted her eyes to Joseph" (וַתִּשָּׂא אִשְׁת־אֲדָמִי אֶת־עֵינֶיהָ אֵלָיוֹסָף; Gen 39:7).

Joseph is the object of her desire, and he is described in terms that emphasize his outward beauty and visual appeal. As in the Eden narrative, the woman finds something to be physically attractive. The correspondence is not direct; in the Eden narrative the fruit of the forbidden tree is desired, while in the Joseph story it is the body of the Joseph himself. Nevertheless, their dual emphasis on visual appeal plays an analogous role in these narratives, which describe interweave desire and temptation through a female character.

Finally, the story of Joseph in Potiphar's house portrays a situation in which the protagonist enjoys great freedom and responsibility, with a single thing withheld from him. Because YHWH is with Joseph in Potiphar's house, he becomes successful there. And when Potiphar recognizes this, he places Joseph in charge. In describing the position Joseph holds in Potiphar's house (Gen 39:2-6), the narrator is above all concerned with ascribing Joseph's rise to YHWH's presence with him.<sup>90</sup> At the same time, however, there is a clear emphasis on the totality of Joseph's responsibility and

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<sup>87</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 374.

<sup>88</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 359.

<sup>89</sup> See the extended discussion in James L. Kugel, *In Potiphar's House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* (2d. ed.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 28-93.

<sup>90</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 460. Cf. also Westerman, *Genesis 37-50*, 61-63. Von Rad likewise acknowledges this emphasis from the narrator, though he argues that the greater purpose of 39:2-6 is to portray Joseph's superb character (von Rad, *Genesis*, 359).

oversight.<sup>91</sup> Potiphar appoints Joseph over his house (וַיִּפְקְדֵהוּ אֶל-בֵּיתוֹ), and places all he has in Joseph's hand (וְכָל-יִשְׁלֹ נָתַן בְּיָדוֹ; Gen 39:4). God blesses Potiphar's house because of Joseph, and his blessing rests on the house and field of Potiphar (Gen 39:5). The phrase "in the house and in the field" (בַּבַּיִת וּבַשָּׂדֶה) should be understood as a merism, once again highlighting the totality of Joseph's responsibility and the resulting blessing of everything Potiphar owns.<sup>92</sup> In Gen 39:6 it is repeated that Potiphar leaves everything he possesses in Joseph's hand (בְּיַד-יוֹסֵף). And this is accompanied by a statement that Potiphar gave no thought to anything except the food that he ate (וְלֹא-יָדַע אֶת־מַאֲמָה כִּי אִם-הֶלֶחֶם אֲשֶׁר-הוּא אוֹכֵל). Whether this is a reference to Potiphar's wife or simply denotes Potiphar's private matters, it excepts only a very small area from Joseph's control.<sup>93</sup> Joseph confirms the narrator's description of his position when he refuses the advances of Potiphar's wife (Gen 39:8-9). He tells her that Potiphar gives no thought to anything in the house, and has placed everything in Joseph's hand (Gen 39:8), directly echoing the narrator's wording in verse six.<sup>94</sup> In Gen

<sup>91</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 107-08. Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 20. Green notes Joseph's rapid ascent (at least on the discourse level) and describes his elevated position in the house as "unnatural" (Green, *What Profit for Us*, 70-71). However, a position akin to what Joseph came to hold in Potiphar's house was not uncommon in Egypt (Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 374; cf. also S. C. Layton, "The Steward in Ancient Israel: A study of Hebrew [אֶל-הַבַּיִת] *al-habbayit* in Its Near Eastern Setting," *JBL* 109 (1990): 633-49). The uniqueness of Joseph's responsibility lies in its source (YHWH's presence) and its degree. Joseph does more than manage Potiphar's household; except for Potiphar's wife, Joseph exercises complete control over all his master's affairs.

<sup>92</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 457. Hamilton cites A. M. Honeyman "Merismus in Biblical Hebrew," *JBL* 71 (1952): 11-18. Honeyman translates the phrase as "in all parts of his property" (p. 15).

<sup>93</sup> A rabbinic interpretation (*Gen. Rab.* 86:6) regards Potiphar's food as a euphemism for his wife, and many commentators acknowledge this possibility: e.g., Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 64; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 374; Arnold, *Genesis 332*; Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 461. Westermann and Wenham, however, prefer to read the statement as an idiomatic description of Potiphar's private affairs. Hamilton, Speiser (*Genesis*, 303) and von Rad (*Genesis*, 359) interpret the phrase literally to mean that Potiphar only had concern for his own food; they hint that Egyptian dietary restrictions may be alluded to at this point.

<sup>94</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 109. Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 463.

39:9, he states outright the scenario that the foregoing description has suggested: within the house, Potiphar himself is not greater than Joseph (אֵינְנו גְדוֹל בְּבֵית הַזֶּה מִמֶּנִּי).

Joseph holds nearly all the freedom and responsibility in Potiphar's house that his master does.

Joseph's freedom and responsibility, however, are limited in one important respect. As he tells Potiphar's wife, she alone has been kept back from Joseph, because she is his master's wife (Gen 39:9). In Joseph's assessment, Potiphar's wife represents the limitation that his master has set for him, the one thing that he has withheld.

Overstepping this boundary by lying with Potiphar's wife will be a breach of his master's trust, as well as a sin against God by committing adultery (Gen 39:8-9).<sup>95</sup> Together, Joseph and the narrator portray Joseph's position in Potiphar's house as one of authority and responsibility, coupled with a limitation on that authority and the freedom that goes with it. Joseph is in charge of all that belongs to Potiphar, and according to Joseph not even Potiphar himself is greater than Joseph within the house (Gen 39:9). Nevertheless, Joseph may not take Potiphar's wife; she, and she alone, represents the boundary that Joseph must not cross.

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<sup>95</sup> The exact motivation underlying Joseph's refusal to sleep with his master's wife is debated. Crenshaw argues that avoiding a "sin against God" serves as Joseph's primary motivation (James Crenshaw, "Method in Determining Wisdom Influence upon 'Historical' Literature," *JBL* 88 (1969): 129-42). Coats, however, notes that while Joseph describes the act as a "sin against God," his reason for rejecting Potiphar's wife is a desire not to betray the great trust Potiphar has placed in him (Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 21; idem., "The Joseph Story and Ancient Wisdom: A Reappraisal," 292). Von Rad argues that Joseph sees betraying Potiphar's trust as a sin against God, so in his reading the latter qualifies the former (von Rad, *Genesis*, 360). It is preferable, however, to recognize both aspects of Joseph's motivation. Joseph recognizes the great authority his master gave him and the wrong inherent in betraying this trust. At the same time, he understands the sinfulness of adultery, acknowledging that sleeping with another man's wife is a sin against God. Neither of these motivations takes priority, and one does not qualify the other. Rather, they both together serve as reasons for Joseph not to sleep with Potiphar's wife. Doing so would be doubly wrong, violating Potiphar's faith in Joseph and committing the sin of adultery.

This situation, in which Joseph has freedom and responsibility with a single limitation, parallels the general situation for the man in the Garden of Eden. The command that God gives Adam in Gen 2:15-17 describes the nature of the man's existence in the garden, as well as his relationship to it and to God.<sup>96</sup> Though God actually commands the man in 2:16-17, Gen 2:15 relates the man's purpose in the garden, the responsibility that he has towards it. The man is there to till and keep the garden (לעבדה ולשמרה; Gen 2:15); he will act as its steward, caring for it on behalf of God. God's command in Gen 2:16-17 describes a prohibition—the man may not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Prior to the prohibition, however, God grants the man permission to eat from any other tree in the garden, including the tree of life. The formulation of the command begins with what Adam is permitted to eat rather than what is forbidden, emphasizing freedom rather than restriction.<sup>97</sup> The tree of the knowledge of good and evil represents the sole limitation on the humans' otherwise free existence and great responsibility in the garden. God withholds it alone for himself, granting the humans access even to the tree of life.<sup>98</sup>

In Potiphar's house, Joseph faces a situation similar to that which the man faces in Eden. Given nearly total freedom and responsibility for administering his master's house, Joseph is denied one thing only, Potiphar's wife. Likewise, the man is responsible for tilling and keeping the garden on behalf of God—acting as God's administrator—with only the tree of the knowledge of good and evil held back from him.<sup>99</sup> This parallel is

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<sup>96</sup> Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 3-5.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 4. In Moberly's view, the serpent's words to the woman in Gen 3:1 shifts the initial focus of the command, making it appear much less permissive (p. 6).

<sup>98</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 229-33.

<sup>99</sup> Dahlberg notes a connection between Joseph's administration of Egypt and Adam's role in tilling and keeping the garden (Dahlberg, "On Recognizing the Unity of Genesis," 364). Joseph's administrative role

striking when combined with the other two discussed above, namely the involvement of a woman in temptation and the emphasis on the desired object's visual appeal. Taken together, these elements allow us to recognize an analogous relationship between Joseph's temptation by Potiphar's wife and the man's disobedience in Eden. This relationship enriches our interpretation of Joseph's situation as well as his response to it. His invitation to sleep with Potiphar's wife is set alongside the human tendency to fail—to disobey God and overstep one's boundaries—that appears in the Eden narrative. And as Joseph overcomes that tendency by refusing to sleep with Potiphar's wife, his actions emerge as a reversal of Adam's sin. Where the first man fails, Joseph succeeds.

As I argued in chapter one, the story of the first humans in Eden largely pivots on their disobedience. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is bound up closely with God's command concerning it (Gen 2:16-17), and God's reactions in Gen 3:8-19 are less in response to the humans' newly gained knowledge than to the fact of their disobedience.<sup>100</sup> Tribble, Mettinger, and Stordalen all regard the scene in which the humans eat from the tree as the central episode of the narrative, placing disobedience at the center of the story.<sup>101</sup> Tribble and Moberly press the emphasis on disobedience to the point of seeing the tree of the knowledge of good and evil solely in terms of God's command.<sup>102</sup> This assessment goes too far—Gen 3:22-24 confirms that God is concerned with the humans' acquisition of knowledge as well.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, it does recognize that the humans' disobedience is the central issue of the narrative, a fact that ultimately

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is not limited to Egypt, however; his characterization as an effective administrator is a repeated point of emphasis throughout Gen 39-41 (Coats, "The Joseph Narrative and Ancient Wisdom: A Reappraisal," 288-89). Joseph administers Potiphar's house and the prison as well.

<sup>100</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 118-19.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 105-15. Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 218-20. Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative*, 16-17.

<sup>102</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 118-19. Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 4.

<sup>103</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 231-32, 246-48.

determines the meaning of the phrase “knowledge of good and evil” in terms of moral discernment.<sup>104</sup>

In contrast to this disobedience, Joseph remains faithful to God. Acknowledging in his own words that he has been given great responsibility with a single limitation—his master’s wife—Joseph refuses to go beyond the boundary that defines his role. Absent an explicit command, Joseph recognizes the immorality of sleeping with Potiphar’s wife, and despite temptation that occurs “day after day” (Gen 39:10), Joseph does not commit adultery. Where the man in Eden oversteps his boundary by eating from the prohibited tree, Joseph remains within his limitations by refusing to betray Potiphar’s trust and lie with his master’s wife. Furthermore, Joseph acknowledges that to do so would be not only a betrayal of his master, but also a sin against God (Gen 39:9). When the man and woman eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they violate an explicit divine command. Thus, although the word “sin” (חַטָּאת) does not appear until Gen 4, where God warns Cain about the sin crouching at the door (Gen 4:7), the humans’ actions in Eden should be understood as a sin. Joseph’s refusal to sin, to betray the trust his master has placed in him, may therefore be understood as a counterpart to the disobedience and violation of boundaries that the humans committed in Eden. Placed in a similar situation, Joseph succeeds where Adam failed. In Egypt, Joseph remains faithful and obedient to God despite strong, constant temptation to do otherwise.

In further contrast to the Eden narrative, Joseph benefits from God’s presence both before and after his encounter with Potiphar’s wife. Indeed, Joseph’s entire time in Egypt is marked by God’s continued presence with him. The narrator states four times in

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<sup>104</sup> Moberly, “Did the Serpent Get It Right,” 24.

Gen 39 that “YHWH was with Joseph.” Two of these are at the beginning, where God is with him in Potiphar’s house (Gen 39:2, 3). The other two are at the end, where God is with Joseph in the prison (Gen 39:21, 23). These statements are striking in light of the narrator’s reticence concerning God’s involvement throughout the rest of the Joseph narrative.<sup>105</sup> Collectively, they create a parallel between the beginning of Joseph’s time in Potiphar’s house and the beginning of his time in the prison. Coats has demonstrated that the statements in Gen 39:2-3 and 39:21, 23 do not form an *inclusio* around the narrative of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife. Instead, 39:21 begins the narrative about Joseph in prison, setting up a structural parallel between Gen 39:1-20 and Gen 39:21-40:23.<sup>106</sup> Just as Joseph’s time in Potiphar’s house begins with a statement that the YHWH was with Joseph, so also his time in prison begins with a statement to the same effect. Nevertheless, the statement confirms that God’s presence has not left Joseph despite his misfortune. Though his station has changed for the worse—from favored servant to falsely accused prisoner—God remains with him. Joseph’s statement that to sleep with Potiphar’s wife would be a “sin against God” (Gen 39:9) hints divine faithfulness to him is bound up with his own faithfulness to God.<sup>107</sup>

By contrast, the man and woman have a diminished experience of God’s presence after the end of the Eden narrative. Prior to the disobedience that occurs in Gen 2:25-3:7, human life consists of harmony with God and with the rest of creation.<sup>108</sup> The man

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<sup>105</sup> Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 131. Though, as Humphreys recognizes, this overt declaration of God’s presence and activity sets Gen 39 apart from the rest of the Joseph story, it need not imply that Gen 39 has a separate origin. Rather, as Westermann notes, these statements function as “the theological introit to the Joseph story as a whole,” affirming at the outset of his time in Egypt that Joseph will constantly be under YHWH’s care (Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 62).

<sup>106</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 29.

<sup>107</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 69. In Westermann’s words, “Were he to lose the trust of his master, he would lose not only his position but also God’s assistance which brought him to that position.”

<sup>108</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 79-105.

cooperates with God in naming the animals that God creates, in addition to tilling and keeping the garden that God plants; the woman, as the man's fit companion, likewise cooperates in these tasks.<sup>109</sup> After Gen 3:7, however, the humans' relationship with God becomes diminished, and access to the divine presence lessens. This begins almost immediately: hearing the sound of God in the garden, the man and woman hide from him because they are naked, attempting to avoid his presence (Gen 3:8).<sup>110</sup> At the end of the narrative, God sends the man and woman out of Eden, so that they may not have access to the tree of life (Gen 3:22-24). Since the humans have become too much like God in coming to know good and evil, their relationship with God has fundamentally changed. They are not completely separated from God's presence, but there is more distance than there had been previously. Though God is still with them in some way—the clothing he gives them indicates continuing care (Gen 3:21)—God is with them in a diminished, restricted way. In comparison, Joseph's experience of God's presence before and after his time in Potiphar's house remains constant. It leads to success and favor first in the house of his master, and then to similar success and favor in the prison where he is kept.

Joseph's encounter with Potiphar's wife has several similarities with the temptation and ultimate disobedience of the man and woman in Eden. Ultimately, however, the result is different. Joseph remains faithful to God, refusing to overstep his boundaries within Potiphar's house, while Adam disobeys God and eats from the one tree that signified his limitations within the garden. Despite Joseph's false accusation and imprisonment, God is with Joseph even after his encounter with Potiphar's wife. The man and the woman in Eden, however, are sent away from God as a result of their

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<sup>109</sup> Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 17.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 17.



disobedience and acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil. In these respects, Joseph succeeds in a situation similar to the one in which the first humans fail. Joseph's faithfulness and righteousness in Potiphar's house amounts to a reversal of the disobedience and unfaithfulness of Adam. The meaning of this reversal depends upon the role of Gen 39 within the plot of the overall Joseph story, as well as the allusions to the Eden narrative that occur after Gen 39. These further allusions are explored in chapters three and four, so the ultimate significance of Joseph's faithfulness in contrast to Adam's disobedience must be evaluated in the final chapter. Exploring the place of Gen 39 within the plot of the Joseph narrative, however, will offer some clues as to the possible significance of his righteousness, enabling us to anticipate some of these conclusions.

The narrative of Joseph's encounter with Potiphar's wife in Gen 39 begins a three-part subsection within the larger Joseph story.<sup>111</sup> Coats has demonstrated that Gen 39-41 has its own internal unity and exhibits a different character than the rest of the Joseph narrative.<sup>112</sup> These chapters are marked by a change of setting, since they are set solely in Egypt while the rest of the Joseph narrative involves both Egypt and Canaan, with frequent movement between the two.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, there is an overall orientation in these chapters towards the royal court of Pharaoh: Potiphar is Pharaoh's captain of the guard (Gen 39:1), while the prison is the place where Pharaoh's own prisoners are held (Gen 39:20). Moreover, Pharaoh and his court come directly into view in Gen 41, and the whole narrative in these chapters moves Joseph to his position as the highest member

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<sup>111</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 60. Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 38-41. Wilson, *Joseph, Wise and Otherwise*, 95-97. Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 19.

<sup>112</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 19-32.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

of Pharaoh's court.<sup>114</sup> The narrative in Gen 39-41 involves different characters as well. There is a clear focus on Joseph alone, and several characters are introduced which disappear after playing their role in the story's progression, including Potiphar, Potiphar's wife, the jailer, Pharaoh's cupbearer, and Pharaoh's baker. By contrast, Gen 37 and 42-50 involves repeated interaction with characters who have already been introduced, particularly Judah and Jacob. Noting differences such as these, Coats argues that Gen 39-41 originated as a didactic narrative at home among wisdom literature; its purpose was to portray the behavior of an ideal administrator.<sup>115</sup>

Structural and verbal parallels, along with thematic continuity, hold Gen 39-41 together, further marking these chapters as a distinct unit of the Joseph narrative. As mentioned earlier, Coats regards Gen 39:21 as the beginning of Joseph's time in prison, such that the statement of YHWH's presence with Joseph at its beginning parallels the same statement at the outset of his time in Potiphar's house (Gen 39:2).<sup>116</sup> Likewise, God's presence with Joseph is affirmed in Gen 41, not at the outset, admittedly, but in the words of Pharaoh as Joseph is elevated to power (Gen 41:38-39). Thus, in both Gen 39 and Gen 40-41, Joseph experiences an elevation from an initially low status (slave, prisoner), due in each instance to the presence and involvement of God. Verbal parallels among these chapters include the repeated use of "house" (בֵּית) in reference to the

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<sup>114</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 95. Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 144-47. Both Humphreys and Green recognize a strong connection to Pharaoh in Gen 40-41. However, Pharaoh's presence is felt also in Gen 39:1 and 39:20.

<sup>115</sup> Coats, "The Joseph Story and Ancient Wisdom: A Reappraisal," 288-91. Humphreys argues for the internal unity of Gen 40-41, 47:13-26, and 50:26 as an originally independent story of Joseph as a wise courtier (Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 135-53). However, this requires him to regard Gen 39 as an independent unit of its own, largely on the basis of its uniquely overt mentions of God's involvement in comparison with the rest of the Joseph story (p. 201-5). Furthermore, in his synchronic analysis of the Joseph story, Humphreys does group Gen 39-41 together under the heading "From the House of Potiphar to the Royal Court" (p. 38-41).

<sup>116</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 29.

various domains where Joseph is successful; he is placed over Potiphar's house (Gen 39:4),<sup>117</sup> the prison-house (בֵּית הַסֵּהַר; Gen 39:20-23),<sup>118</sup> and Pharaoh's house (Gen 41:40). The recurrence of "appoint" (פָּקַד) also links these chapters, as Joseph is appointed over Potiphar's house and appointed to Pharaoh's officials (Gen 39:4-5, 40:4), and Pharaoh follows Joseph's suggestion to appoint overseers over Egypt (Gen 41:34).

The descriptions of Joseph's success in each house consistently emphasize the totality of Joseph's responsibility. In each instance, Joseph is given control of everything, becoming the person effectively in charge of the whole domain. The emphasis on the totality of Joseph's responsibility and control in Potiphar's house was discussed above. A similar emphasis occurs in Gen 39:22-23: כָּל is repeated three times to describe the things in Joseph's care, recalling the five occurrences of the word in Gen 39:2-6.<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, the chief jailer has regard for nothing under Joseph's authority (אֵין שֶׁר בֵּית־הַסֵּהַר רָאָה אֶת־כָּל־מְאוּמָה בִּידּוֹ; Gen 39:23), echoing Potiphar's attitude toward Joseph (cf. Gen 39:6).<sup>120</sup> There is a similar emphasis on the all-encompassing extent of Joseph's authority when Pharaoh appoints him over Egypt. The phrase "the whole land of Egypt" (כָּל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם) occurs three times (Gen 41:41, 43, 44); in addition, all of Pharaoh's people will respond to Joseph's command (41:40). Apart from the throne, Joseph will be as great as Pharaoh himself (41:40). Furthermore, Joseph's success is ascribed in all three instances to God's presence with him. Joseph is

<sup>117</sup> בֵּית occurs five times in Gen 39:1-6 (Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 109),

<sup>118</sup> Alter translates this as "jailhouse" in order to preserve the thematic connection with "house" in 39:1-6 (Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 111).

<sup>119</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 107.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 111.

successful in Potiphar's house and in the prison because YHWH is with him (Gen 39:2-3, 21, 23), and Joseph is able to interpret Pharaoh's dreams and prepare for the famine because God has shown these things to him (Gen 41:38-39). Finally, the chapters collectively portray Joseph as an ideal administrator, with skill in managing various estates as well as prudence and self-control.<sup>121</sup> This characterization of Joseph contrasts with his portrayal in Gen 37 and in Gen 42, where Joseph's actions are less than exemplary.<sup>122</sup>

Despite these features that set Gen 39-41 apart within the rest of the Joseph story, a number of elements connect these chapters with the rest of the narrative. The dreams of Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker, along with the two dreams of Pharaoh himself, recall Joseph's two dreams in Gen 37; together, the three dream pairs give structure to the Joseph narrative and move the plot forward at crucial junctures, in addition to serving as God's means of communicating and acting in the characters' lives.<sup>123</sup> The characters' struggle to deal with dreams and their meaning spans the entire Joseph story, not just Gen 39-41. Furthermore, the famine that Joseph predicts and prepares for in Gen 41 does not play a role in this chapter alone, but determines much of the course of what follows in the Joseph story (esp. Gen 42-47). The famine prompts Joseph's brothers to journey to Egypt to buy grain, initiating the eventual reconciliation of Jacob's family in Egypt.<sup>124</sup> And when Joseph finally reveals his identity to his brothers in the climax of the story (Gen 45:3-15), he interprets the famine as the overarching complication that drives the

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<sup>121</sup> Coats, "The Joseph Story and Ancient Wisdom: A Reappraisal," 289.

<sup>122</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 38.

<sup>123</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 197. Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 37-38.

<sup>124</sup> Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 41. Green, *What Profit for Us*, 117. Both Humphreys and Green regard the famine as a crucial link between Gen 41 and Gen 42; by extension, the famine links the plot concerning Joseph's rise in Gen 39-41 with the larger plot of Gen 37, 42-45, the reconciliation of Jacob's family. Cf. Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 32-33, and Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 98-99.

entire story from beginning to end; he explains to them that God, not they, sent him into Egypt so that they and their property might be preserved during the famine.<sup>125</sup> Finally, Joseph interprets his imprisonment as a further injustice that builds upon his sale into slavery, describing the prison to Pharaoh's cupbearer as a **בֹּר** in Gen 40:15, the same word used for the cistern that Joseph's brothers threw him into before selling him into Egypt.<sup>126</sup> This, combined with the similar use of clothing for deception in Gen 37 and 39, creates a link between the events of Gen 39-41 and the narrative in which Joseph is sold as a slave. So, while Gen 39-41 has a unique character when compared with the rest of the Joseph story, and may even have a separate origin,<sup>127</sup> in its present form it is well integrated into its context. It should be treated as a distinct unit within the broader Joseph story, but not purely as an interpolation.

The function of this unit within the Joseph story is to move the plot forward in a particular way. At the beginning of Gen 39 Joseph is a slave, having been sold into Egypt and purchased by Potiphar, Pharaoh's chief bodyguard (Gen 39:1). At the end of Gen 41, Joseph is effectively the governor of the whole land of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh and carrying the authority and power of the king himself. Joseph's position of power determines the events that follow through the rest of the Joseph narrative (Gen 42-50). It not only brings him into contact with his brothers again, but enables him to forgive them and to provide for them during the famine. Joseph's role as governor makes possible both the reconciliation and reunion of Jacob's family as they journey into

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<sup>125</sup> Culley, *Themes and Variations*, 160.

<sup>126</sup> Arnold, *Genesis*, 339.

<sup>127</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 32, and "The Joseph Story and Ancient Wisdom: A Reappraisal," 288-91. Cf. also Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 135-36. Humphreys posits a separate origin for Gen 39 and Gen 40-41, 47:13-26, 50:26).

Egypt.<sup>128</sup> The events of Gen 39-41 report how Joseph came to be in this position; their chief function is to move Joseph from slavery to power.<sup>129</sup> At the same time, Gen 39-41 portrays this transition in a particular way, highlighting God's role in bringing it about as well as Joseph's own wisdom and virtue. Joseph consistently displays righteousness, prudence, self-control, and keen administrative ability throughout these chapters.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, his success is repeatedly attributed to God's involvement. In Potiphar's house and in the prison, success occurs because "YHWH was with Joseph" (Gen 39:2-3, 21, 23). His ability to interpret dreams is ascribed to God both in the prison and in Pharaoh's house (Gen 40:8; 41:16), while Pharaoh's decision to make him governor results from the king's recognition that God is with Joseph (Gen 41:38-39). In Gen 39-41, the plot moves forward in such a way that Joseph's character emerges and God's involvement is affirmed.<sup>131</sup>

As a part of this subunit in Gen 39-41, the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife has much the same function. First and foremost, it moves the plot forward, taking Joseph from Potiphar's house to the prison, where he eventually meets Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker, interprets their dreams, and makes a reputation for himself that will come to the attention of Pharaoh. Genesis 39-41 describes a sequence of events that results in Pharaoh elevating Joseph to power over Egypt. Joseph's encounter with Potiphar's wife, and his resulting imprisonment, is a crucial link in this chain. Second, the story of Joseph

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<sup>128</sup> Coats regards the search for reconciliation as the central plot of the Joseph story (Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 80-86).

<sup>129</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 60. Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 136-48. Though Humphreys excludes Gen 39 and includes Gen 47:13-26 and 50:26, he regards the overall goal of these chapters as the portrayal of the extraordinary rise of a slave to become the ruler of Egypt who saves the nation from famine (cf. p. 147).

<sup>130</sup> Coats, "The Joseph Story and Ancient Wisdom: A Reappraisal," 288-89. *From Canaan to Egypt*, 286-88.

<sup>131</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 28.

and Potiphar's wife demonstrates that God is involved and active in Joseph's life. It attributes Joseph's success in Potiphar's house to God's presence with him (Gen 39:2-3), a fact that persists even after Joseph is thrown into prison (Gen 39:21, 23). Furthermore, Joseph's refusal to sleep with Potiphar's wife is due in part to his recognition that it would be a sin against God (Gen 39:9). Since she falsely accuses him out of anger at his refusal, Joseph's imprisonment comes about because of his own faithfulness to God. Third and finally, the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife demonstrates Joseph's character as a skillful administrator and a wise, righteous man. Not only does Joseph manage Potiphar's entire estate effectively, such that it prospers, but he also exhibits faithfulness to his master and to God by refusing to sleep with Potiphar's wife. The role of Gen 39 within the plot of the Joseph story is therefore the same as that of Gen 39-41 as a whole: it moves the plot forward in such a way that Joseph's wisdom and righteousness, as well as God's presence with Joseph, come to the fore.

When allusions to the Eden narrative within Gen 39 are recognized and viewed within this overall purpose of the chapter, they deepen the significance of Joseph's character and behavior at precisely the point where the plot moves forward. Within the overall plot of the Joseph story, Joseph's actions in Gen 39 have consequences, setting in motion an whole sequence of events that drives the rest of the Joseph narrative. It is Joseph's faithfulness to God and to Potiphar—his refusal to sleep with his master's wife—that leads to his imprisonment, which in turns puts him in position to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, save Egypt and his family from the famine, and reconcile with his brothers.<sup>132</sup> The actions of the man and woman in Eden likewise had consequences. The Eden narrative affirms that humans have a penchant for disobedience, and that for this

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<sup>132</sup> Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 153-54.

reason their lives are less than they ought to be.<sup>133</sup> Their disobedience and acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil led to a loss of the life they had enjoyed in Eden, giving rise to the present human world characterized by difficulty, toil, death, and estrangement both from God and from one another. These consequences continue to affect and define life as described in Genesis and as felt in human experience. By alluding to the Eden narrative, the account of Joseph and Potiphar's wife raises the possibility that Joseph's actions will have different consequences—that what follows in the Joseph story will surpass normal human experience. In the following chapters, I will argue that this is precisely what we see in the allusions to the Eden narrative throughout the rest of the Joseph story. Joseph's ability to provide food during the famine circumvents the curse upon the ground, doing so through Joseph's faithful use of knowledge and respect for his limitations. His decision to forgive and provide for his brothers marks a fundamental reversal of the fratricide that Cain perpetrates. Allusions to the Eden narrative suggest that in Potiphar's house, Joseph succeeds where Adam fails. As a result, the rest of his story has the potential to play out differently as well.

#### ***V. Clothing and Nakedness, Innocence and Guilt in Gen 37-39***

In the next two chapters, I explore larger narrative analogies between the Joseph story and the Eden and Cain and Abel narratives, elements of parallel and reversal that emerge when the whole Joseph story is read in light of Gen 2-4. Before doing so, however, I wish to note one further connection between these narratives that emerges from the shorter narrative analogies mentioned above—those between Gen 37 and the

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<sup>133</sup> Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 19-21.



story of Cain and Abel, and between Gen 39 and the Eden narrative. This connection centers on the thematic use of clothing in the Joseph narrative, which shows many similarities to the role that clothing and nakedness play in the Eden story. While garments figure prominently in key plot junctures throughout Gen 37-50, they are especially significant in Gen 37-39. Their role in the Joseph story shows thematic continuity with the Eden narrative, establishing a further connection between Gen 37-50 and the narratives of Gen 2-4.

Dahlberg suggests that the special garment that Jacob gives to Joseph in Gen 37:3, the **כתנת פסים** that displays Jacob's favoritism, is an allusion to the **כתנות עור** in the Eden narrative, the garments of skin that YHWH God makes for the man and the woman in Gen 3:21.<sup>134</sup> As Dahlberg notes, the word **כתנת** appears only in these two places in the entire book of Genesis, occurring once in the Eden narrative and eight times in the Joseph story—all in Gen 37 in reference to Joseph's special garment.<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, although **כתנת** is the Hebrew cognate of a common term denoting "tunic" throughout the ancient Near East,<sup>136</sup> it is relatively rare in the Hebrew Bible, occurring just twenty-nine times.<sup>137</sup> By comparison, the more general term **בגד** occurs over two hundred times.

Fourteen times, **כתנת** clearly refers to priestly garments, including all eleven occurrences

<sup>134</sup> Dahlberg, "On Recognizing the Unity of Genesis," 365.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid. **כתנת** occurs at Gen 3:21; 37:3, 23(2x), 31(2x), 32(2x), 33.

<sup>136</sup> Freedman and O'Connor, "**כתנת**," *TDOT* 10: 383-84. Freedman and O'Connor describe it as "the Hebrew equivalent of one of the most common terms in the civilized world" (p. 383).

<sup>137</sup> Gen 3:21; 37:3, 23 (2x), 31 (2x), 32 (2x), 33; Exod. 28:4, 39, 40; 29:5, 8; 39:27; 40:14; Lev. 8:7, 13; 10:5; 16:4; Ezra 2:69; Neh. 7:69 (70 Eng.), 71 (72 Eng.); 2 Sam. 13:18, 19; 15:32; Job 30:18; Song 5:3; Isa. 22:21.

in the Pentateuch outside of the Joseph story and the Eden narrative.<sup>138</sup> These observations support Dahlberg's argument that the uses of **כתנות** in the Joseph story and the Eden narrative are related; it is unlikely that this is a coincidence, given the relatively rare occurrence of this term outside of priestly contexts.

At the same time, however, the **כתנות עור** in the Eden narrative and the corresponding **כתנת פסים** in the Joseph story have different functions in their respective contexts. In the Eden narrative, God makes the **כתנות עור** for the humans after he has pronounced judgment on them for their disobedience and before he sends them out of Eden (Gen 3:21). These garments are typically understood as an expression of mercy and care on the part of God for the humans.<sup>139</sup> They also highlight the inadequacy of the humans' first attempt at clothing, made by sewing fig leaves together (Gen 3:7). The humans still feel the need to hide from God in spite of this clothing (Gen 3:8), while the **כתנות עור** that God gives them are apparently sufficient to cover their nakedness; God does for the humans what they cannot properly do for themselves. In the Eden narrative, therefore, the **כתנות עור** show God's continuing care for the humans despite their disobedience, as well as his willingness to assist them in dealing with the consequences that have arisen because of it.<sup>140</sup>

<sup>138</sup> All occurrences in Exodus and Leviticus denote the priestly tunics worn by Aaron and his sons: Exod. 28:4, 39, 40; 29:5, 8; 39:27; 40:14; Lev. 8:7, 13; 10:5; 16:4. Once in Ezra (2:69) and twice in Nehemiah (7:69, 71—70 and 72 Eng.), there is mention of "tunics of priests" (**כתנת כהנים**).

<sup>139</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 94. Westermann, *Genesis* 37-50, 269.

<sup>140</sup> Trible recognizes this tension between God's care and the lingering guilt that remains even after God clothes the humans: "Neither erasing nor ignoring their transgression, the deity equips them to endure its shame and fear" (Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 134).

Within the Joseph narrative, the precise nature of Joseph's special garment is uncertain. While it is designated as a **כתנת פסים**, it is difficult to determine the meaning of the root **פס**. It occurs only five times in the Hebrew Bible, all within the phrase **כתנת פסים**. Three of these refer to the garment Joseph gives Jacob (Gen 37:3, 23, 32), while the other two refer to the garment worn by Tamar when Amnon rapes her (2 Sam. 13:18, 19). In the case of Tamar, this garment designates her as one of the virgin daughters of the king (2 Sam. 13:18). Joseph's garment is most likely a tunic with sleeves, rather than a "coat of many colors."<sup>141</sup> In any case, it was a garment suitable for someone who did not have to work.<sup>142</sup> The precise nature of Joseph's **כתנת פסים**, however, is less important than the function it plays within the Joseph story. Jacob makes it for Joseph as a sign of the favoritism that he has for the son of his old age. The special garment outwardly communicates that Jacob loves Joseph more than all of his other sons (Gen 37:3).<sup>143</sup> This open favoritism motivates Joseph's brothers to hate him; their hatred is first mentioned as a response to it (Gen 37:4). The fact that the brothers strip the **כתנת** from Joseph immediately when they see him at Dothan (Gen 37:23) suggests that it continued to spark hatred among them, even though their primary motivation for plotting against him was his dreams (see above).<sup>144</sup> After the deed is done, the brothers use Joseph's garment to hide their actions, dipping it in a goat's blood and bringing it to Jacob (Gen 37:31-32). After this moment, Joseph's special garment never appears again; the sole mention of it is in Gen 37. Joseph's **כתנת פסים**, therefore, performs three

<sup>141</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 37.

<sup>142</sup> Arnold, *Genesis*, 318. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 346.

<sup>143</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 37. Green, *What Profit for Us*, 37-38.

<sup>144</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 40.

main functions in the Joseph story, all in the opening chapter: it expresses Jacob's love for Joseph, it causes Joseph's brothers to hate him, and it assists the brothers in convincing Jacob that Joseph has died. The fact that the Eden narrative and the Joseph story employ **כתנת** differently prevents one from drawing a direct connection between them in this respect.

The use of **כתנת** in Gen 37 is more likely intended to recall the **פסים כתנת** in the story of Amnon raping Tamar (2 Sam. 13:1-20). Besides the Joseph story, this is the only other place where the phrase **כתנת פסים** appears in the Hebrew Bible (2 Sam. 3:18, 19). Alter regards this as evidence that the story of Amnon and Tamar is making an allusion to the Joseph story.<sup>145</sup> A connection between these narratives is difficult to deny. Both of them portray strained family relationships and sibling conflict, especially in light of Absalom's subsequent revenge on Amnon for raping his sister (2 Sam. 13:32).<sup>146</sup> Furthermore, the fraternal relationships in Genesis are frequently seen as an analogy to or commentary upon the family of King David, so such a connection would not be isolated.<sup>147</sup> However, Alter notes that the allusion may also go the other way, such that the story of Amnon and Tamar casts light on the Joseph story.<sup>148</sup> Such an allusion deepens the special paternal love that Jacob feels towards Joseph, implying that Jacob cares for and safeguards Joseph the same way that kings cared for their unmarried daughters. It also heightens the brutality of the brothers' treatment of Joseph, by

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<sup>145</sup> Robert Alter, "Putting Together Biblical Narrative," in *Cabinet of the Muses: Essays on Classical and Comparative Literature in Honor of Thomas G. Rosenmeyer* (ed. Mark Griffith and Donald J. Mastronarde; Homage Series; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 117-29.

<sup>146</sup> Alter, "Putting Together Biblical Narrative," 121.

<sup>147</sup> Rendsburg, "Biblical Literature as Politics," 47-70; Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together*, 141-51; Rosenberg, *King and Kin*; Pleins, "Murderous Fathers," 121-36.

<sup>148</sup> Alter, "Putting Together Biblical Narrative," 121.

implicitly comparing it to an instance of incestuous rape. The use of **כתנת פסים** in the Joseph narrative is therefore better explained as an allusion to the story of Amnon and Tamar rather than to the **כתנות עור** in the Eden narrative. Nevertheless, this does not preclude an additional connection with the Eden narrative as well, since further exploration of the general use of clothing in the Joseph story reveals similarities with the role that clothing plays in the Eden narrative.

As Victor Matthews has demonstrated, clothing plays an important role throughout the Joseph story.<sup>149</sup> Garments appear at many places within the story of Joseph and his brothers, in many cases figuring as an important part of the narrative.<sup>150</sup> Joseph's **כתנת פסים**, for instance, manifests Jacob's love for him, motivates his brothers' hatred, and convinces Jacob that Joseph is dead. Likewise, Joseph leaves his garment (**בגד**) in the hand of Potiphar's wife when she attempts to seduce him, which she then uses to deceive her husband into thinking that Joseph attempted to lie with her (Gen 39:12-18). Joseph changes his attire when he first appears before Pharaoh (Gen 41:14), and Pharaoh gives Joseph new clothes when he places him in charge of the land of Egypt (Gen 41:42). Joseph gives garments to his brothers after he reveals his identity to them, recalling the clothing motif that arises first in Gen 37 (Gen 45:22).<sup>151</sup> Finally, clothing factors into the story of Judah and Tamar in Gen 38 as well, as a change of outfit enables Tamar to conceal her identity so Judah thinks she is a prostitute. Clothing, and

<sup>149</sup> Victor H. Matthews, "The Anthropology of Clothing in the Joseph Narrative," *JSOT* 65 (1995): 25-36.

<sup>150</sup> Westermann also notes a "garment motif" at work in the Joseph story (Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 37).

<sup>151</sup> Matthews, "The Anthropology of Clothing," 29-30; 35-36. Westermann notes that the narrator does not need to mention Joseph's **כתנת פסים** explicitly at this point, trusting that the readers will recognize the connection (Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 147).

changes of clothing, not only occur repeatedly within the Joseph story, but move the plot forward at crucial junctures.

The primary thematic use of clothing in the Joseph story is to highlight changes of status.<sup>152</sup> Within the family of Jacob, Joseph is elevated above his brothers as their father's favorite; the **כתנת פסים** that Jacob gives to him gives outward expression to this fact.<sup>153</sup> When Joseph is sold as a slave into Egypt, this garment is removed, signaling a lowering of status—Joseph transitions from being the son of a wealthy man in Canaan to being a slave in Egypt. Similarly, the removal of Joseph's garment as he flees from Potiphar's wife accompanies another change of his status, this time from a slave to a prisoner. Though it primarily serves the purpose of enabling Potiphar's wife to deceive her husband that Joseph tried to assault her, it also offers a further association between the removal of clothing and the lowering of Joseph's status.<sup>154</sup> When Pharaoh elevates Joseph to power in Egypt, he gives Joseph vestments appropriate to his new position of power, once again highlighting Joseph's elevated status through a change of clothing (Gen 41:42). This is initiated already when Joseph removes his prison garments to appear before Pharaoh, marking the beginning of his transition from prison to power in Egypt (Gen 41:14). Matthews even argues that Joseph's gift of garments to his brothers (Gen 45:22) implies a status change, one in which Joseph is now the master in a position to bestow gifts to his brothers. The fact that Joseph shows favoritism to Benjamin, echoing the preference shown earlier by Jacob, supports this notion, suggesting that

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<sup>152</sup> Matthews, "The Anthropology of Clothing," 29.

<sup>153</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 37. Green, *What Profit for Us*, 37-38.

<sup>154</sup> Matthews, "The Anthropology of Clothing," 32.

Joseph may be attempting to take his place as the head of the family.<sup>155</sup> At every turn, a change in Joseph's status, whether an increase or a decrease, is underscored through the use of clothing.

