

Commentary on Genesis 11

JOSEPH

The Life of Joseph (Genesis 37.2b - 51.26)

In this section we have the life of Joseph from beginning to end. It quite clearly bears within it the stamp of a deep knowledge of Egypt, its customs and its background, and could not have been written by anyone who did not have that deep knowledge, and who was not familiar with things at court. The correct technical terms are used for court officials. And the whole of Joseph's stay in Egypt is clearly written against an Egyptian background without the artificiality which would appear if it was written by an outsider.

The Betrayal and Selling into Egypt of Joseph (Genesis 37.2b - 36)

We note here a remarkable change in the narrative. Up to this point each section has been relatively brief. Covenant narrative has followed covenant narrative. This was because the records were written down in order to preserve the words of the covenant which were then, as regularly in the ancient world, put in the context of the history behind them. Thus up to Genesis 37.2a we continually have typical examples of covenant records.

But now all changes. Instead of short sections we have a flowing narrative that goes on and on, portraying the life of Joseph. And this remarkable fact is exactly what we would expect if these records were written in the first part of the 2nd Millennium BC. For Joseph was a high official in Egypt where papyrus (a writing surface made from the papyrus plant) was plentiful and the recording of information about such officials was common practise. A good case could indeed be made for suggesting that it was at this time that the earlier written covenant records were taken and compiled into one narrative to provide background history to this great man.

37.2b 'Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers, and he was a lad with the sons of Bilhah and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought the evil report of them to their father.'

It would appear from this narrative that at this time the six Leah brothers kept some of their father's flocks and herds in a separate place from the others. Perhaps his policy of dividing his possessions into two companies (32.7) had become permanent (although subsequently changed). Or it may simply be that the herds were so large that to remain together was impossible due to the sparsity of good grazing land. Thus Joseph works with the sons of the concubines.

But he made himself decidedly unpopular by tale-telling. He told his father about their bad behaviour. Possibly he felt some superiority as the son of Rachel, but more probably it was because he was spoiled as the next verse shows, and because he felt bitter at their unfriendly treatment of him (verse 4). This is a strong warning against parents having favourites among their children. Yet in this case God would use it for good. But that does not justify the spoiling or the favouritism, both of which are destructive.

37.3 'Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children because he was the son of his old age, and he made him a coat of many colours (or 'a long sleeved coat').'

Here we learn that Joseph was his father's clear favourite. A long sleeved or many-coloured coat was a symbol of luxury (see 2 Samuel 13.18). It was not a working garment but one for wearing to make an impression.

'The son of his old age.' Joseph was not much younger than his brothers. This phrase must therefore mean that in his old age Jacob had made him his special favourite, as old men can tend to do, the one on whom he leaned (verse 4). Later Benjamin is called 'the child of his old age' where his father's special love for him is stressed (44.20).

'Israel.' Jacob is now again called by his new name Israel. But until chapter 42 'Israel' is only used twice (37.3, 13) and 'Jacob' is only used once (in 37.34) thus we cannot speak of a preponderance of either. Then they are interspersed freely. This use of two names of the same person in the same context is evidenced in ancient literature in both Egypt and elsewhere.

37.4 'And his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, and they hated him and were unable to speak to him in a friendly way.'

This is the other side of the story. Because, quite inexcusably, Jacob had let his favouritism be seen his brothers were rough with Joseph. Thus the tale-telling may have been his method of getting his own back

37.5-7 'And Joseph dreamed a dream and he told it to his brothers and they hated him even more. And he said to them, "Listen, I beg you, to this dream that I have dreamed. For behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf arose and also stood upright, and behold your sheaves came round about and made obeisance to my sheaf.'

To dream such a vivid dream was looked on as of special significance. It was not the kind of thing you kept to yourself for it contained portents of the future. Joseph was not on such bad terms with his brothers that he could keep such a thing from them. Perhaps he did not recognise what the dream meant. Or perhaps he was so filled with wonder that he did not consider the consequences. But when they thought of its meaning they hated him even more, for they recognised that it was suggesting his superiority. Perhaps they even thought that he was making it up so as to make them look small..

'Binding sheaves in the field.' The dream is interesting in confirming yet again that the family tribe grew crops as well as herding cattle and sheep.

37.8 'And his brothers said, "Will you indeed reign over us? Or will you indeed have dominion over us?" And they hated him yet even more.

The brothers recognised the significance of the dream. As sons to the slave wives (verse 2) they took it very badly. Joseph was even dreaming of his superiority over them. The idea that they should bow down to him was preposterous.

37.9 'And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it to his brothers and said, "Behold I have dreamed yet a dream, and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars made obeisance to me."

Again he dreams and again he cannot keep it to himself. The meaning of the dream is made clear in the next verse.

37.10 'And he told it to his father and to his brothers, and his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream that you have dreamed. Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves down to you to the earth?"'

This time he not only told it to his brothers with whom he worked but also to his father and his other brothers. Possibly he was even troubled by the dreams. But his father too took it amiss. How dare he suggest that they would all bow down to him?

'And your mother.' This does not mean that his natural mother was necessarily alive. In days when women regularly died in childbirth some other of the family would adopt a child and become its mother. Probably Leah was in mind here.

37.11 'And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in his mind.'

There is here an interesting contrast. Quite understandably his brothers, who were already on bad terms with him, took his dreams badly. If they signified anything they signified his feeling of superiority over them. The suggestion of jealousy indicates that they felt that the dreams did somehow thrust him into further undeserved prominence. But his father was uneasy. While damping down any pretentiousness, he could not get the dreams out of his mind. Somehow he felt that they must have special significance, although he did not know how.

We notice from these previous verses how the hatred of his brothers is steadily growing from strength to strength (verses 4, 5, 8, 11). Preparation is being made for their final act of betrayal. This is a warning to us all that if we let evil thoughts build up in our minds and do nothing about it they will grow and fester and can lead to dreadful consequences. We need to learn to forgive.

37.12 'And his brothers went to feed their father's flock in Shechem.'

Over the years things and circumstances change. It may be that Joseph was now not sent with them because of how they felt about him, but it is equally likely that he was kept at home simply because of his father's needs (he was 'the son of his old age') and possibly even for the very purpose of maintaining communication between home and herd. Jacob, as is the case with those who show favouritism, does not appear to be aware of how much Joseph was hated. He thought Joseph was wonderful and assumed everyone else did as well.

It is clear that any unpleasantness resulting from previous happenings at Shechem (chapter 34) is now forgotten. It may well be that the inhabitants were just unaware of the connection of the brothers with the previous incident and they appeared peaceable enough now. Most eyewitnesses were dead or had been absorbed into the family tribe.

The land at Shechem was clearly good pasture for there is now no suggestion of separation of the flocks. Perhaps famine or raids by bandits had diminished them. There were many ups and downs in life at that time. Or perhaps Shechem was seen as fertile enough for all.

37.13-14 'And Israel said to Joseph, "Aren't your brothers feeding the flock in Shechem? Come, and I will send you to them." And he said to him, "Here I am." And he said to him, "Go now. See whether it is well with your brothers and well with the flock, and bring me word again." So he sent him out of the Vale of Hebron and he came to Shechem.'

Jacob sends Joseph to find out how things are not knowing that they are no longer at Shechem but have moved to Dothan. Constant changes of pasturage were needed for the large flocks. This reminds us that in the lives of all the patriarchs, while they themselves settled down at various places, their herds and flocks often had to be on the move.

'He sent him out of the Vale of Hebron.' Is there a hint of something ominous here? He was going never to return. The city of Kiriath-arba or Hebron was over a thousand feet above sea level but may or may not have existed at this time. It was 'built seven years before Zoan in Egypt' (Numbers 13.22) possibly around 1720 BC. The valley may, however, already have been called the Vale of Hebron ('confederacy') because a confederacy was formed or met there, later giving its name to the city. (Otherwise it could be a scribal updating, a common feature of ancient manuscripts).

37.15-17a 'And a certain man found him, and lo, he was wandering in the countryside, and the man asked him, saying, "What are you looking for?" And he said, "I am looking for my brothers. Tell me, I beg you, where they are feeding the flock." And the man said, "They have departed elsewhere, for I heard them say, "Let us go to Dothan."'

Joseph is unable to find his brothers in Shechem and while searching for them rather helplessly is at a loss what to do. However, fortunately he meets a man who knows where they have gone. He may have received hospitality from the brothers or met them at a well, where people tended to gather, and heard their conversation.

This piece of reminiscence suggests that Joseph remembers vividly little incidents about his last days in Canaan. They were imprinted on his mind. This almost irrelevant incident given in detail bears all the marks of an involved eyewitness.

35.17b 'And Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan.'

Joseph is not disturbed at the thought of meeting his brothers, otherwise he could have made not finding them an excuse to go back. He sets out determinedly for Dothan where at last he spots them.

The fertile plain of Dothan lies between the hills of Samaria and the Carmel range. It was on the trade route to Egypt. Dothan itself is known from inscriptions and excavation.

35.18-20 'And they saw him in the distance, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. And they said to one another, "See, the lord of dreams comes." Come now therefore, let us kill him and throw him into one of the cisterns, and we will say, "An evil beast has devoured him", and we shall see what will become of his dreams.''

Joseph's behaviour and attitude, and especially his dreams of superiority, have so filled his brothers with hatred that they decide to get rid of him once and for all. When they see him approaching, wearing his coat of many colours which emphasises his favoured position (it also showed he had not come to work), they felt bitter. There were a number of cisterns nearby, holes three metres or so deep widening underneath the surface, whose purpose was to catch and store rainwater for the dry season. Remains of such cisterns have been found near Dothan. They could easily hide a man's body. So they decided to murder him and throw him into a cistern. It would be easy to suggest he had met with an accident, for who would ever know?

'The lord of dreams.' A bitter statement that demonstrates their feelings. The dreams and their suggestions of lordship had clearly affected them deeply, as their final comment shows.

37.21-22 'And Reuben heard it and he delivered him out of their hand. And he said, "Let us not take his life." And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood. Throw him into this cistern which is in the wilderness but lay no hand on him." (This was so that he could deliver him from their hand and restore him to his father).'

The repetition 'and Reuben said' bears all the marks of ancient literature. Reuben may not be as strong and fierce as his brothers but he has more compassion and common sense. He thinks of his father's feelings and he thinks of the stain of fratricide and determines to save Joseph, but the roundabout route is typical of him, although it may have also been wise in the circumstances.

'Let us not take his life.' In other words let us not be directly responsible for his death.

'Shed no blood.' Is he thinking here of Cain who shed his brother's blood? He knows how

deeply the world of his day felt about fratricide. Such bloodguilt was a terrible crime which demanded vengeance.

But Reuben's intent was to save Joseph. As the eldest brother he may not have felt the indignity of Joseph's position as deeply as the others and he felt a certain responsibility because of his status.

37.23-24 'And it happened when Joseph had come to his brothers that they stripped Joseph of his coat, the coat of many colours that he was wearing, and took him and threw him into the cistern. And the cistern was empty. There was no water in it.'

The foul deed is done, although not as foul as it would have been without Reuben's intervention. The stripping him of his coat was a sign of their intense jealousy, although later they would have a use for it. Fortunately for his well being it was the dry season and there was no water in the cistern.

37.25a 'And they sat down to eat food.'

To eat heartily after an evil act is always the sign of men who lack conscience. For a time their anger made them feel justified, but no doubt through the years their consciences would not remain so peaceful. In the end conscience makes us pay for what we do. It is interesting that Reuben is not there (verse 29). Perhaps his conscience was stronger than his brothers and he could not eat. It may well be that he was sickened by his brothers' attitudes and wanted to be on his own. Or it may be that he was watching the sheep.

37.25b 'And they lifted up their eyes and looked, and behold, a travelling company of Ishmaelites came from Gilead with their camels, bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down into Egypt.'

The trade route went from Damascus, through Gilead, crossed the Jordan and joined the easy coastal route to Egypt. This then was directly in the line of the trade route along which caravans of traders constantly passed carrying goods between lands to the north and east and Egypt in the south.

'A travelling company of Ishmaelites.' They spot the gold earrings and recognise them as Ishmaelites. Later Joseph will realise that there are also Medanites among them, for it is they who arrange his sale. By this time Ishmaelites, Midianites and Medanites had become intermingled and could be seen as one. In the story of Gideon he fights 'the Midianites' and we learn that 'they had gold earrings because they were Ishmaelites' (Judges 8.24). Thus Ishmaelites are now seen as a grouping within the Midianite confederation, and regularly called Midianites. It seems that once Ishmael was dead Midian took over the pre-eminence in the confederate tribes linked with them. Midian and Medan are brothers, sons of Keturah by Abraham so that Medanites (37.36) are also within the confederation and are unknown in external sources for this very reason. They also are seen as Midianites.

Peoples like the family tribe of Jacob despised such people and the different terms may well have been intended to be disparaging.

The use of different terms for the same peoples in the same context is witnessed elsewhere in ancient literature, e.g. the stela of Sebek-khu (also called Djaa) in Manchester University Museum exemplifies the use of three names for one Palestinian populace: Mntyw-Stt ('Asiatic Bedouin'), Rntw hst ('vile Syrians') and 'mw ('Asiatics'). The ancients liked variation and were not so particular about exactness, especially when they despised people.

'Spicery and balm and myrrh.' 'Spicery' is probably tragacanth, a gum that exudes from the stem of the astragalus gummifer, a small prickly plant which grows on the arid slopes of Iran and Turkey and is a member of the pea family. 'Balm' is possibly gum mastic and 'myrrh' possibly ladanum obtained from rock roses. These were resinous products used for healing purposes (Jeremiah 46.11).

37.26-27 'And Judah said to his brothers, "What profit do we gain if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him for he is our brother, our flesh." And his brothers listened to him.'

There is still disagreement about what is to be done to Joseph. The more belligerent (Simeon and Leah especially? - compare on chapter 34. They were bloodthirsty enough) still want to kill him while others, like Judah, are probably siding with Reuben's idea. But the sight of the caravan combines the two parties. They can not only get rid of Joseph for good without killing him, but also make a profit out of it as well by selling him to the traders.

'Conceal his blood.' That is, conceal his violent death. But they are all aware that spilled blood, especially of a brother, 'cries from the ground' (4.10).

'Let not our hand be upon him for he is our brother, our flesh.' Judah does not like the idea of killing a person of his own flesh and blood. It would be looked on by all decent people as a heinous crime. Instead they will sell him.

37.28 'And the Midianites, merchantmen, passed by and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the cistern and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they brought Joseph to Egypt.'

The 'they' is the brothers. They had seen the caravan in the distance and now it approaches to pass them by. So they draw Joseph from the cistern and sell him for twenty pieces of silver, the price of a man. As we have seen above Ishmaelites were known as Midianites, but distinguished by their gold earrings from other Midianites.

'Twenty pieces of silver.' The price of Joseph as a slave at 20 shekels of silver is correct for that period. We know from external sources that in the late 3rd millennium BC the price of a slave was 10-15 shekels, but by 1800-1700 BC it was 20 shekels. In 15th century Nuzu and Ugarit it was 30 shekels (compare Exodus 21.32) and by the 8th century BC it was up to 50-60 shekels (2 Kings 15.20). This is remarkable confirmation of the accuracy of the narrative.

37.29-30 'And Reuben returned to the cistern, and behold, Joseph was not in the cistern, and he tore his clothes, and he returned to his brothers and said, "The child is not, and as for me, where shall I go?'

Reuben has quite clearly been away for some unknown reason. It may that he was sickened by their desire for blood and wanted to be on his own, or it may be that as the eldest he went to keep an eye on the sheep while the traders were passing. It was not unknown for a few sheep to disappear when a caravan passed by. But afterwards he goes privately to the cistern which his brothers have now left, in order to release Joseph. However, to his shock and dismay he finds that Joseph has gone. The tearing of clothes was a sign of great distress especially expressing sorrow and grief.

He comes to his brothers and expresses his dismay. He clearly feels he has the responsibility for Joseph's welfare as his eldest brother. What is he going to say to Jacob? Then they no doubt told him what they had done.

37.31-33 'And they took Joseph's coat and killed a he-goat and dipped the coat in the blood. And they sent the coat of many colours and they brought it to their father and said, "We have found this. Decide now whether it is your son's coat or not." And he recognised it and said, "It is my son's coat. An evil beast has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn in pieces."'

The dreadful deed has been done but now Reuben's words stir them into action. How can they best cover it up? The answer is simple. They will take Joseph's coat, cover it in blood and then pretend they have found it. And that is exactly what they did. And Jacob was completely taken in. But what they had not considered was the effect on their father. How easily we do things without thinking how many people might suffer as a consequence. Each wrong action can produce a chain of suffering.

'Sent --- and brought.' Is there here an indication of the wrestling already taking place within their minds? Do they 'bring' it by sending it by the hands of servants who pass their words on? One can understand why they would not wish to touch the coat themselves.

37.34 'And Jacob tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son for many days. And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted, and he said, "For I will go down to the grave (sheol) to my son mourning." And his father wept for him.' And the Medanites sold him into Egypt, to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, the captain of his bodyguard.'

The contrast is striking and deliberate. On the one hand the grief-stricken father mourning for the dead son for a long time, unable to be comforted, and on the other the son sold without thought, in moments, into the hands of an Egyptian officer. So does the writer bring out the evil of what was done.

'Tore his clothes -- put sackcloth on.' A regular method of demonstrating great grief and emotion. The writer stresses the prolonged grief of the father. This must surely have torn at the hearts of even the hardest of the sons. For try as they will they cannot comfort him. They had not known not what they did. How many times did they wish that they could bring Joseph back again? We may do things in the emotion of a moment that we regret for a lifetime.

'Daughters'. Probably, along with Dinah, mainly the wives of his sons.

'I will go down to sheol with my son mourning.' Sheol is the world of the departed, connected with the grave. It is always a shadowy world, a vague world of semi or non existence in shadowy form. There is no real doctrine of the afterlife in the Pentateuch.

So do we say goodbye to Jacob for some long time. We leave him grieving and recognise that he will continue grieving and broken hearted while the story goes on.

'Medanites.' Part of the Midianite confederation (see on verse 25). It was probably Joseph who became aware of the different skeins in the Midianite group, a mixture of Ishmaelites and Medanites. He had the chance to communicate with them and knew exactly which of them had sold him. He had cause to know.

'Potiphar.' Possibly an abbreviation of Potiphara (compare 41.45) but not the same person. The latter means 'he whom Re has given', which would be a popular name. It is quite clearly Egyptian.

'An officer of Pharaoh, captain of his bodyguard.' The word for 'officer' is 'saris'. It eventually came to mean eunuch (LXX has eunouchos here), but is here used in its earlier use as a court officer. As 'captain of his bodyguard' he is someone in close touch with the Pharaoh.

Very few were in close touch with Pharaoh for he saw himself as a god and stood aloof and unapproachable.

'Pharaoh.' The title of the king of Egypt. It derives from the Egyptian term for 'great house' and originally signified the palace and court of the king. The first use of it for the king himself is around 1450 BC, but without an individual name attached, as here and in Exodus. Thus we may see the use here as being probably the work of Moses, changing an original 'king of Egypt' into the more modern title. It was only in the early first millennium BC that an individual name began to be attached to the title. This minor detail helps to authenticate the narrative.

Judah Falls Further Into Sin (38.1-30).

The compiler's purpose in the insertion of this separate account of Judah's private life here is to demonstrate that Judah, having betrayed Joseph (and Jacob) by instigating the selling of him to the Midianites, now as a consequence continues on a downward path. Thus the one who suggested selling Joseph to the Midianites demonstrates even more clearly his unworthiness by his subsequent behaviour which the compiler possibly sees as the fruit of his primary sin against Joseph.

It is interesting that all the oldest sons of Leah have now been discredited in Jacob's eyes. Reuben because of his taking of his father's concubine (35.22), Simeon and Levi because they slew the men of Shechem (34.30), and now Judah for marrying a Canaanite woman and breaking his oath to Tamar.

But why should the account have been written in the first place? It is not a covenant narrative and it is not part of the story of Joseph. The answer may well be that it is a kind of covenant narrative in the sense that it is a record of Tamar's vindication after trial, a record necessary to maintain her position in the tribe. She would want it in writing for it is her vindication before all.

38.1 'And it happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned in to a certain Adullamite whose name was Hirah. And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua, and he took her and went in unto her. And she conceived and bore a son and he called his name Er. And she conceived again and bore a son and called his name Onan. And she yet again bore a son and called his name Shelah, and he was at Chezib when she bore him.'

'Went down from his brothers.' He goes to see a friend, Hirah an Adullamite. Adullam was a Canaanite city, later in the territory of Judah (Joshua 12.15). This emphasises his Canaanite associations. Then he compounds his position by marrying a Canaanite woman. This could only add to Jacob's grief of heart, for he would undoubtedly have looked on this as going against the covenant. The lesson is that if we follow sin it will lead us and our children deeper and deeper into trouble.

It is not necessary to see this as signifying separation from the family tribe. There is no suggestion that he takes flocks and herds with him. It is a private friendship. And his visits to Shua to meet his daughter, under the guise of visiting his friend Hirah, may well have been in secret.

Nor does he necessarily lead a separate life from his brothers when he is married. While the marriage would be a shock to Jacob (compare 26.34-35) it was not a reason for his son leaving the family tribe. There is nothing to suggest that Judah did not bring his wife into the tribe. The point is rather stressed that he begets three sons, for this explains the following narrative.

It is only when it comes to the third birth that we are told where he was. Chezeb is probably the same as Achzib, later a town of Judah, in the lowland hills. And there is nothing in this to cast doubt on the fact that he continued to work alongside his brothers. If they took the herds and flocks to Shechem they could also take them to Chezeb.

Later, however, we do read of 'his sheep shearers' (38.12) which may suggest a level of independence. But we might expect the sons as they grow older to exert their authority independently, even establishing sub-groups within the tribe. (But not necessarily. These sheep shearers may simply represent the group he was in charge of at the time. The flocks were very extensive). Yet if this is so it is many years later when his wife has died after two of his children have grown up.

But what is significant is that the name of his wife is never mentioned, she is only 'Shua's daughter' (verse 12). It is as though what follows puts her beyond the pale in the eyes of the writer. This may have been because she was seen as such an evil influence on her sons (see following).

38.6-10 'And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. And Er, Judah's firstborn was wicked in the sight of Yahweh, and Yahweh slew him. And Judah said to Onan, "Go into your brother's wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her, and raise up seed to your brother." And Onan knew that the seed would not be his. And it came about that when he went in to his brother's wife he spilled it on the ground lest he should give seed to his brother. And the thing which he did was evil in the sight of Yahweh and he slew him also.'

We find here the fruit of the difference between the culture of the family tribe and the culture of the Canaanites. It is clear that the family tribe practised the custom of Levirate marriage. According to this custom, which is described later in Deuteronomy 25.5-10 and illustrated in the Book of Ruth, a brother of a man who dies childless has a duty to marry his brother's wife and go in to her to produce children on his brother's behalf, and those children are seen as his brother's. It was a law known and practised elsewhere. But Onan refused to accept the custom, possibly because his mother has brought him up in the Canaanite religion, and he took steps to ensure it did not work. No faithful member of the family tribe would have dared to refuse in that way. (Outwardly Onan would have to conform to the traditions of the tribe. But his mother's influence may well have had a counter-effect).

'Er was wicked in the eyes of Yahweh.' Er may also have been brought up by his mother in the Canaanite religion, and even been taken secretly to some of their festivals, thus his experience of the Canaanite religion may have meant that he indulged in sexual practises that could only be seen as an abomination by the family tribe. So when he dies it is put down to his moral and sacrilegious behaviour. Note the reintroduction of the name of Yahweh. It is clear that Er's crime is seen as going against the covenant.

'Yahweh slew him.' His early death, possibly through venereal disease exacerbated by some other disease, is seen as the judgment of Yahweh.

'And Judah said to Onan.' Onan dared not disobey the head of his sub-tribe. He carried out the motions of what he was required to do. But when he was about to ejaculate he withdrew and let the seed fall on the ground. This has nothing to do with birth control. His sin is that he refused to 'give seed to his brother' and it was a kind of fratricide. He has disobeyed the laws of the tribe which are seen as part of the covenant (Genesis 26.5). Thus he too comes under Yahweh's disapproval and his subsequent early death is seen as the judgment of Yahweh.

But why should someone behave in this way? It may well be that he too had been brought up in

the Canaanite religion and despised the tribal customs. Thus he may have seen the demand made on him as repugnant. Alternately it may have been just stubbornness and unwillingness to do his dead brother a good turn. Indeed inheritance was also involved. Er's inheritance would go to the child. It may have been mainly the idea of this that Onan did not like. And indeed it may have been a combination of all three. Whatever it was it made him refuse to comply.

(Some have cast doubt on the chronology. We know from 37.2 that Joseph was probably about eighteen when he was sold as a slave, making Judah possibly about twenty two, and say twenty three when he married and bore Er. Then in 41.46 Joseph is thirty, although we may see this as a round number indicating that he has completed his period of preparation (three for completeness times ten for intensity), and this is followed by nine years (seven good years and two bad years) at which point Joseph seeks to persuade the family to come to Egypt. Thus at this point Joseph may be roughly forty and Judah roughly forty four. Then not too long afterwards they do make for Egypt and at this point Judah seemingly has grandchildren by Perez whom he begets after his third son has grown up (46.12), when he must be at the earliest say forty (which assumes Er married when still quite young. But this could well be so. It may be that Canaanites with their 'advanced' sexual attitudes did marry much younger than those in the family tribe - as Judah's wife presumably did). This say some is impossible.

But this is to ignore the artificial nature of chapter 46 (which see), for there the writer is seeking to bring the number of Jacob and his direct descendants to seventy by any means possible in order to indicate the divine perfection of the number who went up to Egypt - intensified seven (he also includes the two sons of Joseph who were born in Egypt). He is not counting them but expressing an idea. Thus it may well be that he includes the grandchildren, even though they have not yet been born, as being as it were 'in Perez's loins').

38.11 'Then Judah said to Tamar, his daughter-in-law, "Remain a widow in your father's house until Shelah my son is grown up", (for he said, 'Lest he also die like his brothers'). And Tamar went and lived in her father's house.'

Having lost two sons through premature death Judah is concerned for the safety of his third, who is also under obligation to raise up seed for his brother. But he is not yet of age for marriage. Thus he promises Tamar that as soon as he is (and it would not presumably be too long) he will carry out his duty with her.

'Remain a widow in your father's house.' It was the custom among many that a widow returned to the protection of her parents, although it was not necessarily required (Ruth 1.8; Leviticus 22.13). But the thought is that she remain there only until she can marry Shelah. Judah is here telling her not to marry again until Shelah is of age. Thus he puts himself under even deeper obligation, and his future conduct is inexcusable.

'Lest he also die like his brothers.' It may be that Judah felt she was under some evil influence that had caused the death of his sons (compare the Jewish book Tobit 3.7-17 in the Apocrypha for such an idea). Alternately he may simply have feared that if Shelah did not fulfil his duty to his brother's wife he also would die. But his later actions would not support this latter.

'And Tamar went and lived in her father's house.' She was separated from the tribe and returned home where she could not be a danger.

38.12 'And in process of time Shua's daughter, the wife Judah, died, and Judah was comforted and went up to his sheep shearers to Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite.'

In the meanwhile Judah's wife also dies. This is what makes what follows possible. Had she

still been alive Tamar might not have done what she did. But once she learns of the death of her mother-in-law her mind turns in that direction.

'Judah was comforted.' The period of mourning comes to an end and Judah begins to live life again. It may be or not be that Judah genuinely grieved for her loss, either way the mourning ritual must be carried through. Until that had happened he could not join the sheep shearers in their celebrations at the time of sheep shearing which was a time of feasting (see 1 Samuel 25.11; 2 Samuel 13.23 on).

'Went up to his sheep shearers.' He takes with him his old friend Hirah, who has possibly helped him through his difficult time, and joins his sheep shearers to watch over the work and join in the celebrations.

38.13 **'And Tamar was told saying, "Look, your father-in-law goes up to Timnah to shear his sheep.'**

It would appear that Tamar was not invited to the funeral and mourning for her mother-in-law and realises that she has been ostracised. He has completely ignored her. This brings home to her that he has no intention of carrying out his promise in giving her to Shelah, for she knows that Shelah is now of age. So when she hears that he is coming to nearby Timnah she decides to act.

38.14 **'And she put off from her the garments of her widowhood, and covered herself with a veil, and wrapped herself, and sat in the gate of Enaim which is by the way to Timnah, for she saw that Shelah was grown up and she was not given to him to wife.'**

When we consider Tamar's actions we must recognise that she has been grievously wronged. Basically she has been deserted. She had a right to marriage to Shelah, and the children that would result, because Judah had given her a promise. Shelah, of course, would not be limited to one wife. He had merely to fulfil his duty to Tamar and take her into his household and then he could proceed with his own life as he would.

So she takes the situation into her own hands. It may well be that if all else fails she has a right under the Levirate law to marry and have a child by Judah now that her mother-in-law is dead, for it is clear that the Levirate law reaches beyond just a brother (in the Book of Ruth Naomi is the wife whose husband has died, but Ruth expects to be able to bear children for her and uses the Levirate law to marry a 'near-kinsman' of Naomi).

'She put off from her the garments of her widowhood.' Widows were expected to dress to demonstrate their status. We do not know of what this consisted but it seems that widows did not need to be veiled in public.

'And covered herself with a veil and wrapped herself.' She was not offering herself as a common prostitute but as a religious devotee. In many ancient religions a married woman would dedicate herself to the goddess of love, in this case Astarte, and would then be required to make love to a stranger, acting out that love. This may well have been a common practise to the Canaanites from whose background Judah's wife, and probably Tamar, had come. But it was repulsive to such as the family tribe of which Judah was a part (compare Deuteronomy 23.17). However, Tamar is only pretending to be available to strangers. She has only one person in mind. She wants to be impregnated with the seed of a near-kinsman of her husband as is her right.

'Sat in the gate of Enaim which is by the way to Timnah.' She sat where such women would commonly sit knowing that Judah must pass by that way to reach his destination. Compare

Jeremiah 3.2; Ezekiel 16.25).

38.15 'When Judah saw her he thought her to be a prostitute for she had covered her face.'

Here the common word for prostitute is used (zonot) but in verse 21 the word is kedeshah, a 'holy one', one dedicated to the service of a goddess. It is possible that he had realised the difference while in the act of intercourse, or it may be that in cases like these either word could be used. Both are used in Hosea 4.14.

38.16a 'And he turned unto her by the way, and said, "Go to, I beg you, let me come in unto you." For he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law.'

It is typical of the hypocrisy of men that Judah has no compunction about going in to a prostitute while he would himself condemn the woman for her act. It was quite probably normal behaviour for him. He did not mind taking advantage of 'pious' Canaanite women. But this time his sin will catch him out.

38.16b 'And she said, "What will you give me that you may come in to me?"'

The sacred prostitute was normally paid for her services so that this would come as no surprise to him.

38.17-18 'And he said, "I will send you a kid of the goats from the flock." And she said, "Will you give me a pledge until you send it?" And he said, "What pledge shall I give you?" And she said, "Your signet, and your cord, and your staff which is in your hand." And he gave them to her and came in to her and she conceived by him.'

Judah now offers the payment of a kid (compare Judges 15.1). But clearly with no certainty that he will fulfil his promise a prostitute would want some guarantee. And Tamar has even more reason for her request. She asks for something as a pledge, an earnest. And the pledge she seeks is his signet, his cord and his staff, which he willingly gives in return for her services.

'Your signet and your cord.' The signet would be a cylinder carried on a cord round the neck and would be rolled over soft clay documents to authenticate them. It would be of no use to anyone else. Here we have clear evidence of the use of such writing materials by the family tribe. His staff would be personal to him identifying him in some way. While Judah does not realise it he is giving this woman a hold over him, but it indicates how common taking advantage of such prostitution was for he does not even consider the danger of blackmail.

'And she conceived by him.' Her aim is achieved. She has received effective seed from a near-kinsman of her husband. In the eyes of the people of that day she would be seen as perfectly justified. She is honouring the memory of her dead husband.

38.19 'And she rose and went away and put her veil off from her and put on the garments of her widowhood.'

Having hopefully achieved her aim Tamar goes back to her previous respectability. No one would be aware of anything different about her unless her plan worked.

38.20-23 'And Judah sent the kid of the goats by the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive the pledge from the woman's hand, and he did not find her. Then he asked the men of her place, "Where is the sacred prostitute who was at Enaim by the way side?" And they said, "There has been no sacred prostitute here." And he returned to Judah and said, "I have not found her, and the men of the place also said, "There has been no sacred prostitute here."' And

Judah said, "Let her take it to her lest we be made ashamed. See, I did send this kid and you have not found her." '

It is an indication of his discretion that Judah sends his close friend and not a servant to find the prostitute. Such activities while common should not be publicised. But as we know the woman was not to be found. So Judah decides to let her keep the pledge. He does not want to make a great stir and bring shame on himself. Most men may behave like he had but it was not a thing you publicised. And his friend can witness that he kept his part of the bargain. As far as he was concerned the matter was finished.

38.24 'And it happened about three months after that it was told to Judah, saying, "Tamar your daughter-in-law has behaved as a prostitute, and what is more, she is with child by harlotry." And Judah said, "Bring her out and let her be burned."

Once her pregnancy became apparent Tamar was sure to be stigmatised. What possible explanation could there be? It was clear that she had behaved immorally. No doubt her father was horrified and immediately informed Judah. It was one thing for men to visit prostitutes, it was another for a daughter of the house to behave in that way. A lesson had to be taught.

It is possible that Judah was pleased to find a way of getting rid of Tamar. He probably had a conscience about her but was fearful lest she brought bad luck on his son. Thus what she had done gave him the perfect opportunity to dispose of her. As head of the household it was his to pass judgment on her. And his judgment is that she should die by burning.

She was only a dependent. She had no right to public trial. As widow of his first son and proposed wife to his third son, at least theoretically, it was his to pass the sentence. Her fate was in his hands. And there is no doubt that his sentence was severe, which brings home emphatically the strength of his conscience about her. Later burning was only utilised in the severest cases of prostitution (Leviticus 21.9), the more usual sentence was stoning so that all could partake in the punishment (Deuteronomy 22. 22-24).

Nor seemingly did he question her about what had happened, as he should have done, for had she been forced in the open country she would not be punishable (Deuteronomy 22.25-27). Thus the hardness of Judah's heart is brought out again. The result is that she is brought out to face her punishment, while Judah looks on mercilessly and probably even pleased that things have turned out this way. But it was then that he received a great shock.

38.25 'When she was brought out she sent to her father-in-law, saying, "I am with child by the man whose these things are." And she said, "Discern, I beg you, whose these things are, the signet and the cords and the staff."

The mound for the fire has probably already been prepared, and the tribe will be gathered to watch the sentence carried out. Then the woman is dragged out into the centre of the crowd and faces her judge, probably being given final moments in which she can express her contrition and even name the culprit. And to her judge she says that the guilty man can be known for she possesses his signet and cords, and his staff of identification. And on this she asks him to identify them.

38.26 'And Judah acknowledged them and said, "She is more righteous than I inasmuch as I did not give her to Shelah my son." And he knew her again no more.'

To his credit Judah acknowledges the truth of the situation and recognises that she is not guilty after all. She has only done what she had a right should be done, to bear a son to her late husband by a near kinsman. Had it not been for his failure to fulfil his promise it would have

been, as it should have been, through his son. It is he who is the more guilty for he had failed in his duty to his late son.

Thus he accepts that she is now his wife by right of the levirate law although a wife with whom he feels he can no longer have sexual relations because she is also his daughter-in-law. This brings out the unusualness of the situation. It was not usual for the father to be the near kinsman. But Tamar's innocence is made clear, and we can have no doubt, for her sake and for the sake of her sons, that the verdict was made clear in written form. That is why the compiler later knew of this event.

And for Judah it was a time of shame and open admission of guilt. He could not deny that he had behaved very badly. What began with the cruel suggestion for the sale of Joseph into slavery results in this time of great shame for himself and his family.

38.27-30 'And it happened that in the time of her labour pains, behold, twins were in her womb. And it happened that when she was enduring her suffering one put out his hand, and the midwife took and bound on his hand a scarlet thread, saying, "This came out first." And it happened, that as he drew back his hand, behold his brother came out. And she said, "Why have you made a breach for yourself?" That is why his name was called Perez. And afterwards his brother came out, he who had the scarlet thread on his hand. And his name was called Zerah.'

The happenings at the birth of her children were as confusing as the story of their conception, and it was so unusual that it was remembered in detail. It was no doubt looked on as significant for the future.

'Perez', that is 'made a breach.' From him were descended the Perezites (Numbers 26.20). He was the father of Hezron and Hamul (Genesis 46.12) who were numbered among 'the seventy' (Genesis 46.27) replacing Er and Onan.

'Zerah', that is 'coming forth (especially of the sun)'. From him were descended the Zerahites (Numbers 26.20) among whom was Achan who withheld the 'devoted' thing (Joshua 7).

So after his betrayal of Joseph, Judah is shown to have gone from sin to sin. Truly if we sow the wind we will reap the whirlwind.

Joseph Is Sold Into Slavery, Resists Temptation and Strangely Prospers in Prison (Genesis 39.1-23).

That what now happens to Joseph is in the hands of Yahweh is abundantly made clear (verse 2-3, 21). He is with him there in that strange land able to bring about His will. He is Lord of all the earth.

39.1. 'And Joseph was brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hand of the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there.'

This verse basically repeats 37.36 to update us on the situation after the detour of chapter 38. It may well have been written by the compiler with verse 2 continuing on from 37.36. He describes him as sold by the Ishmaelites because that is how Judah had described it in 37.27, to remind us of Judah's part in the 'tragedy'.

39.2 'And Yahweh was with Joseph and he was a man who prospered, and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.'

In these next few verses Yahweh's part is emphasised. Joseph may be in Egypt (and notice the stress on the fact that his master was an Egyptian (verses 1, 2 and 4)) but he is not forsaken by Yahweh. The name Yahweh is used to stress that what is happening is within the terms of the tribal covenant. Yahweh is at work.

'He was a man who prospered.' Things went well with him because Yahweh was with him.

'In the house.' He was a domestic servant.

'His master the Egyptian.' The constant repetition of this fact may indicate an intention to bring out a feeling of familiarity in others who have also been slaves in Egypt. If Moses is the compiler this is fully understandable and explicable. On the other hand it may have the purpose of emphasising that even an Egyptian can be prospered by Yahweh.

39.3-6a 'And his master saw that Yahweh was with him and that Yahweh made all he did to prosper in his hand, and Joseph found favour in his sight and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand. And it happened that from the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had Yahweh blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake, and the blessing of Yahweh was on all that he had, in the house and in the field. And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and with him he knew nothing except the food that he ate.'

What a different Joseph we have here from the tale-bearing, consciously superior Joseph we have known. His captivity has already done him good. And while his prospering is stressed to be due to Yahweh's watch over him it also includes the fact that he works hard and wisely.

'Made him overseer over his house.' In all periods in the second millennium BC we know that Semites were often placed in places of favour and authority in Egyptian households, from Pharaoh's house downwards. Thus his being made overseer of the house (imy-r pr, a common Egyptian title) is not unusual. The result is that his master puts him in control of everything he has which results in increased prosperity as a result of the blessing of Yahweh.

The Egyptologist K. Kitchen states: "Joseph was but one of many young Semites who became servants in Egyptian households between 1900 and 1600 B.C. Papyrus Brooklyn 35.1446, part of a prison-register, bears on its reverse a list of 79 servants in an Egyptian household around 1740 B.C. of whom at least 45 were not Egyptians but "Asiatics", i.e. Semites like Joseph. Many of these have good North-eastern Semitic names linguistically related to those of Jacob, Issachar, Asher, Job (Ayyabum) and Menahem. Some were "domestics" (hry-pr) just like Joseph in Genesis 39:2 ("in the house")."

Thus Yahweh is seen not only to prosper Joseph but also to prosper an important high official in the Egyptian court. Where now are the gods of Egypt?

'With him he knew nothing except the food that he ate.' This may mean that Joseph was so efficient that he simply left him to it and his only exertion was to eat his food, or it may suggest that that was the one sphere which was not left to Joseph, possibly for reasons of ritual separation (consider 43.32).

39.6b 'And Joseph was good looking and well favoured. And it happened after these things that his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, with me my master does not know what is in his house, and he has put all that he has into my hand. There is none greater in this house than I, neither has he kept anything back from me except you because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"'

The sad story that follows is not unusual. Well favoured slaves were regularly pursued by over-sexed mistresses. And to yield was often the path to even more favours, while to resist was to court revenge. But Joseph shows his worthiness by refusing to countenance her suggestion. His master has been ultra-good to him and trusted him with everything he has apart from her. How then can he fail him? And he has also God to answer to. To sin so would be to sin against God.

It has often been suggested that this story is based on 'The Tale of the Two Brothers', but a comparison between the two reveals little similarity. They differ on nearly every point. The only parallels are the sexual pursuit by the woman and the revenge sought by the woman and of these the one quite naturally follows the other and both are common features of life through the ages. In background and every detail the stories are different. We attach a copy of the story so that you may judge for yourselves.

39.10-20 'And it happened as she spoke to Joseph day by day that he would not listen to her to lie by her or to be with her. And it happened about this time that he went into the house to do his work, and there were none of the men of the house there within, and she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and got himself out. And it happened, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled out, she called to the men of her house and spoke to them, saying, "See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to insult us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice, and it came about that when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment by me and fled and got himself out. And she kept his garment by her until his master came home. And she spoke to him in with similar words, saying, "The Hebrew servant whom you brought to us came in to me to seduce me, and the result was that as I lifted up my voice and shouted, he left his garment by me and fled out." And it came about that when the master heard the words of his wife which she spoke to him saying, "Your servant treated me in this way," that his anger was kindled, and Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were bound, and he was there in prison.'

The wife of Potiphar tries again and again to seduce Joseph but he continually resists her. But one day when he found himself alone in the house with her she grabs his clothing, and when he flees into the outer courtyard, probably quite naked, leaving the clothing in her hand she uses it as false evidence to condemn him, first to the servants and then to her husband, with the result that he is thrown into prison.

'See he has brought in a Hebrew to insult us.' The word almost certainly means Habiru. These were known to the Egyptians as 'prw. The general idea in men's minds about them was of wild, independent people of no specific race who were not quite respectable and who went their own way. Thus by calling him a 'Hebrew' she was cleverly suggesting this of him to servants who probably looked down on such people so that they were likely to believe her story.

Then to her husband she spoke accusingly as though her husband was to blame for bringing such a wild man among them, and spoke of him as 'your servant', almost certainly in a derisory and emphatic tone, making it quite clear whom she expected him to believe. And naturally he accepted her side of the story. Unless he was going to condemn her he had no option. So his anger was kindled against Joseph and he put him in the king's prison 'where the king's prisoners were bound'.

Adultery was not seen as quite the grave personal offence among other nations as it would later be by Israel (Exodus 20.14; Leviticus 18.20; Deuteronomy 22.22 on). The offence was more of taking a man's chattel, what belonged to him, and thus the death penalty would not necessarily be applied. But Joseph had no means of recompense and therefore must be punished. It may be that he was seen as still awaiting trial and left there. The captain of the bodyguard may

have had some doubts about his guilt, and would not necessarily want the affair publicised.

Egyptian prisons were highly organised. Each prisoner's record was filed under seven separate headings from initial arrest to the completion of the sentence. And the prison into which Joseph was put was no ordinary prison, but a special prison for those who were guilty of serious political offences as well as for criminals ('where the king's prisoners were bound'), which demonstrates how seriously Joseph's supposed offence was taken. It may have been that in the well-known fortress Saru, which was on the borders of the Palestinian frontier. This prison is mentioned a number of times in the writings of Thutmosis III, some considerable period after the time of Joseph. It is also mentioned in the edicts of Pharaoh Haremheb, about the middle of the 14th century B.C. But 40.3,7 may suggest a more private prison.

'Insult us ---- seduce me.' The Hebrew is the same. The word means to play, to sport and thus to mock and insult and to play with sexually, therefore seduce.

39.21-23 'But Yahweh was with Joseph and showed kindness to him and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who were in the prison, and whatever they did he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison did not look to anything that was under his hand because Yahweh was with him. And what he did Yahweh made it prosper.'

Joseph was one of those people who have the ability to make people have confidence in him. He had failed abysmally with his brothers, but to them he was only 'younger brother'. But he had succeeded with Potiphar, and now, an even more difficult task, with the keeper of the prison (parallel to the Egyptian title s'wty n hrnt which has the same meaning)

The day to day running of the prison was clearly in the hands of certain of the trusted inmates under the keeper of the prison. Joseph gained his confidence over a period and was eventually put in over-all charge of the general day to day running of the prison.

But it is stressed that all this was due to Yahweh. Yahweh had prospered him in the house of the king's officer, now he prospers him in his prison. The writer does not let us forget that Joseph is there under the protection of Yahweh for the fulfilment of His purposes. What is happening is all part of the covenant between Yahweh and the patriarchs. And the unseen presence of Yahweh must be recognised in the following narrative.

Joseph Comes In Contact With Important Court Officials And Interprets Their Dreams (40.1-23).

40.1-2 'And it happened after these things that the cup-bearer of the king of Egypt, and his baker, offended their lord the king of Egypt. And Pharaoh was angry against his two officers, against the head of the cupbearers and the head of the bakers.'

We note here the old title 'the king of Egypt' and the new title 'Pharaoh', the latter probably an updating by Moses. We do not know how the two 'officers' (saris as with Potiphar) offended but it may be that something made Pharaoh ill and the blame fell equally on the two responsible for his food and drink. Later investigation may then have vindicated the butler and put the blame on the baker.

'The head of the cup-bearers.' The word 'masqeh' (EV 'butler') corresponds approximately to the Egyptian wdpw (which has a wider meaning), and is the exact equivalent of the later wb' (c1600 BC onwards). It means cupbearer. The king's cupbearer had an extremely important and high ranking position. It was he who handed the cup to the king after tasting it to check for poison, and he was thus the only one who could slip something into the drink after

it had been tested. He was therefore a highly trusted officer. In 13th century BC one such was actually called *wb' dp irp* - 'the cupbearer who tastes the wine'.

'The head of the bakers.' Bakers are well known in Egypt but there is no exact equivalent to 'head of the bakers' as far as we know. However there would clearly be someone who was in charge of the bakers at the various palaces. He too would be responsible to guard against the king being poisoned. He may be the equivalent of 'the Royal Table Scribe' - *ss wdhw nsw*.

40.3-4 'And he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, into the prison, the place where Joseph was bound. And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them and he served them. And they continued for a time in custody.'

Such important prisoners were treated with special dignity, and the captain of the guard (note not the keeper of the prison) put them in Joseph's special charge. He took a personal interest in the care of these important men for he knew their influence and that they may well be released and be in a position to do him good or harm.

He 'served them'. Joseph took his charge seriously and made sure they were well looked after, often attending to their needs himself. The fact that he is entrusted with this task by the captain of the guard may point to the fact that the latter had had second thoughts about his previous guilt. Alternately he may have recognised the special qualities of Joseph and accepted that he had simply forgotten himself for a moment with regard to his wife. After all nothing had actually happened to her and by this time tempers had cooled. Or he may even have forgotten who Joseph was and relied on the recommendation of the keeper of the prison.

'In the house of the captain of the guard.' Not his private house but the prison over which he had responsibility. This may well have been located near his house, which would be grand and in its own grounds, probably more like a small palace.

40.5 'And they dreamed a dream, both of them, each man his dream, in one night, each man a dream with its own interpretation, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt who were bound in prison.'

The scene is now set. Both officers have dreams on the same night, dreams which, we are informed, were significant for they had their own meaning. It would appear that they both discussed them in the morning and were deeply troubled by them, for they both knew that such dreams could be a portent of something serious and could have an important meaning. The interpretation of dreams was a 'science'. Men studied and learned the techniques for interpreting them and much had been written on the subject. But because they were in prison they could not consult them.

40.6-7 'And Joseph came in to them in the morning and saw them, and behold, they were sad. And he asked Pharaoh's officers who were in custody with him in his master's house, "Why are you looking so sad today?"'

When Joseph saw them it was clear to him that something was wrong. And he recognised that it was his responsibility to cheer them up. So he asked them what it was.

We note in the narrative the constant reminders that all this was taking place in prison. These accounts would be read out and it was necessary to keep in the hearer's mind the solemnity of the situation. It may also be that the writer is trying to bring home to us emphatically what Joseph's position was.

40.8a 'And they said to him, "We have dreamed a dream, and there is no one who can

interpret it.” ’

Their reply demonstrates the confidence they had built up in Joseph. They felt he was important enough and friendly enough to discuss the matter with (you do not tell such important things to just anyone). Thus they explained that they had had dreams which appeared to be important but that they had no means of obtaining their interpretation. They were no doubt filled with a sense of foreboding. Such portents were often a warning.

40.8b ‘And Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell it to me please.”

To speak of Yahweh would have been meaningless to the men. Thus Joseph speaks of God. Let them tell him the dreams and the implication is that his God will help him to interpret them.