In addition to highlighting the various changes in Joseph's status, clothing also serves as a means of deception throughout the Joseph narrative. Joseph's brothers employ his **כְּתֵנֶת פָּסִים** to conceal the fact that they have sold Joseph into slavery, slaughtering a goat and dipping Joseph's garment in its blood (Gen 37:31-33). They then tell Jacob that they found the garment and ask him to recognize whether or not it belongs to Joseph. When Jacob recognizes it and concludes that Joseph has been eaten by a wild animal (Gen 37:33), the brothers deceive him about Joseph's fate without having to lie directly. Joseph's garment bears the false information that they wish to convey; they present it to their father with minimal comment. As Green describes it, "They imply something and Jacob infers something, with a crucial gap between the two parts of the transaction."<sup>156</sup>

Similarly, Potiphar's wife uses Joseph's garment to accuse him of attempting to lie with her. She shows the garment to her servants (Gen 39:13-15), keeping it beside her until her husband comes home so that she can show him as well (Gen 39:16-19). Potiphar's wife tells her servants and her husband that Joseph came in to sexually assault, but she cried out in a loud voice, and Joseph ran outside, leaving his garment beside her. There is a subtle interweaving of truth and falsehood in her words.<sup>157</sup> Joseph had come into the house, but it was she who wished to sleep with him. Joseph had run away, but

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 35-36.

<sup>156</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 52.

<sup>157</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 109-11. As Alter points out, the accounts that Potiphar's wife gives to her servants and to Potiphar repeat phrases from the narrator's version of what actually happened. The difference, however, is that Potiphar's wife rearranges these phrases, thereby changing their essential meaning of the events while keeping many of the words the same.

not because he feared being caught assaulting her. She had cried out in a loud voice, but only after Joseph fled, not before. Her story hinges on a reinterpretation of the crucial piece of evidence, the garment that Joseph had left. She says that he had left it “beside me” (אצלִי; Gen 39:18), implying that he had removed it voluntarily in preparation for intercourse. As the narrator tells us, however, Joseph had left the garment “in her hand” (בִּידָהּ; Gen 39:12); she had caught hold of it, and he left it behind because she would not let go.<sup>158</sup> She employs the garment to assert Joseph’s guilt, and both the other servants and Potiphar interpret it as such.<sup>159</sup> Clothing may serve as evidence, and Potiphar’s wife exploits this fact to assert Joseph’s guilt much as Joseph’s brothers had used Joseph’s special garment to suggest Joseph’s death.<sup>160</sup> Once again, clothing functions as a means of deception.

Finally, clothing is an implicit means of deception in the encounters between Joseph and his brothers in Egypt, before he reveals his identity to them. As the narrator states, Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him (Gen 42:8). Joseph does not rectify this situation immediately; he deliberately withholds his identity from his brothers throughout this journey and their second journey to Egypt. This is partly enabled by the fact that Joseph does not speak with them in their own language, but instead uses an interpreter (Gen 42:23). Yet this difference in language is part of Joseph’s overall adoption of an Egyptian identity, including his new name and Egyptian wife. This would have also suppressed any feature that might have marked him as a

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<sup>158</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 110.

<sup>159</sup> Green illuminates the changed meaning that Potiphar’s wife invests in Joseph’s garment by describing the garment as a “text.” As such, Potiphar’s wife “reads” the garment for her servants and for her husband in such a way that its meaning is altered. Green, *What Profit for Us*, 79-83.

<sup>160</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 66-67.



Hebrew.<sup>161</sup> Joseph looks and acts like an Egyptian, so his brothers are deceived without even realizing it.<sup>162</sup> Joseph's attire plays an important role in the adoption of his Egyptian identity—Pharaoh gives him a gold chain, signet ring, and linen clothes to signify his new position as Pharaoh's second in command (Gen 41:42). Joseph's vestments are therefore an implicit part of the deception whereby he withholds his identity from his brothers throughout Gen 42-44. Whatever Joseph's reason for this deception—and such a reason is difficult to ascertain<sup>163</sup>—it is ultimately crucial for the reconciliation that eventually takes place between Joseph and his brothers. And once again, clothing plays an important role. Throughout the Joseph story, then, garments enable deception in several key instances while also highlighting Joseph's changes of status.

Clothing likewise plays both of these roles in the narrative of Judah and Tamar, which further integrates the overall clothing motif within the broader story of Joseph and his brothers. This passage is frequently excised from the Joseph story proper, particularly in scholarship that focuses on source analysis.<sup>164</sup> As I argued in the introduction, however, there are important reasons for reading Gen 38 as a part of the Joseph story. Alter has observed several verbal connections between Gen 38 and the larger Joseph

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<sup>161</sup> Matthews, "The Anthropology of Clothing," 34.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>163</sup> Sternberg notes that answers to the question "why does Joseph torment his brothers?" typically center on punishing, testing, teaching, or dream fulfillment. He argues that none of these possible motivations completely account for Joseph's behavior, but all of them do when taken together and in a certain order (Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 285-308). In chapter four, I discuss Joseph's treatment of his brothers in detail, arguing that there is a strong degree of irrationality in Joseph's behavior. That is to say, he treats his brothers harshly because he is genuinely unsure of how best to deal with them and his own lingering anger, resentment, and struggle to comprehend God's involvement in their lives.

<sup>164</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 22, 49. von Rad, *Genesis*, 351-52; Speiser, *Genesis*, 299-300; Cf. also Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 52. Coats's understanding of this chapter is remarkable given his general emphasis on the literary unity of Gen 37-50. He excises only Gen 38 and Gen 47:13-26 from the otherwise coherent and unified narrative.

narrative.<sup>165</sup> Furthermore, Judah's act of sleeping with Tamar, whom he thinks is a prostitute, contrasts with the virtue of Joseph in Potiphar's house, as he refuses his mistress's sexual advances.<sup>166</sup> Judah also changes over the course of this chapter, coming to recognize not only his guilt and Tamar's righteousness, but also the necessity of risking a loved child so that the family line may continue. The change Judah undergoes here enables him to move things forward later in the Joseph story, first by convincing Jacob to send Benjamin (Gen 43:8-10) and then by offering to be a slave in Benjamin's place (Gen 44:18-34).<sup>167</sup> Finally, the birth of Tamar's twins Perez and Zerah presents the familiar Genesis theme of the preference for younger siblings. As Judah Goldin argues, portraying this among Judah's sons confirms the fact that Judah will be a key figure in the narrative that follows.<sup>168</sup>

Clothing plays an important role in Gen 38, especially in Tamar's successful attempt to bear children. As Er's widow, she has both the right and the duty to bear children from Judah's family, so that Er's line may continue according to the levirate law.<sup>169</sup> After Onan dies, Judah fears the death of his only remaining son, Shelah, so he does not give her to Tamar even after Shelah is old enough to perform the duty of fathering a son.<sup>170</sup> Realizing this, Tamar takes action, concealing her identity so that Judah sleeps with her, thinking she is a prostitute (Gen 38:14-19). Tamar's actions at this point are bracketed by changes of clothing. When she hears that Judah has gone up to Timnah, Tamar takes off her widow's garments and puts on a veil (Gen 38:14). After

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<sup>165</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 3-12.

<sup>166</sup> Arnold, *Genesis*, 325.

<sup>167</sup> Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 46-49, 117-20. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 364.

<sup>168</sup> Goldin, "The Youngest Son or Where Does Genesis 38 Belong," 42-43.

<sup>169</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 52.

<sup>170</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 437. Hamilton notes that Judah's fear for Shelah is his real reason for sending Tamar back to her father's house, while Shelah's youth provides a convenient excuse.

Judah has slept with her, she takes off the veil and returns to wearing her widow's garments (Gen 38:19). This change of clothing accompanies an outward change of status, at least in Judah's perception. Putting off the garments that mark her as a widow, she puts on different attire; as a result, Judah perceives her as a prostitute. At the same time, it conceals Tamar's identity from Judah, so that he does not realize that he is sleeping with his daughter-in-law (Gen 38:16). Tamar uses her apparel to deceive Judah and to conceal her identity, much as Joseph's brothers had used the garment to deceive their father and to conceal the fact that they sold Joseph.<sup>171</sup> In this case, however, it is not Tamar who is guilty, but Judah; he is guilty of withholding Shelah from her, preventing her from bearing the offspring to which is entitled. If the signet ring, cord, and staff that Tamar takes from Judah as collateral (Gen 38:18) may be regarded as clothing—and evidence suggests that at least the seal and cord would have been worn in some fashion—then we also see clothing used to confirm Judah's complicity and Tamar's righteousness.<sup>172</sup> His recognition of these items as his own cause him to see his own guilt in withholding Shelah from her (Gen 38:26).<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Friedman, "Deception for Deception."

<sup>172</sup> Most commentators argue that Judah's seal (חֲזָתִים) would have been a cylinder seal, while the cord (פֶּתִיל) would have been attached to the seal and worn around the Judah's neck. So von Rad, *Genesis*, 355. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 368. Arnold, *Genesis*, 328. Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 444. Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 53. Speiser, *Genesis*, 298. Westermann leaves open the possibility that the seal could have been a signet ring, but Speiser argues that the mention of the cord rules out this possibility—a cord by itself would have little meaning, so it must have accompanied the seal. Cf. W. W. Hallo, "As the Seal upon Thy Heart," *BR* 1 (1985): 20-27. Hallo suggests that the "staff" (בִּזְמָה) would have referred to a pin inserted through the center of the cylinder seal and used to roll it over clay. The pin (with the seal attached) would have been worn as a shoulder clasp for robes or attached to a cord and worn as a bracelet. Hallo interprets Judah's seal, cord, and staff in this way, arguing that all three would have referred collectively to Judah's pin-mounted seal, worn as a bracelet. In this case, all three items would have been worn. Hallo acknowledges, however, that a seal worn around the neck would have been more common. In any case, at least the seal and cord would have been worn, if not also the staff.

<sup>173</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 369.

Clothing denotes changes of status in the Joseph narrative, while at the same time serving as a means of deception. This is particularly true for the opening chapters of the Joseph story, Gen 37-39, but it also holds true elsewhere, including Joseph's installation as the second-in-command in Egypt, his gift of garments to his brothers in Gen 45:22, and the implicit use of his vestments in concealing his identity from them in Gen 42-44. The humans' garments function in a similar way in the Eden narrative, which employs the motif of clothing versus nakedness to highlight the change that takes place within the humans after they eat from the forbidden tree. As I stated in chapter two, the statements about humans' attitude toward their nakedness in Gen 2:25 and 3:7 mark off the central scene in which disobedience occurs; naked and unashamed before they eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:25), they become ashamed of their nakedness immediately after eating from it (3:7).<sup>174</sup> This change denotes the effect that the tree's fruit had upon them. It is shown outwardly through the fact that they make loincloths (חגורת) for themselves, the first attempt at making garments. The loincloths accompany the change of status that the humans undergo—from naked, childlike, innocent unawareness to knowledge, disobedience, and shame. This is also a characteristic of the כְּתָנֹת עֹר that God makes for the humans in Gen 3:21. While it is a sign of God's continuing care for them, it does not lessen their guilt in any way.<sup>175</sup> In fact, since the designation "garments of skin" implies that animals were killed in to make them, the garments serve as a continual reminder that the humans' harmony with the rest of the created world has been forever altered by their disobedience and guilt in Eden.

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<sup>174</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 219-20.

<sup>175</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 134. Cf. also Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 84-85.

The humans' garments manifest the change that has taken place within them, since it is part of their attempt to hide their newly recognized nakedness. This continues in Gen 3:8, when the humans hide from God as they hear him in the garden. Both the loincloths and the act of hiding are an attempt to conceal the humans' nakedness from God; they are also, by extension, an attempt to conceal the act of disobedience by which they came to see their nakedness. The attempt fails: the man tells God that he hid because he was naked (Gen 3:10), and God immediately recognizes that the man has disobeyed and eaten from the tree that had been forbidden (Gen 3:11). Clothing is a means of deception and concealment, an unsuccessful attempt to cover up the wrong that has been done. At the same time, however, it is actually evidence of the human's guilt; they cover themselves because they are ashamed to be naked, a state of affairs that arose when they disobeyed. By contrast, nakedness is associated with innocence. The humans' nakedness without shame in Gen 2:25 should be understood as a state of innocence, even if it childlike and naïve.<sup>176</sup> When they disobey God, they cover up their nakedness. However, it is not the nakedness itself which makes them guilty, but their recognition of it. It is the attitude towards their nakedness, rather than the nakedness itself, that is associated with the humans' guilt.<sup>177</sup>

The above discussion reveals a similarity between the use of clothing in the Joseph story and the use of it in the Eden narrative. In both, clothing helps call attention to important changes that take place for the main characters. In the Eden narrative, the humans' attempt to make clothing demonstrates their acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil, while the clothes that God makes for them is a reminder that their

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<sup>176</sup> Gunkel, *Genesis*, 17. Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 114-15.

<sup>177</sup> Cf. Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 228. Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 8-9.

relationship with one another and with the created world has been altered. In the Joseph story, clothing appears wherever Joseph's status rises or falls, from his father's gift of a **כתנת פסים** to the garments that Pharaoh gives to him in Egypt. Apparel also serves as a means of deception in both narratives. In Gen 2-3, the humans employ clothing in an attempt to cover up their nakedness and, by extension, the act of disobedience which led to their awareness of it. The fact that they hide from God in Gen 3:8 confirms this desire to conceal their wrongdoing and their guilt. In the Joseph story, Joseph's brothers use Joseph's **כתנת פסים** to deceive Jacob, Potiphar's wife uses his garment to deceive her husband, and Joseph implicitly uses his Egyptian regalia to help conceal his identity from his brothers. At the same time, clothing is actually evidence of guilt in these instances. Joseph's brothers and Potiphar's wife are in possession of Joseph's garments because of the wrongs they commit against him. The humans in Eden feel a need to cover themselves because their perception has been altered by eating the from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The Joseph story and the Eden narrative reveal similar uses of clothing to highlight changes in status or circumstances, as well as a means of concealing crime and wrongdoing.

There is even a connection between these narratives in their use of nakedness. The humans' nakedness in Gen 2:25 conveys their innocence, as argued above. And while Joseph is never directly described as unclothed in the Joseph story, there are two points at which nakedness is implied. First, Joseph's brothers strip off (**ויפשטו**) his special garment from him when they throw him into a cistern, just before selling him as a

slave (Gen 37:23).<sup>178</sup> Second, Joseph may be naked when he flees from Potiphar's wife and leaves his garment in her hand (Gen 39:12). It is unclear whether Joseph is completely nude as he does so. Matthews observes that Joseph's בגד likely would have described "a gown worn over the tunic," donned by men in nearly every facet of Egyptian society.<sup>179</sup> In this case, Joseph would have left only the outer garment behind. Von Rad, however, suggests that Joseph would not have worn this outer garment inside the house, in which case Potiphar's wife would have grabbed Joseph's tunic and he would have run away completely undressed.<sup>180</sup> In any event, it is clear that Joseph flees Potiphar's wife wearing fewer clothes than he had when he entered, and that this carried an element of impropriety.<sup>181</sup> Potiphar's wife presents the garment to her servants and her husband in a way that suggests Joseph had intended to rape her.<sup>182</sup> The presence of Joseph's garment with her can therefore be interpreted as sexually suggestive, implying nakedness or near-nakedness. In both instances, Joseph is innocent when his clothing is removed, creating an association between Joseph's innocence and his implied nakedness; a similar association is found in the Eden narrative.

Throughout the entire Joseph narrative, clothing is an important motif. This is especially the case in the first three chapters, where changes of attire accompany the

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<sup>178</sup> Hamilton notes that Joseph's implied nakedness in being stripped of his garment would have increased the risk of death by exposure to the elements (Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 419).

<sup>179</sup> Matthews, "Anthropology of Clothing," 32. On the widespread use of this attire in Egypt, Matthews cites its depiction in Egyptian art, as discussed by N. de G. Davies, *The Tomb of Meryra* (vol. 1 of *The Rock Tombs of El Amarna*; London: Gilbert & Rivington, 1903), 11.

<sup>180</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 361. Cf. also Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 465. Hamilton notes that Joseph could have left either an outer garment or undergarments behind. If his undergarment is in view, Hamilton's interpretation seems to presume von Rad's argument that Joseph would have worn this alone in the house—it is unlikely that his undergarment would have been removed while he was still wearing the outer garment.

<sup>181</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 82.

<sup>182</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 467. Cf. also Green, *What Profit for Us*, 82-83 and Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 110.

changes in Joseph's status and where garments are used several times for purposes of deception and concealment. As I have argued above, this thematic use of apparel echoes the function of clothing in the Eden narrative. In Gen 2-3, an interplay between the humans' nakedness and their covering denotes a change that takes place among them, and it highlights their guilt. While the mention of Joseph's **כתנת פסים** does not appear to be a direct allusion to the **כתנות עור** in Gen 3:21, the garment does make up part of a broader thematic use of clothing in the Joseph narrative. As such, it contributes to the Joseph story's connection with the Gen 2-3 on this basis.

## ***VI. Summary and Conclusion***

In this chapter, I identified two episodes in the beginning of the Joseph story that may be read as narrative analogies with the stories in Gen 2-4. First, the opening chapter of the Joseph narrative exhibits several close connections with the story of Cain and Abel, as Joseph's brothers experience hatred and jealousy motivated by the divine and paternal favor shown to Joseph. Their jealousy escalates to the point of near fratricide, driving them to consider killing Joseph. At the same time, however, while Joseph's brothers revisit Cain's animosity toward a younger brother, the brothers do not repeat Cain's crime. Recognizing that it is wrong to shed blood, especially the blood of their kinsman, Reuben and Judah convince the brothers on this basis to dispose of Joseph differently. They sell Joseph as a slave, sending him away in a manner that echoes the exile and separation of other brothers in Genesis, including Ishmael, Esau, and Cain. Exile serves as a substitute for murder; separation occurs so that death is avoided. The



story of Joseph and his brothers begins, in many respects, as the same old story that has repeated itself frequently among siblings in Genesis. Rivalry escalates to open conflict and the threat of death towards the younger, favored son, with separation presented as an alternative to murder. The Joseph narrative begins by echoing this common motif in Genesis, and especially its particular expression in the story of Cain and Abel.

Second, the story of Joseph and Potiphar's in Gen 39 may be seen as a narrative analogy with the account of disobedience in the Eden narrative (Gen 2-3). Both stories involve temptation in which a woman plays a central role, and both likewise emphasize the sense of sight in describing desire and its object. Furthermore, both stories depict a similar situation, in which the protagonist is given great freedom and responsibility with a single limitation, combined with the possibility and suggestion to ignore that limitation. These similarities create an analogy between Gen 39 and the humans' disobedience in Eden, which sheds light on Joseph's character and hints at different consequences to come. The analogy, however, is characterized by reversal and contrast rather than parallel or repetition; Joseph succeeds where the man in Eden failed. He does not disobey or overstep his boundaries, but remains mindful of his place and, more importantly, faithful to God. Joseph's faithfulness and virtue in Potiphar's house emerges as a counterpart to the man's offense in Eden; faced with a similar situation, Joseph is obedient and faithful where his predecessor was not. Joseph's faithfulness has positive consequences in the overall plot of the Joseph narrative. If he had acted differently, Joseph would not have gone to prison, he would not have come to Pharaoh's attention, and would not have been in a position to save Egypt and his family from the famine. The humans' disobedience in Eden likewise had consequences, giving rise to the

present conditions of human life that are less than perfect and surrounded by death. By recalling the Eden narrative at Joseph's moment of faithfulness and strong character, Gen 39 raises the possibility that Joseph's behavior will have different, more positive consequences—consequences that will surpass the normal limitations and hardships of the present world, described in the Eden narrative and experienced in daily life.

Both of these narrative analogies are reinforced through the thematic role of garments and implied nakedness in the Joseph story, which resonates with the motif of clothing and nakedness in the Eden narrative. Throughout the story of Joseph, but especially in Gen 37-39, clothing highlights changes of status, aids in deception, and calls attention to the interplay between innocence and guilt. It performs similar functions in the Eden narrative, as the humans' nakedness and subsequent covering demonstrates their altered lives, while also serving as a means of concealment and highlighting the effects of their guilt. These points of correspondence are not exact, but they do support the identification of analogous relationships between the early chapters of the Joseph story and the narratives in Gen 2-4. At the same time, they hint that broader parallels and resonances may be observed as well, creating intratextual patterns between Gen 2-4 and the whole Joseph narrative rather than single episodes within it. These larger intratextual relationships are the subject of the next two chapters.

## Chapter Three: Life, Death, and Knowledge

### *I. Introduction*

The previous chapter discussed an analogous relationship between two short episodes of the Joseph story and narratives in the Primeval History. The account of Joseph's sale into slavery (Gen 37) parallels the story of Cain and Abel, while Joseph's encounter in Potiphar's house (Gen 39:1-20) presents a reversal of Adam's disobedience in Eden. Having identified these two smaller narrative analogies, in the present chapter I explore a broad analogy with the Eden narrative throughout the larger Joseph story. Focusing on Joseph's knowledge as a major theme in the Joseph story, I show how Joseph's knowledge enables him to preserve life during the famine that threatens Egypt and the whole world. This relationship between knowledge and life constitutes a reversal of the Eden narrative, where the knowledge of good and evil leads to death. By ensuring that the people of Egypt (and others) survive the famine, Joseph circumvents the curse upon the earth that resulted from the first humans' disobedience.

I begin by demonstrating how knowledge is a major theme of the Joseph story, while identifying two related but distinct dimensions to the main character's knowledge. One dimension is his extraordinary wisdom and practical skill, while the second is his insight into God's activity in his life. The first element remains constant throughout the narrative, largely appearing in Gen 39-41 and Joseph's other dealings with the famine and the Egyptians (e.g., Gen 47:13-26). The second changes as the story unfolds, reflecting Joseph's growing perspective as he continues to interact with his brothers in Gen 42-45. With a thorough understanding of Joseph's knowledge throughout Gen 37-

50, I compare it to the knowledge of good and evil in the Eden narrative. Several parallels may be noted, suggesting an analogous relationship between the two stories centered on this theme. Following this discussion of knowledge, I investigate the famine in the Joseph narrative and its central role in the story's plot. The narrative's ambivalent attitude toward the famine resonates with the curse on the earth in the Eden story, suggesting an analogous relationship between the two as well. I conclude the chapter by bringing together these two parallels between the Joseph story and the Eden narrative—the knowledge and the famine—showing how Joseph reverses the effects of the knowledge gained in Eden. Whereas the knowledge of good and evil led to death and a curse upon the earth, Joseph's knowledge leads to the preservation of life in spite of this curse.

## ***II. Knowledge in the Joseph Story***

Knowledge is an important theme throughout the Joseph story, as all of the major characters struggle to understand the meaning of the events in which they find themselves. Sketching the issue in terms of remembrance and interpretation, Green demonstrates how this complex struggle for knowledge lies at the heart of the Joseph narrative's significance.<sup>1</sup> None of the characters at first realize the true meaning of Joseph's dreams, which become clear only after he has risen to power in Egypt and encountered his brothers again. Jacob is largely ignorant of the divisive dynamics within his own family, blatantly favoring Joseph and carelessly sending the young man alone

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<sup>1</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*.

among those who hate him.<sup>2</sup> While he does suspect a connection between the disappearance of Joseph, the imprisonment of Simeon, the request to take Benjamin, and the enigmatic appearance of silver in the brothers' sacks when they return from Egypt (Gen 42:36),<sup>3</sup> the patriarch never seems to understand the full extent of his family's problems.<sup>4</sup> Joseph's brothers fail to comprehend their various difficulties in Egypt until Joseph reveals himself to them. Their fearful question posed to one another, "What is this God has done to us?" (Gen 42:28), succinctly captures the extent to which they find themselves caught in a web of mysterious circumstances for much of the story. Even Joseph, the "magisterial knower" in the narrative, has much to learn as the story progresses, growing into maturity from the boasting dreamer he was at the outset.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, he comes to recognize the extent to which his brothers have changed since selling him into slavery, as Judah's speech convinces him of their love and acceptance of Benjamin (Gen 44:18-34).<sup>6</sup> And as I argue below and explore more fully in the next chapter, Joseph's knowledge develops even more thoroughly than this: he comes to understand God's role in his life and his relationship with his brothers. Noting how the characters' knowledge, or lack thereof, contributes to the story's plot and significance at

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<sup>2</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 44; Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 148.

<sup>3</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 298. Cf. also Green, *What Profit for Us*, 127.

<sup>4</sup> Jacob blatantly favors Benjamin just as he had done with Joseph, as if he regarded only those two as his true sons (Gen 42:38; 44:27-28). And aside from the brothers' false message to Joseph about their father's desire for Joseph to forgive them (Gen 50:16-17), there is never any clue that Jacob comes to know how Joseph came to be in Egypt. A broken, complaining figure through much of the narrative, Jacob again assumes the role of strong and wise patriarch when he learns of Joseph's survival and position in Egypt: he takes charge of the family's journey, receives a vision from God (Gen 46:1-4), blesses his sons (Gen 49) and even Pharaoh (Gen 47:7), and ensures his own burial in Canaan (Gen 47:29-31; 49:29-32). Yet Jacob never demonstrates any regret for his favoritism or for the problems it causes.

<sup>5</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 159.

<sup>6</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 308.

every turn, Robert Alter regards the Joseph story as the most fruitful tale in which to explore the relationship between narration and knowledge in Hebrew narrative.<sup>7</sup>

In several places, knowledge or ignorance receives overt emphasis through the use of the Hebrew root ידע and related terms.<sup>8</sup> While none of its derivatives are found in the Joseph narrative, the verb ידע itself occurs twenty times.<sup>9</sup> Many of these instances refer to a lack of knowledge or concern. So, for instance, Potiphar does not know (i.e., does not concern himself with) anything in his house except the food that he eats (Gen 39:6, 8). In Gen 38:16, Judah does not know Tamar's identity when he asks to sleep with her. Joseph's brothers do not know that he can understand them, since they communicate through an interpreter (Gen 42:23). Similarly, they do not know who returned their money to their grain sacks after the first trip to Egypt (Gen 43:22). And when Joseph accuses Benjamin of stealing his silver cup, he implies that the brothers should know he can practice divination and would therefore easily discover the theft (Gen 44:15).

Occurrences of ידע in the *hiphil* form in the Joseph story refer to the revelation of knowledge:<sup>10</sup> God makes known the interpretation of Pharaoh's dream to Joseph (Gen 41:39), and Joseph eventually makes known his identity to his brothers (Gen 45:1).

Finally, Joseph demands that the brothers bring Benjamin to Egypt so that he may know

<sup>7</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 159.

<sup>8</sup> G. Johannes Botterweck and Jan Bergman, "ידע," *TDOT* 5:448-81 (453). The *TDOT* entry lists the following derivatives of ידע: דעת, דע, דעה, מודע, מודעת, מודע, and מנרע. By far the most common is דעת, which occurs 90 times in the Hebrew Bible and is the only derivative to occur in the Pentateuch (7x): Gen 2:9, 17; Exod. 31:3; 35:31; Num. 24:16; Deut. 4:42; 19:4. The other derivatives are found in 1 Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Daniel, 2 Chronicles, and Ruth. None of them occur in the Joseph story.

<sup>9</sup> Gen 38:9, 16, 26; 39:6, 8; 41:21, 31, 39; 42:23, 33, 34; 43:7 (2x), 22; 44:15, 27; 45:1; 47:6; 48:19 (2x).

<sup>10</sup> Botterweck and Bergman, *TDOT* 5:470. The *hiphil* of ידע is one of the means they list for expressing revelation in Hebrew.

whether or not they are honest men (Gen 42:33-34). In this sense, knowledge refers to Joseph's desire, whether genuine or feigned, for certainty about his brothers' honesty.<sup>11</sup>

A number of words related to יָדַע also develop the theme of knowledge in the Joseph narrative. The most significant is נָכַר, "recognize," which Alter argues is linked to יָדַע as a key-word pair throughout the Joseph story.<sup>12</sup> It comprises an important verbal link between Gen 37 and 38, helping to integrate the story of Judah and Tamar into the larger Joseph narrative.<sup>13</sup> The term also factors into the crucial scene where Joseph meets his brothers again for the first time in Egypt (Gen 42:7-8). Joseph "recognized them" (וַיִּכְרֶם) as soon as he saw them (Gen 42:7). The next verse is similar, saying that "Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him" (וַיִּכַּר יוֹסֵף אֶת־אֶחָיו וְהֵם לֹא הִכְרִיחוּ; Gen 42:8). This juxtaposition of their inability to recognize Joseph and his recognition of them highlights the discrepancy between his knowledge and theirs.<sup>14</sup>

To נָכַר must also be added זָכַר, "remember," as well as its antonyms נָשָׁח and שָׁכַח, both meaning "forget." Joseph remembers (וַיִּזְכֹּר) his dreams when his brothers come to buy grain (Gen 42:9), the recollection reasserting the dreams' influence on the

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<sup>11</sup> On the level of the false accusation which Joseph levels against his brothers, he proposes this as the test by which he can be assured that they are not spies. If his overall purpose is to test whether or not his brothers have changed, then he actually seeks to know something more. He wishes to ascertain whether or not they have treated Benjamin as they treated him so many years before, or to see how they will react when he demands that Benjamin be brought to him. Cf. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 289-90.

<sup>12</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 159.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 10-11. As Alter notes, this connection was also identified in the *Gen. Rab.* 84:11, 12.

<sup>14</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 163. In addition to the fact that they do not recognize him while he recognizes them, Joseph "acts as a stranger" toward his brothers, which is conveyed by נָכַר in the *hitpa'el*: וַיִּתְנַכֵּר (Gen 42:7).

course of events and sparking Joseph's subsequent treatment of his brothers.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, Joseph names his firstborn son Manasseh "because God has made me forget..." (כִּי־נִשְׁכַּח אֱלֹהִים). This shows that he forgets (or attempts to forget) his father's house and his past troubles (Gen 41:51).<sup>16</sup> Though these terms themselves occur only a few times,<sup>17</sup> the concept of remembering is central both to the plot of the Joseph narrative and to its meaning, as Barbara Green has shown: "If the whole Joseph story can be compressed to a single imperative, it is to remember and reinterpret."<sup>18</sup> All of these words deal with proper or improper perception or recollection, a key aspect of knowledge in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 520. Sternberg rules out the desire for dream fulfillment as Joseph's primary motivation for demanding to see Benjamin (Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 291). He does, however, acknowledge that Joseph's recollection of the dreams factors into his interactions with his brothers (p. 288). Green states that Joseph is driven partly by the remembrance of his dreams, but leaves open the precise motivations involved (Green, *What Profit for Us*, 131). Westermann states that the mention of the dreams sets the present scene in the context of the beginning of the narrative, so that this context defines Joseph's subsequent treatment of his brothers. When Joseph remembers his dreams, he decides on a course of forgiveness and healing, but the harsh treatment of his brothers is necessary for this (Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 107). Cf. also Meira Polliack, "Joseph's Trauma: Memory and Resolution," *Performing Memory in Biblical Narrative and Beyond* (ed. A. Brenner and Frank H. Polak; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009), 72-105. Polliack argues that Joseph's memory of his dreams is a recollection of his traumatic experience of being sold into slavery. The memory "hints at a wider traumatized facet in his character" (74).

<sup>16</sup> The exact meaning of Joseph's claim to have forgotten his father's house is unclear. Cf. James S. Ackerman, "Joseph, Judah, and Jacob," in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*, vol. 2. Edited by Kenneth R.R. Gros Louis, James S. Ackerman, and Thayer S. Warshaw. Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 85-113; Yiu-Wing Fung, *Victim and Victimizer: Joseph's Interpretation of His Destiny* (JSOTSup 308; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 105; von Rad, *Genesis*, 374. Ackerman sees Joseph putting the past behind him when he names his sons. In contrast, von Rad argues that Joseph does not actually forget in the sense of ceasing to remember, but simply acknowledges that he is no longer a part of his father's house. Fung notes that in the very attempt to forget his father's house, Joseph remembers it: "his speech-act actually undermines his intention."

<sup>17</sup> זָכַר is found at Gen 40:14 (2x), 23; 41:9; and 42:9. שָׁכַח occurs at 40:23 and 41:30. נָשַׁח is found only in 41:51.

<sup>18</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 109.

<sup>19</sup> Botterweck and Bergman, *TDOT* 5:462. The word יָדַע involves both the reception of sensory information and the intellectual processing of that information, often without distinguishing strongly between the two.



Since knowledge is often connected with sensory perception, the verbs **ראה** and **שמע** should be considered as well.<sup>20</sup> These are common verbs, and every instance of them in the Joseph narrative does not bear on the theme of knowledge. However, in several places they are used when characters receive important information. Thus, hearing enables the man at Shechem to know the brothers went to Dothan (Gen 37:17), Potiphar to know (erroneously) that Joseph assaulted his wife (Gen 39:19), Pharaoh to know that Joseph can interpret dreams (Gen 41:15), and Jacob to know that there is grain in Egypt (Gen 42:2). Similarly, Joseph's brothers see that Jacob loves him more than them (Gen 37:4), Tamar sees that Shelah has grown up and that she has not been given to him as a wife (Gen 38:14), Potiphar sees that YHWH is with Joseph (Gen 39:3), and Jacob sees that Egypt has grain (Gen 42:1). God makes Pharaoh see (**הראה**) what he is about to do (Gen 41:28). In all of these instances, **ראה** and **שמע** describe the reception of crucial knowledge that moves the plot forward.

Similarly, the verbs **נגד** and **ספר** are used when knowledge is imparted rather than received.<sup>21</sup> Joseph both declares (**נגד**; Gen 37:5) and recounts (**ספר**; Gen 37:9) his dreams to his brothers, disclosing to them and to the reader the enigmatic knowledge that will set the whole story in motion and determine its course from beginning to end.<sup>22</sup> Pharaoh's servants recount (**ספר**) their dreams to Joseph (Gen 40:9), just as Pharaoh recounts (**ספר**) his dreams to his magicians and wise men (Gen 41:8). Joseph asks the

<sup>20</sup> Botterweck and Bergman, *TDOT* 5:461-62.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Botterweck and Bergman, *TDOT* 5:470. According to their study, these terms are used to express revelation. Others include **גלה**, **ידע** *hip'il* and *nip'al*, **ראה** *nip'al*, **דבר** *pi'el*, and **אמר**.

<sup>22</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 196-97.

man near Shechem to tell (נָגַד) him where he may find his brothers (Gen 37:16), God tells (נָגַד) Pharaoh what he is about to do (Gen 41:25), Joseph's brothers tell (נָגַד) Jacob that Joseph is alive (Gen 45:26), and Jacob blesses his sons by telling (נָגַד) them what will come about in later days (Gen 49:1). Related to these terms, פָּתַר and פִּתְרוֹן deal with interpretations or explanations, and therefore also bear on the theme of knowledge. Both are used when Joseph interprets the dreams of Pharaoh and his two imprisoned officials.<sup>23</sup>

Other terms that help develop the theme of knowledge in the Joseph story include חָכְם/חֲכָמָה and בֵּין. These are often connected with יָדַע or דָּעַת in the Hebrew Bible, especially in wisdom literature.<sup>24</sup> Joseph is described by Pharaoh as discerning and wise (נָבוֹן וְחָכָם), and therefore fit to administer Egypt during the famine (Gen 41:39).

Furthermore, he exhibits many qualities that are characteristic of wisdom figures in the Hebrew Bible, especially in chapters 39-41. These include his refusal to sleep with Potiphar's wife (thus avoiding the "strange woman," cf. Prov. 22:14; 23:27-28), his great administrative ability, his prudent demeanor before Pharaoh, and his obedience to God.<sup>25</sup> Though there is considerable debate about the extent to which the Joseph narrative has been influenced by wisdom literature,<sup>26</sup> it is difficult to deny the presence of wisdom

<sup>23</sup> פָּתַר occurs in Gen 40:8, 16, 22; 41:8, 12, 13, 15. פִּתְרוֹן occurs in Gen 40:5, 8, 12, 18; 41:11.

<sup>24</sup> Botterweck and Bergman, *TDOT* 5:465-67.

<sup>25</sup> von Rad, "The Joseph Narrative and Ancient Wisdom," 292-300.

<sup>26</sup> Von Rad's argument that the Joseph story is an example of wisdom literature was challenged by James Crenshaw and Donald B. Redford: Crenshaw, "Method in Determining Wisdom Influence," 129-42; Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*. While their criticisms effectively denied that the Joseph narrative was not an instance of wisdom literature, others have established that they did not rule out the possibility of wisdom influence altogether. For a detailed discussion of the scholarly debate, see Wilson, *Joseph, Wise and Otherwise*, 7-27.

elements in the characterization of Joseph, at least in Gen 39-41.<sup>27</sup> If Joseph is portrayed as a wise man in these chapters, it further characterizes him as one who possesses knowledge.

The theme of knowledge, developed by means of the words discussed above, recurs time and again throughout the Joseph narrative, figuring prominently at some of the story's most important turning points. Potiphar's lack of knowledge contributes to the conflict in Gen 39, where the narrative takes a crucial step toward Joseph's eventual rise to power. It highlights the extent of Joseph's authority (Gen 39:6) as well as increases the potential for temptation, since the ignorance of Joseph's master would make it easy for him to get away with adultery. Yet it is just this lack of knowledge that Joseph cites as evidence of Potiphar's great trust in him, which he refuses to betray (39:8). Knowledge similarly factors into the elevation of Joseph to the position of second-in-command in Egypt. Pharaoh deems Joseph the wisest man, and therefore the best choice to administer the land, because God has made known to him the meaning of Pharaoh's dreams and the way to avert the crisis presented by the coming famine (Gen 41:39). Joseph is both discerning and wise (נבון וחכם); the Egyptian magicians and wise men, by contrast, are unable to interpret Pharaoh's dreams (Gen 41:8). It is Joseph's knowledge that sets him apart from the others and leads to his elevation.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, as discussed earlier, knowledge and the lack of it play a strong role in Joseph's dealings with his brothers throughout Gen 42-44, leading up to the climax of the

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<sup>27</sup> George W. Coats, "The Joseph Story and Ancient Wisdom: A Reappraisal," 285-97. Coats identifies these chapters as a political legend, a "kernel," within the Joseph story, and argues for significant wisdom influence at this point. He notes especially the heavy emphasis on Joseph's character that holds the kernel together. Joseph is characterized chiefly by discretion and wisdom (288-89). Cf. also Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 147-48.

<sup>28</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 27-28.

narrative. Joseph recognizes his brothers (ויכר יוסף את־אחיו), but they are not able to recognize him (ואם לא הכרהו; Gen 42:8) and he acts as a stranger toward them (ויתנכר אליהם; Gen 42:7). The repetition of the root נכר highlights the discrepancy between Joseph's knowledge and his brothers' ignorance.<sup>29</sup> Dramatic irony is keenly felt at this moment when they tell Joseph, "we are all sons of one man," unknowingly including him among their number (42:11).<sup>30</sup> The brothers do not know who placed their money back in their grain sacks after their first trip to Egypt (43:22), and they are similarly amazed when they discover that Joseph has seated them according to their birth order (43:33), not knowing how he has been able to do this.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, they find all their experiences in Egypt to be unintelligible, from the time they are detained as spies to the moment Benjamin is threatened with slavery. They have, at most, a vague inkling that these things somehow relate to what they did to Joseph so long ago, and that God's hand is somehow involved (Gen 42:21, 28; 44:16).<sup>32</sup> When Joseph does reveal his identity to his brothers, it is described as a disclosure of knowledge: he makes himself known (ידע hitpa'el) to them (45:1).

Knowledge, therefore, comes into play in the most crucial scenes of the Joseph story: Joseph's encounter with Potiphar's wife, his interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams and elevation to power, and his interactions with his brothers throughout Gen 42-44. At

<sup>29</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 163. Alter identifies the two roots נכר and ידע as "paired key-words" that foreground the theme of knowledge throughout the Joseph narrative (159).

<sup>30</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 164.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 172. Alter regards Joseph's seating of his brothers as a sort of "ritual performance" of the contrast between his knowledge and his brothers' lack of it.

<sup>32</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 123-25; Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 173-74. Alter notes that Judah's statement, "God has found out the guilt of your servants" (Gen 44:16), is false if it refers to Benjamin's theft; of this, all the brothers are innocent. Judah acknowledges guilt vaguely, implicitly accepting guilt for what was done to Joseph while ostensibly admitting to the theft of his cup.

every turning point, the extent of the characters' knowledge is a significant factor.

However, it is Joseph's own knowledge that merits the closest scrutiny, as Joseph is simultaneously the one who knows the most and the one who has the most to learn over the course of the narrative. As will be shown, Joseph's knowledge resonates with the knowledge of good and evil that the first humans acquire in the Eden narrative.

### *III. Joseph's Knowledge*

There are two distinct dimensions to Joseph's knowledge. On the one hand, Joseph exhibits extraordinary practical knowledge, insight, and administrative skill. Such knowledge is evident in his ability to interpret dreams, his success in Potiphar's house, and the insight that helps him deliver Egypt from the famine. This knowledge is relatively constant throughout Gen 37-50: though Joseph demonstrates them in different arenas, the knowledge itself remains much the same.<sup>33</sup> The knowledge Joseph draws upon to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, while on a larger scale and with higher stakes, is not fundamentally different from that which allows him to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh's two officials in prison. Similarly, Joseph's skillful administration of Egypt is congruent with his previous ability to administer Potiphar's house and the prison; the key word "house" (בֵּית) highlights the connection between each of Joseph's positions (Gen 39:4, 20-23; 41:40).

On the other hand, Joseph's insight into God's purposes for him and for his family constitutes another important aspect of Joseph's knowledge. This knowledge is

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<sup>33</sup> Coats, "The Joseph Narrative and Ancient Wisdom: A Reappraisal," 289. Coats notes that the consistent emphasis on Joseph's character, especially his ability to administer effectively and to interpret dreams, tightly binds chapters 39-41 together.

articulated chiefly in Gen 45:3-13 and in Gen 50:19-21, where Joseph acknowledges God's involvement in the twists and turns that brought him to power in Egypt. Unlike Joseph's practical knowledge, however, Joseph's recognition of God's purposes for his life changes over the course of the narrative. Prior to revealing his identity to his brothers, Joseph displays a more limited understanding of God's activity in his life at two points. First, his appeal to Pharaoh's cupbearer to mention him to Pharaoh (Gen 40:14-15) makes no mention of God's activity, showing only Joseph's consciousness that he is the victim of injustice. Second, the names Joseph gives to his sons (Gen 41:51-52) suggest that he sees God's activity as redemptive, since God has elevated him from slavery and prison. Again, however, Joseph does not recognize any larger purpose behind his own slavery, seeing God's activity solely in bringing him to power. This means that Joseph grows in knowledge as the story progresses; his insight into God's purposes is not something he possesses all along, but something he achieves through reflection and sustained interaction with his brothers in Egypt.<sup>34</sup> I discuss this second aspect of Joseph's knowledge thoroughly in chapter four, since it contributes significantly to the Joseph story's connections with the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel. In the present chapter I focus solely on the more stable dimension of Joseph's knowledge—the practical wisdom that enables him to succeed wherever he turns in Egypt. This knowledge also contributes to the Joseph story's relationship with the Eden narrative.

The first dimension of Joseph's knowledge is characterized primarily by his administrative skill and his ability to interpret dreams. To these must also be added Joseph's obedience and faithfulness to God, chiefly displayed in his encounter with

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Green, *What Profit for Us*, 119-20.

Potiphar's wife (Gen 39) but evident also in other episodes.<sup>35</sup> These have long been recognized as significant aspects of his character that set him apart.<sup>36</sup> The second and third, Joseph's administrative skill and faithfulness to God, have often been cited as evidence that the Joseph narrative contains elements of wisdom literature.<sup>37</sup> Though von Rad's claim that Joseph is an exemplar of the ideal wise man goes beyond the evidence,<sup>38</sup> it is clear that Joseph exhibits extraordinary abilities in both of these regards. Joseph's ability to interpret dreams likewise characterizes him as one who possesses special knowledge above and beyond those around him.

Joseph's remarkable knowledge is most clearly portrayed in his ability to interpret dreams. Three sets of dreams occur throughout the Joseph story: Joseph's two dreams in Gen 37:5-11, the dreams of Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and baker in Gen 40:9-11 and 40:16-17, and those of Pharaoh in Gen 41:1-7. These three dream pairs are linked to one another: Green regards them collectively as "the central change agent in the story."<sup>39</sup> Despite this link, a distinction exists between Joseph's own dreams in Gen 37:5-11 and the dreams he interprets in Egypt. The meaning of these dreams is unclear at first, only coming to full light at the climax of the narrative. Joseph's brothers and father confront the dreams with incredulity (Gen 37:8, 10), and Joseph himself does not foresee the

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<sup>35</sup> For instance, he repeatedly attributes his dream interpretations to God, even when it would be in his better immediate interest to ascribe them to himself (Gen 40:8; 41:16).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Coats, "The Joseph Story and Ancient Wisdom: A Reappraisal," 289.

<sup>37</sup> von Rad, "The Joseph Narrative and Ancient Wisdom," 293-95. Von Rad appears to have been the first to make this argument, according to Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 26. The view has been argued also by Coats, "The Joseph Narrative and Ancient Wisdom: A Reappraisal," 285-97. Humphreys likewise attributes the emphasis on Joseph's administrative ability to wisdom influence (Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 147-48).

<sup>38</sup> Crenshaw, "Method in Determining Wisdom Influence," 136-37.

<sup>39</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 92. Cf. also Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 380, and Ron Pirson, *The Lord of the Dreams: A Semantic and Literary Analysis of Genesis 37-50* (JSOTSup 355; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 52-59.

roundabout manner in which the dreams will be realized.<sup>40</sup> Joseph's dreams are not actually fulfilled until his brothers appear before him in Egypt, over twenty years after their initial occurrence. In contrast, the final two sets of dreams are explained right away and fulfilled immediately.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, Joseph himself never explicitly interprets his own dreams; he simply tells them to his brothers and their father.<sup>42</sup> His evident boasting of the dreams, as well as the reactions of his brothers and father, imply that he interpreted them as predictions of his future superiority (Gen 37:6-10), but this is never directly stated. Later, Joseph still does not articulate the meaning of his dreams; he merely remembers them when his brothers bow down to him as they buy grain (Gen 42:9). Joseph's own dreams, and the meaning he finds in them, point to Joseph's relationship with his family and his discernment of God's purposes for their lives. They demonstrate the second, dynamic aspect of Joseph's knowledge, which I discuss in chapter four.

Joseph's ability to interpret the dreams of others, however, is part of the first dimension of his knowledge, since it remains relatively constant during Joseph's time in Egypt. Several observations can be made about this ability. First, Joseph is the only one who possesses it. When Joseph sees Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker the morning after they have their dreams, they are troubled (זעפֿים) because there is no one to interpret them (Gen 40:6-8). The two men despair of understanding their dreams until Joseph

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<sup>40</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 39-40, 43-44. Green makes the interesting observation that Joseph's dreams describe the present as well as predict the future: within the dynamics of the family, Joseph is already superior to his brothers by virtue of his favored status in their father's eyes. At the outset, it remains to be seen how the future will play out with respect to the dreams.

<sup>41</sup> The seven good years are narrated briefly in Gen 41:47-49, right after Pharaoh has finished setting Joseph over all of Egypt (Gen 41:39-46). The implication is that the seven years of plenty begin right away, immediately after Joseph has interpreted the king's dreams. The fulfillment of Pharaoh's officials' dreams occurs in three days.

<sup>42</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 40; Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 166-67. Though, as Levenson notes, Joseph's silence after his brothers and father interpret his dreams may imply agreement with their assessment. He does not offer his own interpretation, but neither does he correct theirs.



offers to explain them. The same is true of Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams, where the uniqueness of his capability is even more pronounced. Upon waking from his second dream, Pharaoh's spirit is troubled (וַתַּפְּעֶם רוּחוֹ), and he calls in all the magicians and wise men of Egypt (כָּל-חֲרָטְמֵי מִצְרַיִם וְאֶת-כָּל-חֲכָמֶיהָ) to tell him the meaning of the dream (Gen 41:8). Only after all these fail does Pharaoh's cupbearer remember Joseph and mention him to Pharaoh (Gen 41:9-13). There are parallels to this narrative in Dan 2 and 4, in which the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar has dreams that no one besides Daniel is able to interpret.<sup>43</sup> Joseph's insight into the meaning of Pharaoh's dreams is a unique ability, possessed by no other wise men in Pharaoh's court.

A second important aspect of Joseph's dream interpretation is his attention to detail of the dreams themselves. Joseph in some sense "reads" the dreams of Pharaoh and his two officials, explaining their meaning in terms of the imagery they contain. Joseph recognizes that the vine, grape clusters, and cup in the dream of Pharaoh's cupbearer pertain to his occupation (Gen 40:9-11), while the same is true for the baskets and baked goods in the dream of Pharaoh's baker (Gen 40:16-17). There is a contrast in the actions of the dreams: the first dream shows the dreamer acting (active verbs appear in Gen 40:10-11), while the second dream portrays inaction (there are no active verbs).<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, there is success in the first dream and failure in the second dream: Pharaoh's cupbearer brings Pharaoh's cup to him, while the baker is prevented from

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<sup>43</sup> Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 149. Humphreys observes that the uniqueness of Daniel's God-given ability vis-à-vis the other potential interpreters is more strongly emphasized than that of Joseph in Gen 41 (cf. Dan 2:27-28). Coats notes that these parallels also share a wisdom setting (Coats, "The Joseph Story and Ancient Wisdom: A Reappraisal," 292).

<sup>44</sup> Pirson, *The Lord of the Dreams*, 53.

bringing the bread.<sup>45</sup> Joseph's interpretations follow this portrayal, as he predicts restoration of Pharaoh's cupbearer but execution for the baker—success prefigures good fortune, while failure prefigures demise. The key interpretive move that Joseph makes is to equate the number three in each dream with the passage of time; the three clusters in the cupbearer's dream and the three baskets in the baker's dream both signify three days.<sup>46</sup> Every aspect of the interpretations that Joseph gives is rooted in the imagery of the dreams themselves.<sup>47</sup>

The same is true for Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams. Both dreams are recounted twice, once by the narrator (Gen 41:1-7) and again by Pharaoh when he describes the dreams to Joseph (Gen 41:17-24). In the first, seven fat and healthy cows arise out of the Nile, followed by seven ugly, thin cows that swallow the healthy ones. In Pharaoh's description of the dream, he states that no one would know that they had eaten the fat cows, because they remain just as emaciated as before (Gen 41:21). In the second dream, seven withered ears of grain swallow seven healthy ears. When Joseph hears the dreams, he again interprets them in light of the imagery they contain. The Nile was the lifeblood of Egypt, the ultimate source of its fertility and food; both cattle and agriculture were dependent on it.<sup>48</sup> The presence of the Nile in Pharaoh's first dream therefore suggests that its meaning pertains to survival and sustenance. This is confirmed by the

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<sup>45</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 75.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-76.

<sup>47</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 292. Sternberg goes on to wonder about the detail of Joseph's own dreams, which become disconcerting because of their apparent lack of fulfillment in every detail. Only ten brothers, not eleven, come to bow before him at first. And what of the moon, who is thought to represent his dead mother? Cf. also Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 166-67. Levenson likewise suggests that Joseph's own dreams should have been interpreted with the same attention to the dreams' detail. Had Joseph or his family members done so for Joseph's first dream, perhaps they would have recognized the role of grain in Joseph's future ascent to power. They also might have understood Joseph's upright sheaf and their bowed sheaves to predict abundance and scarcity, envisioning Joseph's future role as provider.

<sup>48</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 87.

imagery of cows and ears of grain, as well as words such as *אכל*, “eat” and *בלע*, “devour.”<sup>49</sup> Unhealthy cows and withered ears of grain suggest times of hunger or want, while fat cows and robust ears suggest times of plenty. As before, the key to the interpretation lies in Joseph’s identification of the number seven in each dream with the passage of time: the seven cows and ears of grain represent seven years, first of plenty and then of famine.<sup>50</sup> The doubling of the dream is likewise accounted for, as Joseph says it signifies the certainty of what the two dreams predict (Gen 41:32). Joseph even interprets the detail that the seven thin cows remain thin and ugly after eating the fat ones: this signifies that the years of famine will be so great as to leave no memory of the seven good years (Gen 41:30-31).

When Joseph interprets the dreams of Pharaoh and his officials, their meanings are not arbitrary. Rather, they are tied to the imagery found in the dreams and to the present circumstances of the dreamers’ lives.<sup>51</sup> Joseph’s interpretive activity lies in discovering the significance behind this imagery and tying together the various elements into a meaningful message. In doing so, he exhibits insight that those around him are unable to achieve. All those who heard the dreams had the necessary information to unlock their meanings. On the surface, all that is required to decipher them is intelligence and keen observation.<sup>52</sup> Yet Joseph is the only one capable of making these connections and conveying the dreams’ meaning.

Ultimately, Joseph is unique in his ability to interpret dreams because it comes from God, a point Joseph consistently makes prior to explaining the dreams to others. He

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<sup>49</sup> Pirson, *The Lord of the Dreams*, 55.

<sup>50</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 90.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 76, 87.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

states to Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker, "Do not interpretations belong to God?"

(הלוא לאלהים פתרנים; Gen 40:8). And when Pharaoh asks Joseph to interpret his

dreams, Joseph tells the king that God, not he, will give Pharaoh a favorable answer

(בלעדִי אלהים יענה את־שְׁלום פרעה; Gen 41:16). Again, there is a parallel here

with the narratives of Daniel in Nebuchadnezzar's court. Daniel prays that God will

reveal both Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation to him (Dan 2:17-19), and

Nebuchadnezzar appeals to Daniel's divine inspiration in asking him to interpret his

dream about the great tree (Dan. 4:6, Eng. 4:9). Joseph does not pray to God for the

interpretation as Daniel does, not does the narrator directly state God's involvement in

the process. Nevertheless, God does play a role in enabling Joseph to interpret the

dreams.<sup>53</sup> Pharaoh himself recognizes as much, describing Joseph as "one who has the

spirit of God in him" (איש אשר רוח אלהים בו; Gen 41:38).<sup>54</sup> The king tells Joseph

he will put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt "because God has shown all this to

you" (אחרי הודיע אלהים אותך את־כל־זאת; Gen 41:39). The knowledge by

which Joseph interprets dreams is not an inherent talent or a developed skill; it comes

from God.

Furthermore, the dream interpretations give Joseph a window into God's

purposes. The dreams themselves come from God, as Joseph acknowledges (Gen 41:25,

28).<sup>55</sup> Joseph's interpretations unlock their meaning, enabling him to predict accurately

<sup>53</sup> Coats, "The Joseph Narrative and Ancient Wisdom: A Reappraisal," 293.

<sup>54</sup> Alternatively, Pharaoh's words could be translated "spirit of the gods" or "divine spirit," recognizing the ruler's polytheistic worldview. Either way, Pharaoh sees Joseph's ability to interpret dreams as a divinely given ability. This is likewise the case for Pharaoh's statement in Gen 41:39.

<sup>55</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 39-40, calls it a "biblical truism" that dreams are sent by God. In the Joseph narrative, she affirms, God send the dreams both to influence and to impart information to the characters.

the fates of Pharaoh's two officials and the next fourteen years of Egypt's agriculture. God enables Joseph to interpret these dreams, communicating to him knowledge of God's future actions and intentions. Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams thus has the character of an announcement of a divine message.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, this divinely given knowledge involves Joseph's own unique ingenuity: he attends to the detail of the dreams and relates their meaning to the concrete realities in which the dreamers find themselves. Joseph's knowledge is therefore a combination of divine revelation and human skill and imagination. Together, they provide Joseph with privileged insight into the future and God's purposes, which is normally withheld from humans.

A similar combination of human ingenuity and divine involvement characterizes another aspect of Joseph's knowledge, namely his remarkable administrative ability. This ability is displayed primarily in Gen 39-41 as Joseph administers Potiphar's house, the prison where he is kept, and all of Egypt. Arguably, Gen 47:13-26 should be included as well, since it also shows Joseph skillfully managing Egypt's resources.<sup>57</sup> As stated earlier, Joseph's capable oversight of successively greater domains is frequently linked with wisdom influence, bringing this specific understanding of knowledge into view.<sup>58</sup>

Joseph first demonstrates this knowledge in the house of Potiphar, as he comes to be in charge of all that Potiphar possesses (Gen 39:4). In the brief description that we find of Joseph's work on behalf of Potiphar, there is a clear emphasis on the comprehensiveness of Joseph's responsibility and authority: Potiphar only withholds his

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<sup>56</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 91.

<sup>57</sup> Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 144-47.

<sup>58</sup> Von Rad, "The Joseph Narrative and Ancient Wisdom," 293-95; Coats, "The Joseph Story and Ancient Wisdom: A Reappraisal," 289-92; Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 147-51.

wife from Joseph (Gen 39:9). All the rest he places in Joseph's care, prospering greatly because of God's blessing on his house and field (Gen 39:5). God makes Joseph successful (צִלַּח *hip'il*) in Potiphar's house (Gen 39:2-3). The same is said for Joseph in the prison, where again God is with Joseph, making him successful (צִלַּח *hip'il*) in whatever he does (Gen 39:23). As with Potiphar's house, there is again an emphasis on his total administrative responsibility in the prison: "whatever was done there, he was the one who did it" (וְאֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂים שָׁם הוּא הִיָּה עֹשֶׂה; Gen 39:22). The chief jailer, like Potiphar, paid no attention (lit. "saw," רָאָה) to anything in Joseph's care (Gen 39:23; cf. Gen 39:6, 8). Joseph's knowledge in this regard enables him to administer both Potiphar's entire household and Pharaoh's prison successfully.

Joseph's administrative capabilities are evident throughout his time in Egypt, but they emerge most clearly in his encounter with Pharaoh. Pharaoh is impressed with Joseph's ability to interpret his dreams, to be sure, but Joseph's counsel about what to do in the face of the famine equally impresses the Egyptian king. His words to Joseph, "because God has shown all this to you" (אַחֲרֵי הוֹדִיעַ אֱלֹהִים אוֹתְךָ אֶת-כָּל-זֹאת), refer not only to Joseph's prediction of the famine, but also to the advice that Joseph gave in view of it (Gen 41:39).<sup>59</sup> This makes Joseph "discerning and wise" in Pharaoh's eyes (נָבוֹן וְחָכָם), and Pharaoh is confident in placing all of Egypt under his control (Gen 41:39). As before, the text is emphatic about Joseph's total authority and responsibility under Pharaoh: only with respect to the throne is Pharaoh greater than Joseph (Gen

<sup>59</sup> Von Rad, *Genesis*, 371-72; Westermann, *Genesis* 37-50, 93-94.

41:40), and none of Pharaoh's subjects will lift a hand or foot apart from Joseph's command (Gen 41:44).

The plan that Joseph devises to avert the threat of the famine, and the successful implementation of that plan, are the evidence par excellence of Joseph's practical knowledge and administrative ability as he operates on the largest possible stage. It involves predicting the future, planning for the coming events, and effectively organizing a nation the size of Egypt. I spoke above about the attentiveness Joseph displays in "reading" Pharaoh's dream, thereby discerning God's purposes and predicting the prolonged famine that would come in seven years. But since these will be preceded by seven years of plenty, Joseph is able to devise a plan based on his prediction. He prudently sees the necessity of storing up a reserve for future hardship, and then displays ingenuity in outlining a plan to achieve this goal. Joseph suggests placing a single, wise man in charge of Egypt and appointing overseers to facilitate the task of collecting food during the years of plenty (Gen 41:33-34). He names the amount they should gather—one fifth—as well as how to store it up—in cities, under Pharaoh's authority (Gen 41:34-35). When he executes this plan during the seven good years, Joseph gathers into cities produce of their surrounding fields (Gen 41:48), eventually storing up more grain than can be measured (Gen 41:49). Due to Joseph's careful planning, Egypt—and only Egypt—has food when the seven years of famine are underway (Gen 41:54, 57). Pharaoh places the entire kingdom under Joseph's care, telling his people, "whatever he says to you, do" (אשר יאמר לכם תעשו; Gen 41:55). In devising and implementing his plan for the famine, Joseph displays the utmost wisdom and administrative skill.

At the same time, Joseph's successful administrative ability is not due solely to his own ingenuity. Like his ability to interpret dreams, Joseph's wisdom and skill in managing Potiphar's house, the prison, and the land of Egypt are determined by God's presence and involvement in his life.<sup>60</sup> This is made clear from the outset, as the narrator directly states that "YHWH was with Joseph" at the beginning of his time in Potiphar's house (Gen 39:2). Such an overt confirmation of God's presence is rare in the Joseph narrative: nowhere does it occur outside of Gen 39.<sup>61</sup> Much more frequently, God's involvement in human affairs occurs through unstated, indirect guidance of events.<sup>62</sup> This observation makes it all the more significant that we are explicitly told that God is with Joseph in Potiphar's house and in the prison (Gen 39:23). Furthermore, God's presence with Joseph is named as the cause of Joseph's success in both of these houses: God makes everything successful for Joseph in Potiphar's house (Gen 39:3), likewise causing Joseph's endeavors to prosper in the prison (Gen 39:23).<sup>63</sup>

Joseph's success in administering the land of Egypt is also due to God's presence. Though the narrator does not directly state God's involvement as we see in Gen 39, indirect confirmation of divine assistance comes from Pharaoh. As noted above, Pharaoh's reaction to Joseph's interpretation of his dreams does not respond only to the interpretation, but also to the advice Joseph gives on the basis of it.<sup>64</sup> Along with the dream interpretation, Pharaoh understands Joseph's wise counsel as evidence that God is

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<sup>60</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 373.

<sup>61</sup> Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 119.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 118-31.

<sup>63</sup> Gunkel, *Genesis*, 410, regards Gen 39:20b as the beginning of the episode where Joseph is in prison. In this case, the statement of God's presence with Joseph in Gen 39:23 stands at the beginning of this episode rather than at the conclusion of his encounter with Potiphar's wife. This creates a structural parallel in which both episodes begin with an affirmation that God is with Joseph (Gunkel, *Genesis*, 410). Coats follows this position (Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 29), while Humphreys and Wenham begin the second episode at 39:21 (Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 59; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 372).

<sup>64</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 93-94.



with him. He says to all of his servants and attendants, “Can there be found anyone like this man, in whom is the spirit of God?” (הַנִּמְצֵא כֹזֶה אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים בּוֹ; Gen 41:28). The king goes on to acknowledge the divine source of Joseph’s wisdom, claiming that Joseph is discerning and wise “because God has shown all this to you” (אַחֲרֵי הוֹדִיעַ אֱלֹהִים אוֹתְךָ אֶת־כָּל־זֹאת; Gen 41:39). Direct statements of God’s presence with Joseph in Gen 39, both in Potiphar’s house and in the prison, establish the expectation that God is similarly with Joseph when he stands before Pharaoh. This expectation is fulfilled through the words of Pharaoh, not the narrator, but it is fulfilled nonetheless. Just as God enabled Joseph to administer Potiphar’s house and the prison successfully, so God also enables him to govern all of Egypt in preparation for the coming famine.

Thus far, two distinct aspects of Joseph’s knowledge have come to light: his ability to interpret dreams and his administrative skill. Both stem from a combination of his own ingenuity and God’s involvement in his life. It may be that these are responsible in differing degrees for Joseph’s knowledge. Joseph’s ability to interpret dreams, for instance, is likely due more to God’s revelation and less to his own skill, while his successful management of Potiphar’s house, the prison, and Egypt comes from a more balanced combination of divine assistance and personal intelligence. Nevertheless, both divine revelation and human wisdom contribute to the knowledge that Joseph possesses.

A third significant aspect of Joseph’s knowledge is his obedience and faithfulness to God. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, such obedience is directly tied to knowledge and wisdom. The book of Proverbs asserts early on that “the fear of YHWH is the beginning of knowledge” (יִרְאַת יְהוָה רֵאשִׁית דַּעַת; Prov. 1:7), and later that “the beginning of

wisdom is the fear of YHWH” (תְּחִלָּת חִכְמָה יִרְאֵת יְהוָה; Prov. 9:10). Ecclesiastes concludes with an admonition to fear God and keep his commandments (Eccl. 12:13-14). The correlation between wisdom or knowledge and obeying God is not limited to wisdom literature. Jethro suggests that Moses select men who fear God to aid him in judging the people of Israel (Exod. 18:19-22). Deuteronomy mandates that the one chosen as king of Israel must keep YHWH’s statutes, reading the law constantly in order to learn to fear YHWH (Deut. 17:14-20). There is a correlation in both instances between obedience to God and the wisdom that makes one fit to govern. Finally, faithfulness to God is often expressed as knowledge of YHWH, while apostasy or disobedience is conceived as not knowing YHWH.<sup>65</sup> Knowledge, therefore, frequently has an ethical and religious dimension in the Hebrew Bible. As I argued in chapter one, this dimension characterizes the knowledge of good and evil in the Eden narrative, since the context links it with disobedience and suggests it envisions moral discernment.

Throughout the Joseph narrative, Joseph repeatedly displays faithfulness to God in his actions, thoughts, and words. The chief instance of this is his resistance to the temptations of Potiphar’s wife. This passage has already been discussed at length, and parallels with the Eden narrative have been noted in chapter two; a brief discussion here will be sufficient. Though she tries to get him to sleep with her “day after day” (יִּום וַיּוֹם; Gen 39:10), Joseph refuses on the grounds that to do so would violate his master’s trust (Gen 39:8-9).<sup>66</sup> This is one of the reasons Joseph gives for his refusal, but he also describes the act of sleeping with Potiphar’s wife as a great wickedness and a sin against

<sup>65</sup> Botterweck and Bergman, *TDOT* 5:469.

<sup>66</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 21.

God (וַאִיךְ אַעֲשֶׂה הַרְעָה הַגְּדֹלָה הַזֹּאת וְחַטָּאתִי לֹא־לֵאלֹהִים); Gen 39:9).<sup>67</sup> Joseph's resistance to the woman looms large throughout Jewish and Christian interpretive tradition as evidence par excellence of his supreme virtue.<sup>68</sup> In the modern era, interpreters have drawn upon this passage to see Joseph as a wisdom figure. Joseph successfully avoids the pitfalls of the strange or foreign woman, thereby demonstrating the prudence, self-control, and fear of God upheld in wisdom literature.<sup>69</sup> Even those who characterize Joseph negatively, citing his boasting in Gen 37, his treatment of his brothers in Gen 42-44, and his enslavement of the Egyptians in Gen 47:13-26, struggle to apply the same criticisms to his behavior in Potiphar's house.<sup>70</sup> They are forced to admit that here, at least, Joseph acts in a manner that is morally upright and obedient to God.

Joseph demonstrates his faithfulness to God in other ways as well. First, he directly states his fear of God when he first interacts with his brothers in Egypt. Upon releasing them from prison, he mitigates his initial requirement for nine of them to stay in Egypt and one to retrieve Benjamin to verify their trustworthiness. He says to them, "do this and live; I fear God" (וְזֹאת עֲשׂוּ וְחַיּוּ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים אֲנִי יִרָא), then tells them that only one brother must stay in Egypt. The rest may go to Canaan and take provisions for

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<sup>67</sup> Both motivations must be recognized beneath Joseph's actions. He does not prioritize one or the other, but understands that sleeping with Potiphar's wife would be a doubly wrong offense, violating his master's trust and committing the sin of adultery.

<sup>68</sup> Kugel, *In Potiphar's House*, 21-26. Kugel cites 4 Macc 2:1-4; *Jub.* 39:5-8; *T. Jos.* 3:1-2, 9:2-5; *Wis* 10:13-14; and likely also 1 Macc 2:53.

<sup>69</sup> von Rad, "The Joseph Narrative and Ancient Wisdom," 295. Crenshaw, however, argues that the motif of evil women is too common to be clear evidence of wisdom influence (Crenshaw, "Method in Determining Wisdom Influence," 136). Redford links Gen 39 with the Egyptian motif of the spurned wife rather than with Israelite wisdom literature's "strange woman." He does, however, allow the possibility of wisdom influence at this point (Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*, 91-93, 104). Wilson argues that the narrative's focus on Joseph and his virtuous behavior strengthens the connections with wisdom literature, suggesting this as the best context in which to see Gen 39 rather than the Egyptian spurned wife (Wilson, *Joseph, Wise and Otherwise*, 103-4).

<sup>70</sup> I.e., Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*, 104; Wildavsky, *Assimilation Versus Separation*, 57.

their families (Gen 42:18-20). In the next chapter, I will argue that Joseph's changes of attitude as he interacts with his brothers point to his great emotional struggle to deal with them and eventually to self-identify as one of them. If this is true, it is telling that Joseph names his fear of God as the cause of one such change. It suggests an overall orientation of obedience to God, which forms the basis of his thoughts and actions and prompts him to treat them less severely than he does at first.

Joseph's interactions with Pharaoh and his cupbearer and baker likewise point to his general faithfulness toward God. As discussed above, in speaking to these men he attributes his ability to interpret dreams to God. Joseph does not pray for a revelation of the meaning of these dreams, and as noted earlier he largely draws upon their imagery to arrive at his interpretation. Joseph could easily have claimed to interpret dreams on the basis of his own wisdom rather than divine assistance, and in doing so would have made a stronger case for his intelligence and, by extension, his value to those above him. This is particularly true when Joseph stands before Pharaoh, who addresses him as one who has the ability to interpret dreams. Joseph goes so far as to correct the king in saying that not he, but God, can give Pharaoh the interpretation of his dream (Gen 41:16). Joseph risks diminishing his own reputation before Pharaoh in order to affirm that dream interpretations belong to God.

Finally, the interpretations that Joseph offers for what has happened to him since he has been sold as a slave demonstrate a commitment to God and a recognition that God is involved in his life. In the next chapter, I show how Joseph's interpretations change over the course of the narrative; he does not grasp the full extent of God's activity until he has chosen to forgive and be reconciled to his brothers, self-identifying with them as

one of Jacob's sons. Despite this change in the degree to which Joseph comprehends God's activity, he consistently acknowledges that God is involved in his life in some capacity. The names of his sons in Egypt attribute Joseph's good fortune to God (Gen 41:51-52),<sup>71</sup> and he is convinced that Pharaoh's dreams come from God as a prediction of the future (Gen 41:28). Joseph acknowledges God's involvement in his life and in the affairs of the world even before he sees that he has been given authority in order to assist his family (Gen 45:3-15).<sup>72</sup> His behavior, particularly with respect to Potiphar's wife, demonstrates obedience to God and commitment to upright action. The way he interprets his life, though it changes, always affirms that God is present and active. Joseph exhibits a life that acknowledges, fears, and obeys God.<sup>73</sup> Throughout the Hebrew Bible, such a life is frequently associated with knowledge and wisdom.

Related to Joseph's fear of God, a fourth and final aspect of his knowledge is the way in which he knows and respects the limitations that are set for him. Like Joseph's obedience to God, the most notable instance of this is his reaction to the temptations of Potiphar's wife. Again, this passage has been discussed thoroughly in chapter two, so a brief discussion here will suffice. Joseph bases his refusal of the woman's advances on the fact that his master has placed great trust in him.<sup>74</sup> He rightly discerns the situation, as his assessment of it agrees with that of the narrator: Potiphar has put everything in

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<sup>71</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 398.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 93. Westermann observes that Joseph and Pharaoh have this in common: "Joseph and the Pharaoh, despite the differences in their religions, are at one in their conviction that 'God' acts in history."

<sup>73</sup> A potential counterpoint to this argument is Joseph's claim to use his silver cup for divination (Gen 44:5, 15), a practice that is condemned elsewhere in the Bible (Lev 19:26; Deut 18:10). It must be remembered, however, that Joseph's claim occurs within his ruse to frame Benjamin. Throughout his extended encounter with his brothers, Joseph gives the impression of being thoroughly Egyptian; claiming to practice divination would be consistent. Furthermore, throughout the narrative Joseph exploits his superior knowledge and control of the situation as he manipulates his brothers. Claiming to practice divination flaunts this superior knowledge, underscoring how little they know in comparison to him.

<sup>74</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 21.

Joseph's hand, and has no regard for anything in the house (Gen 39:8, cf. 39:6); he himself is not greater than Joseph (Gen 39:9). So much has been given to Joseph, with only one thing withheld: Potiphar's wife. Given so much, it would have been both tempting and easy for Joseph to take much more. Potiphar knows nothing of what happens in the house (לֹא־יָדַע אֲתִי מִה־בֵּית; Gen 39:8); should Joseph choose to sleep with Potiphar's wife, his master would be unaware of the fact.

Furthermore, Joseph may be facing an implicit temptation to usurp the authority of his master in Potiphar's house.<sup>75</sup> Sleeping with the wife of one's superior is often portrayed as an act of usurpation in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>76</sup> Reuben's affair with Bilhah could be construed as an attempt to usurp Jacob's power before he is dead, thereby securing his place as Jacob's successor (Gen 35:22).<sup>77</sup> More certain is the instance where Absalom publicly sleeps with David's wives when he attempts to overthrow his father as king (2 Sam. 16:22). Solomon recognizes a similar motivation in Adonijah's desire to have Abishag as his wife, equating the request for David's former concubine with a request for the kingdom itself (1 Kgs. 2:22). Likewise, Abner sleeps with Saul's concubine, which Ishbaal seems to regard as an attempt to succeed Saul (2 Sam. 3:6-8).<sup>78</sup> These parallels are not exact, but they are suggestive, given Joseph's otherwise total authority in Potiphar's house. Potiphar's wife may be tempting Joseph with an opportunity to replace his master completely. The *Testament of Joseph* unfolds this possibility directly: Potiphar's wife promises that Joseph will be her master and the

<sup>75</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 109; Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 156.

<sup>76</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 387.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 387; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 327.; Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 284.

<sup>78</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 327.

master of the household if he sleeps with her (*T. Jos.* 3:1-2).<sup>79</sup> Despite these temptations, Joseph refuses to overstep the boundaries that have been set for him and take Potiphar's wife. He remains content with the life that Potiphar—and God—have given him. Doing so ultimately lands him in prison, but he shows himself to be faithful in respecting the limitations that have been set for him.<sup>80</sup>

No similar temptation is reported during Joseph's time in prison, where he might have attempted to escape or otherwise overstep the prison's boundaries. He does, however, prosper within the prison's confines with the approval, even facilitation, of the chief jailer, as he achieves a position of responsibility and authority analogous to that which he held in Potiphar's house.<sup>81</sup> The implication is that he respected his boundaries in the prison just as much as he did previously in Potiphar's house. His plea to Pharaoh's cupbearer to mention him to Pharaoh and get him out of prison might be construed as an attempt to escape his imprisonment (*Gen* 40:14-15); it admittedly pushes his boundaries, insofar as Joseph does take initiative to get out of the prison. Nevertheless, Joseph operates within established Egyptian authority structures—he appeals to a higher authority rather than assuming authority for himself.<sup>82</sup> Pharaoh has the authority to imprison and pardon as he sees fit—the cupbearer's own situation demonstrates this, as he is imprisoned and freed on seemingly arbitrary decisions of Pharaoh.<sup>83</sup> Joseph's attempt at rectifying his unjust punishment is therefore a legitimate appeal to a higher authority rather than any sort of usurpation or assumption of authority on his part.

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. Kugel, *In Potiphar's House*, 23-24.

<sup>80</sup> Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 155-57. Levenson recognizes a contrast between Joseph's behavior here and his arrogant dreams in *Gen* 37. In the dreams, Joseph displayed subordination to no one, not even his own father. Now, however, Joseph respects his limitations by remaining subordinate to his master, Potiphar.

<sup>81</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 22-24.

<sup>82</sup> Westermann, *Genesis* 37-50, 76.

<sup>83</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 98.

Finally, Joseph's elevation to the second-in-command of all Egypt represents another instance of his willingness to remain within the boundaries that have been set for him. Pharaoh is clear in this regard: the statement "I am Pharaoh" (אני פרעה) shows Pharaoh maintaining his own sovereignty despite the complete practical authority Joseph receives (Gen 41:44).<sup>84</sup> He further states that "only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you," affirming both the greatness of Joseph's new status as well as setting its limit: Joseph gains power, but Pharaoh retains the throne (Gen 41:40). Joseph respects the limitations that Pharaoh sets, employing his authority to the fullest extent to prepare for the famine as Pharaoh had intended (Gen 41:46-57). There is also reason to believe that in doing so, Joseph does even more than expected to benefit the king. Humphreys argues that by enslaving the Egyptians in Gen 47:13-26, Joseph does his absolute utmost to increase the power and wealth of Pharaoh. In doing so, he plays the role of the wise courtier as well as possible.<sup>85</sup> Thus, not only does Joseph avoid usurping Pharaoh's authority, he also ensures that the king's authority grows even stronger. Joseph acts within the limitations that have been established for him as the governor of Egypt, just as he had done as Potiphar's steward and in the prison.

Even when Joseph proclaims himself to be "father to Pharaoh and lord of all his house" (לאב לפרעה ולאדון לכל-ביתו; Gen 45:8), he does not overstep his authority. "Father to Pharaoh" denotes Joseph's status as Pharaoh's chief counselor, emphasizing the wisdom of his advice and instruction (cf. Judg. 17:10; 18:19; 2 Kgs.

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<sup>84</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 95-96. Westermann further argues that Pharaoh's statement both limits and guarantees Joseph's position.

<sup>85</sup> Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 145-47.



6:21; 13:14).<sup>86</sup> Joseph's description of himself as lord of Pharaoh's house recalls Pharaoh's earlier words to Joseph when he installed him as second-in-command, saying "you will be over my house" (אתה תהיה על-ביתי; Gen 41:40). Joseph's words to his brothers may be boastful, but they are not false.<sup>87</sup> Since Pharaoh himself explicitly places Joseph over his house, Joseph does not claim more authority than he has been given when he admits as much to his brothers.

Taken together, all of the characteristics described above give a clear and detailed picture of the knowledge that Joseph possesses. He shows this knowledge through his dream interpretations, his excellent administrative ability, his faithfulness to God, and his willingness to respect his boundaries. Furthermore, the first two aspects of Joseph's knowledge derive from a combination of his own personal ingenuity and God's presence with him. This is closely related to his faithfulness and obedience to God, without which he would not have enjoyed God's presence and blessing. As I demonstrate below, this knowledge that Joseph possesses resonates in significant ways with the "knowledge of good and evil" that is central to the Eden narrative. Several parallels may be identified between the two, which contribute to a larger analogous relationship between the Joseph story and the Eden narrative.

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<sup>86</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 428.

<sup>87</sup> Josipovici sees Joseph's words to his brothers as evidence that he has not, after all, changed very much from the boy who boasted about his dreams (Josipovici, *The Book of God*, 84-85). As I argue in chapter four, Joseph does exhibit signs of a change over the course of the narrative, particularly with respect to his understanding of his dreams and his relationship with his brothers. Yet even if such a change cannot be demonstrated, Joseph's speech shows him relishing and flaunting the authority and power he has been given rather than claiming more.

#### ***IV. Joseph's Knowledge and the Knowledge of Good and Evil***

In chapter one, I concluded that the knowledge of good and evil in Gen 2-3 refers primarily to moral discernment; the humans' acquisition of it therefore constitutes an assumption of moral autonomy, the ability to decide good and evil for themselves rather than depending on God. This conclusion was based on several key observations about the knowledge of good and evil, chief among which was its close connection with disobedience within the narrative—humans acquire the knowledge of good and evil by disobeying God.<sup>88</sup> God directly commands Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:16-17), and the violation of the command is the stated reason for the punishment God pronounces (Gen 3:17). The command is the primary subject of God's inquiry when he asks the man how he has come to be aware of his nakedness (Gen 3:11), and it is the initial subject of the serpent's conversation with the woman, in which eating from the forbidden tree is suggested (Gen 3:1). From the time it is issued, God's command largely dominates the Eden narrative and drives its action forward. The knowledge of good and evil, therefore, is inextricably bound up with the first humans' disobedience. It can have many connotations based on the use of the term elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. However, the context of the Eden narrative, where it is so closely associated with the divine command and its violation, suggest that moral discernment and the determination of right and wrong are primarily in view. The knowledge of good and evil is gained through disobedience and unfaithfulness to God.

Another important observation is that the knowledge of good and evil properly belongs to God. Within the Eden narrative, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil

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<sup>88</sup> Cf. Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 119; Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 4.

and the tree of life represent two divine prerogatives, one of which (life) is offered by God to humans while the other (the knowledge of good and evil) is withheld via a prohibition—it is reserved for God alone.<sup>89</sup> When the humans transgress the prohibition and eat from the forbidden tree, taking the knowledge of good and evil for themselves, they become like God in this respect (Gen 3:5, 22). In response, God sends the couple out of Eden away from the tree of life, so that they might not eat from it and live forever (Gen 3:23-24). There emerges, by the end of the narrative, an opposition between life and the knowledge of good and evil with respect to what the humans are allowed to have. Both belong to God, and the humans are permitted one but not the other. Stordalen calls this opposition “life, but not life and knowledge.”<sup>90</sup> In the created, proper order of things, the ability to know good and evil—to determine right from wrong—is intended to belong to God alone. The humans must rely on God and obey the divine commandments rather than assuming this ability for themselves.

Finally, the knowledge of good and evil is prohibited because of a concern to maintain the boundary between God and humans.<sup>91</sup> The opposition between life and the knowledge of good and evil may be understood in these terms. God initially grants the humans access to the tree of life, but forbids eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because doing so would make them like too much like God. They are sent from Eden to prevent their becoming entirely like God, having both eternal life and the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 3:22); distance must be kept between God and humankind.<sup>92</sup> The humans, for their part, desire to eat the forbidden fruit in part because

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<sup>89</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 231-32.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 229-33.

<sup>91</sup> Gunkel, *Genesis*, 31-32.

<sup>92</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 229-33.

it will make them like God, as the serpent tells the woman (Gen 3:5). The necessity to maintain the boundary between God and humankind recurs throughout the Primeval History, particularly in the story of the Tower of Babel but also at the beginning of the flood narrative.<sup>93</sup> In the Eden narrative, the boundary is represented by the command God gives to the man not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The command constitutes a limitation on the humans' existence, and in violating the command the humans transgress that limitation.<sup>94</sup> They threaten the boundary between God and humankind, which is reestablished when God sends the humans out of Eden.

All of these observations resonate with the knowledge that Joseph demonstrates during his time in Egypt. As the knowledge of good and evil was reserved for God in Eden, the knowledge that Joseph receives through his ability to interpret dreams is privileged knowledge—it normally belongs only to God. The divine source of Joseph's knowledge has been discussed in detail above: Joseph directly acknowledges that God sent Pharaoh's dreams to him (Gen 41:25, 28), and it is implied that the dreams of Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker are sent by God as well, since they come true as predicted (Gen 40:20-22). The dreams are windows into the future course of events, given by God to those whom they concern; such knowledge is normally reserved for God alone, unavailable to humans.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, the knowledge conveyed in the dreams remains inaccessible apart from their interpretations. Those who receive the dreams are puzzled and troubled—they seem to know that they have been given special knowledge, but are

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<sup>93</sup> I.e., when the sons of God come down to take as wives the daughters of men, thereby violating the boundary between the divine and human realms from the other direction (Gen 6:1-4).