40.9-11 ‘And the head cupbearer told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, “In my dream, behold, a vine was in front of me, and in the vine were three branches, and it was as though it budded and its blossoms shot forth, and its clusters brought forth ripe grapes. And Pharaoh’s cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh’s cup, and I gave the cup into Pharaoh’s hand.”

Thus in his dream the cupbearer saw a vine which magically budded and came to full fruitfulness in a short time from which he was able to fill Pharaoh’s cup (the wine magically fermenting) and give it to Pharaoh. The cupbearer probably went into more detail when speaking to Joseph but the writer is summarising the essential parts.

40.12-15 ‘And Joseph said, “This is the interpretation of it. The three branches are three days. Within yet three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office, and you will give Pharaoh’s cup into his hand in the same way as when you were his cupbearer. But remember me when it is well with you, and show me kindness and mention me to Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house. For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing that warrants them putting me into prison.”

Joseph gives the king’s cupbearer good news. He is to be restored to favour in three days time. And this gives Joseph himself hope. He knows how influential this great man is and he asks him to act to secure his relief. His suggestion that Pharaoh may be approached on the matter is possibly naive, but he may well have been right that the Chief Cupbearer himself was influential enough to be able to do it.

‘Will lift up your head.’ This simply means that he will be brought out of prison to face Pharaoh (the head of the chief baker is also lifted up (verse 20). Then he is to be restored to his duties again.

‘For I was stolen out of the land of the Hebrews.’ It is somewhat naive to suggest that Joseph should have given a full explanation. It would certainly not help his case to suggest that his brothers had actually chosen to sell him, for that would imply some kind of guilt, and his statement was factually correct. He had not been sold legitimately, but dishonestly. His statement said all that needed to be said, and gave the right indication of innocence and misfortune.

‘From the land of the Hebrews.’ As we saw on 39.17 Joseph was seen in Egypt as ‘a Habiru’, for he came from no identified people In the Amarna letters (two hundred years or so later) the king of Jerusalem refers to ‘the Habiru’ as enemies of his and of Pharaoh, clearly expecting Pharaoh to understand. Others in the same letters refer to the SA.GAZ who are the equivalent (see [Hebrews](#)). In both cases the idea they are trying to express is of a wild, unidentified people. Thus Canaan, being made up of a multiplicity of tribes and city states, was looked on in Egypt

as a land full of many unidentified and lawless people, and was thus thought of as 'the land of the Habiru'. There is no reason to doubt that his also applied earlier. Besides Potiphar may well have said to them that Joseph was 'a Hebrew'. Thus Joseph uses the phrase they will understand.

'Here also I have done nothing --'. He adds to the plea that he is imprisoned unjustly.

So Joseph, having given this powerful man good news, hopes that it may contribute to his being freed.

40.16-17 'When the head baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said to Joseph, "I also was in my dream and behold three baskets of white bread were on my head, and in the top basket there were all manner of baked foods for Pharaoh, and the birds ate them out of the basket on my head." '

Again we have a summary of the dream. At such times men tend to be verbose. But the central point was that bread and food meant for Pharaoh was eaten by birds.

40.18-19 'And Joseph answered and said, "This is its interpretation. The three baskets are three days. Within yet three days will Pharaoh lift off your head from you and will hang you on a tree, and the birds will eat your flesh from off you." '

Will Pharaoh lift off your head.' There is a play on words here contrasting this lifting off of the head with the lifting up of the head of the cupbearer. 'And will hang you on a tree and the birds will eat your flesh.' The death described is probably an indication that the baker is to be seen as guilty of a heinous crime (compare Deuteronomy 21.22 for a similar death).

In interpreting the dreams Joseph was probably well aware that in three days time it was Pharaoh's birthday. Thus with God's guidance he recognised the significance of the threes. The remainder of the dreams he was able to work out fairly easily, and the writer certainly intends us to recognise that again he enjoyed the guidance of God (verse 8). The answers may seem obvious once explained but it is not something on which Joseph could afford to be wrong.

40.20-23 'And it happened on the third day, being Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants and he lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants, and he restored the chief cupbearer to his cupbearing again and he gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand. But he hanged the chief baker as Joseph had interpreted to them. Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.'

It was commonplace for prisoners to be released on the birthday of some great monarch. It was thus a time of much hope for many prisoners. But Joseph was in prison for a private 'crime' and may thus have been unknown to those who decided such things. However, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker were taken from the prison and brought before the king. The one was fully restored, suggesting either that his innocence had been proved or that his offence had been a minor one, but the chief baker was hung, possibly after being decapitated. 'Hung' may be a shortened form to cover the whole of what Joseph had forecast.

'His servants.' These would be the highest officials in the land who were 'the slaves of Pharaoh'.

Joseph probably lived in hope for some time but eventually his hopes died. He was not to know that God yet had a purpose in it. It would be another two years before anything further happened, and meanwhile he went on with his life in prison without much hope of release. The darkest hour often comes before the dawn.

Joseph Is Called Before Pharaoh and Interprets His Dreams - He Is Made Vizier (41.1-57)

41.1-4 'And it happened at the end of two full years that Pharaoh dreamed, and behold he stood by the River Nile, and behold there came up out of the Nile seven cows, well-favoured and fat-fleshed, and they fed in the reed grass. And behold seven other cows came up after them out of the Nile, gaunt and thin and bony, and stood by the other cows on the brink of the Nile. And the gaunt, thin and bony cows ate up the seven well-favoured and fat-fleshed. So Pharaoh awoke.'

Pharaoh, the great king of Egypt, was looked on as a god by the people of Egypt. To them he was Horus, son of Osiris the sun god, and on his death would indeed become Osiris, as his successor became Horus. He was relatively unapproachable except by his high officials, and had despotic powers.

We do not know which Pharaoh this was. There are indications which suggest that he must have reigned before the Asiatic Hyksos, the 'rulers of foreign lands', took over the Lower part of Egypt including the Nile delta (c. 1720 BC), ruling there for well over a hundred years. We shall refer to these as we come to them in the narrative. Others, however, feel that the account is best explained by assuming that this Pharaoh was one of the Hyksos rulers, in which case the above comments will not apply. The Hyksos were not worshippers of Ra.

Pharaoh dreams a dream. First seven fat cows come out of the Nile and they eat the reed grass. Then seven thin and bony cows come out of the Nile and they eat the seven fat cows for there is no reed grass. Seven is the number of divine completeness. Such dreams were considered to portend good or evil and he would be somewhat disturbed and determined to discover the meaning of the dream. But before morning came he dreamed a second time.

'The River Nile.' This translates ye'or which is an Egyptian loan word for river and is almost always used, and rarely otherwise, when the River Nile is in mind. We have thus translated 'the Nile'.

41.5-7 'And he slept and dreamed a second time, and behold, seven ears of corn came up on one stalk, fat and good, and behold, seven ears sprung up after them, thin and blasted with the east wind, and the thin ears swallowed up the seven fat and full ears. And Pharaoh woke up and behold it was a dream.'

Pharaoh's second dream is of the growth of good sevenfold corn and then of the growth of thin and wind-blasted corn, and as can happen in dreams the thin corn swallowed up the good corn. Pharaoh clearly found himself very involved in this dream for 'then he woke up and behold, it was a dream.'

41.8 'And it happened in the morning that his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all Egypt's wise men, and Pharaoh told them his dream, but there was no one who could interpret them for Pharaoh.'

Pharaoh was very disturbed by his dream. So he sent for the specialists, the magicians (chartummim - a word borrowed from the Egyptian hry-tp) and wise men. The greatest magicians were the lector priests, learned men who had studied the sacred writings, rituals and spells taught in the House of Life, the temple schools where literature was composed, copied and taught. Thus the parallel between magicians and wise men is apposite. Dreams were considered so important in Egypt that they and their interpretations were gathered into manuals of dream interpretation.

But nothing in their learning or in the manuals could enable them to interpret Pharaoh's

dream. They were, of course, partly hindered by the fact that any unfavourable interpretation might well invoke the Pharaoh's wrath. So Pharaoh went further and sought out the lesser magicians and wise men, but they too could not interpret the dream.

41.9-13 'Then the chief cupbearer spoke to Pharaoh saying, "I do bring to mind my faults this day. Pharaoh was angry with his servants and put me in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, me and the chief baker. And we dreamed a dream in one night, I and he, we dreamed each one a dream having its own interpretation, and there was with us there a young man, a Hebrew, slave to the captain of the guard, and we told him and he interpreted to us our dreams. To each man according to his dream he interpreted. And it happened that as he interpreted to us, so it was. I was restored to my office and he was hanged.'

Somewhat belatedly the chief cupbearer, as he witnesses all that goes on, remembers his own dream and the young man who had interpreted it. We notice that he knows and remembers something of Joseph's background. Joseph had not been some background figure to him, an unknown slave, but someone of whom he was well aware, a relatively important person in his own right. For while the chief cupbearer was an extremely important man, prison is a great leveller. And he wants Pharaoh to know that this was not just some charlatan, but the servant of another man of importance in the royal court. To be a slave was not necessarily looked on as demeaning. Slaves held very important positions, and indeed all men were slaves to Pharaoh.

"I remember my faults this day." A necessary humility before Pharaoh who must not be made to feel blameworthy. Whether he had really committed faults we do not know. He then continues in the third person for the same reason. He must not be thought of as accusing Pharaoh.

So Pharaoh learns of this young man who interprets dreams correctly.

41.14 'Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the prison, and he shaved himself and changed his clothing and came in to Pharaoh's presence.'

Egyptian custom demanded that a man be specially prepared before he was brought before Pharaoh. Access to Pharaoh was limited, and to approach him, for he was seen as a god, was both a unique privilege and a dangerous thing, and required ritual cleanness. It is constantly apparent that the writer takes the Egyptian background in his stride in all sorts of ways (as well as the Canaanite background, as we shall see later) strengthening the view that this is written by someone familiar with the events and their background.

41.15 'And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have dreamed a dream and there is no one who can interpret it. And I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.'

Pharaoh acknowledges that here is a man who is somewhat different from his magicians and wise men. He does not need to consult books and dream manuals. He has the ability to interpret a dream immediately on hearing it.

'When you hear a dream you can interpret it.' Literally 'you hear a dream to interpret it.' This use of 'hear' corresponds to the Egyptian use of sedem - "to hear" meaning "to understand", a meaning which is most clearly shown by its use in the phrase "he hears the speech of Egypt", i.e. "understands the language". This use is found again in Genesis 42:23 where 'heard' means "understood" their language. So Pharaoh is saying 'as you hear you understand'.

41.16 'And Joseph answered Pharaoh saying, "It is not in me. God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace.''

Joseph firmly declares that the gift is not in him. It is God who can reveal the meaning of dreams, and it is He Who will give Pharaoh an answer that will bring him peace of mind, that is, a true interpretation.

41.17-24 'And Pharaoh spoke to Joseph saying, "In my dream, behold I stood on the bank of the Nile, and behold there came out of the Nile seven cows, fat-fleshed and well favoured, and they fed in the reed grass. And behold, seven other cows came up after them, poor and very thin such as I never saw in the land of Egypt for scrawniness, and the thin and scrawny cows ate up the first fat cows. And when they had eaten them up it could not be known that they had eaten them, but they were still thin as at the beginning. So I awoke. And I saw in my dream and behold, seven ears came up on one stalk, full and good. And behold, seven ears, withered, thin and blasted with the east wind sprung up after them, and the thin ears swallowed up the seven good ears, and I told it to the magicians but there was not one who could explain it to me."

Added features to the earlier description are both the vividness and the fact that once the thin cows had eaten the fat cows they did not look any fatter.

Pertinent to the dream are a number of factors. First and foremost, of course, was the fact that the Nile was basically responsible for the fact that Egypt suffered less from famine than other countries. As it swelled over its banks each year it produced fertile soil around it that was the breadbasket of Egypt and on which the cattle flourished. It was only rarely when the river failed that famine came to Egypt. Nevertheless long periods of famine at other times were known and written about there. Moreover the Nile was looked on as a god whose good or evil pleasure could reward or punish the people.

Secondly, there was a goddess Hathor who was worshipped in the form of a cow, and in the tomb of Nefretiri, the beautiful wife of Rameses II, seven cows are to be seen accompanied by the bull god as if they were marching in a solemn procession. In the Book of the Dead seven cows appear in an offering scene, and on the mural reliefs of the Temple of Hatshepsut in Dair-al-Bahri, are to be seen seven cows feeding in a meadow under trees. In another picture, the cow is seen looking out of a grove of papyrus reeds. She was often called 'the mother of Pharaoh'. Thus the seven cows would probably bring to mind for the Egyptians Hathor, the cow goddess, who would also be seen as affecting the situation.

But the essence of the dream for practical purposes, and that was what mattered here, was as outlined by Joseph. For whatever reason the gods and goddesses of Egypt would fail them.

41.25-32 'And Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dream of Pharaoh is one. What God is about to do he has declared to Pharaoh. The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years. The dream is one. And the seven thin and scrawny cows which came up after them are seven years, and also the seven empty ears blasted with the east wind. They will be seven years of famine. That is the thing that I spoke to Pharaoh. What God is about to do he has shown to Pharaoh. Behold there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. And there will arise after them seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt, and the famine will consume the land. And the plenty will not be known in the land by reason of that famine which follows, for it will be very grievous. And in that the dream was doubled to Pharaoh twice it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it about." '

The first essence of Joseph's words is that the great God is over all and brings the Nile and Hathor to His will. What He has established He will do. He is sovereign over all. But far from this leading to inaction it should lead to action. Because His ways are certain men can prepare for them.

The second is in the detail. First seven good, prosperous years when the corn will flourish and the cows grow fat, and then seven disastrous years when there will be no corn worth speaking of and the cattle will starve unless some form of provision is made.

The third is that the repetition of the dream in two forms proves that the thing is certain to happen.

41.33 “Now therefore let Pharaoh look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh do this. And let him appoint overseers over the land and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt in the seven plenteous years. And let them gather all the food of these good years that come and lay up corn under the hand of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. And the food shall be for a store to the land against the seven years of famine which shall be in the land of Egypt, that the land perish not through famine.”

As all are listening to his words Joseph now brings his organisational powers to work. Firstly Pharaoh should appoint one man to take over the whole operation. He will need to be discreet and wise because he will need to obtain people's cooperation and will need to plan wisely.

Then he should appoint overseers throughout the land. The 'him' could be either Pharaoh or the appointed man, but it makes little difference as Joseph hardly expected Pharaoh himself to appoint the overseers directly. But he wants Pharaoh to feel that what is done is done by him.

Then these overseers should gather up all the corn produced in the land of Egypt and lay up a fifth part in silos for the coming bad years. They are to 'take a fifth part' to be put to one side. And they are to do this by gathering all the food of the good years and laying up part under Pharaoh's control for food in the cities. This food will be a store against the seven years of famine.

'Lay up corn.' This is clearly to be understood in terms of what went before, the fifth part. (It is quite clear that under no circumstance would anyone suggest that all the food of the good years should be stored for the future as that would leave the Egyptians without food for the present). In Egypt the storing of grain in public silos by the government was quite customary, and such silos have been discovered, but what is required here is the same measure on a vast scale. One inscription from c 100 BC recalls a seven year famine in the reign of Zoser, a thousand years before the time of Joseph, and at another time one civic authority is quoted as saying, “when famine came for many years I gave grain to my town in each famine” This on a larger scale was what would now be required. Various other Egyptian writings speak of famines and at least two officials, proclaiming their good deeds on the walls of their tombs, tell of distributing food to the hungry 'in each year of want'.

41.37 'And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants.'

Pharaoh consults with his high officials and they agree that the interpretation seems sound and that Joseph's plan is good.

41.38 'And Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the spirit of God?’

Pharaoh has been impressed and accepts that the interpretation has come from 'God' (Joseph's God) through Joseph. He recognises that the spirit of this God, Who is able to interpret when all others have failed, must be working through him. What better man then to take charge of operations.

41.39 'And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Inasmuch as God has shown you all this there is none so

discreet and wise as you. You shall be over my house and my people shall be ruled in accordance with your word. Only in the throne will I be greater than you.' '

Egypt had many gods, and they were aware that there were gods of other nations. There is then no reason why Pharaoh should not acknowledge that this great God Who has revealed the significance of his dream has special powers which can help Joseph.

'You shall be over my house.' The office of 'Lord of Pharaoh's house' was a recognised and very important one in Egypt. It represented wide authority and power for 'Pharaoh's house' was the land and people of Egypt.

'My people shall be ruled according to your word (literally 'mouth').' He would have absolute authority under Pharaoh. Whatever he decreed would be done. He would be Pharaoh's mouth.

'According to your mouth.' The background to these words is clearly Egyptian. There "mouth" (ra) was used metaphorically for a representative of Pharaoh. The office of a "mouth" was so important that it was held by the highest State dignitaries. The titles "mouth" and "chief mouth" were used in relation to people such as chief superintendents and overseers of public works who acted as intermediaries between the Pharaoh and the Government officials. The concept of "mouth" or "chief mouth" involved a confidential and exalted position at court, ranking immediately after the king. They were mouths to a god.

'Only in the throne will I be greater than you.' This office can only be that of Vizier, the highest office in the land. He alone held such authority and power as the representative of the king himself. Without his permission no one could approach Pharaoh and all officials were responsible to him.

Others have seen him as the Superintendent of the Granaries, another high Egyptian post. In fact it is probable that he combines the two positions.

41.40-43 'And Pharaoh said, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." And Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand, and put it on Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck, and he made him to ride in the second chariot that he had, and they cried before him "Look out" ('avrek), and he set him over all the land of Egypt.'

This is the appointment ceremony. It may have taken place immediately or it may have taken place later. The fact that the signet ring is being worn by Pharaoh may indicate that the office of Vizier was at present vacant, for the Vizier would need to have the signet ring so that he could seal his decrees as from Pharaoh. Now Joseph has that authority.

The arraying with fine linen and the conferring of a golden chain are also typical of Egyptian appointments to office. The whole scene is clearly based on intimate knowledge of Egyptian ceremonies.

'And he made him ride in the second chariot that he had.' The chariot as a general weapon of warfare was, along with the general use of horses, introduced by the Hyksos, and this has caused some to see this as indication that this was during their rule. But the impression given is that the chariot was a rare thing here, 'the second chariot that he had', and a sign of great importance, which would not be so under the Hyksos. Given the amount of trade with other nations possession of a few ceremonial chariots must be seen as a real possibility. Certainly there is limited evidence that horses were known in Egypt before the Hyksos for remains of horses just before the Hyksos period have been discovered near Wadi Halfa.

'And they cried before him " 'avrek ". This is probably an Egyptian loan word. Its meaning is uncertain. It could mean 'look out' (Egyptian) or possibly 'to your knees' (Hebrew). The former seems more likely.

'And he set him over all the land of Egypt.' This may be emphasising that he is set over both Upper and Lower Egypt, for Egypt was split into two parts symbolised in the twofold crown of the Pharaoh. The Hebrew for Egypt is 'mizraim' and this has been argued to be a plural stressing the duality of Egypt. But its meaning is disputed. If so it cannot be under the Hyksos for they only ruled over Lower Egypt.

41.44-45a 'And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh and without you no man will lift up his hand or his foot in all the land of Egypt.' And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphenath-paneah, and he gave him to wife Asenath, daughter of the priest of On.'

'I am Pharaoh.' Stressing the total authority of the one who has appointed Joseph. The succeeding words stress in turn Joseph's total power and authority. All in Egypt are responsible to him. This can really only mean that he is the Grand Vizier.

'Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphenath-paneah.' Joseph is to be thoroughly Egyptianised. The giving of the new name signifies his new status and situation. Interestingly the name Zaphenath-paneah has actually been discovered on an inscription of later date designating the priestly leader of the Sed festival, although not relating to Joseph. It could mean 'he who is called 'Ip'ankh', the latter being a common name in Egypt. Other possible alternatives have been offered such as 'head of the sacred college', 'revealer of secrets' or 'sustainer of life', but none have received general acceptance.

'Asenath, daughter of the priest of On.' The name Asenath is good Egyptian. It possibly means 'she belongs to (the goddess) Neit' or 'she belongs to father'. Her position as daughter of the priest of On (or Heliopolis), a leading priest (possibly even the high priest) of the sun god Re, would enhance Joseph's status and reputation. But he would have no choice in the matter. It was by the order of Pharaoh. His later statement that he was appointed 'father to Pharaoh' (45.8) (equivalent of 'father to the gods') demonstrates that he was also given priestly rank.

The writer was quite clear as to the hierarchic significance of such a union, and of the high position occupied by the priests of On (Egyptian 'Iwnw). To the Egyptians On was a holy city par excellence. It was the great centre of the most powerful of cosmic gods, namely of Re and Atum, and was occupied by a numerically large and important body of priests who were known for their wealth. The marriage of Joseph to the daughter of the priest of On, therefore, signified the reception of the foreigner into the highest priestly caste. His elevation to the rank of "father", too, meant that he was included among the most eminent sacerdotal dignitaries of ancient Egypt. How far he had actually to participate in the worship we do not know but he would undoubtedly be present at the great ceremonies. But, like Naaman later, he worshipped Yahweh while he stood in the house of Re (2 Kings 5.18).

All these changes are unlikely to have taken place under the Hyksos. They would have no reason to give him an Egyptian name, and they supported the worship of Amun, not Re, seeking to destroy the power of the priests and undermine the worship of the sun god. They would not thus tie someone they wished to honour to such connections.

41.45b 'And Joseph went out over the land of Egypt.'

Having been appointed for such a vital task it was necessary for him to make himself acquainted with the situation throughout Egypt. Large silos would have to be built in many

cities and arrangements made for the appointment of the overseers who would control the collection of all the produce and arrange for the storage of the one fifth and the distribution of the remainder.

41.46 'And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh and went throughout all the length of Egypt.'

Joseph had thus been in servitude and then in prison for about twelve years (37.2). The thirty years may be a round number signifying that he had come to a point of completeness and was of full age for the task facing him (three intensified), but is probably approximately correct.

'Went out from the presence of Pharaoh.' He not only left Pharaoh but carried with him his authority.

'Went throughout all the land of Egypt.' This repetition of verse 45b is typical of ancient literature which loved repetition for the sake of the hearers.

41.47-49 'And in the seven plenteous years the earth brought forth by handfuls, and he gathered up all the food of the seven years which was in the land of Egypt and laid up the food in the cities, the food of the field which was round about every city laid he up in the same. And Joseph laid up corn as the sand of the sea, very much, until he left numbering for it was without number.'

What he had dreamed began to happen. There were seven years when the corn flourished, and he began to lay up food in each city from round about that city, and of this one fifth would be stored away permanently to prepare for the seven bad years to come. And so flourishing was the harvest that after a time they began to stop keeping records because there was too much to record.

41.50-52 'And to Joseph were born two sons before the year of famine came, which Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him. And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh, for he said, "God has made me forget all my labour and all my father's house." And the name of the second he called Ephraim, "for God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction."'

Not only was the land fruitful, but Joseph and his wife were fruitful as well, and they had two sons 'before the year of famine came'.

'Potiphera', a similar name to Potiphar. They were probably two renderings of the same not uncommon Egyptian name.

'Manasseh.' This means 'making to forget'. This was because the joy of having a firstborn son, added to the privileged position he now enjoyed, enabled him to forget what had gone before.

'All my father's house.' He has also been able to forget the treatment at the hands of his brothers. But this does not mean that he totally forgot his home for, as we discover later, he had fond memories of his father and of Benjamin.

'Ephraim.' From the root 'to be fruitful'. This demonstrated his joy in the fruitfulness of the land and in his own fruitfulness.

41.53 'And the seven years of plenty that were in Egypt came to an end, and the seven years of famine began to come in the way that Joseph had said, and there was famine in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. And when all the land of Egypt was becoming hungry

the people cried to Pharaoh for bread and Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph. Do what he says to you." And the famine was over the face of the whole earth, and Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians, and the famine was severe in the land of Egypt, and all countries came to Egypt, to Joseph, to buy corn because the famine was severe in all the earth.'

As predicted seven years of plenty passed and the particularly severe famine eventually came, and it was clearly very widespread. But everything was ready. The storehouses were opened and the people were able to buy corn to meet their needs, and many in the surrounding area, hearing there was corn in Egypt, came too to buy corn.

'There was famine in all lands.' 'The famine was over the face of the whole earth'. 'All countries came to Egypt to buy corn.' 'The famine was severe in all the earth.' Notice the stress on 'all'. As far as their knowledge reached there was severe famine. But these universal sayings are not to be taken literally. They speak of the world from Egypt's point of view. As far as Egypt was cognisant there was extended famine, and people and requests for corn seemed to come from everywhere. This was the meaning of the words to the Egyptians who did not have a concept of the whole earth as we know it. But Canaan, which was close by and which was totally dependent on rain, would suffer grievously.

'Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians.' That is, through orders to his officials throughout the land (probably sealed by Joseph, his vizier).

The First Visit of the Brothers to Egypt to Buy Corn (42.1-38).

42.1-4 'Now Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt, and Jacob said to his sons, "Why do you look one on another?" And he said, "Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt. Get yourselves down there and buy for us from there, that we might live and not die." And Joseph's ten brothers went down to buy corn from Egypt, but Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he said "In case mischief befalls him." '

At this stage, of course, they did not know that there were years of famine to come. But things were clearly bad. The rain had not come and their stores of corn were getting low and there was little prospect of renewing it locally, for everyone was suffering in the same way. But then came the news that Egypt had a sufficiency of corn and was willing to sell it to foreigners.

Through the centuries Egypt, with its usually unfailling water source in the Nile, was famed for its agricultural prosperity, and would regularly welcome Canaanites who would come in times of famine, and they would provide for them in return for reward. They were regularly welcomed into the areas across the borders, where they were allowed to stay until the situation improved and they could return to their own place. On one ancient grave relief 'Asiatics who did not know from what they would live' are depicted as bowing before the general Haremhab (c1330 BC).

So he had no hesitation in sending his sons to buy corn there. But he refused to let Benjamin go because he still remembered what had (in his own mind) happened to Joseph.

42.5 'And the sons of Israel came to buy among those who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.'

As they travelled to Egypt they found themselves in company with many travelling the same route, for all had been hit by the famine. They would probably have a number of servants with them for much corn would be needed. Others would tend what remained of the once abundant flocks and herds. But the fact that they had 'money' (silver and gold - there were no coins in

those days) demonstrated that they were not yet poor.

'The sons of Israel.' The narrative switches easily between the two names Jacob and Israel. While the use of two names for the same person in one narrative was not unusual it is probable that the writer wants to make sure that we connect these events both with the patriarchs of the past and with the future Israel. It is a fulfilling of the covenant promises and a preparation for the future.

42.6 'And Joseph was the governor over the land, he it was who sold to all the people of the land, and Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves to him with their faces to the earth.'

It is probable that Joseph had arranged things in such a way that all Canaanites coming to buy food had to approach him. He would not of course be actually selling the food but would be on a seat of honour and approached by those who came, who would abase themselves to him before passing on to those who actually handled the transactions.

42.7 'And Joseph saw his brothers, and he knew them, but he made himself a stranger to them and spoke harshly to them. And he said to them, "From where have you come?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan to buy food."

When Joseph saw his brothers he knew them immediately, but he did not make himself known. Rather he signalled to his underlings to bring them forward so that he could speak with them. They were probably quite apprehensive at being selected out to speak to this great Egyptian overlord, and were even more so when he addressed them harshly. They must have wondered why they should be picked out. All they could do was answer his questions and hope for the best.

42.8 'And Joseph knew his brothers but they did not know him.'

There was no way in which they would have recognised him. He was dressed in the dignity of his office, with his hair and sumptuous clothing in the Egyptian style, and he was now a mature man changed by the course of years and what he had been forced to go through. Moreover he spoke to them through interpreters and they would not dare to look at him closely but would do so with bowed heads.

42.9 'And Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed about them and said to them, "You are spies. You have come to see the nakedness of the land."

He had lessons which he wished to teach them. He remembered the dreams of them bowing down to him and was determined they would do it in full measure, for as they spoke with him through the interpreters they would constantly abase themselves to him. He accuses them of being spies come to spy out conditions in the land so as to report back to prospective invaders. The words must have brought a chill to their hearts. The Egyptians could be very severe on their enemies and this man clearly had the power of life and death.

42.10-12 'And they said to him, "No, my lord. It is to buy food that your servants have come. We are all sons of one man. We are true men. Your servants are no spies." And he said to them, "No, but to see the nakedness of the land you have come."

They desperately seek to assert their innocence and integrity, but to no avail. The great man does not believe them and again accuses them through the interpreters of coming to find out the weaknesses of the land. So with fear in their hearts they try again.

42.13 'And they said, "We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land

of Canaan. And behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not.”

They try to present a full picture of themselves so as to allay suspicion. They still think of their family in terms of twelve sons a sign that they have not just been able to dismiss Joseph from their minds. This would suggest a sense of guilt and regret.

42.14-16 ‘And Joseph said to them, “It is as I said to you, you are spies. You will prove yourselves in this way. By the life of Pharaoh you shall not go forth from here unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of your number and let him fetch your brother, and you shall be put in custody so that your words may be proved, whether there is truth in you. Or else by the life of Pharaoh you are surely spies.” ’

Joseph intends that just as he went into slavery and then into custody they too will experience the same. He wants them to taste something of what he had known to see how they will come out of it. Thus he proposes that one should go and return with this supposed youngest son while the remainder are held in custody.

‘You shall be put in custody.’ Literally, ‘you shall be bound’. But in chapter 40 ‘being bound’ is mentioned frequently where men clearly had some freedom (verses 3, 4, 5 compare 39.20). Therefore it may or may not include being restricted with ropes.

To swear by the life of Pharaoh was a solemn oath for the life of Pharaoh was the life of a god. Perhaps he is ensuring that they realise he is a true Egyptian.

42.17 ‘And he put them all together into custody for three days.’

This may well have been in the same prison where he himself had been held. Certainly it would give them a taste of the terror he had known. He felt that it was something that they should know, and they were not immature young men like he had been.

42.18 ‘And the third day Joseph said to them, “Do this, and live, for I fear God. If you are true men let one of your brothers be put in custody in your prison house, but you go and carry corn for the famine of your houses, and bring your youngest brother to me. So shall your words be proved right and you will not die.” And they did so.’

On the third day they are brought out of the prison and led before the great Egyptian official. The news was not as bad as they had feared. One brother was to be retained as a hostage, the others would be allowed to return home. But they must return with Benjamin to prove the truth of their words. Then all would live.

‘On the third day.’ A relatively short time. It was two nights and one day and two part days, regularly called ‘three days’ (42.17) and even at times ‘three days and three nights’.

‘Do this and live.’ He is offering them a chance to save their lives. Thus they realise that the possibility of their execution had been very close.

‘For I fear God.’ They would not suspect the use of ‘God’ (elohim) for they would consider it the work of the interpreter in explaining the meaning of Joseph’s words.

‘Your prison house.’ Hinting that it might now have been their permanent abode until their execution.

‘For the famine of your houses.’ There were not just the ten but their households to feed, and this would involve much corn.

'And they did so.' meaning **'they did as they were told'**. A way of saying that they began to make preparation for departure. They do not yet go for the following words occur in the presence of Joseph.

42.21-22 'And they said to one another, "We are truly guilty in respect of our brother, for we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us and we would not listen. This is why this distress has come on us." And Reuben answered them saying, "Did I not speak to you saying, 'Do not sin against the child', but you would not listen? See, that is why his blood is now required of us."'

This living nightmare that is happening to them brings to their minds the day when their younger brother had pleaded for his life and they had refused to listen. At least it demonstrates that they continually carried it on their consciences. Now they realise that judgment for what they had done is coming on them. And Reuben bitterly forces it home. 'I warned you,' he says. 'And now his blood is being required of us.' They all thought that by now Joseph was dead.

42.23 'And they did not know that Joseph understood them for there was an interpreter between them.'

Had it not been for this twist in the story we would never have known that Joseph had deliberately been speaking through an interpreter. This reminds us that behind these homely stories is more detail than we are aware of. The ancients were not so much interested in background detail as in the pith of the story. They went to the centre of things and ignored the detail. We have seen this constantly in the stories of the patriarchs.

42.24 'And he turned himself away from them and wept, and he returned to them and spoke to them and took Simeon from among them and bound him before their eyes.'

Joseph overhears what they are saying and it brings tears to his eyes. Whether he actually goes out prior to speaking to them again through the interpreter we are not specifically told. Then he acts promptly. Simeon is placed in custody ('bound') and they are made to watch. Whether 'bound' includes being tied up with ropes we do not know, although as Joseph wanted to make the greatest possible impression it is quite possible.

42.25-26 'Then Joseph commanded that their vessels be filled with corn, and to restore every man's silver into his sack, and to give them provision for the way, and this was done to them. And they loaded their asses with their corn and went on their way.'

Joseph now makes sure they are well provided for. Abundance of corn, provisions for the journey and their silver returned, hidden in their sacks.

'Their vessels.' This must refer to their sacks but usually means a vessel. It may, however, signify that anything that could carry corn was filled.

42.27 'And as one of them opened his sack to give his ass provender in the lodging place he saw his silver and behold, it was in the mouth of his sack.'

It is stressed that at this stage only one of them finds the silver. It is probable that they would all feed their asses from the one opened sack and they would not dream for one moment that this would be true for them all. It had every sign of being a plant so that they could be accused of theft. There were probably also a number of servants who also bore sacks on their asses, and they would have no silver in them. Jacob had a large household to feed with many retainers.

42.28 'And he said to his brothers, "My silver has been handed back, and see, it is in my sack."

And their heart failed them and they turned to one another trembling, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?"

The sight of the silver terrifies them and they were filled with fear. This was the worst possible thing that could have happened. It had looked as though things might be resolved reasonably satisfactorily and now this. It was clear things were still as bad as ever. They were clearly marked down as victims.

42.29-34 'And they came to Jacob their father to the land of Canaan, and told him all that had befallen them, saying, "The Man, the lord of the land, spoke roughly to us and took us for spies of the country. And we said to him, 'We are true men, we are no spies. We are twelve brothers, sons of our father. One is not, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan.' And the Man, the lord of the land, said to us, 'By this I will know that you are true men. Leave one of your brothers with me and take corn for the famine of your houses and go your way. And bring your youngest brother to me. Then I will know that you are no spies, but that you are true men. Then I will set your brother free and you shall trade in the land'."'

Jacob has no doubt noted the absence of Simeon and he listens with failing heart to the story unfolded. His problem will be what to do next.

'The Man.' This is an unusual use when used before a further description. It has been suggested from other evidence that the second in command in Egypt was so called in contrast with Pharaoh 'the god' (verses 29 and 33 here and compare 43.3, 5, 6, 7, 11,14 and especially 44.26 when we might expect 'the lord' or something similar).

42.35 'And it happened as they emptied their sacks that, behold, every man's bundle of silver was in his sack. And when they and their father saw the bundles of silver they were afraid.'

All the other sacks are now opened as they store the corn, and the remaining silver is found. Their silver has been returned. This could only mean one thing. Their status as traders was rejected. They were marked for destruction.

42.36 'And Jacob their father said to them, "You have bereaved me of my children. Joseph is not, and Simeon is not. And you would take Benjamin away. All these things have come on me."'

To Jacob this is the end of hope for Simeon. Now he has lost two sons. And yet they expect to be able to take Benjamin as well! 'All these things have come on me.' Tragedy has piled up on tragedy as a great burden to be borne and it is all too much for him.

42.37 'And Reuben spoke to his father, saying, "You may kill my two sons if I do not bring him to you. Hand him over to me and I will bring him back to you again."'

Reuben is concerned to go straight back to obtain Simeon's release. He reveals here something very admirable in his character. Things may look foreboding but he is prepared himself to take the risk in order to obtain, if at all possible, his brother's release, and he is prepared to die in the attempt. But he realises how his father is feeling. So he uses the strongest argument he can. If he does not bring Benjamin back then his father can kill his two sons. He will then fully share in the sufferings of his bereaved father. But his father will have none of it.

42.38 'And he said, "My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead and he alone is left. If mischief befalls him in the way in which you go, then you will bring my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave,"'

His father refuses the offer. His words reveal how much Rachel had meant to him. She had had only two natural born sons. One is dead. He cannot bear to lose the other. Under no circumstances will he let Benjamin go. Benjamin is all of Rachel he has left. Thus is Simeon left to his fate. But if we think of blaming Jacob we must remember that he has every cause for thinking that Simeon's fate has already been sealed as is witnessed by the return of the silver. It is clear the Egyptian lord had evil intent towards them and so as far as he is concerned Simeon is now dead as well. And this is how things would have remained had it not been that the famine went on and on and forced the issue.

'My grey hairs in sorrow to Sheol.' Men desired to full a full life and die content. To die in this way was seen as a tragedy, they would surely not want him to die in unrest?

The Second Visit of the Brothers - Joseph Makes Himself Known (43.1 - 45.28)

The Brothers Again Meet the Egyptian Vizier (43.1-34)

43.1-2 'And the famine was sore in the land. And it happened that when they had eaten up the corn which they had brought out of Egypt their father said to them, "Go again. Buy us a little food."'

The famine continued and grew worse. No crops grew, those water holes which had survived the first onslaught now dried up, the cattle and sheep grew thin and scrawny. And the corn store became emptier and emptier. Meanwhile Simeon was mourned as Joseph had been for they knew they would see him no more. Jacob's intransigence had seen to that.

At length it had to be accepted that there would be no possibility of even the most meagre of harvests and as the corn store became depleted Jacob took the only possible course. He had no choice. He asked his sons once more to take silver to Egypt to buy corn. But he had not met the proud and stern Vizier of Egypt, and his sons had, and a fierce argument ensues.

43.3-5 'And Judah spoke to him, saying, "The Man did solemnly declare to us, saying, 'You shall not see my face except your brother be with you.' If you will send our brother with us we will go down and buy you food. But if you will not send him we will not go down, for the Man said to us, 'You shall not see my face except your brother be with you.'"'

Judah speaks up for his brothers. It is all right for Jacob, he does not have to face the Man. But they know what he is like and the terror he induces. And they know what he is likely to do with them if they return without Benjamin. There are no circumstances in which they will go unless Benjamin goes with them. They do not want to share Simeon's fate.

The fact that Simeon is not mentioned is deliberate on the part of the writer. He wants his readers to recognise that as far as the family is concerned Simeon's fate is now irrelevant. He has previously been sacrificed to Jacob's obstinacy and obsession with his youngest son.

Reuben takes no part in all this. His father had previously rejected his offer and he has given up. Indeed something appears to have happened to him. Trying circumstances bring leaders to the fore and the reaction to the famine seems to have brought Judah into a position of leadership. He may well have proved the most resilient when everyone else was despairing. Everyone now looks to him.

'See his face.' They will not be able to approach the great man but will instead be arrested.

43.6-7 'And Israel said, "Why did you treat me so badly as to tell the Man whether you had yet a brother?" And they said, "The Man asked us firmly (literally - 'asked us asking') about

ourselves and about our relatives, saying, 'Is your father yet alive? Have you a brother?' And we told him according to the tenor of these words. Could we possibly have known that he would say, 'Bring your brother down'?"

In his grief and fear Jacob is being quite unreasonable. They had had no reason to withhold the information and they knew that to have given even a hint of deceit would have been their downfall. The only significance they had seen in the close questioning was the suspicion that they were spies.

'They said' - now the other brothers are joining in. They are all agreed that they cannot face the Man without having Benjamin with them. They would immediately be killed as spies.

43.8-10 'And Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. I will be surety for him. At my hand you will require him. If I do not bring him to you and set him before you I will have sinned against you for ever. For unless we had lingered surely we would now have returned a second time" '

Judah realises how difficult it is for his father and he offers himself as the guarantee of Benjamin's return. It is clear that the position is desperate. Unless they do go only death awaits them and their families.

'The lad.' Benjamin is probably about thirty, but in the eyes of his far older brothers he is still 'a lad', the baby of the family.

'I will have sinned against you for ever.' Clearly a powerful oath basically taking all guilt on himself with all that that would mean for his future.

'Unless we had lingered - .' They have already waited longer than they should have done because of Jacob's obstinacy. By now their case was so desperate that they should have been to Egypt and back again with further corn. The non-mention of Simeon may suggest that they have now practically given up hope for him, or alternately the certainty that his fate will not affect his father's decision one way or another. In this incident Simeon is irrelevant. Jacob does not come well out of it. Meanwhile Simeon has been lingering and languishing in an Egyptian prison.

43.11 'And their father Israel said to them, "If it is so now, do it. Take of the choice fruits of the land in your vessels, and carry the Man down a present, a little balm and a little honey, spicery and myrrh, nuts and almonds. And take double the amount of silver in your hand, and carry again in your hand the silver that was returned in the mouth of your sacks. Perhaps it was an oversight. Take also your brother and arise, go again to the Man, and El Shaddai (God Almighty) give you mercy before the Man that he may release to you your other brother and Benjamin. And if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." '

'If it is so, now do it.' We would say, 'if it must be so'. Jacob is very reluctant but accepts the inevitable. The prospect of starvation leaves them with no alternative. He suggests they take with them a gift. This was a normal courtesy when approaching a high official and a sign of good breeding.

'The choice fruits (literally 'strength') of the land.' These have not been quite so badly affected by the famine. They grow on bushes and trees which are less susceptible. The honey is wild bees' honey which was used then instead of sugar (see Ezekiel 27.17).

They must also take double the silver so as to replace that which was sent back as it must

surely have been an oversight. That is all they can hope. The alternative would leave them with no hope anyway.

'El Shaddai give you mercy before the man -.' He prays that the One Who promised they would become a company of nations protect them before the high official of that great nation Egypt.

The meaning of 'El Shaddai' is not yet apparent to us but the LXX translates it as 'the Almighty'. Whenever God is mentioned under the name of El Shaddai it is in relation to many nations, not just to the family tribe. To Abraham in chapter 17 'you shall be the father of a multitude of nations (hamon goyim)', and Ishmael is a part of that covenant, to Isaac as he blesses Jacob in 28.3 'that you may be a company of peoples' (liqhal 'amim), to Jacob at Bethel in 35.11 'a nation and a company of nations (uqhal goyim) shall be of you', and again to Jacob in 48.4 reference is made to 'a company of peoples' (liqhal 'amim). It is in recognition of this fact that Jacob now speaks of El Shaddai when he sends his sons back to Egypt to obtain the release of Simeon and entrusts them with Benjamin (43.14). It is Yahweh as El Shaddai, the sovereign God over the whole world, who has the power to prevail over the great governor of Egypt. This may also be why Isaac used this title of Yahweh when he sent his son into a foreign land.

'That he may release to you your other brother and Benjamin.' How little the other brothers mean to him compared with Benjamin is made clear here. He does not even mention Simeon's name. His release is of secondary importance. What matters is that Benjamin is not held. We can see now why the brothers had not mentioned the release of Simeon as an argument. They knew their father's thoughts.

'And if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.' A final note of resignation. His hand has been forced by the famine. He may even lose all his children but he can do nothing about it. The choice is to risk that or the death for all.

43.15 'And the men took that present, and they took double silver in their hand, and Benjamin, and rose up and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph.'

They took what was necessary, the present, the double silver --- and Benjamin, the one whose value had delayed things for so long. The long and fearful journey is passed over in a sentence. The tension, the fears, the apprehension, and then the arrival. But at least they were brought into the Man's presence and that was something.

43.16-18 'And when Joseph saw Benjamin with them he said to the steward of his house, "Bring the men into the house, and kill and make ready, for the men will dine with me at noon." And the men were afraid because they were brought into Joseph's house, and they said, "We have been brought in because of the silver that was returned in our sacks the first time, that he may seek occasion against us and fall on us and take us for bondmen, and our asses."'

When Joseph sees Benjamin his heart is full and he tells his steward that he will eat with the men at noon and that he must prepare a feast. His steward is, of course, an important person in his own right. Meanwhile Joseph must continue 'overseeing' the sale of the corn.

But when they are brought to his splendid house, well guarded by Egyptian soldiers and magnificent beyond their dreams, they are fearful as to what it means. Their minds return to the silver that had mysteriously appeared in their sacks and they remember how they had thought it was a plant. Now they are sure of it. It has been planted on them so that an excuse can be found to enslave them and take their possessions.

'Fall on us.' They have a vision of the Egyptian guards suddenly pouncing on them and carrying them off to prison.

43.19 **'And they came near to the steward of Joseph's house and they spoke to him at the door of the house.'**

Coming up to the great house they are filled with fear and as they approach the door they catch up with the steward and try to speak up on their own behalf, probably through an interpreter.

43.20-22 **'And said, "Oh my lord. We did indeed come down at the first time to buy food, and it happened that as we came to the lodging place that we opened our sacks and behold every man's silver was in the mouth of his sack, our silver in full weight. And we have brought it again in our hand. And we have brought other silver down in our hand to buy food. We do not know who put the money in our sacks."'**

The brothers are trying to summarise the story as quickly as possible before they are brought into the house, thus they have to abbreviate what happened. They remember vividly the moment that they first found the silver in one of the sacks and telescope what happened into a few scared, hurried words. Thus the finding of the silver in all the sacks is described as happening at the same time, although we know from earlier that that happened later when they arrived home. It is the primary point that they want to get home. They found the silver in their sacks. They have only a few moments, so detail is of secondary importance. Then they assure him earnestly that they have brought it back with other silver for new purchases.

43.23 **'And he said, "Peace be to you. Don't be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks. I had your money."'** And he brought Simeon out to them.'

The reply suggests that the steward has been well coached by Joseph. He has been told exactly what to say when the obvious questions come up.

'Peace be to you.' **'Shalom'** - a standard greeting put in Hebrew form, possibly by the interpreter, although it may be that Joseph's steward was familiar with their language and thought forms, being chosen by Joseph for that very reason.

'Your God and the God of your father.' Let them be assured that it is their God Who has provided for them. **'The God of your father'** was also the way in which Laban described Jacob's God (31.29). It is a way of being courteous when details of Who the God is are not well known. Let them be assured that their own tribal God is looking after them.

'Has given you treasure.' He is suggesting that he does not know what was exactly involved in the **'treasure'** they found. It was not the silver they had paid over, for he had received that.

'And he brought Simeon out.' The steward had Simeon waiting to greet his brothers just inside the gate, and he is brought out to welcome the brothers. What relief must have flooded their souls when they saw him alive and well. Things were definitely beginning to look up.

43.24-25 **'And the man brought the men into Joseph's house and gave them water, and they washed their feet. And he gave their asses provender. And they made ready the present for when Joseph came at noon, for they learned that they would eat bread there.'**

Suddenly, to their bewilderment, everything has changed. They are being treated as welcome guests. Water is provided for them to wash their feet. (The steward no doubt **'brings'** it through servants). Their tired and thirsty asses are taken and well looked after. They are told

that they would be eating with the great lord. This especially must have given them strength, for to eat with someone was a sign of peace. With some hopes that things might not be so bad after all they get their present ready for when the great lord arrives.

43.26 'And when Joseph came home they brought him the present which was in their hand into the house and bowed themselves down to him to the earth.'

On Joseph's arrival they bring their present and present it, bowing down to the ground, for they are still greatly in awe of him and aware that the slightest failure to show him honour could change the situation against them. So again are Joseph's dreams fulfilled.

43.27 'And he asked them of their welfare, and said, "Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?"'

The question, put through an interpreter, would be recognised as simply a formal courtesy. They could not know with what eagerness Joseph awaited their reply. It has now been some long time since he has seen them.

43.28 'And they said, "Your servant, our father, is well, he is still alive." And they bowed the head and made obeisance.'

The writer is stressing the fulfilment of the dreams. As they give a positive but deferential reply they again make full obeisance.

43.29 'And he lifted up his eyes and saw Benjamin his brother, his mother's son, and said, "Is this your youngest brother of whom you spoke to me?" And he said, "God be gracious to you, my son."

The writer is deliberately prolonging the welcome. He wants us to feel what Joseph felt. He is seeing his own blood brother after so long a time. And he gives him his blessing. The words come through an interpreter so that they are not aware of which god he refers to. Little do they realise that it is the God Whom they too worship.

'My son.' An indication of friendship from a great lord to a young man.

But in the end it is all too much for Joseph. As lord of Egypt he cannot give way to his feelings in front of his servants and he goes aside into a private room to compose himself.

43.30-31 'And Joseph acted hurriedly, for his heart was filled with longing for his brother, and he wanted somewhere to weep, and he entered his private room and wept there. And he washed his face, and came out, and he restrained himself and said, "Serve the food."'

The brothers are totally unaware of his feelings. They see him leave for a while and little do they realise that he has gone to weep. But he releases his feelings in his own private apartments and then hides the evidence, washing his face and composing himself. Then he comes out and commands that the meal be served.

43.32 'And they set on for him by himself, and for them by themselves, and for the Egyptians who ate with them by themselves, because the Egyptians are not allowed to eat bread with Hebrews, for that is an abomination to them.'

Joseph, as vizier and lord of Egypt eats at his own table. None may share with him for they are not of sufficient rank. The Egyptians who have been invited also sit at their own table. It would be ceremonially improper for them to mix with 'foreigners'. Egyptians looked down on non-

Egyptians, especially until they could speak Egyptian. They looked on them as not really human. And the brothers sat at their own table, separate from both.