<sup>94</sup> Gunkel, *Genesis*, 31-32.

<sup>95</sup> Joseph's own dreams function similarly; though the meaning of them is initially uncertain, by the end of the narrative it is clear that they too provided insight into the present and future for Joseph and his family. Cf. Green, *What Profit for Us*, 43-44.

unable to ascertain what that knowledge is. Joseph's ability to interpret the dreams gives him the key to unlock their meaning and reveal the knowledge fully, and once again this ability comes from God. Joseph affirms as much before interpreting the dreams of Pharaoh's officials (Gen 40:8) and of Pharaoh himself (Gen 41:16). Interpretation belongs to the one who sends the dreams, but God gives the interpretations to Joseph. He is the recipient of privileged knowledge that normally belongs to God.

The same may be said to a lesser degree about Joseph's extraordinary administrative ability. This is not typically regarded as knowledge reserved solely for God, as is prophecy or dream interpretation. It is, however, a desirable attribute that can be God-given—Solomon prays for wisdom to govern, and receives it from God (1 Kgs. 3:5-28).<sup>96</sup> In the Joseph story, it is clear that Joseph's ability in this respect comes from God. In Potiphar's house and in prison, Joseph's success is directly attributed to the fact that "YHWH was with Joseph" (Gen 39:2, 23); the direct mention of God's presence here shows how central it is to Joseph's rise.<sup>97</sup> The same is true for Joseph's ability to administer Egypt; the ability to govern well comes from God, as Pharaoh acknowledges (Gen 41:39).<sup>98</sup> Later, Joseph will recognize how God gave him a position of power for the purpose of preserving life (Gen 45:5). While the ability to govern well is accessible to humans, in the Joseph narrative it is due to God's presence in the protagonist's life. God is the source of this knowledge for Joseph, just as God is the source of Joseph's ability to interpret dreams.

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<sup>96</sup> Coats, "The Joseph Story and Ancient Wisdom: A Reappraisal," 289-90. Coats sees a connection between Solomon and Joseph in this respect. He identifies both narratives with the genre "political legend," arguing that both are designed primarily to illustrate how an administrator should use power properly.

<sup>97</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 373.

<sup>98</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 94.

The first humans in Eden received divine knowledge through disobedience, transgressing the limitation that God had set for them. Joseph, however, receives privileged knowledge as a gift from God and remains obedient and faithful. The prime instance of Joseph's faithfulness to God occurs in his resistance to Potiphar's wife. Several parallels between Joseph's temptation in Gen 39 and the Eden narrative were discussed in chapter two. In both narratives, for instance, there is an emphasis on the visual appeal of the desired object (Joseph and the forbidden fruit), and temptation occurs through a woman. Furthermore, Joseph's reply to Potiphar's wife (Gen 39:8-9) sketches a similar scenario to the one in Eden: the protagonist is given great freedom and responsibility, with one object withheld as a limitation.<sup>99</sup> Faced with such a situation, Joseph obeys God and refuses to sin, while the first humans disobeyed God. It is not stated whether God gives Joseph the ability to interpret dreams because he is faithful, but it is telling that "YHWH is with Joseph" both before and after the episode with Potiphar's wife. Had Joseph succumbed to temptation, it is likely that God's presence would have left him.<sup>100</sup> At any rate, he would not have been imprisoned and therefore in position to hear the dreams of Pharaoh's cupbearer, baker, and eventually those of Pharaoh himself.<sup>101</sup> Other dimensions of Joseph's obedience have been discussed at length above. Though an explicit divine command is absent, Joseph is consistently faithful to God, particularly so in a situation that is analogous with the temptation in Eden. Joseph's access to privileged divine knowledge is not gained through disobedience, but through God's presence with Joseph and the revelation of the dreams' interpretations.

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<sup>99</sup> Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 4-5. Moberly notes the significance of God's command in the Eden narrative, saying that the command gives to the man both freedom and responsibility. The man may eat from any tree, the sole limitation being the one tree that is forbidden.

<sup>100</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 69.

<sup>101</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 378.

Just as Joseph's knowledge does not occur through disobedience, it also does not occur through a transgression of his limitations. Joseph's repeated respect for the boundaries in which he finds himself was outlined earlier: in Potiphar's house, in the prison, and before Pharaoh, Joseph time and again operates within the limitations that others set for him. These boundaries contract and expand—he has more freedom in Potiphar's house than he has in the prison, and the greatest freedom occurs when he is given power over all of Egypt second only to Pharaoh. They are not, however, broken by Joseph. The first humans, by contrast, do seek to go beyond their limitations; they transgress God's command and seek to be like God by knowing good and evil. They break the commandment that defines the limits of their action—all fruit they may eat, but not the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—and simultaneously attempt to go beyond their human existence—they desire to know good and evil like God.<sup>102</sup> The knowledge they acquire is the result of this transgression. In contrast, the knowledge that Joseph possesses is given to Joseph by God; he receives it rather than takes it.

Joseph's knowledge cannot be equated with the knowledge of good and evil that the first humans acquire in Eden. Seeing them in light of one another through an intratextual reading, however, uncovers a remarkable relationship of similarity and dissimilarity between them. In its divine origin and in the manner in which it is acquired, Joseph's knowledge may be understood as a mirror image of the knowledge of good and evil acquired by Adam and Eve.<sup>103</sup> Like the man and woman in Eden, Joseph receives privileged knowledge that properly belongs to God alone. Unlike the first humans, however, Joseph possesses this knowledge while remaining obedient and faithful to God,

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<sup>102</sup> Gunkel, *Genesis*, 31-32. Cf. also Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 4-5.

<sup>103</sup> Zakovitch, "Through the Looking Glass," 139.

respecting the boundaries that he has been given. This relationship between Joseph's knowledge and the knowledge of good and evil constitutes part of a narrative analogy between the Joseph story and the Eden narrative, which appears as the two are read intratextually. The remainder of this analogy emerges by considering how the knowledge of good and evil leads to the curse upon the earth.

The humans' acquisition of knowledge, by eating from the prohibited tree, leads to the consequences narrated in Gen 3:14-24. Much of the significance of the Eden narrative lies in its etiological intention, as it offers an explanation for the world in which we find ourselves.<sup>104</sup> The curses which God pronounces on the man, woman, and serpent account for the pains and struggles of human life and the problems we experience in the created world. The narrative tells us why it is difficult to produce food from the soil and children from the womb, why snakes crawl on their bellies and why humans return to the dust in death rather than living forever. These things characterize our world because the first humans disobeyed God and ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The disobedience and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil are intimately linked in the narrative; the knowledge, in part, led to the curse upon the earth, making it difficult for humans to obtain food from the soil (Gen 3:17-19). As I demonstrate below, this curse has a counterpart in the Joseph narrative, which further contributes to the broad analogy between the Joseph story and the Eden narrative.

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<sup>104</sup> Gunkel, *Genesis*, 20.



### ***V. The Curse upon the Earth Revisited: The Worldwide Famine in the Joseph Story***

Joseph's knowledge enables him to prevent disaster and preserve life during the severe seven-year of famine (רעב) that threatens the whole world. This famine, crucial to the plot of the Joseph story and its theological significance, bears important connections to the Eden narrative: it is a prime instance of the curse upon the earth envisioned in Gen 3:17-19. As I argue below, Joseph's understanding of the famine as an act of God requires seeing it both as a punishment and as a characteristic of a world hostile toward humanity. Such a view resonates with the understanding of the humans' relationship to the earth in the post-Eden world envisaged in Gen 3:17-19. If one reads the famine intratextually in light of the curse upon the earth in the Eden narrative, one recognizes a deeper interplay between human and divine activity in the Joseph story. It also underscores the importance of the chosen family of Israel for the rest of the world, since the famine—and the curse on the ground—is a universal problem.

I argued in chapter one that the judgments God pronounces in the Eden narrative (Gen 3:14-19) have a clear etiological function. They are intended to explain the difficulties of present human life as the consequences of the first humans' disobedience of God's command, by which they came to know good and evil.<sup>105</sup> The curse upon the soil (Gen 3:17-19) relates to the challenges of producing food from the ground.<sup>106</sup> The man must sweat and labor, and the ground will produce thorns and thistles alongside the bread which he will eat. As I discussed, this curse does not envision only the soil's lack of cooperation, but the totality of the challenges presented by agriculture. These include

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<sup>105</sup> Gunkel, *Genesis*, 20.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 22; Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 263; Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, 118.

the soil's production of weeds and other unsavory plants, but also crop failures, droughts, locusts, hail, floods, etc.—everything that threatens humankind's ability to extract sustenance from the earth. In light of this, a famine is an appropriate analogue to the curse upon the earth: it represents the absence of food to the point where human life is endangered.<sup>107</sup> Famine is the supreme instance of the ground's apparent hostility to humankind, the ultimate failure to produce food and sustain life. Within Genesis, the famine in the Joseph story has a parallel in the curse upon the ground, since both envision humankind's struggles with respect to food.

The severity and breadth of the famine constitutes a further parallel with the curse enacted in the Eden narrative. The Joseph story states several times that the famine is world-wide: famine in every country contrasts with the presence of bread in Egypt, the result of Joseph's careful planning (Gen 41:54). People from all over the earth come to Egypt to buy food, because the famine overtakes the whole world (Gen 41:57), and conditions are harsh in Canaan as well as Egypt (Gen 47:13). This is not an exaggeration for literary effect, but is crucial to the narrative's plot. The famine must exist at least in Canaan as well as Egypt, since it prompts Joseph's brothers to journey there and sets in motion their eventual reconciliation.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, the narrative rules out the possibility of journeying somewhere else for food. Jacob's adamant stance against sending Benjamin on the brothers' second journey threatens the family with starvation. Only the severity of the situation—Egypt is the only place to acquire food—forces

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<sup>107</sup> T. Seidl, “רעב,” *TDOT* 13:541. While the noun רעב can refer to normal hunger, Seidl observes that it almost always denotes an actual famine in Hebrew narrative. This is certainly how the word is used in the story of Joseph, where it refers to a widespread, prolonged scarcity of food that threatens human lives.

<sup>108</sup> The famine is the crucial link that binds these plots together. Cf. Westermann, *Genesis* 37-50, 98-99; Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 41; Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 32.

Jacob's hand and makes him agree to send Benjamin.<sup>109</sup> The narrative therefore envisions a severe famine that endangers the whole earth. Such a worldwide famine is remarkable in its unlikelihood: due to their differing climates, the conditions that produce famine in Egypt are different from those that produce famine in Canaan.<sup>110</sup> Because it is all-encompassing, the famine is almost supernatural.<sup>111</sup> As such, it recalls the cosmic scope of the Primeval History, where God deals with all of humankind in broad strokes rather than in the localized experiences of a single family.<sup>112</sup>

A detailed analysis of the famine within the Joseph story's plot clarifies the narrative's overall attitude towards it, which shows other connections with the Eden story's portrayal of the curse on the ground. The famine functions on four different levels in the narrative, corresponding to four related plot threads. First, at the most basic level, the famine presents a problem that must be solved: it threatens the well-being of Egypt and, as will be discovered later, the whole world (Gen 41:57). Though the actual working out of the solution to this problem takes some time—the famine itself will not even occur for another seven years—the solution to the problem appears immediately after it comes to light. Even before Pharaoh reacts to the dream's interpretation, Joseph gives him advice about how to prevent disaster during the famine. He suggests placing a single, wise man in charge, who will be responsible for gathering food during the seven good years so that it may be available as a reserve during the famine (Gen 41:33-36).

Joseph himself is the man for the job, as Pharaoh recognizes, so both the proposed plan

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<sup>109</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 300. Sternberg observes that Judah convinces Jacob to send Benjamin by demonstrating the certainty of death for all if Jacob withholds him.

<sup>110</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 398. In Egypt, such events were caused by disruptions in the Nile's annual flooding which would hinder agriculture, while in Palestine they were due to inadequate rainfall in Palestine and Syria. As Wenham acknowledges, it would have been quite unusual for the rains to fail both in Palestine and south of Egypt, where the Nile was fed.

<sup>111</sup> Seidl, *TDOT* 13:540. Seidl recognizes the noun רָעָב as a nearly mythic entity in Hebrew narrative.

<sup>112</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 51.

and the one to carry it out are readily available as soon as the famine is announced. As a problem that arises and necessitates a solution, the famine serves as its own plot thread.<sup>113</sup>

On a second level, the famine plays a role in a larger story line within the Joseph narrative. The famine, or rather its announcement to Pharaoh via two dreams, provides the catalyst that brings Joseph to power in Egypt. This brings about the rectification and redemption of Joseph, which the reader has been anticipating up to this point. From the moment Joseph was sold as a slave by his brothers, things have become progressively worse for him through no fault of his own. Even if he had been guilty of boasting about his dreams, such boasting hardly merits being threatened with death and sold as a slave into a foreign country. In Potiphar's house, Joseph's virtuous refusal of his mistress's advances led to his unjust imprisonment. Even when he interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's two officials, he was forgotten for another two years (Gen 41:1). Throughout the story, Joseph has repeatedly been the victim of unjust treatment, seeing his status progressively decline despite several occasions for hope. The famine is directly responsible for bringing Joseph up out of this state: Pharaoh's enigmatic dreams about it prompt his cupbearer to remember Joseph, and Joseph's plan for mitigating its severity causes Pharaoh to give him authority over the nation. In a single instant, Joseph goes from being an unjustly imprisoned slave to an Egyptian official below only Pharaoh himself. The plot line in which a solution to the famine is implemented serves the larger narrative purpose of bringing Joseph justice and elevating him to great power.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> In terms of Culley's action sequences, this would best be construed as a "rescue sequence," in which the famine poses a threat to the Egyptians (and indeed the whole world), and Joseph provides the means of deliverance from it (Culley, *Themes and Variations*, 63-67).

<sup>114</sup> Culley, *Themes and Variations*, 160.

On a third level, however, the famine has another function that ties the entire story together even more broadly than its role in the bringing Joseph to power. The famine is not restricted to Egypt, but spreads throughout the whole world (Gen 41:57). In doing so, it affects the family of Jacob in Canaan, prompting him to send ten of his sons to Egypt to buy food.<sup>115</sup> In addition to bringing Joseph to power, therefore, the famine is also directly responsible for re-initiating contact between Joseph and his family, which had ceased over twenty years earlier. Its persistence and continued severity force that contact to remain open and come to its climax in Gen 45:1-15, despite Joseph's harsh treatment of his brothers and Jacob's stubborn refusal to send Benjamin to Egypt.<sup>116</sup> Were it not for the famine, Joseph would have remained a prisoner in Egypt and Jacob's family would never have been reunited. The famine is responsible for initiating the reconciliation of Jacob's family as well as rectifying Joseph's situation in Egypt. It therefore plays a crucial role in the Joseph story, linking the plot of Joseph's rise to power with the main storyline of the reconciliation of his family.<sup>117</sup>

The fourth level corresponds with Joseph's interpretation of the famine articulated in Gen 45:3-15, in which he regards the famine as the central conflict of the entire story. When he reveals himself to his brothers in Gen 45:3-13, he sees everything that has happened since his sale into slavery as God's plan for delivering them from the famine. This is discussed in greater detail in chapter four. For now, it will suffice to note that Joseph's interpretation sees all the events of the past twenty-two years as God's response

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<sup>115</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 117. Green notes Jacob's perception of food in Egypt that prompts action. She calls the famine a "resumptive hinge" that links the action of ch. 41 with the action of ch. 42.

<sup>116</sup> Jacob seems to be content with leaving Simeon in Egypt. Only the famine's threat to his family's lives forces him to send Benjamin in the end.

<sup>117</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 98-99. Cf. also Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 41; Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 32.

to the problem of the famine and the threat it poses to God's chosen family. It was God, not Joseph's brothers, who sent Joseph ahead of them to preserve life—their lives as well as those of the Egyptians—in fulfillment of a plan that had been announced to Joseph through two dreams that he had not understood until that very day.<sup>118</sup> In Joseph's interpretation, the famine is the key problem from the very beginning; everything else has occurred in response to that problem.<sup>119</sup> God dealt with the famine's threat to the chosen family by sending Joseph ahead of them into Egypt so that their lives might be preserved.

The interpretation Joseph articulates here, however, potentially contradicts his initial understanding of the famine as he described it to Pharaoh. Joseph speaks of the king's dreams three times as a revelation of God's future intentions: "God has declared (הִגִּד) to Pharaoh what he is doing" (Gen 41:25); "God has shown (הִרְאָה) to Pharaoh what he is doing" (Gen 41:28); and "the matter is fixed by God, and God is hastening to do it" (Gen 41:32). In doing so, Joseph understands the seven years of plenty and the seven years of famine as intentional actions of God, repeating the assertion at the beginning, middle, and end of his interpretation to make it clear.<sup>120</sup> God has decided beforehand how things will proceed, and has given Pharaoh insight into this decision through his dreams and the divinely gifted interpreter, Joseph; both the famine and its prediction come from God.<sup>121</sup> According to Joseph's words in Gen 45:3-13, however, God's actions oppose the famine. It is a threat to human life and to the preservation of chosen family of Jacob, and God acts to eliminate this threat by directing the affairs of Joseph and his brothers. In the face of the famine, God has sent Joseph ahead of his

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<sup>118</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 169. Green suggests that Joseph's increasing comprehension of the dreams drives his actions more and more as the story progresses. Cf. Ackerman, "Joseph, Judah, and Jacob," 88.

<sup>119</sup> Culley, *Themes and Variations*, 160.

<sup>120</sup> Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 110-11.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

brothers, working through the complexity of human actions and intentions, to ensure that their lives will be preserved. In Gen 45:3-13, God is an agent of rescue from the famine.

Yiu-wing Fung has noted this seeming contradiction in Joseph's two interpretations of the famine and God's relationship to it, concluding that they are evidence of Joseph's unreliability as the narrator's mouthpiece.<sup>122</sup> How, Fung asks, can Joseph maintain that God both sends the famine and sends someone to rescue the humans from it?<sup>123</sup> Fung argues that the two claims cannot be reconciled easily; if Joseph is sincere in his first claim, it paints God both as destroyer and deliverer, a problematic claim in Fung's view.<sup>124</sup> If, on the other hand, Joseph is insincere, then it calls his credibility into question. Both possibilities undermine Joseph's reliability as the narrator's voice.<sup>125</sup> Joseph's understanding of his role as a deliverer from the famine is thus inflated and problematic, as his further actions in enslaving the Egyptians affirm (Gen 47:13-26). Fung is not alone in assessing Joseph's character and his self-conception negatively. Josipovici likewise sees Joseph as an arrogant, boastful, and self-centered character even in Gen 45:3-13: the beloved son of Jacob is "the hero of his own psycho-drama" right through the end.<sup>126</sup>

Fung rightly observes the contrast between Joseph's statement to Pharaoh that God will send a famine and his statement to his brothers that God sent him to preserve life during the famine. However, his conclusion that Joseph's interpretation of God's activity contradicts itself goes too far. Already in Joseph's description of his plan to mitigate the famine, Joseph is presented as an agent of deliverance sent by God. Both the

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<sup>122</sup> Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 109-25.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-21.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 112-25.

<sup>126</sup> Josipovici, *The Book of God*, 85.

interpretation of Pharaoh's dream and Joseph's prescribed course of action drew on a combination of Joseph's own ingenuity and God's presence with him. Pharaoh responds to both the meaning of his dream and Joseph's plan by recognizing that God is with Joseph and makes these things known to him (Gen 41:39).<sup>127</sup> If God does indeed lie behind Joseph's plan to avert threat posed by the famine, then God opposes the famine from the moment it is revealed to Pharaoh.<sup>128</sup> Not only Joseph, but Pharaoh and the narrator as well, understand God as sending both the famine and Joseph as a means of deliverance from it. This view is preserved in Psalm 105:16-22, a rare reference to the Joseph story outside of Genesis. In that Psalm, God "summoned famine against the land" (שִׁלַּח לַפְּנֵיהֶם אִישׁ) and "sent a man ahead of them" (וַיִּקְרָא רַעֲב עַל-הָאָרֶץ) to safeguard Israel (Ps 105:16-17). Moreover, such a portrayal of God as an agent of destruction and deliverance is not unique to the Joseph story. In the Primeval History, God at once decides to destroy all life by sending a flood and to preserve life by instructing Noah to build an ark (Gen 6:13-21).<sup>129</sup> Thus, Joseph's assertion that God has sent him to preserve life during the famine does not contradict his earlier claim that God sends the famine. Both are accurate insights into the narrative's portrayal of God's intentions.

Nevertheless, Fung's argument about the incoherence of Joseph's two claims raises an important question with regard to divine activity in the Joseph story: why does

<sup>127</sup> Westermann, *Genesis* 37-50, 94.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Green, *What Profit for Us*, 213. Green reads the survival of the people as "what God is doing" when he reveals the dreams to Pharaoh. Thus, she sees Pharaoh's dreams not simply as a divine revelation of the future, but a divinely given opportunity to save life in light of that future. However, this interpretation requires distancing God from the source of the famine, as Green refers to the famine as "inexplicable tragedy in our lives."

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Dahlberg, "On Recognizing the Unity of Genesis," 364. Interestingly, Dahlberg sees Joseph as a counterpart to Noah and the famine as a counterpart to the flood.



God send the famine in the first place? No reason is stated for God's intentions in this regard, yet the famine is a fixed entity in the narrative. The possibility of averting the famine altogether, through prayer or repentance, for instance, is not considered at all.<sup>130</sup> In Joseph's interpretation, God seems to have been working behind the scenes all along to bring him to a position of power where he could preserve the lives of the Egyptians and save his family from annihilation.<sup>131</sup> If Joseph is an agent of salvation, he was brought to this position through a long and complex chain of events that began in Canaan with his dreams, which made his brothers hate him and ultimately send him into slavery. It seems, therefore, that God has worked in an extremely roundabout way to preserve life in general and the lives of the chosen family in particular. If Joseph is right, then God has been opposing the famine from the very beginning of the narrative, even before he was sold as a slave.<sup>132</sup> But nothing in the narrative provides insight into the reason for the famine's occurrence. At least in the flood narrative, clear reasons are given for God's decisions to send the flood and to preserve life: evil and violence were multiplying on the earth because the heart of man was evil continually (Gen 6:5), but Noah found favor before God because he was righteous (Gen 6:8-9). Yet no such reasons are forthcoming in the Joseph story; the question therefore remains, why does God send the famine?<sup>133</sup>

Unfortunately, the other occurrences of famine in Genesis are unhelpful in answering this question. The term only appears in two other places: a famine prompts

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<sup>130</sup> Cf. Daniel's advice to Nebuchadnezzar in Dan. 4:27 and the repentance of the Ninevites in Jonah 3:5-10. Both instances uphold the possibility of avoiding a future disaster through a change of action or an appeal to God.

<sup>131</sup> Culley, *Themes and Variations*, 160.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>133</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 184. Green wonders about the degree of God's control with regard to the famine: "Does God control the famine in the view of the narrator, or simply need to cope with it and rouse others to do so as well? Alternatively, is the famine a means to an end, the trigger for an ultimate goal which remains offscreen for us?" Green aptly captures the complexity of the famine and of God's involvement in it.

Abraham to journey to Egypt in Gen 12:10, and another famine causes Isaac to settle near Gerar in Gen 26:1. Despite likely connections between these earlier famines and the one in the Joseph narrative—all mention journeying to Egypt—there is no explicit statement that these famines are sent by God. They simply occur, and the emphasis lies more on giving a reason for Abraham and Isaac to reside with a foreign king as a setting for the wife-sister stories that follow.<sup>134</sup>

In order to address why God sends the famine, it is necessary to look at other places in the Hebrew Bible where famine is explicitly sent by God. Wherever the noun רעב appears as an object, God is the subject of the clause and divine punishments are in view. Famine is frequently associated with sword (חרב) and pestilence (דבר) in these instances (Jer. 24:10, 29:17; Ezek. 5:17; 14:13, 21).<sup>135</sup> Likewise, God can increase (יסף) famine (Ezek. 5:16), or give (נתן) famine (Ezek. 36:29), again in the context of punishment.<sup>136</sup> The verb רעב occurs twice in the *hiphil*, both times with God as its subject and both times with punishment in view. In Deut. 8:3, God causes hunger to discipline the people, while in Prov. 10:3 God does not punish the righteous with hunger.<sup>137</sup> Though severe hunger rather than famine is in view, there is still a link between רעב and divine punishment. Even when God's involvement in a famine is not directly stated, punishment from God can be implied. A three-year famine during the

<sup>134</sup> Seidl, *TDOT* 13:539. Seidl notes that famine serves as a cause for migration also in Ruth 1:1 and 2 Kgs. 8:1. In these instances as well, the famine is a plot device. It serves simply as an occasion for travel, to provide a setting for the story which follows.

<sup>135</sup> Seidl, *TDOT* 13:538.

<sup>136</sup> The latter instance refers to a promise not to punish; however, the view that famine is a punishment from God is still in view.

<sup>137</sup> Seidl, *TDOT* 13:535-36.

reign of David is ascribed to bloodguilt on the house of Saul, suggesting that God has sent the famine as a punishment (2 Sam. 21:1). A famine of equal length is presented to David as a possible punishment for taking a census (2 Sam. 24:13). These examples show a clear correlation between famine and punishment when God is the famine's source; especially in the prophetic literature, the noun רעב frequently occurs in the context of divine punishment.<sup>138</sup> In the majority of instances where a famine or the threat of a famine is ascribed to God, it is presented as a punishment that God sends. The one instance where God sending a famine is not clearly punishment occurs in Ps. 105:16, a retelling of the Joseph story itself.

Such a strong correlation between famine and punishment, especially in instances where God is clearly the famine's source, leads one to suspect that God sends the famine in the Joseph narrative as a punishment as well.<sup>139</sup> If so, however, then the reader looks in vain for an offense that God might be punishing, or for any other reason why God might send the famine. Attempts to see the famine as a punishment on Pharaoh or the Egyptians are unfounded.<sup>140</sup> No sins are explicitly mentioned, and the famine is world-wide rather than confined to Egypt. Moreover, the result of the famine actually benefits

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<sup>138</sup> Seidl, *TDOT* 13:542.

<sup>139</sup> Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 113-118. Fung considers whether the famine is a divine judgment or natural disaster, implying that if God's involvement is emphasized, judgment or punishment is likely in view. Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 91. Westermann sees a connection between Joseph's announcement of the famine and prophetic proclamations of woe, which further suggests that punishment may be in view.

<sup>140</sup> Such interpretations include Harold G. Stigers, *A Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 289; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 399. Stigers views the Egyptians' continual sinfulness and idolatry as the general reason for the punishment, while Wenham implies that God sent the famine and the dreams to disturb the arrogant security of Pharaoh and assert God's control of events. Similarly, Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 327. Brueggemann sees the famine as God's attack on the lifeblood of Egypt (the Nile) in order to expose the Egyptian empire as a place of death. Cf. Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 116-17.

Pharaoh greatly, so as a punishment it would be entirely ineffective (cf. Gen 47:13-26).<sup>141</sup>

If the famine is a punishment, then it is one without apparent cause or provocation in the Joseph narrative.

Furthermore, despite Joseph's repeated assertion that the famine comes from God, Joseph seems to regard the famine as a matter-of-fact, as if the potential for famine was simply a part of the world in which they lived. He moves quickly from announcement to preparation (Gen 41:33-36), making the parallel Westermann sees with prophetic oracles of woe less convincing.<sup>142</sup> God is the source of the famine, but the emphasis in the narrative is simply on the famine's imminence, its prediction via the dreams and their interpretations, and the measures taken by Joseph and by Pharaoh to prevent catastrophe. Once it is announced, the famine has more the character of a natural disaster rather than an intentional punishment—it occurs as “inexplicable tragedy in our lives,” the things with which humans must cope in the world.<sup>143</sup> In this respect, Joseph's view of the famine is analogous to those mentioned in Gen 12:10 and 26:1, which prompted Abraham and Isaac to travel. It is something that happens, necessitating human action as a response. Famine is a part of human reality, an indigenous problem to a world that humans often find hostile. Furthermore, if the famine is only a punishment that God desired to send on the world—it did, after all, spread beyond only Egypt—then God's efforts in enabling Joseph to preserve life are incomprehensible. God could have simply refrained from sending the famine.

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<sup>141</sup> Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 117-18. On the great benefit of the events of Gen 47:13-26 for Pharaoh, cf. Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 145-47.

<sup>142</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 91.

<sup>143</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 213. However, cf. Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 113-14. Fung resists seeing the famine in these terms, since Joseph is so emphatic that God is its source.

Within the Joseph narrative, therefore, there is a twofold view of the famine. On the one hand, Joseph claims three times that it is sent by God, and comparison with other texts from the Hebrew Bible generates the expectation that some sort of punishment is in view. On the other hand, however, the narrative generally regards the famine as an inscrutable fact of human life, and any motivation for divine punishment is not forthcoming. Joseph's understanding of the famine is ambivalent. It is simultaneously part of the natural course of events and a catastrophe sent by God.

While this ambiguous view of the famine could be understood simply in terms of God's inscrutability—God's intentions and purposes often lie outside the realm of human understanding—the Joseph story's interplay between divine providence and human comprehension undermines this possibility. The Joseph narrative is remarkable because its main character receives insight into God's involvement, including the divine reasons for doing so—things which are otherwise beyond human reasoning. In other words, in many respects Joseph's insight penetrates the veil of divine inscrutability, discerning not only God's present and future activity but also the logic behind it. The Joseph story reveals for the characters and for the reader the extent and rationale of God's involvement in human affairs. At the same time, no such rationale is forthcoming within the Joseph story itself, either for Joseph or for the reader. Reading the Joseph narrative intratextually alongside the Eden narrative, however, offers a potential solution to this dilemma. If one understands the famine as an instance of the curse upon the earth, one finds God's justification for sending it as a punishment. The divine motivation for the famine that is hidden in the Joseph narrative becomes apparent when seen in light of God's dealings with humankind earlier in Genesis.

The Eden narrative presents an understanding of human hardship with respect to fertility and sustenance that is similar to the famine in the Joseph story. It likewise portrays humankind's struggle to survive both as something that naturally exists—in the sense that it is our common experience—and something that comes from God as a punishment for wrongdoing.<sup>144</sup> In Gen 3:17-19, God curses the earth in response to the man's disobedience and his acquisition of knowledge. It is clearly a punishment, as the **וְעָלְךָ** clause of Gen 3:17 demonstrates. The earth is cursed, and the human will toil to acquire food, because he listened to the voice of his wife and ate from the forbidden tree. Yet the curse also describes the world as the ancient Israelites experienced it; acquiring food was indeed difficult, as was bearing children and interacting with the animal world.<sup>145</sup> Part of the story's purpose is etiological—it explains the difficulties of human life as God's response to human disobedience. The curse on the earth is both a characteristic of our world and a divine punishment for wrongdoing. Because the curse on the soil envisions the totality of humankind's difficulties with respect to producing food, a famine constitutes an appropriate analogue to this curse, as I argued above. In light of the curse in Gen 3:17-19, famine emerges both as a reality of human life and as a punishment from God. Such an understanding resonates with the attitude toward the famine that one finds in the Joseph story.

When one reads the latter in light of the former, there emerges a clear reason why God sends the famine, the insight into the divine logic that is absent in the Joseph story itself. As argued above, the most common reason for God to send a famine in the Hebrew Bible is as a punishment. God sends the famine in the Joseph story as a

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<sup>144</sup> Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 19.

<sup>145</sup> Gunkel, *Genesis*, 22; Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 263; Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, 118.

punishment as well—not, however, in response to a specific instance of wrongdoing, but as a continuation of the punishment that has been in effect since the first humans disobeyed God. The seven-year famine of the Joseph narrative occurs because the earth is cursed. It comes about both as God’s doing and as a part of the world we inhabit. This accounts for Joseph’s twofold claim that God sends the famine and that God sends him as an agent of deliverance. The absence of a stated reason for punishment—the typical divine motivation for sending a famine in the Hebrew Bible—prompts one to look beyond the Joseph story for such a reason. It may be found at the beginning of Genesis, where hardship of human life is understood both as a divine punishment and as a fact of present human life. Interpreting the famine of the Joseph story in light of God’s curse on the earth enables one to see how both the famine and deliverance from it can come from God.

## ***VI. Circumventing the Curse: Knowledge and the Preservation of Life***

The Joseph story recalls elements of the Eden narrative at two crucial points: the knowledge that Joseph possesses and the famine that prevails over the whole earth. The former is analogous to the knowledge of good and evil gained through disobedience in Eden, while the latter echoes the curse upon the earth that God imposes as a consequence of the first humans’ disobedience. Joseph’s knowledge draws upon divine assistance and human ingenuity, the combination of which gives Joseph access to privileged divine knowledge. In this respect, it echoes the knowledge of good and evil in Eden, which also represents knowledge reserved for God alone. Joseph’s knowledge, however, is not associated with disobedience against God or with efforts to overstep his limitations, as

was the knowledge obtained by the first humans. Likewise, the famine in the Joseph story is understood both as reality of normal human life and as an event sent by God, likely a punishment of some kind. Such ambivalence about the nature of the famine recalls the curse upon the earth in the Eden narrative, which presents all of the challenges to human survival—famines included—as a result of God’s punishment for disobedience. Moreover, the breadth of the famine over all the earth evokes the universal scope envisioned in the Primeval History rather than what we typically find in the patriarchal narratives; this further suggests that the famine should be read in light of the Eden narrative.

These connections between the Joseph story and the Eden narrative are not isolated from one another, but together constitute a broad narrative analogy between a key plot of the Joseph story and the account of the first humans in Eden. This analogy is characterized by reversal, and as such it may be understood as an inversion or reflection story.<sup>146</sup> In the Eden narrative, the knowledge of good and evil leads to death via the curse on the ground. In the Joseph story, however, Joseph’s knowledge leads to the preservation of life in the face of the famine. This storyline—in which Joseph delivers the Egyptians and others by mitigating the famine’s severity—is a major sub-plot within the Joseph story, largely confined to Gen 39-41 but including later elements in the Joseph narrative as well.<sup>147</sup> Reading this crucial aspect of the plot intratextually in light of the Eden narrative enriches our understanding of it by setting it in a larger context and exposing key issues at stake for all of humankind.

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<sup>146</sup> Zakovitch, “Through the Looking Glass,” 139.

<sup>147</sup> E.g., Joseph’s enslavement of the Egyptians in Gen 47:13-26 and Joseph’s commitment to provide food for his family in Gen 45:3-13.



In the Eden narrative, the knowledge of good and evil leads to death. It is introduced to the human on these terms, as God threatens Adam with death if he eats from the forbidden tree (Gen 2:16-17). Despite the fact that the humans do not die immediately upon eating the prohibited fruit,<sup>148</sup> the rest of the narrative demonstrates a changed existence in which death dominates.<sup>149</sup> The man and woman are estranged from one another, first as they become aware of the need to cover their nakedness (Gen 3:7) and then as the man begins to exercise superiority over the woman (Gen 3:16).<sup>150</sup> They likewise experience enmity with the animal world, where harmony had prevailed before, and they find their respective natural labors to be toilsome and difficult after obtaining the knowledge of good and evil. Finally, God mentions death specifically to the humans, saying that they will return to the dust at the end of their lives (Gen 3:19), sending them out of Eden, and barring access to the tree of life so that their lives cannot endure indefinitely (Gen 3:22-24). Though the curses are explicitly tied more strongly to the humans' disobedience rather than to the knowledge of good and evil per se, I argued in chapter one that these cannot be separated from one another—the emphasis on disobedience helps to define the knowledge of good and evil. Furthermore, the opposition between life and the knowledge of good and evil likewise associates the latter with death.<sup>151</sup> In all respects, therefore, the humans' acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil leads to death. A significant aspect of this is the curse upon the earth, which makes human existence and survival difficult.

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<sup>148</sup> Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 9.

<sup>149</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 116-39. Cf. also Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 16-18.

<sup>150</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 128.

<sup>151</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 229-33.

Things proceed differently in the Joseph story—the knowledge that Joseph displays throughout the narrative leads ultimately to the preservation of life. This is stated directly in the two statements where Joseph informs his brothers of God’s involvement: God sent Joseph ahead of his brothers to preserve life (לְמַחֲיָה; Gen 45:5), and God intended the brothers’ evil actions for good in order to keep alive a great people (לְהַחֲיֵית עַם־רַב; Gen 50:20). Some interpreters argue that these claims of Joseph are not authoritative within the narrative—that is, that the narrator does not necessarily agree with Joseph’s assessment of God’s involvement and his own role in the story.<sup>152</sup> While it is true that neither the narrator nor God ever confirms Joseph’s words to his brothers, Joseph almost certainly serves as the narrator’s mouthpiece at this point. The reader has confidence in Joseph’s claims about God’s activity, due in no small part to the repeated assertion in Gen 39 that “the LORD was with Joseph” as well as the fulfillment of Joseph’s dream interpretations. Furthermore, Joseph’s assessment of his situation in Potiphar’s house (Gen 39:8-9) agrees with that of the narrator (Gen 39:4-6). Finally, Joseph’s insight that God has brought good out of evil forms the basis for his decision to forgive and provide for his brothers; it is therefore a key aspect of the reconciliation of Jacob’s family toward which the narrative has moved since Joseph was sold. In the next chapter I discuss in detail the process whereby Joseph arrives at his interpretation of God’s activity in his life. At the end of this process, however, Joseph’s interpretation is authoritative, conveying insight into the way in which God has been involved in the story.

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<sup>152</sup> Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 125; Josipovici, *The Book of God*, 85-89. Josipovici denies any ultimately authoritative voice in the Joseph narrative, reading it as an illustration of the Hebrew Bible’s realistic presentation of the elusiveness of certainty with respect to God’s word.

Events in the Joseph narrative confirm his interpretation: Joseph's knowledge, given by God, enables him to preserve life. This occurs first in Joseph's ability to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, predicting the seven years of famine that follow the seven years of plenty. As I argued above, Joseph's dream interpretations come from God, as he acknowledges to Pharaoh (Gen 41:16). The dreams themselves are sent by God, in order to inform Pharaoh of God's future intentions (Gen 41:25, 28, 32), and Joseph's God-given ability to interpret them unlocks their meaning. The knowledge revealed through the dreams therefore gives Joseph privileged knowledge that normally belongs to God alone. And Joseph is the only human who possesses it, since neither Pharaoh nor the wise men and magicians of Egypt are able to explain the dreams (Gen 41:8). Were it not for the dreams and Joseph's ability to interpret them, the seven years of famine would arise unexpectedly, with hope for next year's crop thwarted again and again as the famine drags on. The seven good years would be enjoyed, but would not benefit the people during the lean years since no one would use them to prepare. The knowledge by which Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams and predicted the famine, therefore, was crucial in preserving life.

The ability to interpret dreams would lead nowhere, however, if it were not also for Joseph's great administrative skill and practical insight that allowed him to prepare for the famine the dreams predicted. Again, this knowledge comes from God, since it is due to God's presence with Joseph in Potiphar's house (Gen 39:2) and in the prison (Gen 39:21), and is also recognized by Pharaoh as a divinely given quality (Gen 41:38-39). Joseph's knowledge gives him prudence to prepare for the famine, as well as the insight that such preparations may be made during the seven plentiful years. It lets him know

how much grain to collect and where to store it (Gen 41:34-35), and it lets him see the necessity for selecting overseers to facilitate the task (Gen 41:34). Pharaoh recognizes that Joseph alone possesses the ability to achieve the great task of preparing for the famine, due to God's presence with him (Gen 41:38-39).<sup>153</sup> Joseph's knowledge in this respect leads to the preservation of life—without his extensive, well-executed preparations, food would have run out and the people of Egypt, not to mention the other nations, would have starved.

The episode in which the Egyptian people become Pharaoh's slaves bears this out (Gen 47:13-26). Even with Joseph's preparations in place, the people barely survive, coming to poverty and losing all their possessions because of the famine's severity. Though interpreters often use this incident to cast a negative light on Joseph's character,<sup>154</sup> the conditions which Joseph imposes are comparatively light on the people. They become, in effect, tenants on the land, and are required only to give one-fifth of its produce to Pharaoh.<sup>155</sup> By contrast, 1 Maccabees refers to a one-third taxation (1 Macc 10:30), while private transactions could involve interest as high as sixty percent.<sup>156</sup> Furthermore, the people themselves suggest the arrangement where they become Pharaoh's slaves (Gen 47:18-19),<sup>157</sup> and they express gratitude for Joseph's measures to save their lives (Gen 47:25).<sup>158</sup> Joseph's actions, therefore, should be evaluated

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<sup>153</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 27-28; Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 94.

<sup>154</sup> Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 70-77, 199; W. Sibley Towner, *Genesis* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 273-74; Laurence A. Turner, *Genesis* (Readings; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 196-97.

<sup>155</sup> Skinner, *Genesis*, 500-01; Eric I. Lowenthal, *The Joseph Narrative in Genesis* (New York: Ktav, 1973), 129.

<sup>156</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 406; Wildavsky, *Assimilation Versus Separation*, 153.

<sup>157</sup> Skinner, *Genesis*, 500.

<sup>158</sup> Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, and Theological Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 402. Cf. however, Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 84-85. Fung does not regard the

positively; in spite of the severe famine, Joseph manages to save lives.<sup>159</sup> The Egyptians' poverty is due to the famine, not to Joseph's policies. The episode serves primarily to contrast the Egyptians' situation with the beneficial conditions under which Jacob and his family enter Egypt due to Joseph's position of power and his reconciliation with his brothers.<sup>160</sup> At the same time, it illustrates the dire conditions of the famine and the degree to which it threatens life and property. Joseph's knowledge leads to the preservation of life, despite the poverty that the famine inflicts. The people are enslaved, but they do not starve.<sup>161</sup> Without Joseph's knowledge, the Egyptians and the surrounding nations—indeed, the whole world—would have perished during the seven years of famine.

Even Joseph's faithfulness to God and his refusal to overstep his limitations (the other two aspects of his knowledge discussed earlier) contribute to the preservation of life that comes about through him. While Joseph's ability to interpret dreams and his skill in administration more directly enable him to save the lives of the Egyptians and his family, these other aspects of his knowledge are involved in a less direct, though no less important, way. Through them, Joseph arrives at a position in which he is able to hear of the famine and to take measures to mitigate it. Were it not for Joseph's faithfulness to God in refusing Potiphar's wife, he would not have been placed in the prison and therefore would not have met Pharaoh's cupbearer, who eventually mentioned him to Pharaoh. Were it not for Joseph's steadfast service within his boundaries—in Potiphar's house, in the prison, and over Egypt—events would not have played out as they did in the

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Egyptians' acceptance of slavery for death as grounds for a positive evaluation of Joseph's measures. They resist becoming slaves as long as possible, showing that they do not embrace it enthusiastically.

<sup>159</sup> Sarna, *Genesis*, 322-23; Sigmon, "Shadowing Jacob's Journey," 467-68.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 464-68.

<sup>161</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 184.

narrative. The story of Joseph presents a long, complex sequence of events that cumulatively result in Joseph's opportunity and ability to save individuals from the famine and to preserve the nascent Israelite people.<sup>162</sup> Joseph's faithfulness plays a crucial role in these events, as God's presence with him repeatedly places him in the right place at the right time, under the favor of the right people. The preservation of life is precarious, the chain of events that leads to it delicate. If anything happens differently, if Joseph is unfaithful to God or attempts to overstep his boundaries at any point, then the sequence is jeopardized. Even these aspects of Joseph's knowledge, therefore, are ultimately necessary for Joseph to preserve life.

Joseph's knowledge, manifested in his dream interpretations, his effective administration, his faithfulness to God, and his respect for his limitations, leads to salvation and life. Furthermore, Joseph preserves life by providing food during a time of scarcity. In this respect, his knowledge forms a counterpart to the knowledge of good and evil in Eden which led, among other things, to the curse upon the earth that made acquiring food difficult. The famine in the Joseph story poses a threat to human survival through a lack of food, analogous to that which is envisioned in the Eden narrative as a result of the curse upon the earth (Gen 3:17-19). In the Eden narrative, this curse comes about because of the humans' acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil; knowledge leads to death. In the Joseph story, however, Joseph's knowledge leads to life because he circumvents the threat of famine; God-given wisdom and insight give Joseph an opportunity and the ability to ensure that the Egyptians and others survive.

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<sup>162</sup> Cf. Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 118-31.

In this respect, Joseph emerges as a counterpart to Adam, whose actions brought about the curse, the difficulties of human life, and ultimately death.<sup>163</sup> As in the episode of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, Adam serves as a foil for Joseph. This analogous relationship between the two deepens as one examines Joseph's knowledge and his ability to preserve life during the famine. The opposition to the curse is not total; it is not a reversal that undoes the curse completely. The famine still occurs, and the effects of the curse remain an obstacle to human survival. Joseph's knowledge, however, does circumvent the curse, demonstrating how human life can thrive despite the limitations caused by the shadows of the past. It has long been recognized that Joseph's life offers grounds for hope in the face of difficult circumstances such as he experienced, as God's ability to bring good out of evil is one of the narrative's most important themes. Read intratextually in light of Eden narrative, however, the story of Joseph opens the door to a broader hope. It upholds the possibility that the present limitations and difficulties of life, rooted in the human propensity for disobedience, can be overcome. Yet it is not Joseph's knowledge alone that serves as the basis for this hope. As I demonstrate in the next chapter, Joseph's knowledge is closely bound up with his relationship with his family. It is this family—the family of Jacob, God's chosen people Israel—that provides the ultimate hope for the future.

## ***VII. Summary and Conclusion***

Knowledge is an important motif throughout the Joseph narrative, as the degree to which the various characters possess or lack knowledge factors into many of the story's

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<sup>163</sup> Dahlberg, "On Recognizing the Unity of Genesis," 364.

most crucial turning points. Within this motif, it is Joseph's own knowledge that emerges as the most significant in the provision of food during the worldwide famine. Joseph's knowledge includes his ability to interpret dreams, his ability to govern effectively, his obedience to God, and his respect for his own limitations. In each of these instances, Joseph's knowledge stems from a combination of his own ingenuity and God's presence in his life. The degree of God's involvement, moreover, shows Joseph's knowledge to be a privileged knowledge, largely withheld from humans and normally possessed by God alone. Joseph's ability to interpret dreams and to govern effectively are unique, at least within the narrative, and they are due to God's presence with Joseph.

Insofar as it is a privileged knowledge normally reserved for God alone, the knowledge that Joseph possesses resonates with the knowledge of good and evil that plays such a strong role in the Eden narrative. The chief difference lies in the manner in which this knowledge is acquired: Joseph receives his through God's presence in his life, remaining obedient and faithful, while the first humans obtain the knowledge of good and evil by disobeying God. Furthermore, the famine in the Joseph narrative also echoes the story of Eden, since its widespread breadth and challenge to human life recalls the curse that God pronounces upon the earth. The curse envisions not just the soil's lack of cooperation, but every manner of difficulty in obtaining food from the earth, including famine.

When these two connections with the Eden narrative are brought together, it reveals an analogous relationship with the Eden story that centers on the consequences of knowledge. Joseph emerges as a counterpart to Adam; his knowledge leads to the preservation of life, since he is able to provide food and save lives during the famine,



while Adam's knowledge makes survival difficult and leads ultimately to death. Joseph does not reverse the curse upon the earth, but he does manage to circumvent it and obtain food in spite of it. In the following chapter, further dimensions of Joseph's knowledge will be explored, specifically his growth in knowledge that leads him to be reconciled with his family. It is this reconciliation of the family, ultimately, that leads to hope for the future, not just for Joseph's family, but for all humankind.

## Chapter Four: Knowledge and the Reconciliation of the Family

### *I. Introduction*

In chapter two, I argued that the conflict between Joseph and his brothers in Gen 37 echoes the story of Cain and Abel in Gen 4:1-16, by means of a similar portrayal of jealousy that escalates to the point of fratricide. These are narrative analogies, depicting fraternal conflict and divine favor upon the younger brother while interweaving the threat of death and the motif of exile. The link between these stories is buttressed by verbal connections, including repetition of “brother” (אָדָם) to highlight the relationship between the characters, the use of “blood” (דָּם) to speak of the younger brother’s murder, and the setting “in the field” (בַּשָּׂדֶה) to emphasize his isolation and vulnerability. Despite these parallels, the narrative of Joseph and his brothers in Gen 37 ends differently than the story of Cain and Abel; in the end Joseph is not murdered, but sent into Egypt as a slave. This occurs in part because Joseph’s brothers recognize the sinfulness in killing their brother, their own flesh. The words of Reuben and Judah echo the Cain and Abel narrative as they express this awareness, exhorting their brothers to find an alternative to direct murder (Gen 37:21-22, 26-27).<sup>1</sup> This suggests that the brothers’ moral sensibility goes beyond that of Cain; although their crime against Joseph parallels Cain’s fratricide, they do not go so far as to kill their brother. This narrative analogy served as a starting

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Fraternity*, 171.

point for exploring allusions to the Eden narrative in the Joseph story, since Gen 4 should be read as a continuation of Gen 2-3.<sup>2</sup>

The story of Joseph and his brothers, however, does not come to an end when they sell him into slavery. Despite the strong focus of Gen 39-41 on Joseph alone, and despite Joseph's claim that God has made him forget his father's house (Gen 41:51), Joseph's brothers are not out of the picture. In Gen 42, the story's attention shifts from Joseph back to Jacob and his other sons in Canaan, whom Joseph may have forgotten but God and the narrator have not.<sup>3</sup> As they journey to Egypt to buy grain, the stage is set for a renewed encounter between Joseph and his brothers, which will play itself out over the course of Gen 42-45. Therefore, although the brothers' decision to sell Joseph into slavery parallels Cain's crime, subsequent events move toward a different ending characterized by reversal. The conflict between Joseph and his brothers is ultimately resolved through forgiveness, as Joseph repays the brothers good for evil and promises to provide for them in Egypt during the famine. The end result is neither murder nor estrangement, but a reconciliation that is unprecedented in the book of Genesis.<sup>4</sup> This reconciliation serves as the true counterpart in the Joseph narrative to the fratricide with which the story of Cain and Abel ended. The analogous relationship between the Joseph story and the story of Cain and Abel is carried out over the Joseph story as a whole rather than confined to its opening chapter.

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<sup>2</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 285-86; Stratton, *Out of Eden*, 213; Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Fraternity*, 139-40.

<sup>3</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 374. Von Rad notes the striking juxtaposition of Joseph's claim to have forgotten his father's house at the end of chapter 41 and the immediate reintroduction of his brothers at the beginning of chapter 42.

<sup>4</sup> Though Esau forgives and welcomes Jacob as a brother, their reunion is temporary and they do not, ultimately, remain together. After a brief meeting, the two brothers go their separate ways. Jacob and Esau, therefore, attain an imperfect measure of reconciliation that falls short of what we see among Jacob's sons at the end of the Joseph story. Cf. Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness*, 168-69.

As I demonstrate below, Joseph's decision to forgive and commit himself to his brothers is intimately bound up with his knowledge of God's purposes, a distinct aspect of his insight that echoes the Eden narrative in its own way. In the present chapter, I explore this dimension of Joseph's knowledge and the way it is tied to Joseph's relationship with his family. In doing so, I reveal a broadly articulated relationship between the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel on the one hand, and the Joseph story on the other. In the former, the knowledge that leads to death also leads to fratricide, as Cain's murder of Abel evidences the human propensity for violence in post-Eden life. In the latter, the knowledge that leads to life—via Joseph's ability to provide food during the famine—also leads to forgiveness and reconciliation, as Joseph's growing awareness of God's providence leads him to commit himself to his family and their common future.

## ***II. Knowledge of God in the Joseph Story***

At the climax of the Joseph narrative, when Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers and offers words of forgiveness and comfort, he shares with them his insight into God's purposes for them all in light of the famine (Gen 45:3-15).<sup>5</sup>

And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry that you sold me here, for in order to preserve life God sent me before you. For this famine has been in the midst of the land two years, but there are still five years to come in which there will be no plowing or harvest. So God sent me before you to place for you a remnant on the earth, and to preserve alive for you many survivors. And now,

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<sup>5</sup> Coats recognizes Joseph's decision to reveal his identity to his brothers as a turning point within a larger "denouement" (chs. 43-45) in the Joseph narrative (Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 44). Humphreys sees Joseph's speech as the plot's main resolution, with what follows in Gen 45:16-50:22 as the denouement (Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 48). Cf. also Josipovici, *The Book of God*, 76-77. Though Josipovici denotes the open-endedness of this scene and the Joseph story as a whole, he recognizes the manner in which the reader anticipates Joseph's disclosure of his identity and experiences it as a moment of relief.

you did not send me here, but God. And he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and ruler of all the land of Egypt (Gen 45:5-8).

Joseph tells his brothers that God, not they, sent him into Egypt, doing so in order to preserve many lives and to prevent his family's death and dispossession (cf. Gen 45:11). Neither God nor the narrator confirms the validity of Joseph's interpretation;<sup>6</sup> it should, nevertheless, be recognized as the narrative's conclusive perspective on God's providence.<sup>7</sup> Joseph, the exemplary wise man throughout much of the story, declares the extent and purpose of God's involvement in the orchestrated series of events—an involvement that has been suggested by the striking confluence of circumstances, but seldom stated outright.<sup>8</sup> Joseph acknowledges his brothers' part in what happened—"you sold me here"—but attributes his descent into Egypt ultimately to God, saying that God sent (שלח) him three times in these four verses. In doing so, Joseph exhibits insight into God's intentions and activity, as well as the full significance of everything that has happened to him. This insight forms the basis for his subsequent treatment of his brothers, as he promises to cooperate with God's plan by using his position of power to provide for his family.

At the end of the Joseph story, Joseph repeats this assessment of God's activity, faced with brothers who are reluctant to take his forgiveness and favorable disposition towards them at face value (Gen 50:15-21). Fearing that Joseph will take revenge against

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<sup>6</sup> Miscall, "The Jacob and Joseph Stories as Analogies," 31; Wildavsky, *Assimilation versus Separation*, 157; Josipovici, *The Book of God*, 78; Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 124. Fung offers a sustained argument against equating Joseph's voice with that of the narrator in Gen 45:5-8 and 50:19-21, raising the possibility that the narrator presents Joseph's words ironically (Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 101-27).

<sup>7</sup> Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 125; Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 251; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 432; Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 290; von Rad, *Genesis*, 433; Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 90-91; Longacre, *Joseph*, 42-43; Niehoff, *The Figure of Joseph*, 35-36.

<sup>8</sup> The sole exceptions are the narrator's statements that YHWH was with Joseph, all occurring in Gen 39 (39:2, 3, 21, 23).

them now that Jacob is dead, the brothers tell him that their father instructed him to forgive them before he died (Gen 50:15-17). Their mistrust of Joseph and possibly deceitful words to him—there is no indication that Jacob gave such instructions—may show that they have not completely changed.<sup>9</sup> Their concern, however, is not entirely unfounded: Esau had initially planned to kill Jacob after Isaac died (Gen 27:41), and Absalom waited two years before killing Amnon in revenge for raping Tamar (2 Sam. 13:22-29). Perhaps, they reason, Joseph has had a similar plan for retaliation all along.<sup>10</sup> Joseph's response is designed to comfort them and assure them of his forgiveness: "Do not be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You planned evil against me, but God planned it for good, in order to keep alive a great people as he is doing this day. So now do not be afraid; I myself will provide for you and your little ones" (Gen 50:19-21). Joseph here reiterates that God has worked through their actions, once again juxtaposing their ill will with God's good intentions.<sup>11</sup> He declares again that God's purpose has been to preserve life, reaffirming his resolve to act in accordance with God's plan by caring for his brothers and their families.<sup>12</sup> As before, Joseph promises to "provide" for his brothers (בִּלְפֶּנֶס *pilpel*; Gen 50:21, cf. 45:11), emphasizing God's desire to preserve life (חַיִּים).

<sup>9</sup> Von Rad argues that Joseph's brothers did not fabricate Jacob's instructions, saying that this is a false assumption (von Rad, *Genesis*, 427). However, no such instructions are recorded, and Jacob has already met with Joseph separately from his brothers (Gen 47:29-48:22). It is best, therefore, to maintain that we cannot know for sure whether Jacob actually did give these instructions to Joseph via his brothers (cf. Josipovici, *The Book of God*, 79). Yet deceitful action would be consistent with their behavior earlier in the Joseph narrative, where they deceived Jacob (Green, *What Profit for Us*, 190-91).

<sup>10</sup> Josipovici, *The Book of God*, 80-81. Josipovici cites the example of King David's instructions regarding Shimei (1 Kgs. 2:8-9). Earlier, David had expressed forgiveness, but now orders Solomon to take vengeance upon him and put him to death.

<sup>11</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 191, 208.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Coats, "Redactional Unity," 21. Coats argues that this whole encounter between Joseph and his brothers is a "recapitulation" of the earlier reconciliation scene in Gen 45, added by a redactor who wanted to connect the traditions about Jacob's death (Gen 47:28-50:14) to the Joseph story's conclusion. Whether or not this argument holds, he does observe a general structural parallel between Gen 45:1-15 and Gen 50:15-21, supporting the idea that Joseph's interpretation of God's purposes remains the same in the latter instance.

*hip*□*il*; Gen 50:20, cf. 45:7). Reference to “your little ones” (Gen 50:21) refers back to the wagons Joseph sends along with his brothers “for your little ones and your wives” (לַטַּפְּכֶם וּלְנָשֵׁיכֶם; Gen 45:19). These verbal echoes of his earlier words and actions confirm that Joseph’s perspective on the past has not changed, nor has his attitude toward his brothers.<sup>13</sup>

In these two statements, therefore, we see an added dimension to Joseph’s knowledge, beyond his wisdom, administrative skill, and ability to interpret dreams that we observed in chapter three. Joseph’s words to his brothers demonstrate his remarkable perception of God’s activity in his own life and the lives of his family, understanding the subtle yet compelling divine purposes that brought him to power in order to care for them. And despite Joseph’s extraordinary wisdom in Potiphar’s house and Pharaoh’s court, it is this insight that represents the height of his knowledge about God and the extent of his discernment of the past, present, and future.<sup>14</sup> Only in these two declarations does Joseph understand his power in Egypt in terms of his relationship with his family, bringing the two major narrative threads together in a single horizon of meaning.<sup>15</sup> Only in them does Joseph grasp the complete import of his youthful dreams, which he did not interpret directly, though he seemed to find in them an unqualified

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<sup>13</sup> Westermann argues that Joseph’s statement in Gen 50:20-21 “repeats more briefly and in different terms that given in 45:5-8,” likewise noting Joseph’s repeated promise to provide for his brothers and their little ones (Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 205). Green argues that Joseph’s unchanged interpretation of God’s purposes indicates his limitations in understanding the dreams, though it far surpasses that of the other characters (Green, *What Profit for Us*, 208). Fung likewise regards Joseph’s words in 50:19-21 as a restatement of the sentiment he expressed in 45:5-8, though he evaluates the rationale underlying these speeches negatively (Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 77-80).

<sup>14</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 175.

<sup>15</sup> The story’s two main plots are concerned with reconciliation and political power, the former serving as the overall plot with the latter as a major sub-plot. In other words, the Joseph story first and foremost portrays reconciliation among the family of Jacob, threatened by conflict and strife. Within this, it also depicts an “ideal administrator” in the character of Joseph throughout Gen 39-41 (Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 80-89).

prediction of superiority over his brothers. Before, Joseph understood that he would have power over his brothers, but nothing beyond this; his apparent arrogance in declaring the dreams suggests a focus on domination rather than service.<sup>16</sup> Now, however, he recognizes the purpose of that power—to save lives. Keenly skilled at interpreting the dreams and managing the affairs of others, Joseph now effectively interprets his own dreams and sees to his own family’s care. Reassuring his brothers, the “magisterial knower” in the narrative gives his knowledge its fullest expression.<sup>17</sup>

Through this added dimension to Joseph’s knowledge, the Joseph story further resonates with the Eden narrative, continuing the connection between the knowledge of good and evil and the knowledge that enables Joseph to preserve life during the famine. In Gen 45:3-13 and 50:19-21, Joseph possesses an even stronger ability than before to discern God’s underlying purposes throughout the story. When Joseph comforts his brothers the second time, he uses language that recalls the Eden narrative. As Dahlberg has observed, Joseph’s rhetorical question, “Am I in the place of God?” (Gen 50:19), echoes the serpent’s words to the woman that eating from the forbidden tree will make her “like God” (Gen 3:5). And when he says, “You planned evil against me, but God planned it for good,” Joseph’s words may be recognized as an allusion to the knowledge of good and evil in Gen 2-3.<sup>18</sup> The ability to know good (טוב) from evil (רע) is reserved for God alone in the Eden narrative. Yet at the end of Genesis, Joseph distinguishes between good (טבה) and evil (רעה), speaking on behalf of God and declaring God’s purposes. As the following sections will show, this aspect of Joseph’s knowledge

<sup>16</sup> Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 147.

<sup>17</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 159.

<sup>18</sup> Dahlberg, “On Recognizing the Unity of Genesis,” 363-64; “Unity of Genesis,” 129.



enables him to reconcile with his family, since his decision to forgive is based on his recognition of God's purposes. The first humans' acquisition of knowledge, by contrast, led in part to the eruption of violence through fraternal conflict in the story of Cain and Abel. This inverse relationship between knowledge and conflict constitutes another important connection between the Joseph story and the Eden narrative. Below, I explore the nature of this connection in detail, first studying Joseph's growth in knowledge and then showing how the reconciliation with his family is bound up with it.

### ***III. Joseph's Growth in Knowledge***

As noted above, Joseph's words to his brothers in Gen 45:3-15 articulate his full recognition of God's activity in bringing him down to Egypt; as he reveals his identity, Joseph acknowledges God's providential hand at work throughout his past (Gen 45:5-8).<sup>19</sup> This is not, however, the meaning that he finds in his situation all along. Though Joseph never directly interprets his circumstances before this instance, two points in the text show that Joseph initially fails to grasp the full significance of the things that have happened to him.<sup>20</sup> The first occurs after Joseph interprets the dream of Pharaoh's cupbearer in prison. Joseph asks the man to remember him before Pharaoh and help rescue him from the prison. Joseph's words to the cupbearer imply a sense of injustice: "For I was surely stolen out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have not done

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<sup>19</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 398. Fung notes that Joseph claims divine providence in these verses, even as he challenges the tendency to accept that claim as the narrator's own voice (*Victim and Victimizer*, 44-48; 119-27). For an extended discussion about the complex understanding of divine providence throughout the Joseph story, cf. Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 118-131.

<sup>20</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 119-20.

anything that they should put me into the pit” (Gen 40:15).<sup>21</sup> Joseph here states that he is in Egypt, in prison, for no discernible reason, and this forms the basis of his appeal to the cupbearer to try and rectify his situation. Joseph is often praised for his steadfast trust in God, displayed clearly in his refusal to sleep with Potiphar’s wife (cf. Gen 39:9). His words to Pharaoh’s cupbearer, however, depict Joseph’s lack of comprehension regarding any greater divine purpose behind his circumstances.

In this interpretation, brief though it is, we see Joseph’s perspective on his slavery and imprisonment for the first time. He sees himself as the victim of two unjust actions: he was stolen out of the land of the Hebrews (i.e., sold into slavery), and has been imprisoned as an innocent man. Furthermore, by using the term “pit” (בֹּרַ) to describe the prison, Joseph draws a connection between his captivity and his sale into slavery, initiated when his brothers threw him into the “pit” (בֹּרַ) in the wilderness (Gen 37:24). The prison is a further injustice, compounding the sale into slavery. There is no mention of Joseph’s family or of God’s activity, merely an evaluation of negative, undeserved experiences. Joseph’s mention of the injustice committed against him reassures the cupbearer of his innocence, which would encourage him to intervene on Joseph’s behalf.<sup>22</sup> This emphasis on his victimhood, however, demonstrates a focus on the past rather than a future oriented outlook.

A second point where Joseph interprets his past and present circumstances comes after Pharaoh places Joseph over the land of Egypt. Joseph has two children, and names them Manasseh and Ephraim, the first because “God has made me forget all my distress

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<sup>21</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 76. Westermann also notes the sense of injustice and innocence conveyed by Joseph’s words.

<sup>22</sup> Sarna, *Genesis*, 278-79.

and all my father's house" and the second because "God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction" (Gen 41:51-52). Joseph still regards the things that have happened to him in Egypt and in Canaan as evil and unjust, seeing them as "distress" (עמל) and "affliction" (עני).<sup>23</sup> Now, however, he recognizes God's hand in bringing him out of prison and restoring his fortunes; the names of Joseph's children reflect this reversal of his circumstances. In Joseph's mind, God has redeemed him, restoring and elevating Joseph despite the terrible things that have befallen him. This much is true, but it does not capture the totality of God's dealings with Joseph, as the ensuing narrative will show. Joseph's interpretation is centered on himself, failing to consider a wider meaning behind the events that have brought him to power in Egypt. Joseph's easy dismissal of his father's house (41:51) is particularly striking, given the youthful dreams which prefigured his exaltation over his family.

Joseph's inability to see the broader implications of his situation—his slavery, imprisonment, and elevation to power in Egypt—stands in marked contrast with his otherwise discerning mind. Because the Lord is with Joseph (Gen 39:2-3, 21, 23), he shows himself to be an intelligent and skillful administrator of Potiphar's house and of the prison (Gen 39:4-6, 22-23). This skill continues when Joseph is placed over all of Egypt, since he devises the plan to save Egypt from the famine (Gen 41:33-36). Joseph's aptitude for discerning God's intentions and activity is likewise evident when he correctly interprets the dreams of Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker (Gen 40:8-22), as well as the dreams of Pharaoh himself (Gen 41:25-32). Pharaoh chooses Joseph to administer Egypt because he recognizes that Joseph has wisdom from God: "Can we find anyone like this

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 107.

man, who has the spirit of God in him?...Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one as discerning and wise as you” (Gen 41:38-39). Converging within Joseph, these attributes render him exceptionally wise and knowledgeable, as I showed in chapter three. This wisdom notwithstanding, however, Joseph is unable to grasp the full scope of his own dreams and the complete meaning of the events that have happened to him in Canaan and in Egypt. Thoroughly insightful in every other respect, Joseph only partially comprehends God’s involvement in his own life.

Green has noted Joseph’s incomplete comprehension of events as articulated in these two previous interpretations.<sup>24</sup> She argues that Joseph seeks further comprehension, setting his quest for meaning alongside that of the other characters; in her view, they all wait to see how things will develop under God’s direction.<sup>25</sup> Joseph sees things increasingly in terms of his dreams, which he recalls and understands ever more fully, eventually recognizing that God has sent him to Egypt to preserve life.<sup>26</sup> In her view, it seems to be time and further information, along with fresh remembering, that leads to Joseph’s growth in understanding of his dreams. This reading, however, only partially accounts for the development of Joseph’s knowledge. Time passes, and further information is obtained, but something else contributes to Joseph’s inability to discern God’s involvement properly. We might expect Joseph’s own dreams to be sufficient for showing him what God has been up to, especially considering his high position of authority in Egypt. In other instances, Joseph has interpreted dreams right away, “reading” them and explaining them in terms of the details they contain.<sup>27</sup> Using only

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<sup>24</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 119-20.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 202-10.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 206-8.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. the discussion of this in chapter three.

their dreams, Joseph foretells the imminent future of Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker. Pharaoh's dreams, and they alone, allow Joseph to predict agricultural conditions in Egypt for the next fourteen years. In Egypt, Joseph needs no information other than the dreams themselves in order to see what God has in store for the future. Moreover, as Levenson has shown, Joseph's own dreams contain notable imagery that foreshadows his rise to power and future relationship with his brothers. The sheaves of his first dream prefigure the role of grain in Joseph's ascent, while the uprightness of Joseph's sheaf could suggest abundance and, by extension, an opportunity to provide for the family.<sup>28</sup> To say that Joseph only needs more time to see how his dreams will unfold paints a picture of him that is inconsistent with his ability to interpret dreams elsewhere in the story.

Furthermore, Joseph possesses a talent for reading situations properly. In Potiphar's house, he recognizes that Potiphar has given him great trust and responsibility, withholding nothing but his wife. Joseph's assessment of the circumstances (Gen 39:8-9) agrees with that of the narrator (Gen 39:4-6), showing that Joseph accurately recognizes the state of affairs. Likewise, Joseph understands what is at stake when he appears before Pharaoh, demonstrating prudence, composure, and self-control in the king's presence.<sup>29</sup> The same may be said for his recognition that the coming famine will require extensive preparation: predicting future conditions in Egypt, Joseph proposes measures that will mitigate the famine's severity (Gen 41:33-36). Given his keen foresight, aptitude for reading situations, and skill in dream interpretation, Joseph's inability to recognize the extent of God's activity is remarkable. By all accounts, he should be expected to

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<sup>28</sup> Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 166-67.

<sup>29</sup> von Rad, "The Joseph Narrative and Ancient Wisdom," 294; Coats, "The Joseph Story and Ancient Wisdom: A Reappraisal," 289.

understand the meaning of his position of power and God's intentions for his family right away. Joseph has the dreams he dreamt in Canaan; he has a vantage point from which to assess his own life. Compared with his earlier experiences in Egypt, Joseph has all the necessary information to achieve a proper understanding well before he reveals himself to his brothers in Gen 45:3-15. It is only with respect to God's purposes for him and his relationship with his family that Joseph lacks immediate comprehension.

Something beyond insufficient information prevents Joseph from completely understanding God's plans. The name of his first child gives a clue as to what might obscure Joseph's vision. Joseph calls his son Manasseh, saying "God has caused me to forget all my trouble and all my father's house" (Gen 41:51). It is unclear precisely what Joseph means by this name. It cannot be that Joseph actually forgets his father's house, in the sense that no longer remembers it. The very name of the child recalls the memory of Joseph's father's house, preventing it from being completely out of mind.<sup>30</sup> Von Rad escapes this problem by arguing that "forget" simply acknowledges Joseph's removal from his father's house, expressing "an objective external fact" rather than the loss of a memory.<sup>31</sup> This view, however, removes the force from Joseph's words, which do more than simply acknowledge a break with the past. Rather, they convey an attitude toward the past in light of the current situation; Joseph's present circumstances are so good that they overshadow his past misfortune. He expresses a similar notion regarding the famine in Egypt; it will be so severe that the preceding good years will not be remembered (Gen 41:30-31). Joseph's claim to have forgotten his father's house, therefore, is best understood as an attempt to put the past behind him—to disassociate himself from his

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<sup>30</sup> Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 105; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 398.

<sup>31</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 374.

father's house while embracing his present fortune.<sup>32</sup> The name of his firstborn son represents Joseph's active suppression of his identity as one of Jacob's sons, a member of his father's house.<sup>33</sup> In the other instance where we glimpse Joseph's perspective on his slavery and imprisonment, Joseph makes no mention of his father or his brothers; he states only vaguely that he was "stolen out of the land of the Hebrews" (Gen 40:15). Joseph betrays no longing for his home or his former life, only indignity at being put into prison unjustly.<sup>34</sup>

The notion that Joseph makes a break with his past and his family finds support in his failure to initiate contact with them, especially his father, while he is in Egypt. Given Joseph's rise to power and close relationship with Jacob in Canaan, this absence of communication is striking.<sup>35</sup> As an Egyptian official, Joseph would have had both the means and the opportunity to send a message to Jacob; while silence toward his brothers is understandable, failure to send word to his father is not.<sup>36</sup> Soller gives Joseph's silence a generally positive interpretation, arguing that Joseph refrains from contacting his family to allow Jacob to form a close relationship with his other sons in Joseph's absence.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ackerman, "Joseph, Judah, and Jacob," 87.

<sup>33</sup> Interpretations that draw on human psychology make a similar argument, concluding that Joseph exhibits signs of psychological repression. Both Mann and Polliack, for instance, argue that Joseph has repressed the traumatic experience of being cast into a well and sold into slavery by his own brothers. Mann, "Joseph and His Brothers," 337; Polliack, "Joseph's Trauma," 75. If such a view is not mistaken, it further shows the necessity for Joseph to cope with his past and integrate it with his present situation.

<sup>34</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 76-77.

<sup>35</sup> Mann, "Joseph and His Brothers," 337; Moshe Soller, "Why No Message from Joseph to His Father?" *JBQ* 26 (1998): 158-67; Arnold Ages, "Why Didn't Joseph Call Home?" *BR* 9, no. 4 (1993): 42-46.

<sup>36</sup> Ages, "Why Didn't Joseph Call Home?"

<sup>37</sup> Soller, "Why No Message from Joseph to His Father," 161-62. A similar line of thought is upheld by Arie Ben Yosef, "Joseph and His Brothers," *JBQ* 21 (1993): 153-58. Ben Yosef argues that Joseph refrains from contacting his father because he does not wish to disclose his brother's evil actions in selling him as a slave. As a youth, the "bad report" that Joseph brought about his brothers to Jacob contributed to the rift in their relationship. Recognizing this, Joseph repents of his part in the conflict and avoids informing Jacob of his well-being in Egypt, seeking not to further tarnish his brothers' reputation (p. 157-58). One wonders, however, if Joseph could have informed Jacob that he was alive without accusing his brothers. Moreover, Joseph's harsh treatment of his brothers in Egypt suggests that he is perfectly willing to provoke them, especially when Joseph openly favors Benjamin by giving him more food (Gen 43:34).

This view, however, overlooks the fact that Jacob shifts his paternal favoritism to Benjamin rather than establishing a proper relationship with his other children.<sup>38</sup> If this is Joseph's goal, then it fails entirely. Ages, by contrast, lists a number of potential reasons for Joseph's silence in Egypt, all of which have a stronger basis in the narrative. These possibilities include Joseph's preoccupation with his dreams, as well as a politically-motivated desire not to disrupt his Egyptian power through a relationship with Canaan. Ages further suggests that Joseph may be antagonistic towards Jacob, either for sending him out among his brothers or for his doting love that caused so much trouble.<sup>39</sup> Ultimately, Ages does not settle for one single interpretation, choosing instead to acknowledge the text's inherent open-endedness. Rather than providing a definitive answer, this ambiguity instead points to the "moral dilemmas raised by Joseph's success in Egyptian society."<sup>40</sup> Joseph's failure to contact his family is one aspect of his effort to sever all ties with his former life in Canaan.

Joseph's break with the past is accompanied by his adoption of an Egyptian identity, particularly when Pharaoh sets him over the land of Egypt. Pharaoh clothes Joseph with a linen garment and a golden necklace, and puts his own signet ring on Joseph's finger (Gen 41:42)—Joseph now wears the clothing of an Egyptian official. This change in clothing denotes a change in Joseph's identity, so much that his own brothers do not recognize him when they first come to Egypt from Canaan (Gen 42:8).<sup>41</sup> Joseph ceases to wear the garment that had marked him as a slave and a prisoner, but he

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He readily pushes their buttons, so to speak, making it doubtful that he would refrain from contacting Jacob simply to avoid upsetting them.

<sup>38</sup> Kaminsky, "Reclaiming a Theology of Election," 141.

<sup>39</sup> Ages, "Why Didn't Joseph Call Home?"

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. Ages here cites the work of Sternberg, who holds a similar position regarding the motivation behind Joseph's treatment of his brothers in Gen 42-44 (Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 286).

<sup>41</sup> Matthews, "Anthropology of Clothing," 34-35.



does not return to wearing the special garment that had once identified him as Jacob's favorite son (Gen 37:3). Likewise, the statement that Joseph shaved before entering Pharaoh's presence similarly indicates his transformation into an Egyptian (Gen 41:14).<sup>42</sup> Several Egyptian tomb paintings depict both foreigners and Egyptians, showing the Egyptians to be shaven while the foreigners are bearded.<sup>43</sup> Shaved faces were a distinctively Egyptian feature, suggesting that shaving contributed to Joseph's Egyptian identity. In all respects, even in his language and mannerisms, Joseph lives as an Egyptian (cf. Gen 42:23), inhabiting this world fully for many years.<sup>44</sup>

Joseph's foreign identity is further depicted through his marriage to an Egyptian priest's daughter (Gen 41:45).<sup>45</sup> Ishmael and Esau before him had also married foreign women, in contrast to Isaac and Jacob, so Joseph's marriage aligns him at least partly with those brothers of the patriarchs who were eventually excluded from the chosen family.<sup>46</sup> Along with his new garments and Egyptian wife, Joseph is given a new name, Zaphenath-Paneah, when he arrives at his position of power (Gen 41:45). Joseph's reception of the Egyptian name confirms his transformation, implicitly suppressing his identity as Joseph.<sup>47</sup> His change of clothing, shaven appearance,<sup>48</sup> wife, and new name

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<sup>42</sup> Lisbeth S. Fried, "Why Did Joseph Shave?" *BAR* 33, no.4 (2007): 36-41.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>44</sup> Matthews, "Anthropology of Clothing," 34-35.

<sup>45</sup> von Rad (*Genesis*, 379) states that with the connections Joseph establishes via a wife and children, "Joseph has become completely Egyptian."

<sup>46</sup> On the undesirability of foreign marriage for the chosen sons, cf. Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 96, 99-100. The problematic nature of Joseph's foreign marriage was recognized early on, as the apocryphal story *Joseph and Aseneth* shows. This text portrays Joseph refusing to marry Aseneth until she converts and becomes a follower of the one true God (cf. *Jos. Asen.* 8:5-6).

<sup>47</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 105.

<sup>48</sup> Fried, "Why Did Joseph Shave," 36-41. Fried suggests that Joseph shaved his entire body, not just his face, in order to consecrate himself prior to appearing before Pharaoh, who was considered divine. Fried cites several instances in Egypt and elsewhere in the ANE where shaving one's body occurs in the context of ritual purity. Even the Bible prescribes shaving the body for Israelite priests in Num 8:6-7.

all demonstrate that Joseph totally embraces his newfound Egyptian identity; as the name of his firstborn son shows, he does so to the exclusion of his identity as Jacob's child.

The true extent of God's involvement in Joseph's life, however, depends on a perspective that recognizes his enduring connection with his family and the responsibility it entails. Joseph's dreams portray him among his brothers, determining his life's course and disclosing its meaning in terms of his relationship with them. And when he finally does recognize how God has been using him, he does so in a way that affirms his role in preserving the lives of his family and providing for them in Egypt (Gen 45:3-13).

Joseph's insight into God's activity is initially limited because his perspective is too narrow; focusing only on himself, he cannot fully understand God's purposes, which are oriented toward the whole family of Jacob. Therefore, Joseph's growth in knowledge does not occur only when he receives further information about the past and the future. It comes about as circumstances compel him to interact with his brothers again, when they come to buy grain at the beginning of Gen 42. As they journey to Egypt and appear before him, Joseph is forced to reconsider his relationship with his family. Joseph's perspective broadens as his past forces itself upon him and he struggles to come to terms with it. Only with this struggle resolved can Joseph completely recognize God's purposes for him.

#### ***IV. Knowledge and the Reconciliation of the Family***

Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers is closely bound up with this aspect of Joseph's knowledge—that is, his understanding of God's activity in his life and in the lives of his family. This is evident at the moment Joseph reveals his identity to his

brothers and first offers words of forgiveness; as he does so, he declares to them his understanding of the past, saying that God, not they, brought him to Egypt so that life might be preserved (Gen 45:5-8). In one speech, he offers reconciliation and articulates his understanding of God's purposes in all that has happened to him. This is also the case when he reassures his brothers of his determination to forgive them (Gen 50:19-21), which essentially reiterates his initial words to them in Gen 45:3-13. Again, Joseph promises to provide for his brothers while affirming that everything has been in God's hands. Resolution of conflict occurs alongside Joseph's knowledge of God's involvement in their lives.

Reconciliation does not come about easily, however, occurring only at the end of Joseph's lengthy, puzzling treatment of his brothers throughout Gen 42-44. In order to fully understand the relationship between Joseph's knowledge and the reunion of Jacob's family, it is necessary to discuss the events of Gen 42-44 in detail. Joseph's actions and his brothers' reactions in these chapters lead them to the reconciliation that happens at the beginning of Gen 45. There are, however, various viewpoints regarding the relationship between Joseph's interaction with his brothers and the forgiveness he eventually offers. As I argue below, Joseph's behavior is best explained as a struggle to come to terms with his brothers' reappearance in his life, along with his memory of the past and lingering anger towards them. Joseph's comprehension of God's purposes underlying the past, articulated in Gen 45:5-8, represents the resolution of this struggle. For this reason, it becomes the basis for his decision to forgive his brothers and repay good for evil.

Beginning with Gen 42, the Joseph story picks up the larger narrative begun in Gen 37, concerning Jacob's whole family, after a narrow focus on Joseph alone in Gen

39-41.<sup>49</sup> When the famine reaches Canaan, Jacob sends his sons (excluding Benjamin) to Egypt to buy grain. Joseph's brothers appear before him in Gen 42:6, and he recognizes them (Gen 42:7). They do not recognize him, however, and he does not disclose his identity to them right away (Gen 42:8). Instead, Joseph puts them through an elaborate series of events that defies straightforward interpretation, not least because Joseph's motives are unstated.<sup>50</sup> He accuses them of being spies (Gen 42:7-9) and throws them into prison for three days (42:17), then allows all but Simeon to return to Canaan under the stipulation that the rest bring Benjamin to him (Gen 42:18-20, 24). When they eventually do so, having no other means to avoid starvation, Joseph welcomes them graciously and serves them a meal (Gen 43:25, 31-34). He sends them on their way the next day, but frames Benjamin for stealing his silver cup and threatens to enslave his younger brother (Gen 44:1-17). Only after Judah offers to become a slave in Benjamin's place, begging Joseph to let Benjamin go free for the sake of their father (Gen 44:18-34), does Joseph at last reveal his identity to them. He expresses his forgiveness, articulates his recognition of God's involvement in their lives, and promises to provide for them during the rest of the famine (Gen 45:3-15). Throughout their interactions Joseph weeps repeatedly (Gen 42:24; 43:30; 45:2, 14-15) and secretly returns to them the money they paid in exchange for grain (Gen 42:25, 44:1).

Joseph's actions throughout Gen 42-44 are enigmatic, to say the least.<sup>51</sup> Various interpretations of his behavior in these chapters have been put forward, but many have in

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<sup>49</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 103; Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 32; Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 41.

<sup>50</sup> Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 44.