43.33 'And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright, and the youngest according to his youth. And the men marvelled with one another.'

They were no doubt informed that they must follow protocol and sit in order of seniority, the firstborn probably being nearest to the great lord's table.

'The men marvelled with one another.' The circumstances are so different from what they had been anticipating that they can only be filled with wonder. This great show of favour by the vizier has astonished them. Little are they aware of the real reason for it.

43.34 'And he took and sent portions to them from before him. But Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. And they drank and were merry with him.'

To receive a portion from the great lord's table was a sign of favour and a great privilege. And Benjamin received five times more than the others, a sign of special favour. The 'five times' is significant. Five was the Egyptian number of completeness.

'And they drank and were merry (drank largely) with him.' Their fears are now forgotten. They drink merrily and without restraint. All appears to be well.

The Broken Journey - Seeming Catastrophe - The Final Test (44.1 - 34)

44.1-2 'And he commanded the steward of his house saying, "Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put every man's silver in his sack's mouth, and put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the youngest one's sack, and his corn silver." And he did what Joseph had said.'

The plot thickens. It is clear that Joseph now aims to test his brothers with the steward's connivance, and it is already clear from 43.23 that the steward is aware of much of what is going on. Thus in accordance with instructions he provides full sacks of food which include their silver returned and Joseph's cup in Benjamin's sack.

44.3 'As soon as the morning was light the men were sent away, they and their asses.'

With what joy the brothers went on their way. Simeon had been restored, their sacks were full and Benjamin was safe. All was well. And what a story they had to tell of their feasting in the house of the Egyptian Vizier himself. But then came the further twist.

44.4-6 'And when they had left the city and were as yet no great distance Joseph said to his steward, "Up, follow after the men, and when you overtake them say to them, "Why have you rewarded evil for good? Is not this cup the one in which my lord drinks, and by which indeed he divines? You have done evil in so doing." And he overtook them and spoke to them these words.'

Joseph now sends his steward after the brothers to call them to task because of the cup. It is stressed that the cup is a special one, for it not only has a use for drinking but it is also his divining cup. It is thus a sacred object and the penalty for such a theft is death (compare 31.30-32). Whether Joseph actually used the cup for this purpose we do not know, but every great man in Egypt would have his divining cup. The divining would be carried out by specialists. Divining with a cup was a common practise in the ancient world. Small objects were placed in the cup and the future was deduced by the effect produced on the liquid.

44.7-9 'And they said to him, "Why does my lord speak such words as this? God forbid that your servants should do such a thing. Look, the silver which we found in the mouths of our sacks we brought again to you from the land of Canaan. How then would we steal out of your lord's house silver or gold? With whoever of your servants it be found, let him die and we also will be my lord's bondmen.'

The brothers are appalled and indignant at his accusation. They are confident that they have proved their honesty. Such an idea is inconceivable. They are not thieves. And equally confidently they declare that they are ready for the full penalty to be applied if it be true, death for the perpetrator and slavery for themselves.

44.10 'And he said, "Let it now be as you have said. He with whom it is found shall be my bondman, and you shall be blameless.'

'As you have said.' Not in the detail but in the fact of punishment. The servant lessens the sentence. Joseph does not want to drive his brothers too far. The guilty man will become a bondman and the rest will be seen as blameless and can go free. This was not in accordance with ancient practise which demanded collective responsibility. Those who consorted with a guilty man were themselves seen as guilty, as the brothers had themselves admitted.

44.11-12 'Then they acted hurriedly and every man took his sack to the ground, and every man opened his sack. And he searched and began at the eldest and finished at the youngest, and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack.'

The search is described. They act with the speed of the innocent and each opens his sack. The silver found in each sack is passed over without comment. The servant is not interested in it, he knows exactly what he is looking for and where to find it. The brothers, watching in a daze are mute. They have become used to finding silver in their sacks. Perhaps, as they see it, it also begins to dawn on them that the cup will also be found. They know now that they are simply the victims of a determined effort to destroy them.

The writer balances his work well. To comment on the silver would be to draw out the situation too much and to overload the narrative. The servant has already previously accepted that any silver in their sacks comes from God (43.23). No one pretends it is important. All know that what matters is the silver cup. That is a different matter. And everyone but the brothers know where it is.

So the servant proceeds with his search. It is all really a charade. He knows exactly where to find it, he put it there himself. And at length he produces it from Benjamin's sack.

44.13 'Then they tore their clothes and every man loaded his ass and returned to the city.'

The joy of freedom and success has gone. They accepted that the verdict of guilty was a foregone conclusion. 'They tore their clothes', an accepted way of conveying despair and sorrow. And their minds were numb. They could not understand what had happened. But they knew what it meant. Did they believe Benjamin was guilty? Probably not. The cup had appeared in some strange way just like the silver. They simply accepted that fate was against them.

44.14 'And Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, and he was still there. And they fell on the ground before him. And Joseph said, "What is this deed that you have done? Do you not realise that such a man as I can indeed divine?"'

As in a nightmare the brothers return to the house where they had spent the previous day in

such jollity and relief. And hopelessly they abase themselves before him. Any fight has gone out of them.

Judah is mentioned individually because he is the one who has taken responsibility for Benjamin and will be the key player in what follows. But Reuben has fallen into the background and it would seem that for whatever reason Judah is now seen as the leader (compare 43.3; 46.28).

Joseph professes to be scandalised, and declares that they must recognise that he is a man who sees through things. He is no ordinary man, he can see what others cannot see. He can 'divine'. It is possible that he has a small doubt about whether the brothers might be beginning to get suspicious about all the 'coincidences' and is trying to counter it by explaining how he has been able to act with such accuracy, but he need not have worried. They are far too overwhelmed to even think in those terms.

44.16 'And Judah said, "What shall we say to my lord? What words can we use? Or how shall we clear ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants. Behold, we are my lord's bondmen, both we and also he in whose sack the cup was found."

Judah speaks up for them all. On their behalf he accepts that they have no argument. The cup has been found. There is little point in arguing innocence.

'God has found out the iniquity of your servants.' This is not so much an admission of guilt as a surrender to the past. It is probable that he has in mind what they had done to their long lost brother. He recognises that they are now being punished for that. The impossible circumstance in which they now find themselves can only be due to God's long arm which has reached out into the future to punish them. He has found them out. Whatever the circumstance as regards the cup they are not innocent, as they all know. So they accept the inevitable.

It is noteworthy that they do not refer back to the steward's promise that only the guilty one should be accountable (verse 10). They accept their collective guilt and do not dream of going back without Benjamin. Besides the steward may not have been speaking for his lord and this is no time for arguing fine points before this great lord. And the fact is that they have just given up.

44.17 'And he said, "God forbid that I should do so. The man in whose hand the cup was found, he shall be my bondman. But as for you, get up in peace to your father."

Joseph is thoroughly testing them out. What will they do about Benjamin? Will they sacrifice him like they sacrificed Joseph previously? He tells them that only the guilty man would be punished. The remainder go free. He will see if they will now return home and save their own lives and inform their father that sadly he has lost another son. But these men are no longer what they once were.

The words of Joseph raise a spark in Judah's heart. This man is clearly no harsh avenger. He is almost reasonable. Perhaps then he will listen to a plea. So he approaches closer to him, no doubt abasing himself to the ground, and prepares to put his case. But he recognises that his approach and suggestion might well give great offence to one who has shown such mercy.

44.18 'The Judah came near to him and said, "Oh my lord, let your servant I pray you speak a word in my lord's ears. And do not let your anger burn against your servant for you are as Pharaoh."

Judah assures the great man that he recognises his greatness. Indeed he is depending on it. He

is surely great enough to listen to a case that a lesser man may not be able to listen to. He is above accountability for he is as Pharaoh himself with total power. He begs that he will listen patiently to what he has to say.

He probably feels he has little hope in succeeding, recognising that his words may well bring wrath on himself, but he is determined to do what he can whatever the cost. He does not know, as we do, that this is exactly what Joseph is waiting and longing for.

44.19-20 “My lord asked his servants, saying, ‘Have you a father or a brother?’ And we said to my lord, ‘We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, a younger one,’ and his brother is dead, and he is all that is left of his mother, and his father loves him.”

Judah is now determined that the Man will realise the full position, for he knows it is the only hope. Perhaps there is something in this Man who has been such an enigma, that will move him to mercy. First then he establishes the position of the young man in his father's affections.

‘A child of his old age.’ One on whom in his old age he depended for personal care and support, and the only son of his mother. Of course the Man will not realise how important Rachel had been to Jacob, but Judah does.

44.21-22 “And you said to your servants, ‘Bring him down to me that I may set eyes on him.’ And we said to my lord, ‘The young man cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.’ And you said to your servants, ‘Unless your youngest brother come down with you, you will see my face no more.’ ”

This is an expansion on the words in chapter 42 but we must recognise that more was said than was recorded there. The point is again to emphasise the importance of the young man to his father. Without realising it Judah is showing how much he has changed. Now his concern is not for himself but for his father, and he does not mind about his father's favouritism.

‘That I might set my eyes on him.’ In other words that he may show him favour. Now he intends to show him anything but favour.

44.24 “And it happened, when we came up to your servant my father we told him the words of my lord, and our father said, ‘Go again, buy us a little food.’ And we said, ‘We cannot go down. If our youngest brother is with us then we will go down. For we cannot see the Man's face except our youngest brother be with us.’ ”

This verse strongly confirms the suggestion that ‘The Man’ is an important title. Judah would hardly have described the Egyptian Vizier simply as ‘the man’ when speaking in his presence. Compare his obsequiousness elsewhere.

44.27-29 “And your servant my father said to us, ‘You know that my wife bore me two sons, and the one went out from me, and I said “Surely he is torn in pieces” and I have not seen him since. And if you take this one also from me and mischief befall him, you will bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave (to sheol).’ Now therefore when I come to your servant my father and the young man be not with us, seeing that his life is bound up with the young man's life, it will happen that, when he sees the young man is not with us, he will die, and your servants will bring down the grey hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to the grave.”

Judah recognises how important Benjamin is to Jacob, so important that if he loses him he will die. He pleads with the Man to recognise his filial responsibility towards an old man, something recognised by all races.

44.32 “For your servant became surety for the young man to my father, saying, “If I do not bring him to you then will I bear the blame to my father for ever. Now therefore let your servant, I plead with you, remain as a bondman to my lord, and let the young man go up with his brothers. For how shall I go up to my father and the young man not be with me, lest I see the evil that will come on my father?”

Now Judah comes to the nub of his argument. He has offered himself to his father as a guarantee that the young man will go back. If he goes back without Benjamin he will carry his own burden of guilt for ever, and be for ever guilty before his father. This he cannot bear. So he pleads that the Man will let him take Benjamin's punishment. But he is not just thinking of himself. He is also thinking of the effect on his father. He cannot bear to think of what it will do to his father.

Joseph sees here a different man from the one who callously sold him into slavery. And that, together with the thought of his father's sufferings and the love he has for his family, determines him to bring the whole affair to an end.

Joseph Reveals His Identity To His Brothers and Sends for Jacob (45.1-28)

45.1 ‘Then Joseph could not restrain himself in front of all those who stood by him and he cried, “Cause every man to leave me.” And no man stood with him while he made himself known to his brothers.’

Joseph is overcome with emotion. The double mention of his own ‘decease’, clearly something that Judah now ever carries on his conscience, the thought of how his father suffered at his loss and would suffer at the loss of Benjamin, the hopeless look on the faces of his brothers, the sad picture of his young brother Benjamin standing miserably there not knowing what is to happen to him, all tear at his heart. He cannot bear it any longer. He instantly commands all his retainers and guards to leave. He is the Vizier, and he does not want them to witness what will follow when he makes himself known to his brothers, for he realises that there will be quite a scene which would not enhance his authority in their eyes. They must have been quite amazed, for they nothing of what is going on. Will he not need them in case these terrified criminals suddenly turn? But they were trained to obedience, and to disobey could mean death, so they obeyed.

‘Those who stood by him.’ His various attendants and bodyguard. They must indeed have been puzzled but in obedience to his command they all leave.

45.2 ‘And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians heard, and the house of Pharaoh heard. And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph. Does my father yet live?” And his brothers could not answer him for they were troubled at his presence.’

Joseph is so moved that he breaks down in loud weeping (literally ‘he gave forth his voice in weeping’), so loud indeed that his attendants waiting outside, and possibly on the ready for any violence inside, hear it. And ever conscious of their duty and obedient to their training a message is sent to Pharaoh to tell him of these strange events (compare verse 16).

To Joseph his revelation is something he has been waiting for. He expects his brothers to be overjoyed. But they are not. They are ‘troubled at his presence’. And no wonder. They look on this great man, now broken down in weeping, and it is difficult to believe what is happening. Can he really be their brother? And their minds go back into the past. How can they face this man if he really is their own brother, whom they so callously sold into slavery? How can they look him in the face? What does he intend to do with them now the truth is out? Strange things have happened to them, and they have faced many ups and downs, but they could be as

nothing compared with what will happen to them now. It is not surprising that they are troubled and unable to speak.

45.4 'And Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me I beg you." And they came near. And he said, "I am Joseph your brother whom you sold into Egypt." '

Joseph recognises the situation immediately, so as he looks at his brothers, cowering back and afraid, not sure what to think, he repeats his revelation. 'Please come closer', he says. Then when they automatically obey he says essentially, 'I really am Joseph your brother whom you sold into Egypt'.

45.5-6 "And now do not be concerned, nor angry with yourselves that you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. The famine has been in the land for these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither ploughing nor harvest."

He calms their fears. Quite understandably they think that he may now intend to take his revenge. But he is not thinking like that. He is now aware that all that has happened to him has been in the plan and purpose of God. He is no longer bitter or angry against them. Rather he is filled with wonder at what God has done.

'God sent me before you to preserve life.' His first awareness is of all who have been saved because of his activities. Egyptians throughout the land are debtors to him, and peoples from many countries round about. Without him their case would have been hopeless and indeed in the future would be even more hopeless. But they have hope because of what has happened to him.

'There are yet five years.' The two years that have passed have been dreadful, but they are as nothing compared with what is to come. There will be five more years in which the Nile will not rise, five more years in which there will be no rain in all the surrounding lands. And if it had not been for Joseph there would be nothing to prevent a catastrophe.

45.7 "And God sent me before you to preserve you a remnant in the earth and to save you by a great deliverance."

There is a second greater purpose, the deliverance of the chosen line of God. The language is reminiscent of the Flood when 'the remnant' were preserved alive in the ark and wonderfully delivered. This is the story of Genesis, how God has again and again preserved his chosen line, delivering them from everything that comes against them. And now he is doing it again. These words are important in demonstrating that Joseph has retained his faith in the God of the covenant.

Joseph is well aware of what seven years of devastating famine would have on the family tribe. All the cattle, sheep and goats would die, all the silver and gold would be spent on preserving life, most of the retainers would be dismissed or let go because they would be unable to provide for them, those who were within the covenant of Yahweh would be scattered and then in the end they too might also die. But God has stepped in to save them from all this with 'a great deliverance'.

45.8 "So now it is not you who sent me here but God. And he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and ruler over all the land of Egypt."

Joseph again emphasises the hand of God in his past. This is the third repetition of 'God sent me' (verses 5, 7 and here). It is intended to be seen as sure and certain.

'Father to Pharaoh.' The expression "father" is a reproduction of the Egyptian *ity* or *ites* - "father". It was a very common priestly title which was borne by humble as well as by very high officers, including viziers. Their title was 'father to the gods'. Thus we find, e.g., that Ptah-hotep, a vizier in 3rd millennium BC, referred to himself as *ites neter mery neter*, "father of god, the beloved of god" referring to Pharaoh. In a hierarchic state where Pharaoh was regarded as a god (*neter*) his vizier had to occupy a priestly rank. It was precisely this which was conferred on Joseph by the title "Father". But Joseph could not use this specific title of himself to his brothers. Instead he changes it to 'father to Pharaoh' which to an Egyptian means the same thing, for Pharaoh was seen in Egypt as a god. We can compare the usage with Isaiah 22.21 where the king's steward in Judah was known as 'father to the house of Judah'.

'Lord of all his house.' This corresponds to Egyptian 'merper', 'lord of the house'. As such he was set over all the high officials in the house of Pharaoh. He was the court chamberlain.

'Ruler over all the land of Egypt.' Thus over both upper and lower Egypt. So Joseph was pre-eminent in three spheres, as adviser to Pharaoh, as lord over the highest officials in the land, and as ruler over all Egypt.

One title common in Egypt was that of the 'Superintendent of the Granaries'. It was one of the highest offices in the land. It would seem quite clear that this office was also bestowed on Joseph in view of his activities.

45.9-11 "Be quick and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph. God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me. Do not linger. And you shall dwell in the land of Goshen and you shall be near to me, you and your children, and your children's children, and your flocks and your herds and all that you have. And there I will nourish you, for there are yet five years of famine, lest you come to poverty, you and your household and all that you have.'"

Now that all is in the open Joseph can no longer bear to wait to see his father. He sends them to bring his father immediately along with everything they have.

'You shall dwell in the land of Goshen.' Its exact location is unknown but it was undoubtedly in the Nile delta. It was clearly a very suitable location for shepherds (47.6). The Nile delta regularly saw influxes of Asian refugees as they came over the border seeking help and relief which was regularly given. Thus Joseph is quite confident of their welcome there on his own authority. He does not feel he has to consult on the matter.

'You shall be near to me.' This need not necessarily mean that Joseph lives in the Nile delta. 'Near' is possibly relative, and Memphis, the pre-Hyksos capital, could well be seen as 'near'. The point was that he will not have to visit Canaan to see them.

The whole family tribe is welcome, 'all that you have'. This would be quite numerous. In Goshen they will be specifically provided for and later, after the famine, will enjoy the prosperity of the land.

An Egyptian source interestingly mentions a similar thing some centuries later, when, in c1220 BC, Pharaoh Merenptah gave permission to some Edomite bedouins to settle in the land Goshen 'to keep themselves and their flocks alive in the territory of the king'.

45.12-13 "And behold your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. And you will tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that you have seen, and you will be quick to bring my father down here."

Now his brothers have recognised that he is indeed Joseph, but it is very difficult to believe. But he refers separately to Benjamin because his previous words had been to those who had betrayed him. So he wants them to let his father know as well, as quickly as possible, and to urge him to come down to Egypt.

45.14-15 'And he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin fell on his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept on them, and after that his brothers talked with him.'

The story being told the reunion is sealed. First as a brother he greets his own blood brother, and then all his brothers, and finally, the tensions removed, they talk together as brothers.

45.16-20 'And their fame was heard in Pharaoh's house saying, "Joseph's brothers have come." And Pharaoh was well pleased, and his servants. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do this. Load up your beasts and go, get yourselves into the land of Canaan, and take your father and your households and come to me, and I will give you the good of the land of Egypt and you will eat the fat of the land. Now that you are commanded, do this. Take for yourselves wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father and come. Also do not bother with your stuff. For the good of all the land of Egypt is yours.'

The news about Joseph's brothers follows quickly, and reaches Pharaoh's house a little while after the news that he has been heard weeping with some 'foreigners' (45.2). And it is a tribute to Joseph that Pharaoh is himself pleased at the news, and his high officials also.

Then Pharaoh takes a hand with all the munificence of a Pharaoh. Joseph had intended to bring his family over quietly but now it comes into the public domain. The brothers are to load their asses with a superabundance of provisions, and they are to take wagons to fetch all the members of the family tribe (their households). (Pharaoh could not conceive of travelling without wagons). Then they are all to come to Egypt where they will be given the very best. Indeed, they do not need to bring any extraneous stuff with them for Pharaoh will provide them with all they need and more.

'Wagons'. These were probably large, two-wheeled, covered ox-carts (compare Numbers 7.3).

45.21 'And the sons of Israel did so, and Joseph gave them wagons just as Pharaoh had commanded, and gave them provision for the way.'

Now that Pharaoh has taken charge everything has to be done as he said. Joseph had intended to bring them in without any fuss but now he has no choice.

45.22-23 'To all of them he gave each man changes of clothing, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five changes of clothing. And to his father he sent the following, ten asses laden with the good things of Egypt, and ten she-asses laden with corn and bread and victuals for his father by the way.'

Joseph piles gifts on his family. Each brother receives a full outfit of clothing, but Benjamin his full brother gets five outfits and three hundred pieces of silver. As we have seen 'five' is the Egyptian number of completeness. We can compare how, in the account of Wen-Amon's mission to the King of Biblos, among the presents sent to the king by the Egyptian ruler Smendes were five suits of garments of excellent upper Egyptian linen, and five pieces of the same linen.

But for his father he sends ten ass-loads of gifts as well as ten she-ass loads of provisions. These will help to convince his father of the truth of what he hears.

45.24 'So he sent his brothers away and they departed. And he said to them, "See that you do not fall out with each other on the way."'

Alternatively it could be translated 'do not be agitated on the way'. It is difficult to see why he should warn them against falling out, unless of course he has been aware of some disagreement between them about how they will broach the matter to Jacob. It is equally likely that he is comforting them in view of the task of telling their father that he is alive.

45.25-28 'And they went up out of the land of Egypt and came into the land of Canaan to Jacob their father. And they told him, saying, "Joseph is still alive and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt." And he felt weak ('his heart fainted') because he did not believe them. And they told him all the words of Joseph which he had spoken to them and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him the spirit of Jacob their father revived. And Israel said, "It is enough. Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die."'

Great discussions must have taken place, first with Joseph and then on the journey, about exactly what they should tell Jacob. It would seem that they decided to say nothing, but to leave him to think that Joseph had escaped death in some way unexplained. The news of Joseph being still alive was enough shock for the old man without adding to it. He just could not believe it. But when he saw the wagons and the provisions he had to accept that maybe it was true. And gradually he accepted the good news with clear satisfaction. His words are poignant. 'I will be able to see him before I die.'

However 'all the words of Joseph' may suggest that they admitted everything, in which case we must recognise that the writer does not want to spoil the joy and response at the news of Joseph's survival with recriminations about the past. But in our view it is more likely from the narrative that the facts were kept from him, at least for the present.

Jacob Goes to Egypt (46.1-7)

46.1 'And Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.'

It is probable, although not stated, that Jacob started off from Hebron (37.14). The area of Hebron was one often dwelt in by the patriarchs (13.18 - 20.1; 23.2; 35.27). Beersheba was another (20.1-22.19; 26.1-28.10). So as Jacob makes his way to see his son he calls in at Beersheba where his father had built an altar to Yahweh (26.25).

The famine was severe and was prophesied to continue and the move seemed a sensible one to make, especially as he would see his son. But the fact that he calls in at Beersheba may suggest he is seeking God's assurance that his move is the right one. It was there that Yahweh had appeared to Isaac. For he 'offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac'.

46.2-4 'And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "I am here." And he said, "I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down into Egypt for there I will make of you a great nation. I will go down with you into Egypt, and I will surely bring you up again, and Joseph shall put his hand on your eyes."'

God graciously responds to his prayers. He comes as 'God, the God of his father', demonstrating that He knows Jacob's thoughts. He assures him that the visit to Egypt is not to be shunned and that He will go with him. Indeed there he will become a great nation. But He also confirms that one day he will return. This refers partly to the return of his body to the land, which he considered important (50.5), but also to the return of his descendants. The land is his and theirs and he will 'return' in them in accordance with the covenant. Egypt is but a

temporary resting place.

'And Joseph will put his hand on your eyes.' That is Joseph will close his eyes when he has died. Thus he can be assured that at the time of his death Joseph will be with him to carry out his wishes.

46.5-7 'And Jacob rose up from Beersheba, and the sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, and their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him. And they took their cattle and their goods which they had obtained in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt, Jacob and all his seed with him, his sons and his daughters, and his sons' daughters and all his seed he brought with him into Egypt.'

So at God's assurance Jacob now takes all he has into Egypt. It is clear that much of his herds have survived the famine up to this point, probably helped by the corn from Egypt, but water was getting scarcer and they may not have survived much longer. They also took their goods (in spite of what Pharaoh had said, but that was a gesture and was probably not intended to be taken literally). But most importantly his whole family went with him, together with their 'households' (Exodus 1.1). Jacob's wives are not mentioned. It may be that they were all dead.

'His sons and his daughters and his sons' daughters.' His sons' sons are not mentioned although we know that Reuben had two sons (42.37), but this was because they were considered as included in 'sons'. Daughters were slightly different as his 'daughters' were mainly his daughters-in-law, his sons' wives, whereas presumably his sons' daughters were daughters of the blood (although only one is named, but that was because to name more would have taken the number over seventy).

Those Who Went Down Into Egypt (46.8-27).