<sup>51</sup> Green observes that only at this point do we see Joseph undertaking plans of his own; except for his own dreams, which he merely declared and did not interpret, he has been serving the interests and dreams of others (Potiphar, the jailer, the cupbearer and baker, Pharaoh). Now, however, Joseph's own designs come to the fore (Green, *What Profit for Us*, 158). Nevertheless, they remain clouded. We know that Joseph is

common the notion that Joseph intends to forgive his brothers from his initial meeting with them. Claus Westermann is a case in point, arguing that Joseph has reconciliation in view at the outset; he sees Joseph's treatment of his brothers in Gen 42-44 as the path that reconciliation must take.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, von Rad argues that Joseph is both testing and chastising his brothers in these chapters.<sup>53</sup> Fung, who evaluates Joseph's character negatively, likewise holds that Joseph's treatment of his brothers is intentionally oriented toward reconciliation.<sup>54</sup> Such readings are not limited to modern interpreters. Both Philo (*Ios.* 232-235) and Josephus (*Ant.* 2:125) argue that Joseph is trying to test his brothers in these chapters to see if they have changed since they sold him into slavery. The author of *Jubilees* has a similar view (*Jub.* 42:25).<sup>55</sup> These interpretations share an emphasis on Joseph's self-control and overall good intentions toward his family. They presuppose that Joseph's actions are purposeful, however perplexing they may be for the reader. Even if the test through which Joseph puts his brothers is regarded as problematic, there is agreement that Joseph sees it as the path to reconciliation.<sup>56</sup>

The view that Joseph is testing his brothers is not the only interpretation of his behavior; many alternative reasons for Joseph's actions have been proposed. Coats, for example, explicitly rejects the notion that Joseph is conducting a test, describing Joseph's behavior toward the brothers as despotic, manipulative, and deceptive. In his view,

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making plans and acting on them, but the intended outcome, if Joseph even has any coherent conception of it, is unknown to us.

<sup>52</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 107. Westermann bases this conclusion on Joseph's recollection of his dreams in Gen 42:9: "the narrator wants to say that at the very moment that he saw his brothers before him, Joseph had decided to heal the breach begun at that time." He goes on to say that immediate forgiveness would not lead to a true reparation of the relationship between Joseph and his brothers, so Joseph's treatment of his brothers is oriented toward this purpose.

<sup>53</sup> Von Rad, *Genesis*, 378.

<sup>54</sup> Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 31-34.

<sup>55</sup> Kugel, *The Bible as It Was*, 267-69.

<sup>56</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 107. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 431-32. Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 180-182. Humphreys especially emphasizes Joseph's profound self-control in an otherwise emotionally-charged narrative. Cf. also the discussion in Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 34, note 51.

Joseph's intentions are not to reconcile, but simply to drive tensions between him and his brothers to their breaking point.<sup>57</sup> He uses his power to punish and to torture, and perhaps also to maintain that power rather than risk it through openness towards his brothers.<sup>58</sup> When reconciliation does occur, it is due to a change within Joseph in response to the change manifested in his brothers. The change in them, however, is wrought, not proven, by their encounter with the unrecognized Joseph; it is an outcome that is both unforeseen and unintended.<sup>59</sup> Josipovici similarly suggests that Joseph's desire is to punish his brothers, causing them to suffer as he had suffered before at last revealing his identity to them.<sup>60</sup> Humphreys notes Joseph's absolute control over the situation and his brothers, but resists ascribing to him a singularly punitive motivation; instead, he seeks to preserve a complex characterization, in which both the ruthless manipulator and the reconciling brother constitute two poles in the field of possibility.<sup>61</sup>

Sternberg offers a thorough discussion of the most oft-cited motives explaining Joseph's behavior, along with the relationship of these potential motives to one another and their role in the Joseph story.<sup>62</sup> In his view, interpretations of Joseph's motives fall into the categories of punishing, testing, teaching, or dream fulfillment.<sup>63</sup> Punishing, testing, and teaching broadly describe the viewpoints discussed above, in which Joseph

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<sup>57</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 37-38. Though recognizing that Joseph does indeed propose a "test" (42:15-16), Coats observes that the test "is simply a motif in Joseph's speech." The proposed test gives no indication as to Joseph's actual motivations, but simply seeks to verify whether or not they are spies, an accusation that Joseph already knows to be false.

<sup>58</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 82-83, 88.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-44, 83-86.

<sup>60</sup> Josipovici, *The Book of God*, 75-76.

<sup>61</sup> Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 180-81; cf. 89-92.

<sup>62</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 285-308.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 286. See also Ben Yoseph, "Joseph and His Brothers," 153-56. Ben Yoseph names the following possible reasons for Joseph's behavior towards his brothers: revenge, dream fulfillment, atonement through suffering, education, and repentance. He sees largely the same field of possibility as Sternberg. Ben Yoseph sees repentance as Joseph's primary motivation, arguing that Joseph seeks to lead his brothers to repentance.

either seeks to make his brothers suffer, to verify a change within them, or to bring such a change about. The possibility of dream fulfillment finds apt expression in the analyses of Ackerman and Green. Noting the implicit connection between Joseph's memory of his dreams (Gen 42:7) and the false accusation he levels against his brothers, Ackerman argues that Joseph compels them to bring Benjamin to Egypt so that all eleven brothers will bow to him.<sup>64</sup> Thus, the first dream will be fulfilled, and the second will be fulfilled when Jacob journeys to Egypt and reunites with his lost son.<sup>65</sup> Green observes the same link between Joseph's remembrance of his dreams and his subsequent treatment of his brothers, arguing for the deep influence of the dreams on Joseph's behavior here and upon the story in general.<sup>66</sup> In addition, she also emphasizes Joseph's earlier recognition of the connections between dreamers, dreams, and interpretations, which further support the view that Joseph's dreams and their fulfillment at least partially underlie his actions.<sup>67</sup>

Despite these various possibilities, it is Sternberg's own interpretation of Joseph's actions that best describes what we encounter in the text of Gen 42-44. In his view, all of these possibilities—and others as well—must be considered together in order to give a full account of what drives Joseph's actions; as he says, "each line is wrong because all are right."<sup>68</sup> Sternberg first addresses the notion that Joseph is bent on revenge, a possibility raised by the link between Joseph's recollection of his dreams and the outward hostility that immediately follows this statement (Gen 42:9). In remembering his dreams, Joseph likewise recalls his brothers' hostile reaction to those dreams; perhaps he will

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<sup>64</sup> Ackerman, "Joseph, Judah, and Jacob," 87-88.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-9.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 160, 206-8.

<sup>67</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 119.

<sup>68</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 286.

respond in kind.<sup>69</sup> This hypothesis is reinforced when one notes that Joseph's accusation of spying corresponds in a way with his own suffering at the hands of his brothers and of Potiphar's wife, as does his decision to put them into prison. Joseph himself suffered incarceration, and by accusing his brothers of coming to view the "nakedness of the land" (עֲרוֹת הָאָרֶץ; Gen 42:9) Joseph adds a sexual dimension to their spying that recalls his mistress's false accusation. These measure-for-measure qualities enhance the possibility that Joseph intends vengeance.<sup>70</sup>

A motivation solely bent on vengeance, however, does not explain why Joseph withholds his identity from his brothers; revenge would be more satisfactory if his brothers recognized Joseph as their tormentor.<sup>71</sup> Sternberg therefore turns to the possibility that Joseph is testing his brothers, albeit with plans of revenge still in mind; this possibility is supported by Joseph's ensuing words, which requires them to bring Benjamin so that they may be tested (Gen 42:15). Joseph wishes to know whether they have done with Benjamin as they did to him.<sup>72</sup> The test, furthermore, comes increasingly into view as Joseph's desire for revenge subsides. After incarcerating his brothers for three days, Joseph changes his attitude towards them, requiring only one to remain in prison while the rest may return with food to their families (Gen 42:18-20). Joseph thus turns from thoughts of retribution to thoughts of life; while initial vengeful desires are real, they ultimately give way to other motivations.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 286-87. On the connection between Joseph's remembrance of his dreams and his recollection of the full events narrated in Gen 37, cf. Polliack, "Joseph's Trauma," 72-105; Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 107.

<sup>70</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 287-88.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>72</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 289.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 290-91.



Joseph's requirement to bring Benjamin to Egypt also raises the possibility that he wishes to see his dreams fulfilled, since he dreamt of eleven brothers bowing before him but only ten appeared initially. Sternberg rejects this simple correlation between the dreams and Joseph's desire to see Benjamin, instead preferring a more complex relationship between past events and present understanding. Joseph's dreams were difficult to interpret, made all the more so by the absence of Benjamin in Gen 42 and by the fact that Rachel has been dead all along, not to mention Joseph's experience of slavery and imprisonment rather than the dreamt-of exaltation within his family. Joseph's demand that Benjamin be brought to Egypt is therefore a means of testing and illuminating the dreams, to ascertain more deeply the relationship between the past and the present.<sup>74</sup>

At the same time, Joseph's decision to return the brothers' money to their grain sacks secretly points to a still deeper motivation, in which Joseph continues to test his brothers. Now, however, the test will determine not whether they have harmed Benjamin in any way, but whether they will keep the money and abandon Simeon. Joseph places his brothers in a situation where they may be tempted to repeat their crime against him, once again exchanging a brother for silver.<sup>75</sup> Jacob may well infer such a connection between the disappearance of Joseph and the imprisonment of Simeon, since his exclamation upon seeing the brothers' silver in their sacks addresses not the money, but the loss of Joseph and Simeon and the threat to Benjamin. It is as if he says, in

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<sup>74</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 291-93.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 293-94.

Sternberg's words, "this mysterious money explains why sons of mine keep disappearing from your company."<sup>76</sup>

Upon the brothers' return to Egypt, this time with Benjamin, Joseph presses this test to its breaking point. He frames Benjamin for stealing his silver cup, threatening to enslave him, while simultaneously returning the brothers' money to their sacks a second time. Once again, the brothers are given an opportunity to abandon one of their own in exchange for silver. This time, however, the situation more closely corresponds to the circumstances under which Joseph was sold. Benjamin, not Simeon, is the threatened brother; he is their father's favorite, having replaced Joseph, and Joseph has reminded them of Benjamin's favored status by giving him a fivefold portion of food at their banquet (Gen 43:34).<sup>77</sup> Joseph isolates Benjamin by affirming that only the guilty one found with the cup will be enslaved, while the rest may go free.<sup>78</sup> Judah responds astoundingly well to the test, showing that the brothers will not repeat their crime; with no reason other than his love for Benjamin and their father, Judah offers to become a slave in Benjamin's place. His test thus satisfied, Joseph reveals his identity and prepares to reconcile with his brothers.<sup>79</sup>

The opaqueness of Joseph's actions in Gen 42-44 makes heavy inference necessary, giving rise to multiple interpretations of his underlying motives. All of these possibilities have ample support in the text. Sternberg's analysis, however, relies upon the power of inference while acknowledging its limitations; exploring and elucidating the various possibilities, he resists the temptation to name any single motivation that

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<sup>76</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 298.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 306-8.

definitively underlies Joseph's behavior. By doing so, Sternberg draws out two essential points that Joseph's treatment of his brothers conveys: the development of Joseph's character and Joseph's search for knowledge. In Sternberg's reading, the development of Joseph's character emerges primarily as he abandons his thoughts of revenge and proceeds with a desire to ascertain Benjamin's fate.<sup>80</sup> At this point, curiosity and a need to elucidate the future take over as the primary factors driving Joseph's actions. Joseph's search for knowledge increasingly comes to dominate his interactions with his brothers, as he presses the test further and further until Judah demonstrates proof of their capacity for proper fraternal relations. Having checked the impulse to revenge after three days of reflection, Joseph embarks on a focused quest to understand his dreams, confirm Benjamin's well-being, and see whether and to what extent his brothers have changed. Joseph's demand to see Benjamin, his two decisions to return his brothers' money, his behavior at the banquet, his accusation of theft, and his threat to enslave Benjamin each have a specific function in fulfilling Joseph's desire for information.

On closer inspection, however, Joseph's character development and his search for knowledge are distinct events in Sternberg's interpretation; that is, they happen sequentially rather than concurrently. Sternberg portrays Joseph's search for knowledge largely as a test, the terms of which are set purposefully by Joseph himself; accordingly, his character develops little once the test is underway. After his thoughts of revenge subside, Joseph essentially retains the same attitude toward his brothers throughout the remainder of their interactions: he is prepared to forgive and be reconciled on the condition that they have truly changed. Joseph's search for knowledge in this regard is an attempt to find proof of this transformation. In Sternberg's analysis, Joseph's

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<sup>80</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 290-91.

character development and quest for knowledge occur in stages, the former as Joseph moves beyond revenge and the latter as a result of his altered disposition.

Elements of the text suggest that the two are more closely intertwined than Sternberg allows, however, and that ascribing less intentionality to Joseph's behavior paints a more accurate picture of his search for knowledge. In Coats's view, Judah's speech at the end of Gen 44 effects an actual change within Joseph rather than simply verifying the brothers' integrity. Joseph opens himself to reconciliation, where previously he had been unreceptive to it. Coats's reading places a decisive development in Joseph's character at the beginning of Gen 45, just before he reveals his identity to the brothers.<sup>81</sup> Bringing this insight to bear on Sternberg's interpretation renders a more extended character development of Joseph, which begins as he moves beyond revenge and concludes as he reveals himself to his brothers. Joseph's repeated weeping supports this more gradual character development, signaling intense emotions and personal growth at several points during his interactions with his brothers.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, while Joseph's treatment of his brothers on this visit is remarkably softer and more welcoming than on their first journey, this need not mean that he has already decided to treat them as family, as Westermann implies.<sup>83</sup> He still maintains distance between them, dining separately from them and interacting with them largely through a subordinate, his steward (lit. "the

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<sup>81</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 43-44. Cf. also Green, *What Profit for Us*, 168-69. As Green argues, something about Judah's speech causes Joseph to "lose control" (cf. Gen 45:1)—that is, he loses control not only of himself, but also of the situation. Whatever Joseph's plans were before, Judah's speech leads him to greater understanding of the necessity to bring his family to Egypt. It brings about a change, therefore, both in Joseph's knowledge and in his actions.

<sup>82</sup> Polliack, "Joseph's Trauma," 88; Guyette, "Joseph's Emotional Development," 187; Mann, "Joseph and His Brothers," 338-39.

<sup>83</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 125. Westermann notes that the first meeting was political in nature, while the second takes on qualities of a "family meeting," including questions about health and welfare, and the use of שלום as a lead word in verses 27 and 28. Cf. also Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 45-46.

one over his house,” *אֲשֶׁר אֶל-בֵּיתוֹ*; Gen 43:16).<sup>84</sup> Though Joseph may be simply playing his role for the sake of a test, his distance may well suggest a desire to maintain power over his brothers, an unwillingness to become vulnerable and embrace reconciliation.<sup>85</sup>

If this is the case, then Joseph acquires knowledge about his brothers, the past, and the future not through a controlled experiment, but through simple receptivity to further revelation—an openness towards the transformation that his actions will bring about. Joseph’s character develops alongside his growing knowledge and understanding rather than prior to it. Though Sternberg does not acknowledge this more gradual character development for Joseph, he nevertheless recognizes it as an expansion of Joseph’s perspective; Joseph changes as his thoughts turn from death to life, from the past to the future, and from himself to responsibility towards his family.<sup>86</sup> It is precisely this shift in perspective that needed to occur for Joseph to interpret the past and God’s involvement properly, as I argued above. And it is both this newfound orientation and the resolution of Joseph’s “testing” of his brothers that constitute his growth in knowledge. Sternberg describes a two-stage process, in which Joseph first opens himself in a new way to family and then seeks confirmation that his brothers have undergone a transformation of their own. Even though the progression is more complex than Sternberg portrays it, advancing fluidly rather than by stages, Sternberg’s analysis identifies the two crucial components of the development of Joseph’s knowledge. Just as

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<sup>84</sup> Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 46. Similar references to the steward occur at Gen 43:19; 44:1, 4.

<sup>85</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 88.

<sup>86</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 290.

importantly, it demonstrates the degree to which that knowledge is bound up with Joseph's relationship to his family.

It is unclear which aspect of Joseph's encounters with his brothers leads him to see things differently. The text points to a confluence of different factors rather than any single event. The reintroduction of Joseph's brothers in the narrative soon after Joseph is said to have forgotten his father's house highlights the suddenness of their reappearance, suggesting a psychological jolt that would reawaken suppressed emotions within him.<sup>87</sup> The memory of his dreams would have a similar effect (Gen 42:9), leading him to reconsider the present situation from a perspective that encompasses the past.<sup>88</sup> Polliack regards Joseph's sudden dream memory as a catalyst for confrontation with his past, particularly the traumatic experience of being sold into slavery, the resolution of which causes a shift in perspective.<sup>89</sup> Joseph also appears to be affected by overhearing his brothers' recollection of the moment they sold him as a slave, along with their accompanying feelings of guilt and remorse.<sup>90</sup> Alternatively, Joseph feels a strong kinship with Benjamin, exhibiting a concern for his maternal brother that likewise may lead him to act or think differently. Desire to see Benjamin moves him to orchestrate the youngest son's journey to Egypt, and the sight of him prompts Joseph to weep.<sup>91</sup> Finally, Judah's speech and offer to become a slave in Benjamin's place (Gen 44:18-34) immediately precedes Joseph's revelation of his identity and the accompanying recognition of God's past activity. Judah shows Joseph that his brothers have changed

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<sup>87</sup> Cf. von Rad, *Genesis*, 374. Von Rad notes the intentionality of the reintroduction of Joseph's family shortly after Joseph mentions them in connection with what has happened to him in Egypt.

<sup>88</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 107; Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 163.

<sup>89</sup> Polliack, "Joseph's Trauma," 72-78.

<sup>90</sup> Polliack, "Joseph's Trauma," 83-86; Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 167-68.

<sup>91</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 289, 301.

since selling him a slave, and he communicates how Jacob's very life is bound up with what happens among his sons, especially Benjamin. Both the transformation of his brothers and concern for his father undoubtedly play a role in leading Joseph to full insight into God's involvement in their lives.<sup>92</sup> Each of these events presents itself as a factor that could lead Joseph to further knowledge about God's dealings with him and his family, as well as Joseph's own role within God's plan. Though the precise cause is ambiguous, it is clear that Joseph reaches a greater depth of understanding in response to a renewed encounter with his brothers.

Joseph's discernment of God's involvement forms the basis for his decision to forgive, reconcile with, and provide for his brothers. This is apparent in both of the scenes where Joseph speaks to his brothers—first in Gen 45:3-13 and later in Gen 50:19-21. Though Joseph never actually uses the word “forgive” (נָשָׂא or סָלַח), he implies it clearly enough, effectively acquitting his brothers for selling him because it was part of God's plan.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, the statement in Gen 45:15 that Joseph's brothers spoke (דָּבַר) with him recalls their attitude towards him in Gen 37:4, when they could not speak (דָּבַר) peaceably to him. This suggests that the relationship between Joseph and his brothers has been repaired from their hostile jealousy towards him earlier.<sup>94</sup>

Joseph's discourse in Gen 45:3-13 begins with an initial revelation of Joseph's identity and the brothers' response to it (Gen 45:3). The remainder of the speech may be

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<sup>92</sup> Wildavsky, *Assimilation Versus Separation*, 104-6. Wildavsky notes the heavy emphasis on Jacob's grief in Judah's appeal to Joseph, showing how both the reference to their father and the demonstration of fraternal solidarity move Joseph to reveal himself to his brothers.

<sup>93</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 45. Coats recognizes an “acquittal” here despite his later assertion that there is “no absolution from Joseph that would mark a noble and magnanimous act of forgiveness” (p. 84). Magnanimous and explicit forgiveness is absent, but comfort and reassurance that wrongdoing will not be punished serves as an expression of forgiveness nonetheless. Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 145.

<sup>94</sup> Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness*, 176; Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 582-82.

divided into two sections, where Joseph first addresses his brothers and their past (verses 4b-8) and then gives instructions for bringing Jacob to Egypt (verses 9-13).<sup>95</sup> The first section bears most directly on the present discussion, since it contains both Joseph's insights into God's involvement and his words of comfort and reassurance.

Acknowledging the brothers' role, Joseph tells them not to be distressed or angry because it was ultimately God, not they, who sent him to Egypt (Gen 45:5). Three times Joseph says that God sent him, doing so in order to preserve life (Gen 45:5-8). He names God's purposes as the reason for the comfort and assurance he offers; because God sent Joseph for a purpose, the brothers need not be afraid. Joseph's insight into God's plan is therefore the basis for the reconciliation that takes place between them.

At the same time, Joseph's understanding of God's plan is accompanied by a recognition of his own role within it. God's design was to preserve life (Gen 45:5)—presumably the lives of the Egyptians and the others who came to buy grain—and God gave Joseph authority in Pharaoh's house for this purpose (Gen 45:8). Through his foresight in storing food and distributing it to the people, Joseph accomplished this goal. Joseph also sees a role for himself in the specific salvation of his own family, also attributed to God (Gen 45:7). The reference to a "remnant" (שְׂאֵרִית) is theologically weighty, recalling the larger story of God's dealings with Israel.<sup>96</sup> It thereby points to the specific concern for the nascent people of Israelite people, above and beyond the more general preservation of life effected through Joseph.<sup>97</sup> For this reason, Joseph urges his

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<sup>95</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 45-47. Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 142.

<sup>96</sup> The verb שָׁאָר and its derivative nouns, שְׂאֵר and שְׂאֵרִית, often refer to a faithful remnant left after a disaster or war, offering hope for the future alongside continuity with the past. See, for example, Gen 7:23; Isa 4:3; 10:20-22; 11:11, 16; 37:31-32; Jer 31:7; 50:20.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 45-46; Green, *What Profit for Us*, 170.



brothers to bring Jacob to Egypt so that the family may settle there and be close to him (Gen 45:9-13). He will provide for them (כֹּל *pilpel*) during the famine according to the purpose he discovered for himself (Gen 45:11). Insight into God's plan determines the course of Joseph's future actions with respect to his family; recognizing that God intends to care for them, Joseph casts himself as the agent of provision.<sup>98</sup>

The same relationship between Joseph's knowledge of God and his reconciliation with his brothers is apparent the second time he communicates his forgiveness, in Gen 50:19-21. Still worried that Joseph harbors thoughts of revenge at the end of the narrative, Joseph's brothers mention forgiveness directly, broaching the subject by mentioning instructions from Jacob prior to his death (Gen 50:15-17). Joseph's response to them largely reiterates what he had told them before: there is a similar emphasis on God's providential involvement, a similar juxtaposition of divine and human action, and a similar promise to provide for (כֹּל *pilpel*) Joseph's brothers (Gen 50:19-21).<sup>99</sup> His words, however, further express how his decision to forgive is based on God's actions. In turning the brothers' evil intentions to good, God effectively rendered a judgment on the situation: rather than punishing the brothers, God brought good out of evil. When Joseph rhetorically asks, "Am I in the place of God?," he affirms that he cannot oppose God's verdict. God turned the brothers' actions to good; how, then, can Joseph do otherwise?<sup>100</sup> Joseph's decision to forgive and to provide for his brothers is based directly on his discernment of God's plan to bring good out of evil. In both statements of forgiveness, therefore, knowledge of God leads to the reconciliation of the family,

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<sup>98</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 45-46.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. the more detailed discussion above.

<sup>100</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 427; Westermann, *Genesis* 37-50, 205.

providing the basis for comfort and reassurance as well as the rationale underlying future action.

### ***V. Reversing Cain and Abel***

Considered within the context of the entire book of Genesis, the reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers marks a dramatic shift from the fratricide that occurred at the beginning, between Cain and Abel. Judah's speech provides evidence that Joseph's brothers have changed since they sold him into slavery two decades earlier, thereby serving as the catalyst that moves Joseph to reveal his identity and offer words of forgiveness.<sup>101</sup> Judah's words very nearly demonstrate a point-for-point reversal of the wrongdoing the brothers committed against Joseph.<sup>102</sup> Intentionally or not, Joseph had placed them all in a situation that corresponded closely with their previous actions, giving them an opportunity, even encouragement, to repeat their earlier crime against him with Benjamin.<sup>103</sup>

A number of parallels between the sale of Joseph and the threat to enslave Benjamin make this clear. Besides the possibility of slavery—realized for Joseph and threatened for Benjamin—there is Jacob's obvious paternal love for Benjamin, which surpasses his love for the other sons just as his love for Joseph had done.<sup>104</sup> Jacob expresses this affection outwardly, safeguarding Benjamin as a counterpart to Joseph, the only remaining son of his favored wife (cf. Gen 42:38). This emerges poignantly in

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<sup>101</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 308; Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 43-44; Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 175.

<sup>102</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 174.

<sup>103</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 388; Ackerman, "Joseph, Judah, and Jacob," 94; Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 303-8.

<sup>104</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 303.

Judah's description of their father's attitude, in which Jacob refers to Rachel as "my wife," implying that Leah and the others are not his wives and their sons are not his sons (Gen 44:27).<sup>105</sup> Jacob prefers to leave Simeon in Egypt rather than risk losing Benjamin, eventually endangering the whole family by bringing them to the point of starvation, as Judah recognizes (Gen 43:8-10).<sup>106</sup> Jacob's great love for Benjamin echoes his love for Joseph that initially prompted the brothers to hate him. Joseph calls attention to the preference for Benjamin, reminding his brothers of it by giving him a greater portion of food than the others receive when they dine with him (Gen 43:34).<sup>107</sup>

Joseph's use of silver in accusing Benjamin constitutes another parallel with his sale into slavery. The vessel that Joseph employs to frame Benjamin of theft is made of silver, designated as his "silver cup" (גביע הכסף; Gen 44:2). As he places the cup in Benjamin's sack, Joseph also returns the brothers' own money (כסף) to their sacks (Gen 44:1). By doing so, he invites the brothers once again to be rid of a favored brother and go their own way with a profit, as they had done in selling him to slavery. They are encouraged to do so all the more by the apparent guilt of Benjamin and their own powerlessness in the situation.<sup>108</sup> Joseph had presented them with a similar temptation on their initial visit to Egypt, imprisoning Simeon and returning their silver to their grain sacks before their first journey home (Gen 42:24-25). While the return of their money may be viewed as a veiled gesture of goodwill,<sup>109</sup> it is more likely intended to force

<sup>105</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 175; Wildavsky, *Assimilation Versus Separation*, 99.

<sup>106</sup> Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 48.

<sup>107</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 303.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 303; Ackerman, "Joseph, Judah, and Jacob," 94.

<sup>109</sup> Von Rad, *Genesis*, 379. Cf. also Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 111. Westermann states the case less strongly than von Rad, seeing the money as evidence of Joseph's conflicting impulses towards his brothers. The return of their money indicates his willingness to reconcile, although he knows the time is not yet right.

Joseph's brothers to relive their past treatment of him. When the brothers discover their money returned to them, they have an opportunity to keep it and never return for Simeon.<sup>110</sup> Once again, they are forced to bring word to their father that one of his sons is missing, and suspicious silver turns up.<sup>111</sup> On each journey, therefore, the brothers may effectively choose to exchange a brother for money, as they had done with Joseph. In the final instance, when Benjamin is the brother in question, Joseph presses the parallel as far as it can go, tempting his brothers ever more strongly to repeat their crime.<sup>112</sup>

This time, however, the brothers respond differently. Judah has told Jacob that he will be surety for Benjamin on their journey to Egypt, at last convincing his father that they have no alternative if they wish to avoid starvation.<sup>113</sup> Moreover, in contrast to their previously held feelings, Joseph's brothers seem to have no problem with Jacob's preference for Benjamin. Though their father's love for Joseph sparked hatred in them before, no such hatred is mentioned now with respect to Benjamin. Nor is any anger mentioned on their part when Joseph gives a greater portion of food to Benjamin in Egypt (Gen 43:34).<sup>114</sup> Instead, the brothers become drunk in Joseph's house, implying an atmosphere of merriment and relaxation.<sup>115</sup> Judah, representing all the brothers and speaking on their behalf, has come to terms with the fact that Jacob loves Benjamin more

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<sup>110</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 293.

<sup>111</sup> Ackerman, "Joseph, Judah, and Jacob," 91-92.

<sup>112</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 305-7.

<sup>113</sup> Judah's offer is successful whereas Reuben's is not (cf. Gen 42:37). The inadequacy of Reuben's proposal is widely recognized; it is extreme, if not monstrous, to propose killing Jacob's grandsons if Benjamin should be lost (Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 170; Wildavsky, *Assimilation Versus Separation*, 98; Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 48). Judah, by contrast, has learned the meaning of "surety" from his experience with Tamar, and offers himself rather than another as a guarantee for Benjamin's safety (Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 121).

<sup>114</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 424.

<sup>115</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 556; Speiser, *Genesis*, 329; von Rad, *Genesis*, 384.

than the rest.<sup>116</sup> Accepting the inequality of his father's love, Judah asks to substitute himself for the beloved son; he thereby demonstrates an "abnormal solidarity" that has taken root among the brothers since Joseph was sold.<sup>117</sup> Tempted to repeat their actions in Gen 37, Joseph's brothers do otherwise; led by Judah, they offer to sacrifice themselves for their brother instead.

In light of the parallels I discussed in chapter two between the sale of Joseph into slavery and the story of Cain and Abel, Judah's desire to save Benjamin may be understood as a resolution of the impulse to fraternal conflict that characterized Gen 4 as well as Gen 37. Jacob's affections for Joseph, together with the young man's dreams of superiority, recall the inscrutable divine favor that rests on Abel, but not on Cain. The brothers' anger and jealousy of Joseph echo Cain's reaction to God's preference for his brother. In acting on their jealousy and selling Joseph into slavery, Jacob's sons revisit the crime of Cain, though without exactly the same fatal consequences.<sup>118</sup> Now, however, Judah's transformed attitude towards Jacob's unequal paternal love demonstrates a reversal of that wrongdoing. Judah offers to become a slave in Benjamin's place, thereby responding to Jacob's favoritism with filial love and brotherly devotion. His response is a reversal of his own previous actions in selling Joseph. At the same time, it also stands as the opposite of Cain's reaction; where Cain killed Abel and Judah initially sold Joseph, Judah now offers himself in his brother's place. Cain's crime revolved around his refusal to accept God's preference for Abel.<sup>119</sup> Judah, however,

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<sup>116</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 175.

<sup>117</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 308.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. the discussion in chapter two. Cain's wrongdoing is not exactly replicated, since the words of Judah and Reuben show a consciousness that spilling a brother's blood should be avoided (Gen 37:21-22, 26-27). Joseph is sold rather than killed. Nevertheless, both stories narrate of extreme hostility against one's brother, so the two are analogous.

<sup>119</sup> Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 74-75.

responds with the very acceptance that Cain lacked, recognizing and supporting Jacob's inequitable love by offering himself in Benjamin's place.<sup>120</sup>

Judah's speech sets the stage for the reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers by showing how Joseph's brothers have changed; they no longer resemble Cain in desiring to be rid of their brother. At the same time, much also depends upon Joseph's decision to forgive his brothers for the wrong that they did to him. He has every reason to be angry and seek revenge upon them for selling him as a slave. Matthew Schlimm argues that anger in the Old Testament typically results from a perception of having been wronged.<sup>121</sup> Based on this understanding, one might easily expect Joseph to be angry with his brothers and react with violence and/or separation, the two most frequent consequences of anger.<sup>122</sup> As Schlimm demonstrates, however, Joseph responds to this situation with neither of these reactions, choosing instead to forgive his brothers.<sup>123</sup> Acknowledging that God turned the past evils to good purposes, Joseph affirms that his future actions towards his brothers will be characterized by care and provision.<sup>124</sup> By doing so, Joseph also serves as a counterpart to Cain—an anti-Cain, so to speak, who acts as “his brother's keeper” whereas Cain did not.<sup>125</sup> It is Joseph's decision to forgive that ultimately determines the outcome of the conflict between him and his brothers. Both Judah and Joseph contribute to a resolution of fraternal conflict that surpasses Cain's fratricide.

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<sup>120</sup> Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 164.

<sup>121</sup> Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness*, 54.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-59.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 169-79.

<sup>124</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 82-86. Coats draws attention to the importance of a vision oriented towards the future for the reconciliation of Jacob's family. Reconciliation occurs on the basis of the brothers' risky yet firm commitment to one another for the purpose of a beneficial and life-giving future.

<sup>125</sup> Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness*, 178.

## ***VI. Preservation of Life and Blessing for the Chosen Family***

In the preceding chapter, I argued that Joseph's knowledge enabled him to preserve life during the world-wide famine, as he found a way to feed not only the Egyptians, but the rest of the world as well. Read with a view toward the Eden narrative, Joseph's efforts may be regarded as a circumvention of the curse upon the ground in Gen 3, since Joseph's knowledge led to the provision of food and the preservation of life whereas the knowledge of good and evil led to difficulty in procuring food from the soil. In the present chapter, I have also argued that Joseph's knowledge emerges fully only when he reconciles with his brothers, understanding their relationship and his past within God's overall providential designs. Not only does Joseph's recognition of God's purposes demonstrate an ability to discern between good and evil, recalling the Eden narrative (Gen 50:20); it also leads him to reconcile with his brothers and resolve fraternal conflict without violence, echoing the story of Cain and Abel.

The way in which Joseph's knowledge resonates with the Eden narrative and the ensuing story of Cain and Abel therefore deepens as his knowledge develops through his interactions with his brothers. This is borne out further in the manner in which Joseph enables his family to survive the famine, which safeguards their property and their livelihood to a greater degree than what happens with the Egyptians. While Joseph's knowledge does evade the curse upon the earth for the Egyptians and others, insofar as he enables their lives to be saved, his greater knowledge after reconciling with his family enables a more complete circumvention of the curse for the children of Jacob. Not only are their lives saved, but their possessions and freedom are secured as well. The

thoroughgoing salvation of Jacob's family emerges in clear relief when juxtaposed with the fate of the Egyptians as described in Gen 47:13-26.

Joseph's enslavement of the Egyptians in Gen 47:13-26 has been interpreted in a number of ways, ranging anywhere from a disconnected interpolation with an etiological focus to a central passage for understanding Joseph's character. To be sure, this passage has many features that set it apart from its surrounding context, including stylistic differences<sup>126</sup> and distinctive vocabulary.<sup>127</sup> There is also a changed focus from Jacob's journey into Egypt to Joseph's treatment of the Egyptian people, where Joseph's family recedes temporarily from view.<sup>128</sup> Finally, the passage stands between the narrative of Israel's settlement in Goshen (Gen 46:11-12) and the summary statement of that settlement in Gen 47:27a, therefore separating an otherwise continuous account.<sup>129</sup> For this reason, many have argued that it has been inserted into the Joseph narrative at this point. Coats, for example, removes only this passage and Gen 38 from the Joseph story, in a reading that otherwise emphasizes the literary unity of Gen 37-50.<sup>130</sup> Westermann holds a similar position, likewise concluding that this passage is entirely disconnected from the context in which it presently occurs.<sup>131</sup> Both of these authors argue that the

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<sup>126</sup> Von Rad observes, for instance, that the passage is "unmistakably schematic," evidencing a markedly "theoretical interest" that describes matters concerning the entire country and unfolds Joseph's activity in distinct, progressive stages (von Rad, *Genesis*, 404). Cf. also Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 173.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*, 64. Redford notes the occurrence of several terms in this passage that are otherwise attested in late Hebrew or Aramaic. While he compiles similar late vocabulary throughout the rest of the Joseph narrative, it appears somewhat more concentrated in this brief passage and seldom in its immediate context of Gen 46-50. Humphreys argues for verbal connections between this passage and Gen 40-41, further arguing for its uniqueness within its immediate context (Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 146).

<sup>128</sup> Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 146. von Rad, *Genesis*, 403.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 172. Cf. also Sigmon, "Shadowing Jacob's Journey," 462.

<sup>130</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 52-54.

<sup>131</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 173.



passage serves a purely etiological purpose, portraying Joseph as the originator of later Egyptian economic practices.<sup>132</sup>

Despite the features that set Gen 47:13-26 apart, others have shown that it is not as disconnected as Coats and Westermann argue. Humphreys sees it as a continuation of the story of Joseph as a wise courtier, connecting it with Gen 40-41. Though he posits a separate origin for the whole, his interpretation confirms that Gen 47:13-26 has a broader purpose than etiology alone; it portrays Joseph serving Pharaoh faithfully and otherwise fulfilling the purpose for which he was made governor of Egypt.<sup>133</sup> Wildavsky draws on this passage to establish a strongly negative evaluation of Joseph, seeing him as an antithetical counterpart to Moses. Just as Moses led the Israelites out Egypt and slavery, Joseph brought the Israelites into Egypt and gave rise to the economic structure that led to their enslavement.<sup>134</sup> Others have similarly argued that Joseph's enslavement of the Egyptians paved the way for the Egyptians' eventual enslavement of the Israelites, though without necessarily seeing Joseph as a negative precursor to Moses.<sup>135</sup> Yiu-Wing Fung heavily emphasizes this passage not only to characterize Joseph unfavorably, but also to dispute the validity of Joseph's claim that God has sent him to Egypt.<sup>136</sup>

Together, these authors establish that Joseph's enslavement of the Egyptians does bear on

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<sup>132</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 173; Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 53. Cf. also von Rad, *Genesis*, 405-6; Gunkel, *The Stories of Genesis*, 18-19.

<sup>133</sup> Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 145-47.

<sup>134</sup> Wildavsky, *Assimilation versus Separation*, 139-61.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. Lerner, "Joseph the Unrighteous," 280-81. Benno Jacob makes this connection while still evaluating Joseph positively. He observes that the Egyptians offer themselves as slaves, but Joseph neither uses the word "slave" in his reply nor accepts their total slavery, requiring only twenty percent tax for their use of the soil that he buys for Pharaoh. It is this "servile attitude" of the Egyptian people, who prefer food to freedom, that makes Egypt into the "house of bondage" for the Israelites that we see in the book of Exodus. Benno Jacob, *The First Book of the Bible: Genesis* (ed. and trans. Ernest I. Jacob and Walter Jacob; New York: KTAV, 1974), 318.

<sup>136</sup> Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 70-77.

the overall Joseph story in which it now occurs, contrary to the view of Coats and Westermann. It remains to show, however, the precise manner in which it does so.

Though the text states that the Egyptians offer to become Pharaoh's slaves (עבדים; Gen 47:19, 25), the structure Joseph enacts would be more accurately described as feudal tenancy rather than slavery.<sup>137</sup> Neither Joseph nor the narrator employs the word "slave" (עבד) in describing the Egyptians' fate; rather, this word is used only by the collective Egyptians themselves (Gen 47:19, 25). This limited usage casts doubt on whether Joseph agrees to the people's own description of their situation as Pharaoh's subjects.<sup>138</sup> Through Joseph, the Egyptians eventually sell their land and themselves to Pharaoh in exchange for food. In return, Joseph gives the Egyptians seed to sow their land, requiring them to give one-fifth to Pharaoh while they may keep four-fifths for food and future seed (Gen 47:23-24). The land belongs to Pharaoh, but eighty percent of its produce belongs to the people, who also retain the right to live on it. As noted in the previous chapter, the twenty percent that Joseph collects is relatively light on the people when compared with tax and interest figures from elsewhere in the ancient Near East.<sup>139</sup> Such figures could reach sixty percent or more.<sup>140</sup> Furthermore, it is the Egyptian people themselves, not Joseph, who suggest that he purchase them as Pharaoh's slaves in exchange for food (Gen 47:19), and their response to his actions conveys gratitude for

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<sup>137</sup> Lowenthal, *The Joseph Narrative in Genesis*, 129; cf. also Sarna, *Genesis*, 322. Sarna uses the phrase "serfs of the crown" to describe the Egyptians' service to Pharaoh.

<sup>138</sup> Jacob, *The First Book of the Bible*, 318.

<sup>139</sup> Skinner, *Genesis*, 500-501; Lowenthal, *The Joseph Narrative in Genesis*, 129.

<sup>140</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 406; Wildavsky, *Assimilation versus Separation*, 153; Sarna, *Genesis*, 322. Sarna states that the government received one-half to two-thirds of the state-administered fields during the reign of Hammurabi. He also calls attention to frequent interest rates of twenty percent for monetary loans in Babylon, as well as rates of thirty-three percent for loans of produce.

saving their lives (Gen 47:25).<sup>141</sup> Ultimately, it is the severe and prolonged famine that gives rise to the conditions under which the Egyptians become Pharaoh's slaves—the famine that would have taken their lives were it not for Joseph's foresight.<sup>142</sup> Though their property and a measure of their freedom are lost, Joseph's actions preserve their lives.<sup>143</sup>

Yet the famine's consequences for Pharaoh's people stand in marked contrast to the circumstances under which Jacob and his family enter Egypt. Elsewhere, I have argued that this is precisely the function of the passage itself—it is a sideshadow, a literary device that gives the sense of alternative possibilities within a narrative. Included within a larger section that generally portrays Jacob's journey to Egypt favorably (Gen 46-50), the account of Joseph enslaving the Egyptians gives a sense of how that journey might have been different if Joseph had not come to power in Egypt or forgiven his brothers.<sup>144</sup> There is nearly a point-for-point contrast between what happens to the Egyptians and what happens to Jacob and his family. The Egyptians give up all of their money in exchange for food (Gen 47:14-15), but Joseph twice returns the brothers' money to them (Gen 42:25; 44:1). There is never any hint that they actually pay for their provisions; rather, Joseph's promise to "provide" (כֹּל *pilpel*) for them suggests that they will be supplied freely without charge (Gen 45:11; 47:12).<sup>145</sup> Similarly, the Egyptians exchange all their livestock for food as well, with the comprehensive list of animals

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<sup>141</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 405; Lowenthal, *The Joseph Narrative in Genesis*, 129-30. However, cf. Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 84-85. Fung argues that the very choice between slavery and death is itself problematic, and the Egyptians' acceptance of slavery does not necessarily an endorsement of it within the narrative. Indeed, it is resisted and delayed as long as possible.

<sup>142</sup> Sarna, *Genesis*, 321.

<sup>143</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 405.

<sup>144</sup> Sigmon, "Shadowing Jacob's Journey," 454-70.

<sup>145</sup> A. Bauman, "כֹּל," *TDOT* 7: 85-89 (87-88).

emphasizing the totality of their dispossession (Gen 47:17). Joseph's family, however, brings all of their possessions and livestock from Canaan to Egypt (Gen 46:6), despite Pharaoh's instructions to take no heed of their possessions because they will be generously received (Gen 45:20). Finally, though the Egyptians become slaves and tenants on their land, which now belongs to Pharaoh, Jacob and his children settle (יִשְׁבּוּ) in Goshen. They pasture their flocks and gain possessions in the land, and Joseph grants them property in it (Gen 47:4, 11, 27); this implies that they—and not the Egyptian king—own the land on which they dwell.<sup>146</sup>

The enslavement of the Egyptians hints at what might have happened to Jacob's family if it were not for Joseph's position of power and his decision to provide for his family. The famine extended across the whole earth, and people from all over journeyed to Egypt to buy food. Like the Egyptians, Jacob and his sons may eventually have been required to sell all their livestock in exchange for food after their money ran out. Like them, Joseph's family might have found themselves exchanging their freedom for survival. Yet because of Joseph's actions and his reconciliation with his brothers, these things are avoided for the family of Jacob.<sup>147</sup> Because of Joseph, the lives of the Egyptians are preserved during the famine that threatens them. Jacob, however, also retains his possessions, even gaining more after he settles in Egypt (Gen 47:27). The reconciliation of Jacob's family, which rests on Joseph's discernment of God's purposes for them, leads to increased prosperity and a more complete salvation for the nascent people of Israel than for the others in the story.

<sup>146</sup> Sigmon, "Shadowing Jacob's Journey," 465-67.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 468-69. Others who recognize a contrast between Joseph's treatment of his family and his treatment of the Egyptians include Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 403; Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom*, 630-35; and Peter Weimar, "Gen 47,13-26," 125-38. Weimar argues that Gen 47:13-26 is an addition, but sees it as a purposeful interpolation because of the contrast that emerges with Joseph's treatment of his family.

This is significant not only for the welfare of Jacob and his children, but for the ancestral promise and blessing that they carry. Initiated with Abraham and passed to Isaac and Jacob, God's promise to the ancestors runs throughout much of Genesis and is generally recognized as a unifying feature of the book.<sup>148</sup> Clines regards it as an integral aspect of the entire Pentateuch, insofar as its central theme revolves around the partial fulfillment of that promise.<sup>149</sup> Though scholars are divided about how to define the various elements of the promise, it includes land, descendants, blessing, and blessing to the nations.<sup>150</sup> As Devorah Steinmetz has shown, the preservation of this patriarchal promise, specifically the promise of the land, is a central issue in the account of Jacob's migration into Egypt at the end of the Joseph story (Gen 46-50). Jacob's command that he be buried in Canaan acts as a safeguard, affirming that the promise remains intact despite the journey away from the land and into Egypt, the land of the Israelites' future slavery.<sup>151</sup>

Other aspects of the narrative also ensure the continued validity of God's promise. As Jacob's journey to Egypt begins, God appears to him in Beer-sheba, just prior to his actual departure from Canaan (Gen 46:1-4). Such an appearance is remarkable in the Joseph narrative; only at this point does God speak directly, while everywhere else God's

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<sup>148</sup> Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, 54-58; Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers*, 119; Walther Zimmerli, *Man and His Hope in the Old Testament* (SBT 2/20; Naperville, Ill.: Allenson, 1971), 50; Willem A. VanGemeren, *The Progress of Redemption: The Story of Salvation from Creation to the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1988), 104.

<sup>149</sup> Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 29.

<sup>150</sup> A concise discussion of the various classifications may be found in Wilson, *Joseph, Wise and Otherwise*, 223-30. The two "blessing" aspects are closely linked with one another (cf. p. 225). On the complex development and various stages of the promise motif, see Rendtorff, *The Problem of the Process*, 55-84.

<sup>151</sup> Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 130-33, 151-53.

actions are hidden and only grasped through inference.<sup>152</sup> Here, God confirms that Jacob's migration to Egypt will not negate the promise of land, descendants, and blessing, mentioning all three while reassuring Jacob about the journey (Gen 46:3-4). God promises to bring Jacob back to Canaan (land), to make Jacob into a great nation (descendants), and to be with Jacob (blessing).<sup>153</sup> Similarly, Joseph's instruction to his brothers that they bring his bones with them when they leave Egypt upholds the promise of the land by looking towards Israel's future there (Gen 50:24-26).<sup>154</sup>

Furthermore, the repeated statement that Jacob brought all of his possessions with him to Egypt (Gen 45:10; 46:1, 6, 32; 47:1) creates continuity with God's blessing that caused to Jacob to prosper in Paddan-Aram and in Canaan (cf. Gen 30:29-43). The possessions that Jacob previously gained through God's blessing are not lost as he journeys to Egypt, while the wealth he gains there (Gen 47:27) may be ascribed to God's continued presence with him.<sup>155</sup> Finally, it must be noted that Jacob blesses Pharaoh, not the other way around as might be expected (Gen 47:7, 10). This is reminiscent of God's promise to Abraham that all the nations of the earth would be blessed in him and his descendants (Gen 12:1-3).<sup>156</sup> The journey into Egypt, therefore, occurs in a way that preserves the promise of land, descendants, and blessings for the family of Jacob. And it is Joseph's knowledge and his reconciliation with his family that ultimately brings this

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<sup>152</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 154-55. According to Westermann, the theophany is "an essential part" of the broader patriarchal story, so it resonates with Gen 12-36 rather than with the rest of the Joseph narrative.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom*, 617-19.

<sup>154</sup> Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 151-53.

<sup>155</sup> Sigmon, "Shadowing Jacob's Journey," 459. Cf. also Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom*, 617, 620.

<sup>156</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 171.

about; by preserving their lives, Joseph ensures that the divine promise bound up with Jacob's family will endure.<sup>157</sup>

Elsewhere in Genesis, the promise itself is presented in a manner that recalls the Eden narrative and the rest of the Primeval History. The promise is initiated, for instance, at the transition between the Primeval History (Gen 1-11) and the ancestral narratives (Gen 12-36), when God first speaks to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3).<sup>158</sup> Before Gen 12, God deals with all of humankind in broad terms—expelling humanity's ancestors from Eden, flooding the whole world in response to human evil, and dispersing all people across the earth by confusing their language at Babel. In calling Abraham, however, God begins to deal with humankind in a particular way, establishing a unique relationship with an individual and, by extension, the people who descend from him.<sup>159</sup> While the remainder of Genesis envisions other peoples and even accounts for their origins (the Moabites, the Ishmaelites, the Edomites, etc.), the focus is overwhelmingly on the nascent people of Israel and their ancestors. Yet God's dealings with this family affect not only them, but the rest of humankind as well. God's initial promise to Abraham includes the statement that "in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Gen 12:3). The ancestral promise begins, therefore, with an affirmation that God has not abandoned the universal concern for humankind that characterized the Primeval History. Israel's blessing overflows to the rest of humankind.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 46, 90-91.

<sup>158</sup> He is called Abram initially, before God changes his name in Gen 17:5.

<sup>159</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 105-6.

<sup>160</sup> Cf. Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, 81-85. Kaminsky is careful to recognize that this aspect of God's calling for Israel must not be made to overshadow the particularity of Israel's election. He criticizes Hans Walter Wolff ("The Kerygma of the Yahwist") for placing undue emphasis on Gen 12:3, resulting in an unbalanced view of God's call to Abraham primarily as one of service to the nations.

The various elements of God's promise to Abraham correspond with the curses that God pronounced in the Eden narrative. God first promises to bless Abraham and make him into a great nation: "I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse the one who curses you, and in you all the families of the ground will be blessed." (Gen 12:2-3). There is, then, a twofold promise of nation and blessing. God adds a third aspect of the promise after Abraham travels to Canaan from Haran, saying "I will give this land to your offspring" (Gen 12:7).<sup>161</sup> The promise thus comes to consist of land, descendants, and blessing.<sup>162</sup> As Michael Fishbane notes, these three blessings may be regarded as a "typological reversal" of the curses God pronounces in Eden, which afflict the earth, procreation, and human labor.<sup>163</sup> Drawing on this observation and Lamech's expressed hope that Noah will bring comfort from the curse on the earth (Gen 5:29), Levenson argues that Abraham represents a reversal of the Eden curses even more than Noah. As he argues, "The man without a country will inherit a whole land; the man with a barren wife will have plenteous offspring; and the man who has cut himself off from kith and kin will be pronounced blessed by all the families of the earth."<sup>164</sup>

The correspondence these two authors identify between the promise and the curses is not exact. Nevertheless, the strong emphasis on blessing in Gen 12:2-3—the root בֵּרַךְ occurs five times in these verses<sup>165</sup>—stands in opposition to the motif of

<sup>161</sup> Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 84.

<sup>162</sup> Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, 81.

<sup>163</sup> Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 372-73.

<sup>164</sup> Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 84.

<sup>165</sup> Three times in the *pi□el* form, once in the *nip□al*, and once as the noun בֵּרַכָּה.



cursing (עֶרֶר) that characterizes the end of the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel.<sup>166</sup> Furthermore, God promises to bless “all the families of the *ground*” (אֲדָמָה) through Abraham in Gen 12:3, and this wording is echoed in Gen 28:14 when God reiterates the promise to Jacob. Elsewhere, however, the blessing is directed to “all the nations of the earth” (כָּל גֵּוֵי הָאָרֶץ; Gen 18:18; 22:18; 26:4).<sup>167</sup> The mention of the ground (אֲדָמָה) in Gen 12:3 may recall the repeated occurrence of ground (אֲדָמָה) throughout the Eden narrative and the Primeval History. Finally, God’s command for Abraham to go forth (Gen 12:1), accompanied by the subsequent promise of the land (12:7), may recall the expulsion of the humans from Eden in which their “land” was lost (3:22-24). These allusions to the Eden narrative are subtle, but they bolster the relationship between the divine promise that dominates the ancestral narratives and the universal scope of the Primeval History. Occurring at the transition between these two major sections of Genesis, the initial promise to Abraham thus demonstrates how God’s promise to the patriarchs envisions blessing for all of humankind despite its concentration in a single family.

The Eden narrative depicts the entrance of death into the world and a rift in the relationship between humans and God, while the Primeval History carries these themes forward as humankind grows and spreads over the face of the earth. The patriarchal promise offers hope of life and a renewed relationship with God, concentrated within God’s chosen family but not confined to them. Joseph’s preservation of this promise and

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<sup>166</sup> Wolff, “The Kerygma of the Yahwist,” 145-56. Wolff observes that the root occurs five times in the Primeval History (Gen 3:14, 17; 4:11; 5:29; and 9:25), underscoring the correspondence between the curse of the Primeval History and the fivefold mention of blessing in God’s promise to Abraham in Gen 12:1-3.

<sup>167</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 278.

blessing, therefore, is not inconsistent with his more general preservation of life through the provision of grain during the famine. This preservation of life echoes the Eden narrative in its own way, as I argued in chapter three. By providing the Egyptians—and, in fact, the whole world—with food and preventing their starvation, Joseph circumvents the curse upon the ground that works against human survival. Joseph's greater provision for his family, sustaining not only their lives but their property and freedom as well, maintains the ancestral promise intact. And just as God's initial promise to Abraham contained the prospect of reversing Eden's curses, so Joseph's preservation of the promise carries that hope forward as well.

## ***VII. Summary and Conclusion***

In this chapter, I have argued that Joseph's insight into God's purposes for him and his family echoes the Eden narrative in a number of important ways. Most directly, this knowledge presents itself as an ability to discern between good and evil in Gen 50:19-21, recalling the knowledge of good and evil on which the Eden narrative hinged. At the same time, Joseph's understanding results in the eventual reconciliation of Jacob's family, as I concluded based on the close relationship between Joseph's growth in knowledge and his interactions with his brothers. On the one hand, the renewed encounter with his brothers in Gen 42, and his subsequent dealings with them over the next two chapters, leads to an expansion of Joseph's perspective. With his field of vision widened, Joseph is able to comprehend the full extent of God's past, present, and future designs for him and his brothers, where this knowledge was limited before. On the other hand, Joseph's recognition of God's plans for his family causes him to forgive his

brothers, determining his future course of action as one of care and provision. Leading to the reconciliation of Jacob's family, Joseph's knowledge further echoes the knowledge of good and evil in Gen 2-3 insofar as the latter resulted in expulsion from Eden and strained, if not destroyed, family relationships. The first narrative in the post-Eden world—after humans have come to know good and evil—is one in which one brother murders another. Joseph's knowledge, however, leads to resolution of brotherly conflict without violence or even separation.

Finally, I argued that Joseph's discernment of God's providence leads to a greater preservation of life, prosperity, and blessing than the other nations experienced, chiefly the Egyptians. The narrative of Gen 47:13-26 demonstrates the dire consequences of the famine for Pharaoh's own people, who became utterly dispossessed. Joseph saved their lives through his extraordinary wisdom and administrative skill, and thus to a certain extent sidestepped the curse upon the earth that threatens human survival. Joseph's greater knowledge about God's purposes for his family, however, results in a greater salvation for them, the fledgling people of Israel only seventy persons in number (Gen 46:27). Not only are their lives saved, but their possessions and freedom are safeguarded as well. By preserving their lives and their welfare, Joseph maintains the ancestral promise that is bound up with them, which in its own way recalls the Eden narrative and casts itself as God's way forward in dealing with humankind. In response to the bleak outlook put forward in the garden story, therefore, the experience of Joseph and his brothers offers a measure of hope for the future. The nature of this hope is discussed in the next chapter, as I explore the full significance of reading the Joseph story in light of the Eden narrative.

## **Chapter Five: The Significance of an Intratextual Reading of the Joseph Story**

### ***I. Introduction***

In the preceding chapters, I have outlined the intratextual relationship between the story of Joseph (Gen 37-50) and the Eden and Cain and Abel narratives (Gen 2-4), exploring linguistic connections, structural parallels, and aspects of reversal that emerge when these narratives are compared. While these relationships contribute to our understanding of Genesis as a whole, overall my focus has been on the manner in which they enrich the Joseph story itself as a conclusion to the book. I have kept this goal in view through close exegesis of the Joseph story in chapters two through four, first with attention to Gen 37 and Gen 39 as individual episodes (chapter two) and subsequently through studying Joseph's knowledge and how it leads to life and reconciliation (chapters three and four). In each of these chapters, I established the connections between the Joseph story and the narratives in Gen 2-4, which are best understood as narrative analogies, and I offered some reflection on the significance of these analogies for interpretation. In this final chapter, I discuss the significance of these relationships in more detail, demonstrating the extent to which they alter one's interpretation of the Joseph story in meaningful ways—not undermining it or co-opting it for a purpose alien to the narrative, but penetrating more deeply into the concerns that the story manifests on its own.

Broadly speaking, these connections with the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel recall the beginning of Genesis as the Joseph story brings it to a close. They help situate Gen 37-50 within its proper context, shedding light on the significance of

Jacob's family and the nascent people of Israel with respect to all of humankind. At the same time, these intratextual relationships do more than contextualize the Joseph narrative as a whole. They also lead to potential connections between Joseph and Adam and between Eden and Egypt, which I clarify below. An overly simplistic correlation between these aspects of the stories must be avoided, since it can obscure the more subtle impact of the Joseph story's relationship with the Eden narrative. At the same time, exploration of their role in the various intratextual patterns can enrich our reading of the Joseph story to an even greater extent. Finally, the Joseph story's allusions to Gen 2-4 lend depth and complexity to three of its major themes, all of which are interrelated: reconciliation among brothers, knowledge and perspective, and God's unseen providence. Below I explore each of these themes in turn, showing their additional dimensions brought into focus when they are read alongside the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel.

## ***II. The Joseph Story, Genesis, and the Pentateuch***

As I stated at the outset of this project, the Joseph story is a narrative that inherently points beyond itself. On the one hand it looks forward, recounting the Israelites' entrance into Egypt and setting the stage for the exodus narrative that marks the next chapter in Israel's history. On the other hand it looks backward, continuing the story and fleshing out themes from the ancestral narratives that precede it.<sup>1</sup> In the foregoing chapters, I have argued that the Joseph story ultimately looks farther backwards than is typically recognized, as it contains allusions to the Eden narrative at

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<sup>1</sup> Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 194.

several key points. By bringing this narrative into view, the Joseph story serves as a satisfactory conclusion to the book of Genesis, looking back to its beginning as it draws the book to a close.<sup>2</sup> And yet it is not only a conclusion, since the Joseph story also functions undeniably as a transition to the book of Exodus—movement from Canaan to Egypt is an integral structural feature of the narrative,<sup>3</sup> and attempts to downplay this “bridging” function nevertheless recognize it as a clear feature of the story in its present form and context.<sup>4</sup> The Joseph story does not conclude Genesis with a final, triumphant reversal of the curses introduced in the Eden narrative; it is one chapter in a much larger story, which continues in the biblical books that follow.<sup>5</sup> Though I have thus far treated Genesis as a single text, one aspect of this text is the way it serves as a prelude to the ensuing Pentateuchal narrative; Genesis is a self-enclosed text, but it is a forward-looking one as well.<sup>6</sup> The Joseph story’s allusions to the Eden narrative help clarify its place within this larger story—not only in terms of the theological and literary unity of Genesis, but within the context of the Pentateuch as a whole.

The significance of these allusions for the Joseph story must be considered alongside the relationship between the Primeval History and the rest of the Pentateuch, particularly the ancestral narratives. The precise nature of this relationship is ambiguous,

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<sup>2</sup> Dahlberg, “On Recognizing the Unity of Genesis,” 365-66; idem, “The Unity of Genesis,” 132-33.

<sup>3</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 54.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. for example, Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*, 27; Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*, 50-55.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Josipovici, *The Book of God*, 85. Josipovici hints at the irony that exists when the Joseph story is read within all of Genesis through 2 Kings, since it is Judah, not Joseph, who ultimately becomes the ancestor of Israel’s monarchs.

<sup>6</sup> Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 85. Dahlberg himself recognized this aspect of Genesis, comparing the book to an orchestral overture: complete in its own right, it also introduces the artistic work that follows it (Dahlberg, “On Recognizing the Unity of Genesis,” 365-66; idem, “The Unity of Genesis,” 132-33).

especially from the perspective of composition history.<sup>7</sup> One clear aspect of this relationship, however, is that much of the Pentateuch in its present form proceeds in part as a response to the Primeval History. That is to say, the Primeval History introduces a series of obstacles in the relationship between humans and God, and the rest of the Pentateuch progresses toward overcoming these obstacles. God initiates the resolution of these difficulties by entering into an intimate relationship with one family and the people descended from them; this relationship between God and God's chosen people is the subject of the rest of the Pentateuch.<sup>8</sup> This may be seen most clearly in the transition between the Primeval History and the ancestral narratives, when God first calls Abraham with the promise of land, descendants, and blessing (Gen 12:1-3). As discussed in chapter four, the various elements of this promise echo the Eden narrative and the curses that result from it; in doing so, they show how God's call of Abraham and his descendants envisions the reversal of these curses.<sup>9</sup> Abraham is told that all the nations of the earth will be blessed in him (Gen 12:3), which means that Abraham's relationship with God is not for his sake alone.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, allusions to the creation and Eden narratives in Exodus also point to this universal aspect of God's relationship with Israel.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The compositional issues are concisely summarized in Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*, 151-55. On the one hand, the construction of God's promise to Abraham in Gen 12:1-3 looks back toward the Primeval History, and the *toledot* structure of Genesis integrates the Primeval History and the ancestral narratives. On the other hand, there is evidence to suggest that the Primeval History may have once been joined to the exodus story apart from the ancestral narratives, including the juxtaposition of creation with the deliverance from Egypt in Psalm 136. Schmid ultimately rejects this position, arguing that the Primeval History was joined to the ancestral narratives prior to the connection between Genesis and Exodus, though he recognizes that the issue is difficult to resolve with certainty.

<sup>8</sup> Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 77-79.

<sup>9</sup> Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 84; Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 372-73.

<sup>10</sup> Wolff, "The Kerygma of the Yahwist," 137-47.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Ilana Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel: National Narratives in the Bible* (Contraversions 14; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 28; James S. Ackerman, "The Literary Context of the Moses Birth Story (Exodus 1-2)," in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives* (ed. Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis, James S. Ackerman, and Thayer S. Warshaw; vol. 1; Nashville: Abingdon, 1974), 74-119;

The family that God has chosen—and the people of Israel who descend from them—represent God’s act of reaching out to all of humankind.<sup>12</sup> While the distinct benefit and blessing of Israel should not be overshadowed by this universal concern, the blessing of the nations remains an important aspect of their relationship with God.<sup>13</sup> Israel is God’s solution to the breach in the divine-human relationship that begins with transgression in Eden and grows throughout the Primeval History; it is through Israel that God’s intentions for creation will be realized.<sup>14</sup>

The story of Joseph and his brothers narrates an important episode in the story of God’s chosen people, demonstrating how the nascent Israel survives threats to its existence and unity at a crucial juncture between family and nation.<sup>15</sup> Faced with a famine that threatens the whole earth, Jacob’s family is preserved—and with them, the ancestral promise that represents God’s blessing not only on Israel but on the rest of the world as well. The Joseph story’s allusions to the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel remind the reader of this fact—that Joseph and his brothers are caught up in something far greater than their own actions and experiences. On the level of the story, recognizing these connections allows the reader to recall what is at stake in the preservation of Jacob’s family and in their journey into Egypt. Not only is their survival ensured, but God’s plan to heal the divine-human relationship is safeguarded along with them.

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Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus* (Interpretation; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 12-14, passim. I discuss connections between Exodus and the creation narratives in further detail below.

<sup>12</sup> Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, 82.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-85.

<sup>14</sup> Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 147-48.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.



The broad intratextual patterns between the Joseph story and the Eden narrative bear this out, as I argued in chapters three and four. When the seven-year famine threatens the earth, Joseph's knowledge leads to the preservation of life—through his ability to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, recognize God's intentions, and develop a plan for providing food. Read in light of the Eden narrative, this emerges as a reversal of its negative consequences: the first humans' acquisition of knowledge produced death, but Joseph's knowledge produces life. The curse upon the ground made it difficult to obtain food, but Joseph provides food despite the struggles of the natural world. A member of Jacob's family circumvents the curse upon the earth, bringing benefit to the chosen family but also to the rest of the world. Furthermore, Joseph's knowledge also leads to his reconciliation with his brothers, as I demonstrated in chapter four. Joseph's recognition of God's purposes not only for him but for his family moves him to forgive his brothers and initiate a reunion with them. Again, when one reads this resolution with the narratives of Gen 2-4 in view, it emerges as a reversal of the strained human relationships in the post-Eden world. Cain's murder of Abel is the first of many instances of fraternal conflict in Genesis, but it is also a further consequence of the humans' acquisition of knowledge in Eden.<sup>16</sup> Joseph's knowledge, however, works in the opposite direction, leading to forgiveness and reconciliation rather than further conflict. Joseph recognizes that while his brothers intended evil, God meant it for good; he resolves on this basis not to harm his brothers (Gen. 50:19-21).

At the end of Genesis, discernment between good and evil leads to the preservation of life and the reconciliation of family members. Many of the negative

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Stratton, *Out of Eden*, 213; Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 285-86. The connections between the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel are discussed in detail in chapter one.

effects of Eden are thereby reversed, or at least circumvented, in this family. This is not to say that Joseph and his brothers return to a pre-Eden world; famines still happen—the ground remains cursed—and brothers still fight one another. The etiological force of the Eden narrative emerges precisely insofar as it characterizes the present world.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, Joseph and his family members overcome these obstacles, and in doing so they surpass the normal limitations for human flourishing. At the heart of this resolution lies God's commitment to Joseph and the rest of Jacob's family. It is not Joseph's intuition that ultimately brings salvation from the famine; rather, deliverance originates with the dreams God sends to Pharaoh and the divine assistance by which Joseph interprets them (cf. Gen 41:16, 25, 28). The reconciliation of Jacob's sons cannot be attributed directly to any human agent, resulting instead from God's involvement and human recognition of God's purposes.<sup>18</sup> Since these are universal human problems, this carries with it the implicit hope for the reversal of Eden's misfortunes for the rest of humankind as well. If one recognizes the Joseph narrative's analogous relationship with the stories of Gen 2-4, this dimension of the salvation of Jacob's family emerges with more clarity. One sees more completely that the preservation of Jacob's family upholds hope for all of humankind.

Approaching the Joseph story from the other direction, one can recognize how its connections to the Eden narrative enhance the relationship between the books of Genesis and Exodus. As I stated above, despite the literary unity of Genesis the Joseph story also functions as a bridge between the ancestral narratives of Genesis and the exodus narrative that occupies much of the rest of the Pentateuch. This is a crucial aspect of the entire

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<sup>17</sup> Gunkel, *Genesis*, 20.

<sup>18</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 43-44; 83-86.

Joseph story; Noth went so far as to posit this function as the original purpose behind its composition.<sup>19</sup> Others have rightly observed that reducing the Joseph story to this purpose does little justice to its length, literary artistry, or theological sophistication.<sup>20</sup> Yet it is impossible to deny that the story does play such a role in its present form and context; it offers an explanation for why the Israelites entered Egypt.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the story's focus oscillates between Canaan and Egypt, following the action as the characters (Joseph, his brothers, and Jacob) move back and forth between the two lands over the course of the story before finally settling in Egypt. Coats has shown that movement from Canaan to Egypt is an integral structural feature of the Joseph story.<sup>22</sup> And the denouement of the Joseph narrative, in which the family journeys to Egypt, contains affirmations that anticipate their return to Canaan (Gen 46:1-4; 47:29-30; 50:13, 24-26).<sup>23</sup> The transition from Canaan to Egypt, and with it from the ancestral narratives to Exodus, is thus a crucial feature of the whole Joseph narrative. It recounts the entrance into Egypt, providing an "eisodos" narrative in preparation for the exodus.

The Joseph story's allusions to the Eden narrative bolster this connection with Exodus, since the latter contains its own well documented allusions to the creation narratives in Genesis. So, for example, the statement of Israel's fertility in Exod 1:7 echoes God's blessing of humankind in creation (Gen 1:28), reiterated in God's covenant with Noah (Gen 9:1-2).<sup>24</sup> The seventy sons of Jacob mentioned in Exod 1:5 may recall the seventy sons of Noah listed in Gen 10, the ancestors of the human nations; if so,

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<sup>19</sup> Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, 208-13.

<sup>20</sup> Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*, 27

<sup>21</sup> Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*, 50.

<sup>22</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 54.

<sup>23</sup> Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 130-33, 151-53; Green, *What Profit for Us*, 178-79.

<sup>24</sup> Ackerman, "Literary Context," 76-77.

Israel is portrayed as a microcosm of all of humankind.<sup>25</sup> The salvation at the Sea contains several details that recall creation, including the division of the water to reveal dry land (Exod 14:21; cf. Gen 1:9-10) and the “blast” of God’s “nostrils” that drives back the waters (Exod 15:8, 10; cf. Gen 1:2; 2:7).<sup>26</sup> God’s destruction of the Egyptians as portrayed in Exod 15:1-18 resembles other poems invoking God’s mythic victory over chaos, a further connection with creation motifs (e.g., Isa 51:9-10; Ps 74:13-14).<sup>27</sup> Even the general movement of Exodus, from harsh labor to worship (עבודָה refers to both) may be a reversal of the Eden narrative, where humankind goes from easy labor for the ground (עֵבֶר; Gen 2:15) to difficult toil outside the garden (Gen 3:17-19).<sup>28</sup> These connections sketch the birth of Israel as a new creation, showing how God’s designs for the whole cosmos are brought to fruition within the Israelite nation.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, they also suggest that God’s dealings with Israel envision the divine intentions to bless the rest of humankind as well.<sup>30</sup> Through these echoes of creation, the journey out of Egypt sets the Israelites’ particular relationship with God in the context of the whole earth and universal humankind. Allusions to the Eden narrative in the Joseph story provide a corresponding recollection of these stories for the same purposes in the “eisodos” narrative. Once again, such allusions remind us what is at stake in the preservation of Jacob’s family and God’s promises to them, in preparation for God’s future act of their deliverance from Egypt.

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<sup>25</sup> Ackerman, “Literary Context,” 78.

<sup>26</sup> Pardes, *Biography*, 28.

<sup>27</sup> Fretheim, *Exodus*, 166.

<sup>28</sup> Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 37.

<sup>29</sup> Ackerman, “Literary Context;” Pardes, *Biography*, 28.

<sup>30</sup> Fretheim, *Exodus*, 25-26.

The Joseph story's intratextual relationship to Gen 2-4 adds to our understanding of its contextual role in the Pentateuch, as it draws Genesis to a fitting conclusion while simultaneously transitioning into the book of Exodus. At this important juncture, the Joseph story shows how the family of Jacob flourishes despite a threat to its survival and unity, as well as how they enter into the land of Egypt prior to their exodus. Throughout the story, it is clear that the survival and unity of God's chosen family is a primary concern, and with them God's promise of land, descendants, and blessing given to the patriarchs. Allusions to the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel remind the reader that something else is at stake as well, and that God's dealings with this family have implications for all of humankind. Broadly speaking, this intratextual relationship situates the Joseph story in its largest possible context. In doing so, it raises the possibility of connections between specific aspects of the Joseph narrative and the Eden and Cain and Abel stories. Seeing the Joseph story as a conclusion to Genesis, might the reader discover a typological relationship between Joseph and Adam, or between Joseph and Cain? And given these intratextual connections, does the Joseph narrative uphold a correlation—positive or negative—between Egypt and Eden? I turn to these questions below, first discussing the relationship between Joseph and Adam, then demonstrating how the Joseph story presents an ambiguous view of Egypt that is maintained through comparisons with Eden.

### ***III. Joseph, Cain, and Adam***

In his explication of the connections between the Joseph story and the Primeval History, Dahlberg portrayed Joseph as an anti-type to Adam, Cain, and Noah. Joseph's

preservation of life showed him reversing Adam's actions, those that led to the entrance of death among humankind. At the same time, Joseph offered a measure of deliverance from a world-wide threat, sketching him as a new Noah who likewise ensured salvation from the danger posed by the world-wide flood. Finally, through Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers, Joseph becomes an anti-type to Cain, bringing forgiveness and life where Cain brought enmity and death.<sup>31</sup> This last typological relationship is also suggested by Schlimm, who sees Joseph as an "anti-Cain," since the two characters demonstrate such different responses to the emotion of anger.<sup>32</sup> Possible correspondence between Joseph and Noah will not be considered here, since my goal is to explore the significance of the Joseph story's allusions to the Eden narrative and to the story of Cain and Abel that immediately follows it. The other two relationships, between Joseph and Adam and Joseph and Cain, are certainly supported by the observations I have made in the previous four chapters. At the same time, the correspondences are not so strong as to warrant a typological relationship, and to argue for such connections would be to gloss over many of Joseph's characteristics as well as the manner in which events play out in the Joseph story.

A potential Joseph-Cain typology may ultimately be ruled out, despite a number of warrants for it that exist on the surface. Joseph and his brothers are reconciled, while the story of Cain and Abel ends in death. As Schlimm points out, both Joseph and Cain experience anger and evidence different reactions to it, with Joseph choosing forgiveness while Cain chooses murder.<sup>33</sup> It must be remembered, however, that the reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers is not accomplished by Joseph alone; Judah bears just as

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<sup>31</sup> Dahlberg, "On Recognizing the Unity of Genesis," 364-5; idem, "The Unity of Genesis," 129-31.

<sup>32</sup> Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness*, 178.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 169-79.

much responsibility for the happy ending as Joseph, since he refuses to sell Benjamin as the brothers had sold Joseph before (Gen 44:18-34). And Judah fulfills a Cain typology to a greater extent than Joseph. He is representative of the older brothers and the one who twice avoids killing his kinsman: once when he suggests selling Joseph rather than killing him, and again when he offers himself in Benjamin's place.<sup>34</sup> As I argued in chapter three, the Joseph story and the story of Cain and Abel are related through the motif of conflict between brothers and the repeated preference for the younger son. Based on this, it is Judah and the other brothers collectively who most closely resemble Cain, while Joseph bears resemblance to Abel (and perhaps to Seth).<sup>35</sup> Joseph is the beloved younger son, where Judah and the others are the unchosen older siblings. Thus, if there is a typological relationship between these narratives to be uncovered, Judah should be identified as the counterpart to Cain. Even this reading, however, neglects many of the nuances of the Joseph story. In Coats's reading, neither Joseph nor his brothers are solely responsible for reconciliation, which emerges despite lingering estrangement, guilt, and ignorance among both parties.<sup>36</sup> The Joseph narrative as a whole is a reversal of the story of Cain and Abel, but identifying any character too firmly as an anti-Cain loses the story's richness.

The issue is more complex in the case of a potential Joseph-Adam typology. In the narrative analogy I identified between the Eden narrative and Joseph's experience in Potiphar's house, there is a clear correspondence between Joseph and Adam. Both

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<sup>34</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 307-8.

<sup>35</sup> On the identification between Abel and Seth as a replacement, see Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 78. Insofar as Joseph is the beloved son who is given up to death and later returned, Joseph is connected both with Abel and with Seth. Alternatively, Benjamin becomes Joseph's replacement as the object of Jacob's affections, so in some ways Benjamin can be equated with Seth as well.

<sup>36</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 43-44, 83-86.

experience temptation through the agency of a woman, though this emerges more clearly in the case of Joseph. Likewise, both initially enjoy a position of authority and freedom characterized by limitation, and both lose this position through their response to the woman who approaches them. The difference is that Joseph resists temptation and remains faithful to God, refusing Potiphar's wife and respecting the boundary that has been set for him. Adam, on the other hand, does not; he eats the fruit offered by his wife, disobeying God's command and transgressing the one limitation that God set on his existence. Comparing the two stories, it appears that Joseph succeeds where Adam fails, suggesting a typological relationship between the two characters. Similarly, in the larger analogy between the two narratives identified in chapter four, Joseph's knowledge leads to the preservation of life while Adam's knowledge leads to death. And in both instances, the threat to human life centers on food; Adam's punishment is a curse upon the ground that makes procurement of food difficult, while Joseph's knowledge enables him to stockpile food before the famine to prevent starvation. Correspondences between Joseph and Adam go beyond the singular episode in which they are tempted; they extend into the continuation of each narrative as well.

Through the intratextual comparison of the Joseph and Eden narratives, Joseph does emerge as a counterpart to Adam—he is obedient where the first man is disobedient, he respects his limitations where Adam transgresses them, and his knowledge leads to food and life where Adam's leads to toil and death. Adam becomes a foil to Joseph, serving as a point of contrast to highlight Joseph's successful administration of Egypt and his extraordinary righteousness in Potiphar's house. While there are certainly problematic aspects of Joseph's character, his behavior overall is positive, bringing life



and reconciliation despite his flaws.<sup>37</sup> And as Joseph's mirror image, Adam conveys the inherent human tendencies toward failure and disobedience that emerge in the Eden narrative. The typological relationship between the two serves the overall goal of painting Joseph as a deliverer, whose upright actions surpass normal human limitations and enable him to become an agent of divine providence.

This relationship, however, must be seen as a feature of the book of Genesis, which sketches universal human difficulties in the Primeval History (Gen 1-11) and then portrays God's election of Israel as a means of surpassing these difficulties and procuring blessing for all of humankind (Gen 12-50).<sup>38</sup> Joseph is not a "new Adam" who singularly counteracts the negative effects of the humans' disobedience in Eden. Rather, by recalling the Eden narrative the Joseph story hints at the universal benefits of the ancestral promise; it is this promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that envisions the reversal of Eden's consequences. Joseph does bear striking connections with Adam, succeeding where the first man failed and bringing life where he brought death. Yet the narrative's hope for humankind is not in Joseph, but in the chosen people whose lives and destiny Joseph preserves. Abraham, too, is a counterpart to Adam, as various aspects of his story suggest.<sup>39</sup> The future people of Israel may similarly be seen as an anti-type to Adam, a microcosm of humankind whose birth in Exodus resonates with the creation

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<sup>37</sup> So, for example, many recognize Joseph's treatment of his brothers in Gen 42-44 as morally problematic, likewise his enslavement of the Egyptians in Gen 47:13-26. For decidedly negative evaluations of Joseph's character on these grounds, see Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 38; Josipovici, *The Book of God*, 83-85; Wildavsky, *Assimilation versus Separation*, 139-61; Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 70-77.

<sup>38</sup> Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, 81-84.

<sup>39</sup> Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 372-73; Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 84, 91-94, 140. In addition to God's promises to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3) that invert the Eden narrative's curses, Levenson also notes that Abraham's steady obedience to God's command in the Akedah (Gen 22) stands in contrast to Adam's disobedience in Eden.

story.<sup>40</sup> So it is with Joseph, whose successes lead to preservation of the nascent Israel. It is this chosen people, at the transition between family and nation, that realizes God's intentions for creation.

#### *IV. Eden and Egypt*

The Joseph story's allusions to the Eden narrative naturally lead to the question of the relationship between the land of Egypt and the Garden of Eden. Much of the Joseph story centers on the ancestral family's journey to Egypt. From Joseph's sale into slavery, the action and narrative perspective oscillates between Canaan and Egypt, finally ending with the whole family's migration to the land of future slavery. Although the Joseph story exhibits its own independent themes and motifs, one of its major purposes in the Pentateuch is to show how this journey takes place.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, Egypt is depicted as a land of salvation and provision, the place where the family's lives and prosperity will be preserved.<sup>42</sup> Given the important place that Egypt occupies, one wonders how it fits into an intratextual pattern with the Eden narrative. Is Egypt a new Eden? Or, alternatively, does it represent an anti-Eden, a place diametrically opposed to the Israelites' ideal home?

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<sup>40</sup> Ackerman, "Literary Context," 78-79. Note also the further parallels between Exodus and the creation narratives, above. Several studies have noted broad parallels between the Eden narrative and the overall history of Israel, so that Adam's creation, disobedience, and expulsion from the garden sketches in universal terms the particular Israelite experience of election/birth, apostasy, and exile from the promised land. See, for example, Postell, *Adam as Israel*; Carlos R. Bovell, "Genesis 3:21: The History of Israel in a Nutshell?" *ExpTim* 115 (2004): 361-66; Van Seters, *Prologue to History*, 126-29; N. Lohfink, "Die Erzählung vom Sündenfall," in *Das Siegeslied am Schilfmeer: christliche Auseinandersetzungen mit dem Alter Testament* (Frankfurt am Main: J. Knecht, 1965), 81-101; Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right," 4-5.

<sup>41</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 54, 77-78.

<sup>42</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 178.

The answer seems to be both, since Egypt exhibits both positive and negative characteristics throughout the Joseph story.<sup>43</sup> On the one hand, Egypt in the Joseph story does exhibit several things in common with the Garden of Eden. It is a place of life and prosperity for the children of Jacob, the place where their food and sustenance will be provided by their own kinsman. The garden in the Eden narrative was similarly associated with life and abundance, where the man and woman could eat freely and enjoy harmonious relationships with one another and the created order.<sup>44</sup> By contrast, the land outside of Egypt—not only Canaan, but the whole world—is a place of starvation and difficulty, dominated by the world-wide famine and the threat it poses to human life (Gen 41:57). Furthermore, for the first humans Eden serves as the scene of temptation, which contains not only the forbidden fruit but also the creature that raises the possibility of eating it despite God's prohibition. In the same way, Egypt is the scene of Joseph's temptation, since it is in Egypt that Joseph encounters Potiphar's wife and her sexual advances. Both Eden and Egypt function as testing grounds, the place where the protagonist may obey or disobey God's wishes.<sup>45</sup> In several ways, Egypt in the Joseph story plays a role similar to the one played by the garden in the Eden narrative.

Other qualities of Egypt in the Joseph story, however, show a clear dissimilarity with the Garden of Eden. In Gen 3, the humans' expulsion from Eden is presented negatively, an unfortunate but necessary consequence of their disobedience and the resulting acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil. Eden is their intended home, the place where the humans were created and the place where they encountered God

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<sup>43</sup> F. V. Greifenhagen, *Egypt on the Pentateuch's Ideological Map: Constructing Biblical Israel's Identity* (JSOTSup 361; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 34-44.

<sup>44</sup> Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 75-105.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Greifenhagen, *Egypt*, 31-35.

intimately and innocently. If Egypt is meant to correspond to Eden directly, one would expect the entrance into Egypt to be portrayed like a journey homeward. In fact, throughout the Joseph story there is a strong indication that Egypt is not the true home of Jacob and his family, but a place where they will reside as aliens. Egypt is a temporary detour, not a final dwelling place.<sup>46</sup> God affirms to Jacob at the outset of his journey to Egypt that he will bring Jacob and his family back to Canaan, their promised land (Gen 46:1-4). Jacob instructs Joseph to bury him in Canaan, affirming his faith in God's promise (Gen 47:29-31), and the instructions are carried out upon Jacob's death (Gen 50:7-13).<sup>47</sup> And though Joseph allows himself to be buried in Egypt, he instructs his brothers and their descendants to bring his bones to Canaan from Egypt when they return home, anticipating that their life in Egypt will be temporary (Gen 50:24-26).<sup>48</sup> Canaan, not Egypt, is their true home, and it is the return to Canaan that the Joseph story ultimately envisions.