There now follows a catalogue of 'all the souls who came into Egypt.' At first sight this is rather an understatement. It excludes his sons' wives (verse 26) and ignores retainers and camp followers. The number who actually went down into Egypt may well have numbered a few thousand for we have the households of each of the sons as well as Jacob's household. (And we must remember that from his household Abraham was able to raise three hundred and eighteen fighting men (14.14)). The numbers may have diminished because of the effect of the famine making them surplus to requirements, and some may have been left in Canaan for other reasons, but there would still be a goodly number.

But this passage is a good example of the early use of numbers. The 'seventy', which is the divine number seven intensified, *included everyone* by implication and indicated the divine completeness of the number who went down to Egypt. It said in effect that not one was missing. They were 'seventy'. They were God's divinely complete band. No early reader would take the number literally. They would know exactly what it indicated.

However, in accordance with ancient practise this number is now applied, and it is done by manipulation of what is known, including or excluding as necessary. This is immediately apparent from the names given. It is very questionable whether the sons of Perez, Hezron and Hamul, could yet have been born (see on 38.6-10), or even more so that at this stage the young man Benjamin would have ten sons (verse 21). These were rather seen as going down 'in the loins' of their fathers. And the number is made up by including Dinah, but excluding his sons' daughters, and including the sons of Joseph who were born in Egypt but had 'gone down to Egypt' in the loins of their father.

This table of names therefore was written by the writer in Egypt at a later date. He looks at the extended family as it was then and names them in his list. By then these sons had been born

and were acknowledged as being part of 'the seventy', the divinely complete band. We do not think like this but it is quite in accord with ancient thinking. It is probable that he had a genealogical list and amended it to suit his purpose. This would explain why he mentions Er and Onan, and then excludes them, and brought Jacob and Dinah in to replace them. Also why he introduced Zilpah's daughter Serah (verse 17).

The original list had thirty three 'sons' of Leah. He specifically excluded Er and Onan and brought in Dinah and Jacob to make up the thirty three, the thirty three signifying a complete number (intensified three, compare 4.24). The second part of the list included Joseph and his two sons, but he excludes them in making up his sixty six, although retaining them in the text. He also now excludes Jacob and introduces Serah. This was necessary to make up the sixty and six (twice thirty and three) and finally the seventy.

Thus for the purpose of the record the number is split into two main groups, one of thirty and three, (intensified three - compare the contrast of seven with seventy and seven in Genesis 4.24), depicting completeness, and one to make up the number sixty six (but see below). Both these groups are therefore 'complete' in themselves, being made up, by inference in the second case, of intensified three. And there were 'three' in Egypt, Joseph and his two sons. Together with Jacob they make up seventy. Thus the divine completeness of the whole group is made apparent and emphasised to the ancient mind.

46.8 'And these are the names of the children of Israel who came into Egypt, Jacob and his sons. Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and the sons of Reuben: Hanoch and Pallu and Hezron and Carmi.'

We know from 42.37 that Reuben had two sons at that stage (he would be about 46). Therefore two of these must be recent births, possibly twins, or else they may have 'gone down to Egypt' in the loins of their father.

46.9-12 'And the sons of Simeon: Jemuel and Jamin and Ohad and Jachin and Zohar, and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman. And the sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath and Merari. And the sons of Judah: Er and Onan and Shelah and Perez and Zerah. But Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan. And the sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul.'

Joseph was about eighteen when he was sold into slavery (37.2) making Judah about twenty two when he married Shua. He was possibly twenty three when he bore Er and Er grew up and married. If Er married at eighteen that would make Judah forty one. Shelah was too young to marry when Er died. Thus when Shelah came of age Judah was at least forty three. So unless Er married very young Judah must have been at the very least forty four when he bore Perez. Thus Perez could not have two children before he moved to Egypt (when Judah was about forty four - 41.46 plus seven good years plus two bad years plus say five years older than Joseph).

It is clear therefore that Hezron and Hamul were seen as 'in the loins of Perez'.

46.13-15 'And the sons of Issachar: Tola and Puvah and Iob and Shimron. And the sons of Zebulun: Sered and Elon and Jahleel. These are the sons of Leah whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, with his daughter Dinah. All the souls of his sons and his daughters were thirty three.'

A count of 'the sons and daughters' produces thirty three if we include Er and Onan, who died in Canaan, and exclude Dinah, but they are clearly intended to be excluded. If we exclude them and include Dinah there are only thirty two. Note that the plural is used for 'daughters', but we can compare verse 23 where 'sons' is followed by only one son. They were technical

descriptions. To make the thirty third Jacob was counted in. But the important thing for the writer was to reach thirty three to demonstrate completeness. He did not mind too much of what it consisted.

This 'artificiality' is confirmed by the fact that the final sixty six includes thirty four names in the second part, making sixty six including Dinah but excluding Jacob. This is to indicate double thirty three. Jacob then comes in with Joseph and his sons to make the seventy.

46.16-18 'And the sons of Gad: Ziphion and Haggi, Shuni and Ezbon, Eri and Arodi and Areli. And the sons of Asher: Imnah and Ishvah and Ishvi and Beriah, and Serah their sister. And the sons of Beriah: Heber and Malchiel. These are the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah his daughter, and these she bore to Jacob, even sixteen souls.'

Serah is added in to make the 'sixteen souls' although she is not a son.

46.19-25 'The sons of Rachel, Jacob's wife, Joseph and Benjamin. And to Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath, daughter of the priest of On bore to him. And the sons of Benjamin: Bela and Becher and Ashbel, Gera and Naaman, Ehi and Rosh, Muppim and Huppim and Ard. These are the sons of Rachel who were born to Jacob. All the souls were fourteen. And the sons of Dan: Hushim. And the sons of Naphtali: Jahzeel and Guni and Jezer and Shillem. These are the sons of Bilhah whom Laban gave to Rachel his daughter, and these she bore to Jacob. All the souls were seven.'

Benjamin has ten sons, but we must question whether he has had all ten by this stage. Certainly the impression we have of him as a 'young man' does not tie in with this. They are probably seen as going down to Egypt 'in his loins', but by the time of the writer they are there to be seen walking about. The writer is careful to number all the groups. In all there are sixteen plus fourteen plus seven making thirty seven. This with the previous thirty three makes seventy.

46.26-27 'All the souls who came with Jacob into Egypt, which came out of his loins, besides Jacob's sons' wives, all the souls were sixty and six. And the sons of Joseph who were born to him in Egypt were two souls. All the souls of the house of Jacob who came into Egypt were seventy.'

The writer is careful with his wording. Having made up thirty and three for the first group by including Jacob, he then says all who came 'with Jacob' were sixty and six, because there were thirty four in the second group excluding Joseph and his two sons. But he carefully points out that he has not included the sons' wives. These would have taken the number above seventy and therefore had to be excluded. Reaching the number seventy was the important thing, not because of some attempt to fit in with other writings but because the number seventy was so significant. It signified that the group was divinely complete. But the group as a whole was actually composed of a much larger number because of their households. And they were included in the divine completeness.

Jacob and His Family Tribe Arrive and Settle in Egypt (46.28-47.12)

46.28 'And he sent Judah before him to Joseph to show the way before him in Goshen, and they came into the land of Goshen.'

Jacob sent Judah ahead to ask Joseph to meet him to show them where they should settle in Goshen. Judah is now clearly seen as the leader of the brothers. The LXX here has 'to appear before him' which requires two further letters in the Hebrew, but it also gives the name of a city and therefore must be considered doubtful.

46.29-30 'And Joseph made ready his chariot and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and he presented himself to him and fell on his shoulder (Hebrew 'neck') and wept on his shoulder a good while. And Israel said to Joseph, "Now let me die since I have seen your face that you are still alive."'

Joseph comes up in his chariot. If this is before the Hyksos the chariot would be a rare sight in Egypt and would cause something of a sensation on its way. But he wants to reach his father quickly. And when they meet he weeps on his shoulder for some good long while. We are not told if Joseph is accompanied by his retinue but it seems probable that he would have at least some of his bodyguard with him.

Jacob's happiness and great joy is brought out by his words. Now that he has seen his son is still alive he can die content.

46.31-34 'And Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's house, "I will go up and tell Pharaoh, and will say to him, 'My brothers and my father's house, who were in the land of Canaan have come up to me, and the men are shepherds for they have been keepers of cattle, and they have brought their flocks and their herds and all that they have.' And it shall happen that when Pharaoh shall call you and shall say, 'What is your occupation?', you will say, 'Your servants have been keepers of cattle from our youth, even until now, both we and our fathers', that you may dwell in the land of Goshen, for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians."'

Joseph is clearly very concerned that they should settle in Goshen. That was his purpose from the beginning (45.10). He knows that it will be better for them there. It is good pasture and they will meet their own kind. They might be very miserable elsewhere in Egypt because of the general attitude to shepherds and foreigners. Pharaoh has, however, said that they can live anywhere and he is a little afraid that Pharaoh might, with the best of intentions, insist on somewhere else. So with his knowledge of affairs he briefs them on what to say so as to get his way.

'I will go up and tell Pharaoh.' Pharaoh had told him to bring them to Egypt. Now he must report back on his accomplishment of the task. He knows then that Pharaoh will call them into his presence. This is a great privilege indeed, but it will be because they are his kinsfolk. Then they must know what to say.

'Your servants have been keepers of cattle--.' This will turn Pharaoh's mind towards Goshen.

'Every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians.' They were probably looked on as uncivilised and irreligious.

47.1 'Then Joseph went in and told Pharaoh, and said, "My father and my brothers, and their flocks and their herds, and all that they have, have come out of the land of Canaan, and behold they are in the land of Goshen."'

'Went in.' Pharaoh lived an isolated life in his palaces as befitted a god. Apart from his high officials entry to him was difficult and all who entered his presence must be suitably clothed, washed and shaved. Joseph would make the usual preparations before entering in his regalia as Vizier. He enters alone. Court etiquette demands that he speak to Pharaoh himself before bringing in his brothers. Pharaoh might decide not to see them.

Astutely he lays the foundation. He stresses their flocks and their herds and that they are now settled temporarily in Goshen. But it is Pharaoh who will have the last word. Meanwhile outside in an antechamber await his brothers and his father.

47.2 'And from among his brothers he selected five men and presented them to Pharaoh.'

Five was the Egyptian number of completeness and thus Pharaoh would see five as suitably representing the whole. They too would need to be washed and shaved, and clothed in suitable clothing. They would enter his presence and abase themselves before him.

47.3-4 'And Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?" And they said to Pharaoh, "Your servants are shepherds, both we and our father." And they said to Pharaoh, "We have come to sojourn in the land, for there is no pasture for your servant's flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now therefore we pray you, let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen."

Joseph knew what question they would be asked. He had seen such visitors questioned many times before. And his brothers knew what to reply. They stressed that they were shepherds and needed pasture for their flocks. But they made clear that they were not presuming. They asked only what had been granted many times before to similar Asian shepherds, permission to sojourn in the land of Goshen while the famine is on. The rest is up to Pharaoh.

47.5 'And Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, saying, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. The land of Egypt is before you. Settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land. Let them settle in the land of Goshen. And if you know any able men among them then make them rulers over my cattle." '

Pharaoh gives his response to their request, and it is generous. There is no question of temporary sojourning. They must be given the very best. Joseph can select anywhere he wants for them to settle in, and as they have requested it, let it be in the land of Goshen. What is more, if any are suitable they are to be given high and important positions among those who look after Pharaoh's own cattle.

Joseph then seeks to introduce his father.

47.7 'And Joseph brought in Jacob his father and set him before Pharaoh. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh.'

Jacob comes in before Pharaoh. We need not doubt that he too behaves with great respect but he takes advantage of the privilege of an old man and a patriarch, in ancient days respected in all societies, and pronounces a blessing on Pharaoh.

47.8 'And Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many years are the years of your life?"

Pharaoh can see how old Jacob is, and is clearly impressed. His question is one of respect and courtesy. The full and perfect life in Egypt was seen as one hundred and ten years. But he can see that Jacob is older even than that.

47.9-10 'And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my sojourning are a hundred and thirty years. Few and evil have been the years of the days of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojourning." And Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from the presence of Pharaoh.'

Jacob cannot prevent himself from a quiet boast in the most respectful manner. He lets Pharaoh know that he is one hundred and thirty years old but that compared with his fathers he is still but a comparatively young man. His words indicate that this is partly due to the great problems and trials he has faced.

'The days of the years of my sojourning --- the days of their sojourning.' This too is a quiet reminder of the transitoriness of life. Men do not belong here, they sojourn. Pharaoh, with his belief that in the afterlife he would live on as Osiris would appreciate that.

Jacob again blesses Pharaoh. We do not know what form the blessing would take but it would possibly be a standard patriarchal blessing, probably in the name of Yahweh.

47.11 'And Joseph placed his father and his brothers, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses. And Joseph provided his father and his brothers and all his father's household with food according to the number of their dependents.'

Joseph gladly obeys Pharaoh. The best of the land would belong to Pharaoh and in his name he is able to take possession of it and allocate it to his family.

'In the land of Rameses.' It would not be called this until much later (when Rameses was Pharaoh in 13th century BC). Moses probably made this change to a name familiar to his own readers and listeners who would remember from whence they had come.

And not only were they settled in the best of the land but they received ample food to feed all their retainers throughout the famine.

Joseph Feeds Egypt During the Famine On Behalf of Pharaoh (47.13-26)

We should recognise that what follows is schematised to some extent. Not all silver would run out for everyone at the same time, some would keep their cattle and herds longer than others, the description covers the general picture. But in the end all would succumb for the famine goes on and on. It must be remembered that Egypt looked on the land of Canaan as under her control, sometimes more so, sometimes less so, and therefore recognised some sense of responsibility towards it.

47.13-17 'And there was no bread in all the land, for the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan wilted by reason of the famine. And Joseph gathered up all the silver that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan for the corn which they bought, and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house. And when the silver was all spent in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, "Give us bread, for why should we die in your presence? For our silver fails." And Joseph said, "Give your cattle, and I will give you corn for your cattle if your money fails." And they brought their cattle to Joseph, and Joseph gave them bread in exchange for the horses, and for the flocks, and for the herds and for the asses, and he looked after them with bread in exchange for all their cattle that year.'

The famine continues and conditions get more and more severe. Meanwhile silver pours into Pharaoh's coffers until the majority of people in Egypt and Canaan have no silver left. Then they begin to trade in their herds and flocks, their horses and their asses, until again they had no more of these, and they all belong to Pharaoh. Many would have only a few. And in the end these too run out. For the Egyptians this would not be quite so bad. They probably do not actually hand the animals over, rather they are assigned to Pharaoh and looked on as his property. Then they act as keepers and shepherds for Pharaoh providing each with part of the revenue (compare verse 24). The high officials over Pharaoh's cattle (verse 6) would now have plenty to do in organising it all.

'They brought their cattle.' This may refer to the first movement when some would actually bring their cattle for exchange and the agreement is made. Eventually it would become

recognised that they can simply be given in pledge. Alternately it may be that they have to bring them to be valued and listed.

'Their horses.' If these are pre-Hyksos days these would be comparatively rare in Egypt which may be why they are mentioned first. While Canaan is not mentioned in 15b it is probably to be understood to some extent (it was the people of Egypt who would approach Joseph about the matter) and the majority of the horses may have come from Canaan or through Canaan from even further afield.

'And he looked after them.' Literally 'led them'. The word is usually used of a shepherd leading his flocks. Joseph was a shepherd to them.

But the Jacob family tribe are meanwhile kept well provisioned through the good offices of Joseph, and keep their silver and their cattle.

47.18-20 'And when that year ended they came to him the second year and said to him, "We will not hide from my lord how that our silver is all spent, and the herds of cattle are my lord's. There is nothing left in the sight of my lord but our bodies and our lands. Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for bread, and we and our land will be servants to Pharaoh. And give us seed that we may live and not die, and that the land be not desolate." So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh, for the Egyptians sold every man his field because the famine was severe on them, and the land became Pharaoh's.'

'And when that year ended they came to him the second year.' This is not the second year of the famine. We have already seen that Jacob and his family tribe have had sufficient silver to tide them through two years. This is 'the second year' after the one in which the silver had run out and the majority pledged their animals. It is thus well into the famine.

Now the people pledge themselves and their land to Pharaoh. In one sense nothing changes. They still live on the land and they still serve Pharaoh and pay taxes. It is the conception that is different. There is a new sense in which they are no longer freeholders and they are no longer freemen, although the old social distinctions between men would not change. This especially affects the 'nobility' who have been jealous of their influence and independence but whose power is now crushed.

'Give us seed that the land be not desolate.' This may indicate attempts to maintain some kind of crops on the land. Some would certainly attempt to use what water there was to irrigate land and grow some kind of meagre crop. The Nile was not completely empty. Or it may signify that at this stage they see the end of the famine in sight. The former seems more likely. They are bravely trying to keep some form of normality on the land, some signs of life among the continuing deadness.

47.21 'And as for the people he removed them to the cities from one end of the border of Egypt even to the other end of it.'

This refers to a largish part of the people and was probably for administrative convenience. Not all would be taken away from the land. But the task of feeding the people was onerous and it would be easier if they were all in one place. Once the crisis was over they could move back. Previously they may have been unwilling to leave their land, but now that it belongs to Pharaoh things are different. The whole scenario is of a gradually worsening situation.

The LXX has here 'he made slaves of them.' This involves changing he'evir le'arim to he'evir la'avadim and assumes the d was later read as an r (they are very similar in Hebrew) and that the v dropped out, but this may have been due to failure to understand why he gathered them

in cities. But it may be that LXX is witness to an early reading.

'Made slaves' is an emotive term capable of many meanings. If the thought is that they ceased to be 'freemen' this has already been stated. But in one sense the people of Egypt were always seen as 'slaves of Pharaoh' for he was a god. It is true that there would be a sense of a loss of independence but their overall condition has not worsened. They simply have to recognise their responsibility to pay 'the fifth' (see later). There is no suggestion that they are bitter about it. Rather they are grateful and look on Joseph as their 'saviour'. Thus the reading may be correct. But there is much to be said for retaining the 'harder reading'.

47.22 'Only the land of the priests he did not buy. For the priests had a portion from Pharaoh and ate their portion which Pharaoh gave them, and for that reason they did not sell their land.'

The priests were powerful and influential. Furthermore they were provided with their food by Pharaoh. Thus they did not need to sell their land and remained semi-independent. We know that in the later so-called New Kingdom this was so. The extensive Temple lands were not formally included in Pharaoh's right of possession. This is further support for the view that this was not under the Hyksos. They would not have given such benefits to the priests who were opposed to them, the priests of Re and Atum.

47.23 'Then Joseph said, "Behold I have bought you this day, and your land, for Pharaoh. Look here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land, and it shall be that at the ingatherings you shall give one fifth to Pharaoh, and four parts shall be your own, for seed of the field, and for your food and for those of your households and for food for your little ones." '

The famine is now approaching its end and Joseph declares their new position. From now on they are debtors to Pharaoh for one fifth of their produce, and on these terms he provides them with seed for sowing. This is not onerous. It may well be that they had already been paying this amount in taxes. And to receive seed at the end of a famine was luxury indeed. This has ever been the problem of a famine, that the seed has been consumed and little is left for sowing.

'This day.' This clearly is not intended to mean that the transaction from start to finish took place on that day. These transactions took place over fairly long periods. 'This day' refers to the end position. He is really saying, 'this day I declare to you that ---' and from this day they must fulfil the responsibility of the fifth.

We can compare with this how later Israel would have to give one tenth to Yahweh as well as many sacrifices and offerings. One fifth is a typically Egyptian proportion.

47.25 'And they said, "You have saved our lives. Let us find favour in the eyes of my lord and we will be servants to Pharaoh." '

The people are profoundly grateful. They do not look on Joseph's measures as harsh. They rather think of him as the one who has delivered them from disaster. He has well served Pharaoh. And in their gratitude they pledge themselves anew to the service of Pharaoh.

We must remember that they still have their lands, they still have their cattle, they still have their social standings, only they are in pledge to Pharaoh. It is only the most influential who are really affected for they have lost something of their independence. And even they are grateful to have survived the famine.

47.26 'And Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt to this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth. Only the land of the priests alone did not become Pharaoh's.'

The writer summarises the position as it still is in his day. How long the fifth remained the standard we do not know. But when the Hyksos took over things would change. This would suggest he wrote before that time.

But how does this tie in with what we know of conditions in Egypt? Certainly we know that in the period before the Hyksos there was a feudal system whereby the land was largely owned by the nobility with the peasantry under their control. This would clearly be brought to an end by Joseph's reforms, and confirms the picture presented. Assuming, as we have suggested, that this took place before the advent of the Hyksos, their coming would change the situation in the part of Egypt that they controlled. They in fact restored the land to a feudal system.

But when they were expelled and the so-called New Kingdom was established the whole land was expropriated and transferred to Pharaoh, being declared his exclusive property. This may well have been because it was seen as a restoration of the position before the reign of the Hyksos, which would thus confirm the accuracy of the Joseph story. This position then continued for many centuries.

The Family Tribe Prosper - Jacob's Plea (47.27-31)

47.27 'And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen, and they obtained possessions in it and were fruitful, and multiplied greatly.'

This summary states what happened after the famine was over and covers many years. Jacob and the Family Tribe prosper greatly (by now the name 'Israel' is beginning to be attached to the tribe - note the plural, 'they obtained') and become even wealthier. Furthermore they continue expansion, with nothing to hinder them, and many children are born to the tribe. They 'multiply greatly.' Their move appears to be a success. They see no reason to return to Canaan. But Jacob's heart is still there.

47.28-31 'And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years. So the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were one hundred and forty seven years, and the time drew near that Israel must die, and he called his son Joseph and said to him, "If now I have found favour in your sight put, I pray you, your hand under my thigh and deal kindly and truly with me. Do not bury me, I beg of you, in Egypt, but when I sleep with my fathers you will carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place." And he said, "I will do as you have said." And he said, "Swear to me." And he swore to him. And Israel bowed himself on the bed's head.'

Jacob lives another seventeen years, reaching one hundred and thirty seven. It is probable that we are not to see this as too literal. It is doubtful if account was kept of age so accurately and there are grounds for thinking that the patriarchal ages are to be seen as round symbolic numbers. For this see *The Use of Numbers in the Ancient Near East* and in *Genesis*. But he is clearly of a great age (compare 47.9).

Now, with death approaching, he is concerned that he should be buried with his fathers in the land of Canaan. He therefore calls Joseph to come to him privately for he has a favour to ask him which only Joseph can guarantee, for what he will ask may well conflict with recognised Egyptian protocol.

'If I have found favour in your sight.' He remembers the high position occupied by his son. 'Put your hand under my thigh' - a typical type of oath, possibly seen as swearing on his life producing functions (compare 24.2). 'Swear to me.' This will not only put Joseph under obligation but will enable him to thwart any other plans by anyone else. No one would dispute an oath to a dying man and it will give him leverage with Pharaoh whose permission will have to be sought (see 50.4-6).

'And Israel bowed himself on the bed's head.' This probably represents the weak old man bowing to his son, assisted by the bedhead, partly because of who he is, but also in gratitude at his firm promise. It stresses how weak he is. But it may be partly because of his blindness (48.10). The end was not to be long in coming.

Jacob Adopts Ephraim and Manasseh and Gives Them His Dying Blessing (48.1-22)

48.1 'And it happened after these things that someone said to Joseph, "Behold, your father is ill." And he took with him his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim.'

Jacob has obtained Joseph's promise only just in time for shortly afterwards he falls ill and knows he has not long to go. The 'someone' may well have been despatched by him, or it may be a faithful servant appointed by Joseph to look after him and constantly update him on his condition.

'He took with him his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim.' Not only in order to see their dying grandfather but precisely in order to obtain his dying blessing for them. The dying blessing was the equivalent of a will, and was also considered to have effectiveness to determine the future, for God was to be seen as in the blessing. It was considered legally binding. A man at such a time was thought to see beyond the ordinary and mundane. Manasseh is mentioned first because he is the firstborn.

48.2 'And someone told Jacob, "Behold your son Joseph is coming to you." And Israel strengthened himself and sat on the bed.'

At the news of his son's coming Jacob prepares himself for what he is about to do.

48.3 'And Jacob said to Joseph, "El Shaddai (God Almighty) appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessed me, and said to me, "Behold I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples and will give this land to your seed for ever for an everlasting possession." And now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you into Egypt, are mine, Ephraim and Manasseh, even as Reuben and Simeon shall be mine. And your issue, which you have begotten after them, shall be yours. They shall be called after the name of their brothers in the inheritance."

The repetition of the covenant appearance is important (see 35.11-12). Jacob wants it to be clear that Joseph's two sons, born in Egypt, are not excluded from the covenant and the promises, for the promise was given by El Shaddai, lord of the whole earth. So he now intends to adopt the two children of Joseph giving them the rights of full sons, on equality with Reuben and Simeon. (He is speaking to Joseph. He is not aware at this moment that they are standing there behind Joseph).

'And your issue (Ephraim and Manasseh) which you have begotten after them (Reuben and Simeon) shall be yours.' That is they will stand in Joseph's place in the inheritance.

The mention of Ephraim before Manasseh is deliberate. Jacob knows what he is about to do.

48.7 "And as for me, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way, when there was still some way to come to Ephrath. And I buried her there in the way to Ephrath (the same is Bethlehem)."

His thoughts turn momentarily to himself. He is about to die but he has no regrets, for long before he had lost the one who possessed his whole heart, his beloved Rachel, Joseph's mother, and now he will go to her. The description demonstrates how he ever kept the scene in his

heart and the tenderness with which he remembered her. It is because of his great love for her, the great passion of his life, that he is now intending to adopt her two grandchildren.

48.8 'And Israel became aware of Joseph's sons and said, "Who are these?"'

The old man is blind (verse 10) and he has only been aware of Joseph, but now he becomes aware of two others with him and asks who they are.

48.9 'And Joseph said to his father, "They are my two sons whom God has given me here." And he said, "Bring them I pray to me and I will bless them."'

Joseph tells him that they are his two sons. His words echo Jacob's mention of them as being born in Egypt. Then, on hearing this, Jacob calls them forward to receive adoption immediately.

'I will bless them.' Or alternately, 'I will make them kneel.' Some translate 'take them on my knees', which represents the 'taking on the knee', the legal rite of adoption. But as he is old and weak, and they are grown men,, he probably takes them, kneeling, between his knees. (Note how Joseph brings them from between his knees - verse 12). This was thus part of the adoption ceremony.

48.10 'Now the eyes of Israel were dim for age so that he could not see. And he brought them near to him and he kissed them and embraced them.'

Having adopted them as full sons he now draws them to him and kisses and embraces them. The mention of his blindness is to explain the awkwardness of the whole event.

48.11 'And Israel said to Joseph, "I had not thought to see your face, and lo, God has let me see your seed as well."

The act of adoption fills him with gratitude to God and he cannot help expressing his feelings. Not only has he seen Joseph's face again, something he had never expected, but he has had the joy of seeing his two sons grow up as well. He has been truly blessed.

48.12 'And Joseph brought them out from between his knees and he bowed himself with his face to the earth.'

Joseph is filled with gratitude for what his father has done for his sons. He raises them from where they are and shows his gratitude by bowing low to his father. The great Vizier does obeisance to the old man, his father. And now is the time for them to receive his dying blessing as his sons.

48.13 'And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand towards Israel's left hand and Manasseh in his left hand, towards Israel's right hand, and brought them near to him.'

Manasseh is the eldest and should receive the blessing from the right hand in acknowledgement of his seniority. The right hand was conceived as being the most powerful, as it usually is in practise. Thus Joseph guides them towards Jacob in the right positions for the blessing. But Jacob in his dying insight is aware of something that Joseph is not aware of .

48.14 'And Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding his hands wittingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn.'

Jacob knew the position the young men would be in and deliberately crosses his hands to bless Ephraim with the right hand, indicating superior blessing.

48.15 'And he blessed Joseph and said, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God who has shepherded me all my life long until this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads, and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."

'He blessed Joseph.' This is no error. The two are being blessed as one and are being blessed in Joseph's stead. His blessing is for Joseph but imparted to his two sons. What greater blessing for Joseph than for his two sons to be brought within the covenant of Yahweh, El Shaddai?

The blessing is straightforward. The young men, the sons of an Egyptian mother and born outside the promised land, are brought within the covenant, receiving the name of the patriarchs who had received that covenant on them, and are to be full sons and share in its blessings and become great peoples. So does Jacob un-Egyptianise these two young Egyptian men.

His description of God is significant. He is the One before whom his fathers walked in love and obedience, He is the one who has been with Jacob all his life and provided him with help and sustenance, He is the angel (God in His earthly presence) who has delivered him from all evil. This possibly especially refers to his struggle at Peniel when his name was changed and his life as well.

We note that Jacob in all humility does not himself claim to have walked before God in love and obedience, although others may well have said it of him. He is too aware of his failings. Thus his gratitude is in what God has done for him. It is this God, the faithful God, from Whom he beseeches blessing.

'Redeemed me.' The idea is of one who buys back someone from another. It is the first mention of the concept which would become so important. Is he thinking of his deliverance from Laban and the evil he had planned for Jacob? Is he thinking of the change in Esau who had once planned evil against him? Is he thinking of the deliverance from the evil of dire famine? Possibly all of these, but they are centred in that moment when he wrestled with God and was for ever changed. It was God Who set him free and became his Redeemer, and has thus ensured his constant deliverance from evil, including the evil of his own heart.

48.17-18 'And when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim it displeased him, and he held up his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. And Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father, for this is the firstborn. Put your right hand on his head." '

Joseph is upset. As a father he wants his sons to be treated fairly (possibly he remembers what the result was of his father's favouritism). He is so incensed that he interrupts the blessing. Joseph's action demonstrates how important this was all seen to be. It was a matter of precedence, which was accepted everywhere in the ancient world, that the firstborn received the primary blessing, although there were exceptions. In the Keret Legend found at Ugarit it says, 'The youngest of them I will make firstborn'. But possibly Jacob remembers his own past. He too was the younger and yet he received the firstborn's blessing. And something in his heart tells him that this is right here. It is in the end God Who is sovereign and will do His will.

48.19-20 'And his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also will be great, however his younger brother will be greater than he and his seed will become a multitude of nations." And he blessed them that day, saying, "In you shall

Israel bless, saying, 'God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh.' And he set Ephraim before Manasseh.'

Jacob is understanding and does not rebuke him. Then he confirms why he has acted as he has. He continues his blessing. Manasseh will become a great people, but Ephraim will be even greater and become a multitude of nations. So much so that when men speak of them in proverb they will always put Ephraim first. But both will be mentioned in the proverb, and there is no greater statement of success than to become a proverb.

That Jacob would become a company of peoples he knew from the covenant promises. That this would be through his sons he must have been aware. Thus this blessing is the natural sequel to that with the additional awareness of the extra success of Ephraim.

And both did become great peoples, but Ephraim became so great a people that all Israel was later named after them because of their superior numbers. Indeed 'Ephraim' could be called God's firstborn (Jeremiah 31.9). Judges 8.2 already hints at their greatness.

'In you shall Israel bless.' We had the hint in 47.27 that the name of Israel was beginning to be applied to the tribe. This is confirmed here. The family tribe is now seen as a people.

48.21 'And Israel said to Joseph, "Behold I die. But God will be with you and bring you again to the land of your fathers. Moreover I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow."

Jacob prophesies the future return to the land. Joseph will return in his descendants to the land of his fathers. Perhaps it was Jacob's intention that Ephraim and Manasseh should lead the return.

'One portion (shechem) above your brothers.' This is because now Joseph's portion is twofold in that Ephraim and Manasseh have become full sons, each entitled to their full share in the inheritance.

'Which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow.' This unknown incident clearly refers to some area outside the promised land which Jacob and his tribe took by force, and which Jacob now sees as made part of that land. This, he feels, is what gives him the right to give a portion to both Ephraim and Manasseh. He has extended the promised land. It was possibly in the hill country beyond Jordan, which was seen as Amorite country (Numbers 13.29). It is possibly not without significance that that was where the half tribe of Manasseh received their portion. This is a rare example to remind us that much of the story of the patriarchs we do not know, only what was connected with covenants. We do not tend to think of Jacob as a warrior, but clearly he could be as warlike as his father Abraham.

Some have referred it to the Shechem incident but Jacob was there displeased with his sons' actions, and Shechem was part of the promised land already.

Jacob's Deathbed Blessing on His Sons (49.1-28).

49.1 'And Jacob called to his sons and said, "Gather yourselves together that I may tell you what will befall you in later days."

This is, and is stated to be, not so much a blessing as a series of prophecies. But that does not diminish its effectiveness. The dying words of a man were considered to have powerful effect on the future, and Jacob knew that God was with him (48.20). Yet at the end they are called a blessing, for such words were a guide to each one as to his future, and we can always change

our futures. The prophecy begins in verse 2 as is witnessed by the parallel form. The form of the prophecies suggest the expansion of the family tribe since coming to Egypt, and the building up of diverse interests by some of his sons. With their brother as Vizier of Egypt there need be no limit to their ambitions and they could give free reign to their dreams, leaving the shepherding to inferiors.

'In later days.' Compare Deuteronomy 4.30; 31.29. This is not 'the latter days' of the prophets.

49.2 "Assemble yourselves and hear, you sons of Jacob, And listen to Israel your father."

His words are to the sons as a family, although each will be treated individually. For some they represent devastating criticism and warning, for others general prophecy, and for Judah and Joseph effective prophecy in more detail. But their main emphasis is on their current life in Egypt which belies any suggestion that they were invented afterwards in Palestine.

49.3-4

"Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my power,
Pre-eminent in dignity, and pre-eminent in strength,
Uncontrolled as water you will not be pre-eminent,
Because you went up to your father's bed,
Then you defiled it. You went up to my couch."

Jacob first describes Reuben in terms of being his firstborn. As such he had been his father's strength and the beginning of Jacob's power base as found in his sons.

But Reuben has little future for he has revealed his weakness in his sexual behaviour. Such weakness has destroyed many men and Reuben is no exception. Because of it he is a nonentity. He was a dignified man with a certain strength of character, but he was also not of leadership material, lacking the necessary ability to control and direct. And he had revealed his weakness in the affair with his father's wife.

'My firstborn, my might and the beginning of my generative power.' As the firstborn son, the first product of Jacob's strength, he was the one of whom much was expected. He was set to be Jacob's right hand. But he failed.

'Pre-eminent in dignity, pre-eminent in strength.' He was more contained than his brothers, and bore himself well and as the eldest was strongest.

'Uncontrolled as water, you will not be pre-eminent.' But he had a fatal flaw, he was unreliable, uncontrolled like a flow of surging water. Thus he could not safely take the pre-eminence, and, as we have seen, his place as leader has been taken by Judah. (The verb means 'unstable, uncontrolled, frothing over').

'Because you went up to your father's bed, then you defiled it ---'. This refers, of course, to when he went in to his father's concubine (35.22). This too was a sign of his unreliability. He who should have watched over his father's bed defiled it. Thus he cannot be trusted.

He had his good points. He had tried to save Joseph and at least saved him from death, although he was not strong enough to stand up to his brothers. He was the one who was concerned about Simeon and wanted to go back for him, but he failed to persuade Jacob to let him take Benjamin. It was Judah who was firm and later succeeded. Perhaps even then his failure was because his father saw him as unreliable and untrustworthy.

Interestingly the tribe of Reuben also failed early. It is depicted by Moses as dying

(Deuteronomy 33.6) and is mentioned with censure in Judges 5.15 where their inability to make a strong decision is emphasised. These ideas may have partly arisen from this original perception of Reuben.

49.5-7

**“Simeon and Levi are brothers,
Weapons of violence are their swords,
Oh my soul, do not come into their council,
Oh my glory, to their assembly do not be united.
For in their anger they slew man,
And in their self-will they hamstrung oxen,
Cursed be their anger for it was fierce,
And their wrath for it was cruel,
I will divide them in Jacob,
And scatter them in Israel.”**

Simeon and Levi demonstrated their strength and their fierceness when they led their men against Shechem having disabled the inhabitants by their ruse (Genesis 34). They were two of four full brothers to Dinah, but Reuben and Judah did not join with them in their blood vengeance, although later joining in the general destruction of the city. They wanted justice without mercy, and acted together in unison. And that is Jacob's complaint, that they are merciless. (Their being mentioned together almost certainly suggests that they were twins).

‘Their swords are weapons of violence.’ Or alternately ‘Their plans (devices) are instruments of violence.’ The meaning of mecherah is not certain, but the general idea is clear. They are violent men who carry out violent deeds. Thus they are to be avoided.

‘Oh my soul, do not come into their council, oh my glory, to their assembly do not be united.’ They are troublemakers and best avoided, they are the kind who lead men astray. ‘Oh my glory’ is parallel to ‘oh my soul’ and clearly has a similar implication. He is warning his immediate family, his ‘soul’, not to be carried along by their aims and methods, and warning his ‘glory’, all the remainder of the household, not to be so either.

‘For in their anger they slew man, and in their selfwill they hamstrung oxen.’ This could be seen as referring metaphorically to their ruse whereby the men of Shechem were basically hamstrung by circumcision and slain. But it also refers to more general cruelty, that being short tempered and harsh they do not restrain themselves. They have within them a streak of cruelty and harshness. They slay men without thought and hamstring oxen. Hamstringing of oxen (cutting the tendons in the hocks) was unnecessary and may have been their way of punishing someone who had offended them. Compare here Joshua 11.6, 9 where battle chargers were hamstrung to prevent their use in battle.

The point here is that while all had to kill in those days, if necessary, in self defence, they seemed to delight in it. They were not murderers, but they were heartless.

‘Cursed be their anger for it was fierce, and their anger because it was cruel.’ This again suggests Shechem and may confirm that the oxen are to be seen as metaphorical. But Jacob would surely not have so dealt with them if it had been a one-off incident. So the impression is of passionate, violent and merciless men who do not mind inflicting pain.

‘I will divide them in Jacob, I will scatter them in Israel.’ The use of ‘Israel’ for the tribal group rather than just the patriarch has begun to be apparent (47.27; 48.20). Here ‘Jacob’ is also used in the same way. Because of their fierce and cruel ways they must be separated by the children of Israel and kept apart, otherwise they will dominate. They are dangerous men.

'Scatter' is a poetic use to parallel 'divide'. The 'I' is probably a prophetic utterance put on the lips of God, Who will ensure the dividing, or it may refer to the tribe acting in Jacob's name.

The age of the narrative comes out in that there is no thought of Levi as a priestly tribe (although even as a priestly tribe they were not averse to slaying their brothers. They had a fierce godliness). As a tribe Levi would indeed be scattered among the tribes, but then for a godly purpose. His descendants will have, as it were, purged his contempt. But this is clearly not what Jacob has in mind, although we may see it as being a secondary application. For as a result they were divided up.

Simeon later combines with Judah as the weaker of the two tribes (Joshua 19.9) but it retains its identity throughout the period of the kings (1 Chronicles 4.41-43; 12.24-25; 2 Chronicles 15.9) although it is never mentioned after the Exile (except in the list in Revelation 7). Thus Jacob's words do not directly relate to the tribes of Simeon and Levi but to his actual sons, with only secondary application to their seed.

So the first two deathbed sayings are analyses of the brothers themselves, depicting their weaknesses and the consequences. In the case of Reuben loss of pre-eminence, something that has already partly befallen him. In the case of Simeon and Levi separation in the tribe in order to control their blood lust. Thus it comes as some surprise when the words about Judah are more full and prophetic, for in his case his father sees wonders that lie ahead. But by now Judah had revealed his leadership potential. And yet even here the first words concern Judah himself.

49.8-12

"Judah, your brothers will praise you,
 Your hand will be on the neck of your enemies,
 Your father's sons will bow down before you.
 Judah is a lion's whelp,
 My son, you are gone up from the prey,
 He stooped down, he couched as a lion,
 And as a lioness, who will rouse him up?
 Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
 Until Shiloh come,
 And the obedience of the peoples will be to him.
 Binding his foal to the vine,
 And his ass's colt to the choice vine,
 He has washed his garments in wine,
 And his vesture in the blood of grapes,
 His eyes will be red with wine,
 And his teeth white with milk."

These words spoken of Judah take into account the pre-eminence he is already showing among the brothers. He has become their leader, and this will develop until his descendants become 'rulers', and in view of the promise that kings would be descended from Jacob (35.11) we can almost certainly say not tribal rulers but 'kings'. And once the kingship is established one will be awaited who will be called 'Shiloh' and he will receive obedience and will issue in the time of plenty.

This raises the great question as to what or who 'Shiloh' means. Answers are wide and various.

- 1). That Shiloh is the title of a great coming king, similar to the Messiah. There is, however, no direct evidence for applying the title to the Messiah. We may do so indirectly if we follow one of the suggestions below.

- 2). That the verse should be rendered 'until he comes to Shiloh' which was the tribal sanctuary in early days after the conquest. This would then signify a particular ruler coming to Shiloh seeking the obedience of the people. Some see the fulfilment of this in the assembling of the tribes to Shiloh in Joshua 18.1 but this has no real connection with a sceptre in Judah. But this would limit the prophecy to a time when Shiloh was known.
- 3). That the verse should be rendered as per LXX 'until that which is his shall come' . That would involve a change to shelloh as in Ezekiel 21.27 (in the Hebrew 21.32). It would involve the fulfilment of some undesignated expectation which will enhance Judah's standing.
- 4). That the verse be rendered 'until he come to whom it belongs' following a variant reading in LXX. This suggests a Messianic expectation, as the one to whom Judah's sceptre or rod finally belongs comes to claim it. This also involves a change to shelloh.
- 5). That 'shiloh' be connected with Arcadian 'shelu' meaning 'the prince'. Thus 'until the prince comes'. This would again look forward to a unique coming prince.
- 6). That 'shiloh' be changed to 'moshlo' by introducing 'm', thus meaning 'his ruler'.
- 7). That 'shiloh' be changed to 'shay lo' resulting in 'so long as tribute is paid to him'.

Changing the consonantal text is always unwise unless we have good external reason for doing so, but some of the above only require a change in vowels (not in the main present in the ancient texts) and clearly 'Shiloh' does refer to some expectation connected with the rod and sceptre of Judah, which would follow after the conferring of that sceptre, and would result in the obedience of the peoples and a time of good things. And this suggests, in today's terms, a Messianic expectation. One will come whose right it is.

We shall now consider the text in detail.

'Judah your brothers will praise you, your hand will be on the neck of your enemies, your father's sons will bow down before you.' This prophesies future rulership for Judah and his seed. He already has the pre-eminence among the ten and he is promised further exaltation, success and authority. His enemies will submit to him and his brothers will acknowledge his leadership and rule. He is clearly established to be a leader of men.

'Judah is a lion's whelp, my son you are gone up from the prey, he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as a lioness who will rouse him up.' If Judah is a lion's whelp we may see Jacob as the lion. Certainly Jacob in his old age is remembering past glories as 48.22 demonstrates. Thus Jacob is likening Judah to himself in his younger days (as seen in his own eyes). Judah is a young lion who is successful in the hunt (he has gone up from the prey) and before whom men cower in fear. In other words he is a strong man who can impose himself on others.

'The sceptre will not depart from Judah nor the ruler's staff from between his feet --'. This is a clear prophecy of rulership for Judah's seed, and in the light of 35.11 we may say kingship. His seed will carry the sceptre, and sit in judgment with their staff of office and authority between their feet demonstrating their right to do so.

'Until Shiloh come, and the obedience of the people will be to him.' See details above. This surely suggests the coming after a period of kingship of a greater one who will establish his rule and bring the people to final obedience. Here we have in seed form the promise of a Messiah from the tribe of Judah.

'Binding his foal to the vine, and his ass's colt to the choice vine. He has washed his garments in wine, and his vesture in the red liquid of grapes. His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.' This is a poetic picture of a coming time of plenty connected with the coming of Shiloh. Animals will be tethered, not to ordinary trees but to sumptuous vine trees, clothes will be washed not in water but in wine, and he will be saturated in wine and milk

(compare Isaiah 55.1). The picture is not intended to be practical but a vision of a theoretical paradise (as we may speak of a city with its streets 'paved with gold').

So Jacob commends Judah for his strength and leadership, and prophesies for Judah's seed kingship and the bringing in of final blessing. We must surely tie this in with God's promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that in them and in their seed all the world would be blessed.

49.13

**“Zebulun will dwell at the shore of the sea,
And he will be for a haven for ships,
And his flanks will reach towards Sidon.”**

Having moved into prophetic mode Jacob now seems more inspired. But as the previous blessings have first majored on the patriarchs themselves, it must probably be seen as the same here. It thus seems probable that we must see Zebulun as having revealed a liking for the sea and as having taken an interest in ships. For the family tribe will have had constant contact with merchants who may have stimulated such an interest, and his residence in Egypt may have brought him in contact with the ships and sailors, with the result that they had become his passion. This may be why Jacob forecasts such a continuing interest for him and his seed. (This would be an unusual interest in Canaan where harbours were both small and a rarity because of the coastline, which was not suited for shipping, but is understandable in Egypt).

There is no reason indeed why, with Joseph's endorsement, he should not have been engaging in some kind of activity in shipping, and this may be what Jacob is referring to. It would not need to be very large to excite Jacob.

'His flanks will reach towards Sidon.' This may then refer to some proposed maritime activity aiming to trade with Sidon, a well known merchant seaport in Phoenicia.

But the prophecy may also include the thought that his descendants too would take up their residence by the sea and would provide harbours for the use of ships with their 'sides' or boundaries reaching towards Sidon. Assuming that Phoenician Sidon is meant, this last may simply indicate a desire, which was eventually fulfilled. As Sidon was famous for its maritime adventures so will Zebulun reach out to emulate them. While there is nothing in the tribe's actual future as recorded in Scripture to suggest this, we do find in the blessing of Moses that Zebulun, with Issachar, will 'suck the abundance of the seas and the hidden treasures of the sands' (Deuteronomy 33.19), although that may simply refer to benefiting from a fishing industry. (It does however connect them to the sea).

Alternately 'the sea' may reflect the Sea of Galilee, but the mention of Sidon is against this, and besides originally Zebulun territory did not even touch on that. However migrations of tribes were not unusual (compare Issachar and Dan (Judges 18)) and some may possibly have moved there (see below).

At first Zebulun in fact resided in the area around 'Aijalon in the land of Zebulun' (Judges 12.11) in a broad wedge in Southern Galilee between Asher and Naphtali (Joshua 18.10-16), seemingly some distance from the sea. The River Kishon formed one of its boundaries. (Later Nazareth would be in the territory). Historically, however, there are indications that the tribe of Zebulun may later have resided by the sea in the region of the modern port of Haifa. There was in fact only Asher that lay between Zebulun and the sea, and Asher became severely weakened by being in territory where the Canaanites were strong. Thus the expansion of a strong Zebulun (Judges 5.14) seawards was always likely as the Canaanites grew weaker, strengthening Asher and giving backbone to their weak control, as indeed Josephus seems to suggest, for Josephus says, *'The tribe of Zebulun's lot included the land which lay as far as the*

Lake of Genesareth, and that which belonged to Carmel and the sea' . By the time of Psalm 68.27 Zebulun and Naphtali were equated with Benjamin and Judah in power and dignity, and as Isaiah 9.1 lets us know it is Zebulun and Naphtali who are seen as summing up Galilee of the nations. Thus the suggestion of the expansion of Zebulun's authority over a wide area at the expense of other tribes, and therefore as almost certainly reaching to the sea, is clearly documented.

We may therefore conclude by saying that while the blessing of Zebulun appears to relate very much to the time in Egypt where he would have such opportunities with regard to the sea, and not directly to the future of the tribe, it is probable that his interest is also to be reflected in what turned out to be the future of the tribe.

49.14

“Issachar is a strong ass, couching down between the sheepfolds,
And he saw a resting place that it was good, and the land that it was pleasant,
And he bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a slave under forced labour.”

Jacob recognises in Issachar ('man of wages') someone who enjoys his pleasures and lacks initiative. He would always be a servant to others rather than taking the mastery. He would always prefer to be paid rather than being an entrepreneur.

'A strong ass.' The ass was a beast of burden, and Issachar is pictured as being ready to receive extra burdens as he does his work among the sheep. It may be that in Egypt he had fixed his eyes on its pleasures and in order to enjoy them had become committed to a certain level of forced labour in order to subsidise a pleasurable lifestyle.

There is no evidence that the tribe of Issachar became specifically a slave nation, but its territory which was in the vicinity of, at times, strong Canaanite cities whose fortunes varied (Judges 1.27-28) might suggest that it would itself at times be subject to strong outside pressures and never fully establish itself. Consider its non-mention in Judges 1, possibly there being included in Manasseh. However it was lively enough in helping Deborah (Judges 5.15), and there is no real reason for seeing it as especially enslaved.

49.16

“Dan will judge his people, as one of the offshoots (or rods or tribes) of Israel,
Dan will be a serpent in the way, an adder in the path,
Who bites the horses' heels, so that his rider falls backwards.
I have waited for your deliverance, Oh Yahweh.”