In addition, there are several places where Egypt is portrayed negatively, not just as a place outside of home for Jacob and his family. Joseph's initial journey to Egypt is far from happy, since he is taken down there as a slave sold by his brothers. Egypt is also the place where Joseph experiences further hardship and descent, first becoming a prisoner and then remaining in prison for a prolonged period of time because of the cupbearer's neglect (Gen 39:20; 40:23). Furthermore, though Egypt is presented as a place for Joseph's brothers to acquire food (Gen 42:1-2), their endeavor to do so is complicated by the unexpected hostility of the land's governor, their unrecognized brother (Gen 42:7). Both Joseph and his brothers experience Egypt negatively at some

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<sup>46</sup> Greifenhagen, *Egypt*, 41.

<sup>47</sup> Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 130-33.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 151-53.

point, despite the generally positive depiction of it; this shows that Egypt is far from an ideal setting easily likened to Eden. Moreover, even Pharaoh's own people experience slavery in Egypt, as the famine drives them to sell their possessions and eventually themselves to avoid starvation (Gen. 47:13-26). Slavery characterizes Joseph's initial experience as well, and it is the fate that Joseph eventually threatens for Benjamin (Gen 39:1; 44:17). Egypt, therefore, comes to be associated with slavery at many points in the narrative, resonating with Egypt's identification elsewhere in the Bible as "the house of slavery" (בֵּית עֲבָדִים).<sup>49</sup>

Although there are many positive aspects to the land of Egypt, highlighted by the Joseph story's allusions to the garden narrative, these must not be made to outweigh the negative characteristics. The Joseph story portrays Egypt both positively and negatively, making any correspondence between Egypt and Eden highly ambiguous. The journey to Egypt is celebrated insofar as it enables the preservation of life, but despite this attitude Canaan is maintained as the true home of Jacob and his family. The migration to Egypt is portrayed as a journey to a foreign land, an exile of sorts,<sup>50</sup> but this is depicted with far less tragedy than the humans' expulsion from Eden. The exile from Eden included measures to prevent the humans' return (Gen 3:24), while the departure from Canaan is recounted with frequent affirmations that a return is certain (Gen 46:1-4; 47:29-31; 50:24-26). And despite Egypt's characterization as a negative place for many people—and for the Israelites in the book of Exodus—in the Joseph story it is a place of blessing, life, and prosperity for Jacob's family. The conclusion follows that Egypt is neither a

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<sup>49</sup> Exod 13:3, 14; 20:2; Deut 5:6; 6:12; 7:8; 8:14; 13:5; 13:10; Josh 24:17; Judg 6:8; Jer 34:13; Mic 6:4.

<sup>50</sup> Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 151-53.

new Eden nor its diametric opposite. Its characteristics evoke both, thereby suggesting a complex relationship.

That is not to say that the Joseph story's allusions to the Eden narrative draw no relationship at all between Eden and Egypt. On the contrary, a positive correlation between Egypt and Eden occupies an important part of the Joseph story's intratextual relationship with Gen 2-4. What it means, however, is that these intratextual patterns are not the only voice speaking about Egypt in the Joseph story. As evident from the discussion above, the Joseph story presents an ambivalent attitude towards Egypt. It is simultaneously a place of refuge and a house of slavery; it is a place of life and prosperity that is nevertheless characterized by potential danger.<sup>51</sup> It is where God's plans come to fruition, but it is also inadequate as a permanent home.<sup>52</sup> Egypt's ambiguous portrayal in the Joseph story resonates with the attitude toward it elsewhere in Genesis, as Greifenhagen has demonstrated. A generally negative evaluation of Egypt in the Abraham narratives is occasionally subverted by instances where Egypt is a place of fruitfulness (e.g., Gen 12:10-20).<sup>53</sup> Throughout the Pentateuch, particularly in Exodus-Deuteronomy, Egypt's positive attributes are subverted in favor of a decidedly negative evaluation.<sup>54</sup> Egypt is the "other" against which Israel defines its own identity.<sup>55</sup> Much of Genesis upholds this view, yet the Joseph narrative problematizes it by highlighting Egypt's good qualities. Egypt's dangers are acknowledged in Gen 37-50, to be sure, but as Greifenhagen observes, the Joseph story is "wrestled somewhat uneasily into the

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<sup>51</sup> Greifenhagen, *Egypt*, 35.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-205.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-13; Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 3-4.

dominant anti-Egyptian framework” of the Pentateuch.<sup>56</sup> The effect behind this may be to show how the journey into Egypt, potentially ominous, continues the prominent motif of God’s guidance and blessing with the ancestors.<sup>57</sup> Regardless of the exact purpose, the fact remains that the Joseph story presents a tension between a positive and a negative portrayal of Egypt. The intratextual patterns we see with the Eden narrative contribute to this tension by inviting the reader to consider Egypt’s similarities with the garden, recognizing how the future house of slavery can be a place of refuge and life. The correspondences between Egypt and Eden sharpen our awareness of Egypt’s ambiguity in the Joseph narrative.

Reading the Joseph story in light of the Eden narrative should not overwhelm our initial reading of Gen 37-50, obscuring its distinctive themes, theological concerns, and central features with an unwieldy comparison. Rather, this recognition must be attentive to the Joseph story on its own terms, understanding how the allusions resonate with these more overt aspects of the narrative. Seeing Egypt as an anti-type to Eden would neglect far too many aspects of the Joseph story’s portrayal of it, forcing the Joseph story into an overly positive attitude contradicted by much of the narrative. Due attention to these other aspects, however, allows one to recognize a subtler function behind the allusions: by likening Egypt to Eden, they complicate an already ambivalent picture. Awareness of the Joseph story’s own voice demonstrates how these allusions contribute to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of it.

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<sup>56</sup> Greifenhagen, *Egypt*, 45.

<sup>57</sup> Sigmon, “Shadowing Jacob’s Journey,” 456-61.

## ***V. Reconciliation among Brothers***

Conflict and reconciliation among brothers may rightly be identified as the overarching theme of the Joseph story. Wénin regards this as central concern of Gen 37-50, approaching the whole narrative as an extended reflection on relationships between brothers.<sup>58</sup> Coats likewise recognizes reconciliation as one of two major themes, the other being political power, with reconciliation being the more dominant of the two.<sup>59</sup> The hostility among Jacob's sons represents the broad conflict of the story, with Joseph's rise to power in Egypt embedded as a sub-plot within the larger narrative arc; it reaches its climax in Gen 45:3-15, when Joseph resolves matters with reconciliation.<sup>60</sup> In the preceding chapters, I have demonstrated in detail how reconciliation comes about within the Joseph story, how Joseph's knowledge of God's purposes contributes to it, and how it relates to the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel. I therefore discuss this theme only briefly here, summarizing the arguments from previous chapters in order to clarify how these allusions alter our interpretation of the Joseph narrative in meaningful ways.

In chapter two I identified several verbal links between the account of Joseph's sale into slavery (Gen 37) and the story of Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1-16), as well as structural parallels that highlight an analogous relationship between the two. Intratextual patterns between these two narratives include such elements as the preference for the younger son, the jealous response of the older son, violent action against the younger son, and the exile of one or more of the sons. While this pattern is established directly

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<sup>58</sup> Wénin, *Joseph*, 11.

<sup>59</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 80.

<sup>60</sup> Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 32.



through the Joseph story's allusions to the Cain and Abel narrative, it also constitutes a common thread among all the stories of fraternal conflict in Genesis, including those about Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau and, to a lesser extent, Joseph's sons (Gen 48:13-20) and Judah's sons (Gen 38:27-30). There is a clear progression of this motif throughout Genesis, as the brothers in question achieve greater degrees of reconciliation in successive generations: murder actually occurs only in the story of Cain and Abel, and reconciliation is fully achieved only in the story of Joseph and his brothers.<sup>61</sup> Through connections with the narrative of Cain and Abel at critical places—Joseph's sale into slavery and his threat to enslave Benjamin—the Joseph story highlights its role as the culmination and final resolution of this hostility that repeats itself in every generation. Only among Jacob's sons does there emerge a stable family that will not undo itself through violence or separation.<sup>62</sup> And since the Joseph story alludes to the narrative of Cain and Abel directly, the attentive reader understands this conflict as a latent impulse within all of humankind, not just the previous two generations of the ancestral family.<sup>63</sup>

The Joseph story's allusions to the narrative of Cain and Abel probe this motif of fraternal conflict and reconciliation even more deeply than this, however. The related motifs of fraternal conflict and the preference for the younger son in Genesis are closely bound up with the idea of election—that is, the brother narratives of Genesis recount the emergence of Israel as God's chosen people and the rise to prominence of the Joseph and Judah tribes within the nation. They constitute, to quote Joel Kaminsky, a “sustained

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<sup>61</sup> Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 126-27; Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness*, 169-79; Wénin, “La fraternité,” 32-34.

<sup>62</sup> Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 130.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 148; cf. also Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 146; Wénin, “La fraternité,” 27.

meditation on the idea of chosenness.”<sup>64</sup> Conflict happens whenever God chooses one son to the exclusion of his brother(s),<sup>65</sup> and the repeated success of younger siblings highlights the primacy of God’s choice rather than human expectation.<sup>66</sup> Thus Isaac and Jacob are chosen, while Ishmael and Esau are not.

The stories of Cain and Abel and Joseph and his brothers treat this theme of election from a distinct perspective, however, which contributes to the interpretive significance of reading them together. More than their counterparts in Genesis, these two brother narratives penetrate in depth the reaction of the un-chosen brother rather than focusing solely on the chosen. The story of Cain and Abel centers primarily on Cain’s reaction to God’s acceptance of Abel’s sacrifice and rejection of his own.<sup>67</sup> The key issue is not why God accepts one and rejects the other, but how Cain will respond to this perceived injustice; his decision to murder Abel is a failure in this regard.<sup>68</sup> Likewise, while the story of Joseph largely centers on the chosen brother, it directly addresses the emotions, actions, and ultimate transformation of the others as well. The story’s turning point depends not solely on Joseph’s attitude, but on Judah’s response to Jacob’s clear favoritism of Benjamin and Joseph’s exploitation of it. Both narratives bring to the surface the issue of chosen vs. un-chosen, specifically exploring whether and how favor can be gained for the un-chosen.

By alluding to the story of Cain and Abel, the Joseph story achieves a deeper reflection on this issue, exploring how the reactions of those whom God (or Jacob) does

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<sup>64</sup> Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, 19.

<sup>65</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 297.

<sup>66</sup> Fox, “Stalking the Younger Brother,” 60-62; Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together*, 109-10, 131-32.

<sup>67</sup> Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, 19-27.

<sup>68</sup> Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 74-75.

not choose determine their fate. By offering himself in Benjamin's place (Gen 44:18-34), Judah shows that favor can be gained precisely by overcoming the typical human tendency towards jealousy and violence—the tendency exemplified by Cain and expressed by Joseph's brothers when they sold him into slavery. Cain is a foil for Judah at the end of the narrative, just as he is a parallel for Judah at its beginning. Not only does this confirm Judah's positive transformation, it also hints at how Judah and his brothers remain a part of the chosen family. God's promise continues with all of Jacob's sons, not just with Joseph, but this only comes about after Judah comes to terms with being un-chosen, by his father and apparently also by God.<sup>69</sup> Cain, on the other hand, does not accept his un-chosen status, reacting with anger, hostility, and murder to God's preference for Abel's offering. Yet eliminating his brother gains him exile, not acceptance; God's favor and Adam's lineage continue through Seth, Abel's replacement (Gen 4:25).<sup>70</sup> Jacob's sons represent the first set of brothers in Genesis who dwell together and collectively inherit God's promise and covenant.<sup>71</sup> Reading the Joseph narrative in light of Cain and Abel provides nuanced reflection on how this comes about, focusing attention on Judah's response as one who is un-chosen. It leads to the hopeful suggestion that Judah's inclusion in the ancestral promise—and by extension the other brothers' inclusion as well—is driven by his own behavior, not by fate or inscrutable divine choice.<sup>72</sup> Just as the issue for Cain is not his rejection, but his response to that

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<sup>69</sup> Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, 68.

<sup>70</sup> Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 78.

<sup>71</sup> Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 130.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, 74. Kaminsky seems to hint at this possibility, stating that "if one hopes to see God's face and thus receive God's blessing, one must be reconciled with one's brother." On the role of the individual in determining his fate, whether as a part of the covenantal promise or not, cf. Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 151. Steinmetz in general sees individual actions and/or attitudes as determinative for one's status. This view, while provocative, ultimately undermines the narrative's emphasis on the inscrutability of God's choice. At the same time, the un-chosen can have hope and receive

rejection, so Judah's fate is determined not by the favor shown to Joseph and Benjamin but by his own acceptance, humility, and self-sacrifice in light of it.

Because the story of Cain and Abel is intimately connected with the Eden narrative, through the repetition of key vocabulary and motifs, the fratricide that it recounts is best read as a continuation of that story's consequences—a symptom of the fractured human relationships brought about by first humans' disobedience in the garden and their acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil.<sup>73</sup> The Joseph story's allusions to the Cain and Abel narrative therefore invite comparison also with the Eden narrative in forming intratextual patterns. With respect to the motif of reconciliation, the Joseph story's relationship with the Eden narrative develops alongside the connection between Joseph's knowledge of God and his decision to reconcile with his brothers.

Reconciliation, as I argued at length in chapter five, is closely tied to Joseph's knowledge of God's purposes and his own role within them. Connections with the Eden narrative deepen our interpretation of the Joseph story in this respect as well; they provide an added dimension to its other major theme, that of knowledge and perspective.

## ***VI. Knowledge and Perspective in the Joseph Story***

While reconciliation may be the overarching theme of the Joseph story, knowledge is another important dimension of the narrative as well. In chapter three I argued that the theme of knowledge is crucial in the Joseph story, showing how ידע and related words recur throughout Gen 37-50 and how characters' knowledge or ignorance

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God's blessings by virtue of their behaviors and attitudes, insofar as they accept the inequality of God's favor on their brothers.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. the discussion of the Cain and Abel narrative in chapter one.

factor into crucial turning points of the narrative. Alter has likewise noted the prominent role of knowledge in the Joseph story, recognizing it as the optimal text in which to explore the relationship between narration and knowledge in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>74</sup> Green also sees knowledge, understood as remembrance and reinterpretation, as a crucial aspect of the Joseph story,<sup>75</sup> while others call attention to it in terms of wisdom.<sup>76</sup> In chapter four I focused specifically on Joseph's knowledge about God and God's purposes, demonstrating that his knowledge grows and deepens as the story progresses. This growth coincides with Joseph's extended encounter with his brothers in Gen 42-44, culminating in his renewed commitment to his family and orientation towards their common future. Joseph's interactions with his brothers, and especially Judah's offer to be a slave in Benjamin's place, leads him to conceive God's involvement in their lives differently. At the same time, it is Joseph's newfound understanding of God's providence, articulated in Gen 45:5-8, that leads him to reconcile with his brothers. As Joseph's perspective grows—that is, as he comes to see things in terms of his family rather than himself alone—his understanding of God's providence becomes clear. From beginning to end, the Joseph narrative exhibits a trajectory of expanding knowledge, exemplified in the main character's struggle to find a proper vantage point from which to interpret the meaning of his life.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 159-77.

<sup>75</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*.

<sup>76</sup> von Rad, "The Joseph Narrative and Ancient Wisdom," 292-300; Coats, "The Joseph Story and Ancient Wisdom," 285-97; Wilson, *Joseph, Wise and Otherwise*.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Green, *What Profit for Us*, 196-216. Green understands this struggle in terms of a repeated, ongoing act of remembering—of reconceiving the past, present, and future in light of new information and alternative perspectives. And while other characters undergo similar struggles to recall and reinterpret (especially Jacob and Joseph's brothers), it is the memory of Joseph himself that is central to the whole story.

In the end, Joseph settles on a vantage point that encompasses his family and their salvation. Based on the expressions he gives to it in Gen 45:3-13 and Gen 50:19-21, Joseph's perspective on his own life and God's designs within it focuses on his family's preservation and prosperity during the famine. Both Levenson and Kaminsky recognize Joseph's perspective in these passages as an indication of his transformed attitude towards his election. In Gen 37, Joseph focuses solely on himself and the future superiority that his dreams predict. At the end of the narrative, however, Joseph recognizes that his power and authority are not for his own sake, but for the benefit of others, chiefly his family.<sup>78</sup> As Joseph tells his brothers, "God sent me before you to place for you a remnant on the earth, and to preserve alive for you many survivors" (Gen 45:7). And Joseph further expresses his understanding of God's plan through his commitment to act as God's agent; recognizing God's desire to preserve his family, Joseph promises to provide for them during the famine (Gen 45:11). Joseph's expanding perspective, therefore, eventually broadens and becomes re-centered around his family, encompassing their salvation as the goal of God's providential activity.

There are indications, however, that Joseph's field of vision extends beyond the immediate horizon of his own family and their security, hinting at even an even greater divine purpose than Gen 45:3-13 expresses at first glance. The language that Joseph uses to describe God's designs includes the phrases "remnant on the earth" (שְׁאֵרִית בָּאָרֶץ) and "many survivors" (לְפָלִיטָה גְדֹלָה). These phrases are somewhat out of place in the present context, but they may hint at Joseph's awareness of his place in salvation history (Gen 45:7). As Hamilton observes, the words שְׁאֵרִית and פְּלִיטָה are "freighted

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<sup>78</sup> Cf. Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, 68-69; Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 164-69.

with theological significance” in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>79</sup> Westermann compares their parallel usage here to similar usage in the prophets (e.g., Isa 37:32),<sup>80</sup> while von Rad denies this connection and sees Joseph claiming a divine rescue that recalls other such rescues in Genesis, such as Noah’s salvation from the flood.<sup>81</sup> There may be no such theological weight behind these words,<sup>82</sup> but if there is, Joseph’s use of them links his viewpoint with God’s larger dealings with the people of Israel or their ancestors.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, Joseph’s urgent desire to bring his family to him in Egypt shows the importance of preserving the family intact, a crucial step forward in the journey from family to nation.<sup>84</sup> Each of Jacob’s sons becomes a tribe within Israel, rather than one son becoming the sole patriarch as in the stories of Isaac and Jacob. And at the end of his life, Joseph’s instructions concerning his bones show his awareness of the future exodus, however vague that may be in his own mind; at some point, his people will leave the land of Egypt, and they must take his bones with them (Gen 50:24-26). This awareness points to the continued validity of God’s promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, even as it anticipates the next chapter in Israel’s history.<sup>85</sup>

Joseph’s viewpoint, therefore, seems to extend beyond the Joseph narrative itself. While his perspective is centered on God’s intentions for his family, he recognizes that the immediate story of Jacob’s sons fits within God’s larger past and future purposes for the ancestors of Israel. Yet even if Joseph, as a character within the narrative, only has an

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<sup>79</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 576.

<sup>80</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 144.

<sup>81</sup> von Rad, *Genesis*, 393-94.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 428. Wenham notes that these terms are paired in Exod 10:5, when Moses predicts that the plague of locusts will devour “the remaining survivors (הַפְּלִטָּה הַנִּשְׁאֶרֶת) left for you from the hail.” This seems to constitute an ordinary use of the term without weighty theological significance, indicating that Joseph’s words could have a similarly mundane meaning.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Green, *What Profit for Us*, 170.

<sup>84</sup> Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 126-27.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 151-52.

inchoate picture of these things, the Joseph story itself presents them clearly for the reader. Much of Gen 46-50 situates the Joseph story in the larger narrative of Jacob and his family, demonstrating God's continued presence among them as they enter Egypt and looking ahead to the exodus and return to the promised land.<sup>86</sup> God states this directly to Jacob when the patriarch leaves Canaan, promising to be with him in Egypt and bring him back from there (Gen 46:1-4); the only theophany in the Joseph narrative is a direct preparation for the exodus.<sup>87</sup> Various other passages in Gen 46-50 likewise anticipate the exodus. Jacob's desire to be buried in Canaan confirms his connection to the promised land (Gen 47:29-31).<sup>88</sup> Finally, statements that Jacob and his family bring their own possessions into Egypt (Gen 46:1, 6), in contradiction to Pharaoh's instructions to "do not trouble yourselves about your possessions" (Gen 45:20), indicate the independence and prosperity of Jacob's family as they enter Egypt. This suggests that Jacob's prosperity in Egypt will be a further blessing, consistent with God's promise to make Israel into a great nation.<sup>89</sup> Questions of perspective—of the proper vantage point from which to interpret the characters' lives and God's activity within them—are central to the Joseph story, and the whole scope of the narrative broadens as the story progresses. Ultimately, it encompasses a field of view that extends beyond the confines of Gen 37-50, seeing its significance within the larger history of the ancestors and the nascent Israelite people.

In light of the Joseph story's allusions to Gen 2-4, the ultimate perspective from which to interpret Joseph's life and its significance becomes broader still. Seeing these connections—the analogous relationships and reversals of the primeval story that the

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<sup>86</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 177.

<sup>87</sup> Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 49.

<sup>88</sup> Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 131.

<sup>89</sup> Sigmon, "Shadowing Jacob's Journey," 459.



Joseph story presents—the reader obtains a field of vision that looks beyond the ancestral narratives all the way back to the creation of humankind. It is no coincidence that Joseph’s final perspective on the past, and God’s purposes behind it, shows discernment between good (טֹב) evil (רָע), recalling the Eden narrative (Gen 50:20).<sup>90</sup> While there is no hint that Joseph himself intends to recall the Eden story, the attentive reader recognizes an echo of the Eden narrative at this point. Such a reader sees the Joseph story ultimately within a larger context than even Joseph and Jacob, the two farthest-seeing characters in the story, can comprehend.<sup>91</sup> By doing so, the reader can penetrate even more deeply into the meaning and significance of the events that have taken place among Joseph and his brothers. Not only did these things occur to preserve the immediate family of Jacob; not only did they occur to preserve the ancestral promise intact and set the stage for the exodus from Egypt. In this grand perspective, Jacob’s sons were reconciled and Joseph’s family was saved for a purpose that envisions all of humankind and the difficulties introduced through the humans’ disobedience in Eden. More specifically, the Joseph story is understood in light of God’s plans for the redemption of humankind through a relationship with one particular chosen family and one discrete people.

An intratextual reading that brings the Eden narrative into view alongside the Joseph story deepens the theme of knowledge and perspective that contributes so powerfully to the richness of Gen 37-50. Knowledge is not stagnant within the Joseph

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<sup>90</sup> Dahlberg, “On Recognizing the Unity of Genesis,” 363-64.

<sup>91</sup> In many respects, Jacob is ignorant about the divisive dynamics of his own family, so one may rightly question Jacob’s ability to see anything beyond his own preferences for Joseph and Benjamin that divide the family and threaten to destroy it through starvation. At the same time, Jacob shows insight that his story continues the story of Isaac and Abraham before him, and recognizes the centrality of God’s promise. Moreover, his blessings in Gen 48 and 49 show an awareness of the future. He, like Joseph, sees farther than any of Joseph’s brothers in the narrative.

narrative; the main character—as well as the reader, who shares Joseph’s perspective—exhibits a dynamic knowledge that sees God’s purposes ever more clearly as the story unfolds. The Joseph story itself directs the reader to a view that extends beyond its boundaries, recognizing the significance of the reconciliation and preservation of Jacob’s family within the larger story of the nascent Israel. Connections with the Eden narrative enlarge the reader’s perspective even further, recalling how God’s designs for the chosen family bear import for all of humankind. This brings us to the related, yet distinct theme of God’s unseen providence in the Joseph story, which is also enriched by a reading that sees the Joseph story in light of the Eden narrative.

### ***VII. God’s Unseen Providence***

The Joseph story’s theme of growth in knowledge is closely bound up with the theme of God’s unseen providence, also widely recognized as a distinct aspect of the Joseph narrative.<sup>92</sup> Unlike the surrounding narratives in Genesis, the Joseph story portrays a God who works in muted, unseen, yet powerful ways.<sup>93</sup> God nowhere appears to Joseph directly, in contrast to the theophanies experienced by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; rather, God communicates to Joseph and others through dreams that require interpretation, and even then God’s true intentions often remain unclear. The narrator states little about God, doing so only in Gen 39 and Gen 46:1-4; apart from these

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<sup>92</sup> As exemplified by the subtitle of Longacre’s book, *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence*. Longacre recognizes Joseph’s statement of God’s intentions in Gen 45:5-8 as a declaration from the story itself what it is primarily about, namely God’s providence in sending Joseph to Egypt to preserve lives during the famine (p. 41).

<sup>93</sup> Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 119.

statements, mentions of God occur only in the mouths of the story's characters.<sup>94</sup> At the same time, it is clear that God does act within the narrative, as the course of events providentially brings Joseph to power in Egypt, places him in contact with his family, and leads him to be reconciled with them.<sup>95</sup> And as I argued in chapter four, Joseph's recognition of the divine purpose behind these events is an important aspect of his knowledge, as well as the basis for his reconciliation with his brothers.

There are several clues throughout the narrative that God is both active and intentional in directing the plot toward its resolution. If Green is correct that the notion that dreams come from God is a "biblical truism," then the reader knows at the outset that God will be directing things toward the fulfillment of Joseph's youthful dreams.<sup>96</sup> The repeated statement that God is with Joseph in Egypt demonstrates that God has not abandoned the divine plan for Joseph despite the apparent setback of his sale into slavery (Gen 39:2-3, 21, 23). Even the sudden appearance of the "man" who directs Joseph to his brothers at Dothan has been interpreted as a divine agent, helping move the story along its intended course.<sup>97</sup> And Joseph's frequent mentions of God in Egypt show his own consistent, if vague, conviction that God is somehow in control (Gen 40:8; 41:16, 25, 32, 51-52).<sup>98</sup> What remains is for the characters, and with them the reader, to uncover the manner in which this resolution takes place and the divine purposes underlying it. Joseph's knowledge, and the reconciliation that occurs alongside it, comes about via his recognition of these purposes. Unstated by the narrator and unseen by the other actors in the story, God's providence finds expression in the words of Joseph (Gen 45:5-8), who

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<sup>94</sup> Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 119.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 119-20.

<sup>96</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 39-40.

<sup>97</sup> Savran, *Telling and Retelling*, 86; Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, 69.

<sup>98</sup> Savran, *Telling and Retelling*, 86.

understands it as the meaning behind his suffering, the guiding principle for the future, and the basis for reconciling with his brothers.<sup>99</sup>

Corresponding to his growing perspective, Joseph ultimately conceives God's providence in terms of his family's preservation: God's intentions and activity were from the outset oriented towards the care of Joseph's family during the famine. The whole narrative, going all the way back to Joseph's sale into slavery, is retold in these terms as Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers in Gen 45:3-15.<sup>100</sup> At the same time, as stated above Joseph also sees God's activity directed towards the preservation of the ancestral promise, safeguarding both possessions and the prosperity of Jacob's family, protecting them as a remnant on the earth, and maintaining the future possession of the promised land. And finally, God's involvement envisions the salvation not only of Jacob's family, but also of the Egyptian people and the others who sought refuge from the famine in Egypt. This is likely the meaning of Joseph's general reference to the "preservation of life" (מַחֲיָה) when he addresses his brothers (Gen 45:5), and the Egyptians are saved from starvation despite the poverty they eventually experience (Gen 47:13-26). Within the narrative, Joseph at last recognizes how God's providence affects more than his own life, and how his life fits within these purposes to be a human agent of divine deliverance.

The theme of God's providence is deepened through the Joseph story's allusions to the Eden narrative. When these connections are recognized, God's designs and activity attain an even greater significance, corresponding to the enlarged field of vision that the Eden narrative brings into view. God's providence is directed not only towards

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<sup>99</sup> Savran, *Telling and Retelling*, 87.

<sup>100</sup> Culley, *Themes and Variations*, 160. On the importance of Joseph's re-narration and re-interpretation of being sold into slavery, see Polliack, "Joseph's Trauma," 87-89.

the preservation of the chosen family, and not only towards the preservation of the promise that is bound up with them. It is oriented towards the preservation of the means by which God seeks to bless all of humankind, offering the hope for redemption of the negative consequences that emerge in the Eden narrative and the Primeval History. The ancestral promise itself is a part of this purpose, as God's initial promise to Abraham echoes the curses of the Eden narrative and hints that their reversal will take place through God's interactions with the chosen family (Gen. 12:1-3).<sup>101</sup> With the ancestral promise, God begins dealing with a single family rather than with humankind as a whole, but all of humankind is never completely out of the picture; all the nations of the world will be blessed in Abraham and his descendants.<sup>102</sup> By alluding to the Eden narrative, the Joseph story reminds the reader that this blessing for all of humankind remains in view as God preserves Jacob's family from death and poverty. We see other hints of this as well: the Egyptians' lives are saved, despite their poverty (Gen. 47:13-26), and Jacob blesses Pharaoh, which some regard as a direct reference to the blessing of the nations (Gen 47:7, 10).<sup>103</sup> The Joseph story's allusions to the Eden narrative contribute to this understanding, giving one more perspective on how the reconciliation of Jacob's family and their preservation in Egypt holds significance for all of humankind. By showing how this lies within God's providential activity, the allusions helps us see that this benefit for the world is not a byproduct of Jacob's preservation, but fully intended by God from the beginning.

The relationship with the Eden narrative also leads to deeper reflection on God's providence within the Joseph story, beyond simply setting that providence within a larger

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<sup>101</sup> Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 84; Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 372-73.

<sup>102</sup> Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, 81-84.

<sup>103</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 446-47; Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 171.

context and showing how it is directed toward larger purposes. As stated above, the Joseph story is distinctive in its portrayal of God's activity, showing God working behind the scenes and in covert ways rather than through direct interaction with characters or events. In this respect, it resembles everyday human experience much more closely than do many other biblical stories; the Joseph narrative presents a highly realistic view of the interaction between divine and human actions and intentions.<sup>104</sup> Within this portrayal, however, Joseph's own insight into God's activity departs from this realism, since this level of perception into God's purposes is both rare and extraordinary. Joseph is exceptionally privileged to have a glimpse of the "big picture," recognizing how God has been involved in his experiences in Canaan and Egypt, even if this only occurs after many years and after so many painful experiences. Recognizing the Joseph story's nuanced portrayal of divine involvement in human affairs, interpreters such as Humphreys and Savran nevertheless affirm the main character's total comprehension of God's providence as articulated in Gen 45:5-8 and Gen 50:19-21.<sup>105</sup> Savran especially notes the limitations of Joseph's knowledge prior to Gen 45, but sees Joseph's disclosure to his brothers as an authoritative statement of how God has acted.

When one reads Joseph's description of God's providence in light of the Eden narrative, however, Joseph himself is shown to be short-sighted in comparison with God's actual designs. Although Joseph sees the "big picture" regarding the preservation of his family, he does not see the "biggest picture," recognized only when God's providence is viewed in terms of all of humankind. Allusions to the Eden narrative give the reader a larger perspective on the story's meaning than Joseph possesses, and in doing

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<sup>104</sup> Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 127-30.

<sup>105</sup> Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 124-27; Savran, *Telling and Retelling*, 86-87.

so they expose the limitations of his insight into God's purposes. This in turn gives implicit commentary on the nature of God's providence and our ability to recognize God's activity in our own lives. If the Joseph story confirms that we can trust God's purposes—by portraying one character's insight into them—then the allusions to the Eden narrative complicate this message by showing how nobody can fully comprehend God's intentions, not even Joseph as the story's authoritative interpreter. However far humans can see, God's vision always encompasses much more. This complicating factor cautions against any claim to have God “figured out,” showing how even the deepest and most profound human attempts to understand God ultimately fall short. Moreover, such a view resonates with Joseph's lifelong struggle to understand his own dreams, which turn out to communicate something much more complex than he or his family members initially believed.<sup>106</sup> Throughout the Joseph narrative, there is always something more to be understood, something else to account for when trying to make sense of God's purposes.<sup>107</sup> By suggesting that God's providence envisions all of humankind, the Joseph story's allusions to the Eden narrative demonstrate that even at the story's end there is more to be understood than Joseph has seen.<sup>108</sup>

This view must be differentiated from arguments that Joseph's claims about God's providence in Gen 45:5-8 and Gen 50:19-21 are wrong. Such a view is upheld by Fung, who argues that Joseph is not the narrator's mouthpiece, and that readers are encouraged to doubt Joseph's explanation of God's activity through various passages that

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<sup>106</sup> Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 166-69.

<sup>107</sup> Green, *What Profit for Us*, 196-216.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Josipovici, *The Book of God*, 85. Josipovici similarly argues that the story envisions more than Joseph can see, but does so with respect to the future. He points to the story's “final irony” that Judah, not Joseph, will be the ancestor of the kings, despite Joseph's claim of superiority.

undermine Joseph's trustworthiness.<sup>109</sup> My view is not that Joseph is wrong in claiming that God has acted in his life; such an understanding requires an overly skeptical interpretation of Joseph's words, and it does not recognize the various indicators of God's providence within the narrative mentioned above. Instead, Joseph is right to a certain extent, but simply fails to comprehend the farthest reaches of God's providence. Joseph's articulation of God's activity is correct, but limited; it does not go far enough in describing the sweeping scope of God's designs. Allusions to the Eden narrative complicate Joseph's words to his brothers, but do not expose them as mistaken.

Ironically, the Joseph story's connections with the Eden narrative actually uphold the message of God's care and providence even as they make this message more complex. Part of the significance of this theme within the Joseph narrative is to encourage hope and faith in even the direst of circumstances, to show its readers how God's hand may be discerned in unexpected places and events. By understanding God's activity, Joseph sees the divine hand not only in his rise to power but also in his slavery and imprisonment. His strikingly positive interpretation of his own suffering makes a bold claim about God's ability to bring good out of evil and to work through the most unusual events and circumstances.<sup>110</sup> By showing even this perspective to be limited, the Joseph story's allusions to the Eden narrative affirm the positive message that God works for good in ways that are beyond human comprehension. The Joseph narrative's reflection on God's providence, then, offers a glimpse into God's purposes while still maintaining that human understanding cannot contain them. Connections with the Eden narrative encourage the reader to look in still more unexpected places for divine

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<sup>109</sup> Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 101-27.

<sup>110</sup> Polliack, "Joseph's Trauma," 87-91.



involvement in human life, seeing God's designs in the widest possible terms that stretch the limits of human imagination.

### ***VIII. Summary and Conclusion***

Although the Joseph story may be read—and read well—without noticing the specific intratextual connections that I have identified, I have shown that recognizing them leads to a richer understanding of some of the Joseph story's central motifs. Much of this work was accomplished in earlier chapters, as I identified analogous elements between Gen 37-50 and Gen 2-4, tracing their intratextual patterns through detailed exegesis of the Joseph story. In the present chapter I offered a concise synthesis of this prior analysis, to illustrate how connections with the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel contribute to our understanding of the Joseph story—in terms of its context within Genesis and the Pentateuch, but also with respect to its own literary and theological tropes. The end result suggests an overarching unity to Genesis, as Dahlberg argued over three decades ago.<sup>111</sup>

At the same time, the story of Joseph and his brothers is not defined by its intratextual relationship to the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel; these connections do not set it in a completely new light or impart an alien meaning to it. The Joseph story exhibits its own independent literary themes and theological outlooks, related to yet distinct from the narratives that surround it. Little else should be expected from a story widely regarded as one of the most artistic and sophisticated literary works in the Bible. The Joseph narrative offers a distinctive transformation of the motif of

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<sup>111</sup> Dahlberg, "On Recognizing the Unity of Genesis;" idem, "The Unity of Genesis."

fraternal conflict, showing how such conflict can be resolved with reconciliation rather than separation or death. It also explores the extent and limitations of human knowledge, specifically in terms of one's perspective and one's ability to discern God's activity. It portrays this divine activity in a unique way in the Bible, showing a God whose actions are largely unseen and who can never be definitively pinpointed, while nevertheless exerting undeniable influence over the course of events. Finally, from the very beginning the Joseph story directs attention beyond itself, looking backward to the ancestral narratives and forward to the exodus from Egypt. Allusions to the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel contribute to this broad perspective and to the Joseph story's other characteristic features mentioned above, adding depth and nuance, providing alternative perspectives or scenarios, or simply complicating an already obscure picture. These allusions aid our interpretation not because they forcefully redirect it, but because they carry it forward or coax it down new avenues.

## Conclusion

I began this dissertation by observing that the story of Joseph and his brothers points beyond itself, exhibiting continuity with the preceding narratives of Genesis. This continuity contributes significantly to the Joseph story's meaning and message as it draws the book of Genesis to its conclusion. My analysis has shown that the Joseph story's connections with Genesis reach through the entire book, going all the way back to the early chapters of the Primeval History. Joseph's relationship with his brothers ends with reconciliation, while his activities as governor of Egypt preserve life through the provision of food. Both of these results emerge as reversals of the narratives in Gen 2-4, where the humans' disobedience led to death and fraternal conflict ended in murder. The Joseph story's allusions to these other narratives enrich its theological outlook in a number of important ways, not least by setting it within its proper context for interpretation.

This conclusion lends further support to the argument that Genesis is a unified literary work. This is the same conclusion reached by Dahlberg when he first noted the Joseph story's allusions to the Primeval History, arguing that Genesis exhibits literary and theological cohesion on its own even as it introduces the Pentateuch.<sup>1</sup> It is likewise held by those who argue for the independence of Genesis from the rest of the Pentateuch, emphasizing a strong disconnection between stories of Genesis and the subsequent narratives of Exodus-Numbers.<sup>2</sup> These scholars tend to focus on the ancestral narratives of Gen 12-50, acknowledging their uncertainty about the role played by the Primeval

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<sup>1</sup> Dahlberg, "On Recognizing the Unity of Genesis," 366-67; idem, "The Unity of Genesis," 132-33.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*; Dozeman and Schmid, eds., *A Farewell to the Yahwist?*

History.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, Pentateuchal scholarship is increasingly coming to recognize the independence of Genesis from the rest of the Pentateuch. The Joseph story's clear connections with the early chapters of Genesis reinforce this argument, giving further evidence that Genesis is largely unified and self-contained. Though it anticipates the exodus narrative,<sup>4</sup> Genesis comes to a satisfactory conclusion on its own.

Furthermore, since the Joseph story exhibits unity not only with the ancestral narratives but also with the stories of the Primeval History, the internal cohesion of Genesis encompasses the whole book. As stated above, scholars emphasizing the break between Genesis and Exodus frequently focus on the ancestral narratives in Gen 12-50. Arguments that stress a disjunction between Gen 1-11 and Gen 12-50 must be reevaluated in light of the Joseph story's connections with the Eden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel. These connections are not superficial; they contribute in substantial ways to the Joseph story's theological vision, deepening its reflections on fraternal reconciliation and human knowledge of God's providence. The Joseph narrative is a fitting conclusion to Genesis as a whole, not only to the ancestral story that begins in Gen 12.

This view of the Joseph story leads to the strong possibility that the concluding narrative of Genesis contains other allusions, parallels, and reversals of the Primeval History beyond the Eden and Cain and Abel stories. My goal in this project has not been to multiply connections between the Joseph story and the Primeval History, but rather to examine the significance of such connections in light of an attentive and detailed reading of the Joseph story itself. I have restricted my analysis to this small but crucial section of

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<sup>3</sup> Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*, 151-55.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., Gen 15:13-16; 46:1-4; 50:24-26.

the Primeval History, the first of the **תולדות** in Genesis that depicts the emergence of disobedience and human violence. There are clues, however, that the Joseph story recalls other aspects of the Primeval History. Dahlberg argued that Joseph parallels Noah, bringing about salvation in the face of worldwide catastrophe.<sup>5</sup> And Joseph's second dream depicts the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowing down to him. In Genesis, the only other mention of these celestial bodies together occurs in the first creation narrative (Gen 1:14-18). The imagery of Joseph's second dream is enigmatic, finding no exact basis in the Joseph narrative itself.<sup>6</sup> This suggests that Joseph's second dream may deliberately recall the first creation narrative in order to give a cosmic scope to the events it predicts. These are two potential connections between the Joseph story and the other narratives of Gen 1-11; there may well be more.

It remains to be seen whether and to what extent such connections exist and how they may enrich the Joseph story's meaning. Yet if the Joseph story's echoes of Gen 2-4 are any indication, it seems likely that other intratextual allusions are both present and significant. The Joseph story looks backward as well as forward, and its vision extends all the way back to the creation of humankind. In doing so, it offers a complex view of the relationship between divine intention and human understanding. Joseph comprehends God's providence more fully as his perspective broadens. The more one's vision takes in, the more deeply one penetrates into God's purposes for the present and future.

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<sup>5</sup> Dahlberg, "On Recognizing the Unity of Genesis," 364; idem, "The Unity of Genesis," 130.

<sup>6</sup> The other dreams in the Joseph story all show connections with the lives of their dreamers. Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker dream about grapes and bread, respectively; Pharaoh dreams about the agricultural future of Egypt, over which he presides. Even Joseph's first dream, about sheaves, seems to communicate that Joseph's elevation over his brothers will have something to do with grain. No such logic is forthcoming about the imagery of Joseph's second dream, however. It is not readily apparent why he dreams of the sun, moon, and stars. This suggests that one must go beyond Gen 37-50 to better understand the second dream. The possibility that this dream recalls the first creation narrative is well worth exploring.

Recognizing other connections with Gen 1-11 will doubtlessly uncover new insights as the context for interpreting the Joseph story is made wider still.

The value of these intratextual connections lies in the light they shed on the Joseph story, prompting interpreters to reconsider with fresh eyes a narrative that has been studied repeatedly over the history of its existence. Such a renewed reflection is consistent with the outlook of the Joseph story itself, where there is always new knowledge to be discovered—a larger perspective from which to reexamine the past, present, and future and thereby reveal new depths of understanding.

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