'Dan will judge his people.' The family tribe was split up into sub-tribes. This is evidenced by the fact that Exodus 1 speaks of 'every man and his household' coming down to Egypt. This is what we would in fact expect as the sons married and built up their own groupings, as Jacob had himself done with Laban. Thus 'Dan will judge his people' simply refers to the common fact that he is to be master over his own 'household', successfully making independent major decisions and acting as arbiter when necessary (in part contrast to Issachar).

'As one of the offshoots (shivte) of Israel.' This is the first use of a phrase that would much later signify 'the tribes of Israel'. But the latter is probably a developed meaning of shevet (used in verse 10 for 'sceptre') with a specialised meaning and not strictly applicable at this stage. 'Shevet' as translated 'tribe' is in fact used exclusively of Israel in the Old Testament representing those who have 'descended' from Israel. The one possible exception to this is Isaiah 19.13, but there it may mean 'sceptres', or alternately simply arise from its later established use. It is thus, at least at this early stage, not a general word for a tribe. Its meaning is 'rod', either as a symbol of rulership or as a means of punishment, or 'offshoot'.

So in this early use it probably signifies 'offshoot' referring to Dan himself as an offshoot of Jacob. Compare for this verse 28, where the sons are described as 'shivte of Israel'. Jacob had all the pride of a patriarch who had produced a large family tribe.

An alternative possibility is that Dan is here being seen as one of Jacob's 'rods' as the one who acts as leader and judge. Compare 'the rod of men' in 2 Samuel 7.14 and 'Oh Assyrian, the rod of my anger (Isaiah 10.5).'

If we do accept the translation 'tribes' it may serve to demonstrate that the groupings in Egypt are enlarging and expanding to such an extent that they can now be called 'tribes', although the word is never used of groupings other than Israel in the Pentateuch and thus has a specialist meaning. Their influence and wealth in Egypt, bolstered by having their brother as Vizier, might ensure such rapid expansion. They may well now be too large to be called 'households'.

'Dan will be a serpent in the way ---'. Jacob's complaint is that in his leadership and as a dispenser of justice he is devious and untrustworthy. He is like a snake waiting to strike unexpectedly, thus bringing down a horse's rider. He will not deal fairly with his people. Alternately it may mean that although his sub-tribe is small and insignificant he will be able by subtlety to beat greater peoples than his own who are threatening him.

'I have waited for your deliverance, Oh Yahweh.' Jacob has waited for Yahweh to act to deal with the problem, and in his dying breath again calls on Him to do so. Is it not time now for Yahweh to act? This suggests that Dan's behaviour is actually contrary to the covenant and covenant ordinances to such an extent that Yahweh's intervention could be expected.

Alternately the prayer may reflect the large task facing Dan which he needs Yahweh's help to cope with.

The mention of, and prayer to, Yahweh demonstrates that in Egypt the covenant is still holding and Jacob expects God to act in accordance with it.

49.19

"Gad, a marauding band will press on him, but he will press on their heel."

This rather enigmatic statement reflects Jacob's conviction of some disaster to face Gad at the hands of a marauding band. He may indeed, with the wisdom of an old man, be aware of some trouble already brewing. But he assures Gad that he will be able to retaliate successfully. Success will finally be his.

49.20

"Asher's food will be rich, and he will yield royal dainties."

It would appear that Asher has ventured into catering. He may even have been given a position in Pharaoh's palace. He is thus eating excessively well and providing royal dainties. There are no suggestions anywhere that this interest was carried into the future.

49.21

"Naphtali is a hind released, he gives goodly words."

Naphtali has clearly been the surprise among the brothers. He is like a trapped hind which has been let loose, in that he has moved from being merely the quiet one to becoming a teacher of wisdom (see Proverbs 15.26; 16.24). Wisdom teaching was well established in Egypt.

49.22-26

**“Joseph is the son of a fruitful tree,
 The son of a fruitful tree by a spring,
 His daughters run over the wall.
 The archers have sorely grieved him,
 And shot at him and persecuted him,
 But his bow abode in strength,
 And the arms of his hands were made strong,
 By the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob,
 From there is the shepherd, the Rock of Israel,
 Even by the God of your father who will help you,
 And by Shaddai who will bless you,
 With blessings of heaven above,
 Blessings of the deep which couches beneath,
 Blessings of the breast and of the womb.
 The blessings of your father have prevailed,
 Above the blessings of my progenitors,
 To the utmost bound of the everlasting hills.
 They shall be on the head of Joseph,
 And on the crown of the head of him
 Who was separate from his brothers.”**

In this word in respect of Joseph his father rejoices in the way that God has triumphed. Although Joseph has been persecuted (the archers represent his brothers sniping at him) he has been strong and has also triumphed. Indeed mighty blessings have been poured on him including the birth of sons. This is because the blessings of his father have far exceeded those of his contemporaries, and these blessings will be on him into the future.

‘Joseph is the son of a fruitful tree --- by a spring, his daughters run over the wall.’ The picture is of a tree planted by abundant water, not such a common sight in Canaan where water was short, with branches (daughters) that abound and climb a wall. The idea is probably of a vine tree. In other words Joseph is fruitful, and flourishing and exceedingly blessed, and will produce abundant fruit and offspring.

‘The son of a fruitful tree.’ Jacob may well have himself in mind here as the fruitful tree, with his twelve sons and many daughters. Once again his pride in his own abilities comes out. But he knew from God’s promises that he himself was to have abundant seed and declares the same for Joseph. Manasseh and Ephraim in fact became two of the largest tribes.

‘The archers have sorely grieved him and shot at him and persecuted him.’ The reference here is to his brothers who have constantly attacked him with words as arrows, and have persecuted him.

‘But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong.’ The persecution did not cause him to fail, rather he became strong under the persecution, and answered all their accusations. Pulling a bow required strong arms, but God gave him all the strength required (‘were made strong’).

‘By the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob.’ His arms were made strong by the Mighty One of Jacob. This may have been Jacob’s own special name for God, compare ‘the Fear of Isaac’ (31.42), because he had experienced His mighty power. And Joseph too had become mighty, and would continue to be so through his seed with the help of the Mighty One.

‘From thence is the shepherd, the Rock of Israel.’ Jacob now expands on What the Mighty One

of Jacob is to them. As the Mighty One of Jacob He is also the Rock of Israel, the firm foundation, the one who shepherds and watches over Jacob and his family.

'Even by the God of your father who will help you, and by Shaddai who will bless you.' And He is the God of their father, and Shaddai (the Almighty), Who with His mighty arm helps and blesses Joseph, and will continue to do so. The God of his father is a reminder of the covenant situation which he enjoys, Shaddai is a reminder that the One Who watches over him is also the God of the nations.

'With blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that couches beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb.' This God will cause blessings to abound. The description is one of abundant fruitfulness. The heavens gave forth rain, the Nile sent forth its water, so that abundant corn could be stored for the famine. Strictly 'the deep' may be seen as referring to the sea so the idea may be more general, but even the Reed Sea could be described in terms of the deep (Nehemiah 9.11; Isaiah 63.13), so how much more so the Nile. The ancients recognised that below the surface of the earth were deeps waiting to spring forth, what we call in our scientific day the water table. The idea of the blessings of the deep in Egypt must surely refer to the beneficial Nile which is elsewhere called 'a sea' in poetry, and the picture is one of rising waters that bring fruitfulness. Such a picture was natural to someone living in Egypt, but not in Canaan.

'That couches beneath' like an animal waiting to spring. This splendidly depicts the overflowing of the Nile suddenly springing from its depths. Moses, who had long familiarity with the blessings of the Nile, took up the same picture concerning Joseph in Deuteronomy 33.13. The blessing also included personal fruitfulness in the birth of his sons, 'the breasts and the womb'. The word for 'deep' is *tehom* which has been proved at Ugarit to be a standard word for deep without mythological connection.

'The blessings of your father have prevailed -- unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills.' This may mean the blessings he has received or the blessings he bestows, but either way they are so expanded as to reach the furthest bound of what is most sure and reliable, 'the eternal hills'. And these will fall on the head of Joseph, even on him who was separated from his brothers, and is blessed more than all of them. See again Deuteronomy 33.15-16. Moses clearly had this blessing before him and used it in his own blessing.

So Joseph has been blessed and will go on being blessed.

49.27 "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf, in the morning he will devour the prey and at even he will divide the spoil."

To a shepherd the ravenous wolf was a dreaded but awesome sight. He ate in the morning and was himself satisfied and then in the evening he provided extra for his young. Thus likewise Benjamin will be successful in all his efforts, providing for himself and for his children. The picture is not necessarily derogatory. Men liked to be thought of in terms of fierce beasts.

49.28 'All these are the twelve offshoots (tribes) of Israel, and this is what their father said to them, and he blessed them, with a blessing suitable to each one he blessed them.'

'The twelve offshoots (tribes) of Israel.' This is the first use of this full phrase (only used elsewhere in Exodus 24.4; Ezekiel 47.13), but we must recognise here that in this initial mention there is more emphasis on Israel the person. These are his twelve offshoots (or 'rods' - see on verse 16), twelve leaders, the representatives of the twelve sub-groups under their father Israel himself. They represent in their persons their 'sub-tribes', and in embryo the future tribes. It is then emphasised immediately that the above words are words spoken to them as

persons and blessings as befitted each one. Even the warnings are blessings for they can be acted on and even responded to. This comment may well have been added by Moses as he saw its fruition in the twelve groups he led.

In context 'offshoots' fits better than 'tribes'. It is only if we take the dogmatic position that the later tribes of Israel are in mind here that 'tribes' fits as a translation. But the writer or compiler certainly describes this passage as words spoken to the sons not to the tribes.

It will be seen that this blessing of Jacob can be related very closely to their time in Egypt, and not so much (with exceptions) to their later time in Canaan. This is what we would expect from a genuine blessing by Jacob.

The Dying Jacob Charges His Sons To Bury Him in Machpelah (49.28-33)

49.29-32 'And he charged them and said to them, "I am to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave which is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought, with the field, from Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a burial place. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah, the field and the cave within it which was purchased from the children of Heth.'

Jacob is aware now that death is close. He will now join those who have gone before, and he longs to be buried with them. 'Gathered to my people', a synonym for dying (49.33) and going to the grave, the place of the departed.

It is clear that Mamre was the place to which the family came when death was near, if they had a choice. Sarah died there (23.2), Isaac died there (35.27), Abraham died there by implication (25.9), and Leah presumably died there - in a hot country burials had to take place within a fairly short time of death for physical reasons. Jacob can be taken there because of the possibility of mummification. And that is his dying wish.

49.33 'And when Jacob made an end of charging his sons he gathered his feet up into the bed and yielded up his breath and was gathered to his people.'

Jacob dies calmly and at peace. There is no thought of his grey hairs going with sorrow to the grave for in the end all has worked out happily, and he is content. But nor is there any thought of an afterlife. This concept does not appear in Genesis, possibly as a reaction against the extremism of the surrounding religions. The patriarchs concentrated on what God would do in this world.

The Burial of Jacob In Canaan (50.1-13).

50.1-3 'And Joseph fell on his father's face, and wept on him, and kissed him. And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father, and the physicians embalmed Israel. And forty days were taken for it, for those are the number of days taken for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him for seventy days.'

Joseph is heartbroken at the death of his father. Then he takes charge of preparation of the body and calls for his physicians to embalm his father. The period taken for embalming in Egypt varied in length, but required some considerable time if done properly. 'Forty days' probably means just over a month. The Egyptians were experts in the subject.

Embalming consisted of removal of the viscera (brain, heart, liver and so on) for separate preservation, and desiccation of the body by packing in salt Then the body was packed with

impregnated linen and wrapped in linen in its entirety.

'Physicians.' This parallels the term *seyen*, "physician", employed by the Egyptians to denote the embalmers.

'And the Egyptians wept for him for seventy days.' This was the recognised period for mourning in Egypt for highly placed persons. The 'Egyptians wept' because they were paid to do so or because it was sensible to do so if you belonged to Joseph's entourage. Weeping at funerals was something that was ensured financially and performed by professionals. This was a sign of great respect. That of course is not to deny that there were genuine mourners. But the private mourning by his family is not mentioned here. Here we are dealing with the official ceremonies.

50.4-5 'And when the days of weeping for him were past, Joseph spoke to the house of Pharaoh saying, "If now I have found favour in your eyes, speak, I pray you, in the ears of Pharaoh saying, "My father made me swear, saying, "Lo, I die. In my grave which I have dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there you will bury me." ' Now therefore let me go up I pray, and bury my father, and I will return." '

'The days of weeping.' This expression reproduces the Egyptian expression *herwu-en-reny*, "days of weeping", for the time observed for mourning. Its Egyptian origin is denoted by the fact that it occurs here in connection with Jacob's mourning in Egypt, and nowhere else in the Old Testament. During the "days of weeping" there was an extraordinarily elaborate program of mourning processions, with wailing women crying aloud, rending their garments, and tearing their hair. The mourning program also comprised very complicated ceremonies in which various priests took part.

'Joseph spoke to the house of Pharaoh.' If there was a death in the family, it was not permissible to come into Pharaoh's presence, however high your position, until the dead had been buried. Thus Joseph has to make his approach through court officials. His approach follows court etiquette.

'Made me swear.' He stresses that what he is seeking to do is as a result of an oath. But Pharaoh was not likely to refuse such permission. It was quite customary in Egypt to convey the dead to distant burial places and to devote long periods for mourning.

Which I have dug for myself.' This refers to preparations Jacob had already made in the cave of Machpelah to receive his body. Joseph wants Pharaoh to know that a place has been made ready. (For 'dug' in this connection compare 2 Chronicles 16.14)

50.6 'And Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your father just as he made you swear." '

The message comes back that permission has been granted. The Pharaoh acknowledged that as his father had made him take an oath, he had to fulfil it.

50.7 'And Joseph went up to bury his father, and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt. And all the house of Joseph and his brothers, and his father's house. Only their little ones, and their flocks, and their herds they left in the land of Goshen.'

So Joseph departs from Egypt with a great funeral procession. Egypt was well known for its grand funerals and this was no exception.

'All the servants of Pharaoh.' That is all of the court officials that could be spared. The

"servants of Pharaoh" were the court officials who formed a close circle round the king and stood nearest to him.

'The elders of the house.' These are identical with the shemesu - hayit, which means "the elders of the hall". They held high-court rank.

'The elders of the land of Egypt,' These are the leading councillors representing every district of Egypt. They had seats in the supreme council of the king.

'All the house of Joseph and his brothers.' All their servants and retainers apart from a skeleton staff necessarily required to remain to care for the little ones and tend the flocks and herds.

'His father's house.' Jacob's own servants and retainers. This reminds us again that the number who came down to Egypt was quite large.

50.9 'And there went up both chariots and horsemen, and it was a very great company.'

The statements that the cortege was joined by a whole galaxy of high dignitaries and by horsemen and chariots, corresponds to the Egyptian custom of accompanying funeral processions to the burial place in large bands. As a matter of fact, in no other country but Egypt were funerals composed of such elaborate processions, and the interment ceremonies were carried out with the greatest pomp in the case of highly situated personages.

'Chariots and horses.' Chariots and horses were comparatively rare in Egypt before the reign of the Hyksos. This may therefore indicate an elite group. The very best is available for the burial of the father of the Vizier of Egypt. Or it may be that the Pharaoh was now one of the Hyksos. There is no reason why the Hyksos should not have allowed Joseph, as a Semite, to continue in high office. It would provide some kind of continuation in the civil service.

50.10 'And they came to the threshingfloor of Atad which is 'Beyond Jordan', and there they lamented with a great and bitter lamentation, and he made mourning for his father seven days.'

The Egyptian official mourning being over, similar mourning now took place in accordance with Canaanite custom.

'The threshing floor of Atad.' This special mention of the threshing floor is significant. The threshing floor was held in great esteem as the place where the heaps of corn were piled in full view of the villagers in harvest times, speaking of blessing from heaven and providing food and happiness. It was therefore considered a place of honour in which an important villager could be honoured in death, and the threshing board was regularly used as a bier, symbolical of the work and the activity of the villager, in a similar way to a soldier being borne on his shield.

A threshingfloor was placed where the winds would be helpful for winnowing. It would be either a rock outcropping or a soil area covered with marly clay.

'Beyond Jordan.' A technical name (compare Transjordan - you can be in Transjordan and still call it Transjordan) that could refer to either side of the Jordan. Thus Moses could use it as referring to the west side of the river (Deuteronomy 3.20) and to the east side (Deuteronomy 9.10). Compare also 'Beyond Jordan in the wilderness' (Deuteronomy 1.1; 'Beyond Jordan westward' (Joshua 5.1; 12.7; 22.7) and 'Beyond Jordan eastward' (Joshua 13.8; 18.7). See also its use in Isaiah 9.1.

'Made mourning seven days.' Here too there was an ostentatious funeral, with official and loud mourners and undoubtedly a period of feasting to mark the occasion.

50.11 'And when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning in the floor of Atad, they said, "This is grievous mourning ('ebel) to the Egyptians." That is why the name of it was called Abel-mizraim ('water-course of Egypt') which is Beyond Jordan.'

There is a pun and play on words here. 'ebel means mourning, and 'abel means water-course or brook. The Canaanites were understandably surprised by this huge gathering of Egyptians in mourning, following Canaanite customs, and it was ever linked to the place in a new name. 'Water-course' may refer to the flow of tears thought to be coming from Egyptian eyes. And it was not surprising that they thought that they were Egyptians for that is how they were all dressed and adorned.

. Once the typical Canaanite funeral was over the main body possibly remained here while the brothers went on to Machpelah to bury their father.

'Beyond Jordan.' The site of the threshingfloor was not necessarily east of the Jordan. 'Beyond Jordan' is a technical name, and mention of Canaanites as 'inhabitants of the land' also suggests otherwise (see above on verse 10). But if it was then it would suggest that the party had deliberately taken this route as a less disturbing route. Such a large party could easily have given the wrong impression

50.12-13 'And his sons did as he had commanded them, for his sons carried him into the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of Machpelah which Abraham bought, with the field, for a possession of a burial place, from Ephron the Hittite, before Mamre.'

The final burial was carried out by the sons of Jacob. They bore his body to Mamre and laid him in the place he had prepared from himself in the Cave of Machpelah. So we have three 'funerals'. The official ceremony in Egypt, a local ceremony in Abel-mizraim and a private ceremony at the tomb. Jacob has indeed died in honour. But his own choice was not to be buried in honour, but to be back in the land that God had promised. For that was where his heart was.

'Did as he commanded them.' Their filial obedience is stressed. They did what was right. They 'carried him into the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of Machpelah'. The writer is stressing that that was what he had commanded them, and that that was what they did.

The Brothers Fear For Their Lives on the Death of Jacob (50.14-21).

The prime purpose of this section is not so much to deal with the brothers' fears with respect to Joseph as to stress that all that has happened has happened in the sovereign purpose of God. He it was who was behind all that happened and Whose sovereign control brought good out of evil.

50.14-17 'And Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers, and all who went up with him to bury his father, after he had buried his father. And when Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and will fully repay us for all the evil which we did to him." And they sent a message to Joseph saying, "Your father gave a command before he died, "So shall you say to Joseph. Forgive, I pray you now, the transgression of your brothers, and their sin, in that they did evil to you." And now, we pray you, forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father. And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.'

The whole entourage now return to Egypt, and it is then that the brothers' fears begin to emerge. They have lived for years with this dread in their hearts and now it has to be faced.

It is not surprising to find that the brothers are still carrying a heavy burden of conscience about what they had done to Joseph, for it had been unmentionably cruel. And now that their father was dead they feared that the obstacle which had prevented their being punished had been removed. Sin, even forgiven sin, can demand of us a heavy price, and so it was with the brothers. It had lain hidden underneath but it had never gone. And now it had resurfaced. They now had to face the great Vizier alone. And they did not know what he would do. Thus their next contact with him was by messenger. They were afraid to see him face to face.

And they had prepared for this day. In their fears they had discussed the matter with their father and he had advised them what to do. He had told them to pass on his dying wish that Joseph should forgive them for their general transgression against him and the specific evil that they had done. So this is what they do and add to it their own plea as 'the servants of the God of your father.' They not only plead their father's words but the fact that they are a part of the covenant community and servants of the God of Jacob. And when Joseph receives their message he weeps. He cannot believe that they are still afraid of him and his heart goes out to them. It was probably the news of this weeping that makes them pluck up courage to face him.

50.18 'And his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, "Behold we are your servants." '

Once again they fall on their faces before him, fulfilling the dream at which they had once scoffed, as they have become used to doing through the years. And they admit, no, more than that, stress, that they are 'his servants'. Now they do not get angry at his official superiority. They are eager to admit to it if only it will spare them from his revenge.

50.19 'And Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. For am I in the place of God? And as for me, you intended evil against me, but God meant it for good, to cause to happen as it is this day, to save large numbers of people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid. I will nourish you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke directly to their hearts.'

Joseph is large minded. He sees things from God's perspective, and he assures them that he has no intention of harming them because he knows that what happened was all part of God's sovereign purpose, so that their evil was used for good and he is ready to leave any consequences, both for him and for them, in the hands of God.

'Am I in the place of God?' He is saying that they have all been experiencing the outworking of the covenant God, and asking whether, when He is so working, man can interfere. The whole pattern was God's. Thus what man would dare to disturb the pattern? So as far as he is concerned all is in the hands of God. If He has seen fit to use their behaviour to save the covenant community alive, and not only them but also vast numbers of other people, then it is He Who must determine the consequences. Meanwhile he will continue to love and nourish his brothers and their families.

And that God's purpose was good, he adds, has been revealed in that so many now live because of it who would otherwise have died. This message is important for it reveals that to him and to the writer Egyptians matter to God as well as the covenant community. This is no narrow message of mercy but one that has reached out to Egypt and all the surrounding countries.

'And he comforted them and spoke directly to their hearts.' And this was no cold theological position, for his heart was warm towards them and he wanted their hearts to be warm towards him.

Conclusion: Joseph, his Fruitfulness and Death (50.22-26)

50.22 'And Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he and his father's house, and Joseph lived one hundred and ten years.'

There is no word of condemnation here. For the time dwelling in Egypt was right. In his own way Joseph and his family were witnesses there of the power and glory of their God.

'His father's house.' This covers all who came down to Egypt both family and retainers and all who have since been born and remained within the community. It is composed of some tens of thousands of people.

'One hundred and ten years.' This was seen by the Egyptians as the length of a perfect life. It may thus be a round number indicating the fullness of Joseph's life.

50.23 'And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation. The children also of Machir, the son of Manasseh were born on Joseph's knees.'

That he lives to a grand old age is certain, for he lives to see his great, great grandsons.

'Born on Joseph's knees.' That is were placed on his knees at birth as the proud grandfather. Among the Semites the placing on the knees was an important indication of acceptance. This is possibly what is in mind in Job 3:12 where we read 'why did the knees receive me?'. When a child was adopted it was 'placed on the knees' (see on 48.11).

50.24 "And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am dying. But God will surely visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob." '

Some of his brothers are clearly yet alive and he calls them and tells them that he is dying. And once he is dead God will then surely visit them and take them back to the promised land. Joseph is strongly aware that the covenant still stands firm and God's promises to their fathers must be fulfilled.

It would seem that he feels that, now that his position of authority will cease, their purpose in Egypt is done. They must by now have been a fairly large group numbering probably tens of thousands. But they have comfortably settled down and do not return to the land God has promised them, and eventually they will suffer for it. It is not wise to delay in obedience when God commands. And yet as the future reveals, when man fails God finds another way.

50.25 'And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, "God will surely visit you and you will carry my bones from here.'

Joseph is so certain that they will be returning to Canaan that he makes his brothers and their sons, the 'children' of Israel their father, swear an oath to take his bones with them when they go. He longs for his final resting place to be in the land of the covenant, the promised land. So does he affirm his strong belief in that covenant that has been his mainstay throughout his life, even in the courts of Egypt.

50.26 'So Joseph died being a hundred and ten years old, and they embalmed him and put him in a coffin in Egypt.'

This verse is not a conclusion but a hesitation, for it describes a temporary situation. The final conclusion awaits the return of his bones to the promised land when God visits His people.

'One hundred and ten years old.' It is repeated and thus emphasised that he lived a full and complete life. And the very fact that this is done in terms of Egyptian thought must surely confirm to us that this was written down at a time when Egyptian thought was primarily influencing the writer and that suggests it was by someone not too long after his death as befitted a great Vizier of Egypt.

'And they embalmed him and put him in a coffin in Egypt.' This is his temporary resting place. He will not remain in Egypt, any more than will the children of Israel. The same embalming and mourning that followed the death of Jacob follows here. But the writer omits it. He mentions only the coffin into which he is placed, richly made and shaped roughly in the form of a man. For the reader is expected to wait expectantly for the next episode. After all, this is the story of God.