Wheaton College Graduate School

# JOSEPH, DREAMS, AND INTERPRETATION

## A Study of the Stylistic and Rhetorical Features of the Dreams in the Joseph Narrative

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THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL STUDIES DEPARTMENT
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by

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Wheaton, Illinois

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## THESIS COMMITTEE APPROVAL

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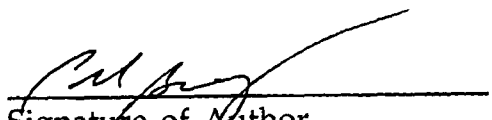
Biblical and Theological Studies — Master of Arts





Signature of Author

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Richard M. Wright, Jr., for providing me with the tools with which I may open the letter; to Dr. Herbert Wolf and Dr. C. Hassell Bullock for their patience and their inspiration; and to my wife, Elizabeth, for her constant love and encouragement and for believing in me.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis introduces stylistic approach, a method of approaching the biblical text which seeks to understand and appreciate the material within its canonical context while applying appropriate critical tools so that the text can be interpreted and applied for use by today's church. Stylistic approach is then applied in a detailed stylistic and rhetorical analysis of the six dreams found within the Joseph Narrative. The study focuses upon these dreams as a stylistic feature being used by the author in order to enhance the meaning of the narrative and to move the plot forward.

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# CHAPTER I
# INTRODUCTION

Over the last two hundred years there have been many developments in the field of biblical studies. Perhaps most notably has been the advancements in the field of biblical criticism. Until that time the study of the Bible had been undertaken exclusively by men of faith. Or, more accurately, men of differing faiths and religions, but all of whom shared a belief in the Bible as a holy book and so they studied it for insight and inspiration. With the Age of Enlightenment came the need for a rationalistic approach which rejected any occurrence of the supernatural and created a scientific hermeneutic based upon reason.[1] Thus the careful and methodical study of the Bible for religious insight gave way to the study of the Bible for its historical and cultural value. As Gerhard Hasel summarizes the situation "ultimately the Bible simply became one of the ancient documents, to be studied as any other ancient document."[2] And out of this came the most forceful and influential critical approach which has ever impacted biblical studies: the documentary hypothesis.

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[1]Gerhard Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 13.

[2]Ibid.

The documentary hypothesis is based largely upon an Hegelian system of philosophy, which views religion as developing evolutionarily from nature worship, where God and nature are equated with one another, to God as a personal spirit and finally to God as an infinite spirit. This methodology found its lasting definition as articulated by Karl Graf and Julius Wellhausen in the last half of the nineteenth century.[3] In general terms this critical method seeks to find the sources which lie behind the current form of the Pentateuch by using vocabulary and style as its criteria.[4] This search finally led to the hypothesis that there are four original documents, labeled J (for Jahwistic source), E (for Elohistic source), P (for Priestly source), and D (for the Deuteronomic source). And the text, and in particular the Book of Genesis, was now seen to be a loose collection of fragments of varying age and origin.

Within the Book of Genesis the largest "fragment" and the only section whose unity is affirmed by almost all scholars is Gen. 37-50, the Joseph Narrative.[5] It is in many ways a unique passage. It forms a coherent whole over thirteen chapters of text which feature a wide range of literary or rhetorical devices in order to convey both the setting of Egypt and the meaning of the text. The author has succeeded in not only conveying information, but also in conveying that

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[3]Herbert Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 64-66.

[4]See below for further discussion.

[5]Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis*, (Winona Lake, Michigan: Eisenbrauns, 1986), 79. Cf. Duane Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991) 169-182 and John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) and Wolf, p. 122.

information in a manner that is pleasing to the ear and a joy to read. Among these devices and perhaps most unique is the author's use of dreams to help carry the story and develop the plot.

There are six dreams in this passage, and unlike other dreams found in the Pentateuch, they are not a vision where either God appears or his[6] word is spoken. Rather, a message is conveyed in a analogic form.[7] These dreams not only record what historically happened, but also they are used by the author to create a flowing and moving verbal picture. It is the task of this paper to uncover how these dreams are used and to what purpose they are employed in this narrative. In order to do this I will require the use of certain critical methods which brings us back to the beginning of this introduction.

The school of biblical criticism has not been respectful of the received text and consequently the results of its work has often been the destruction of the text. It is my goal to develop an approach which assumes the integrity of the Masoritic text while utilizing the best tools available to analyze the text on the level of both content and style. I do not intend to recreate the wheel, but to utilize the best tools that biblical critics have developed within the context of the canon. The thesis of this study is then twofold: it seeks to (1) develop a method of approaching the text which is consistent with a view of the Old Testament which accepts the unity of the text as it has been received

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6Throughout this work I have followed the convention of the New International Version of the Bible in not capitalizing personal pronouns referring to God.

7This type of dream occurs only in Jdg 7.13-15 and in Daniel throughout the rest of the Old Testament. This distinction and other criteria concerning the form of dreams in the OT will be discussed later in this paper.

and (2) apply that method to the investigation of the dreams found within the Joseph Narrative (JN) so that we might arrive at a better understanding of the meaning and purpose of the narrative.

## *Methodology*

In developing a method of analysis it is important to evaluate those methodologies which have been used in the past while at the same time recognizing our own prejudices and biases. The field of biblical studies, and Old Testament studies in particular, is replete with various critical methods. Some of these methods are useful while others are so esoteric as to lend themselves to use only by the most expert of linguists and semiologists.

Many quake with fear at the phrase "critical method," assuming that the destruction of the biblical text is sure to follow; and unfortunately that is all too often the case. As I have mentioned earlier the critical methods as they have been employed in the last two hundred years or so have most often led to a taking apart and reassembling of the text so that the scholar might recover the "original text."[8] This process generally pays little heed to the form and integrity of the received text.

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[8]Carl E. Armerding, *The Old Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 6-7. This work provides an excellent summary of the major critical methods being practiced today and also offers a balanced review of these methods showing which portions of these methodologies fit into the general world view of most evangelicals.

As a student of the Bible, I too have felt the tension of approaching in a critical manner that which many hold sacred. Yet if the Bible is true then I believe that, as the truth, the text will withstand any fair and objective scrutiny to which I might subject it. The words "fair" and "objective" are, of course, key to this venture. To apply a methodology which has at its base an *undeclared* assumption is not simply "unfair," it is unscientific. This is not to say that to maintain certain assumptions is wrong. It only becomes unscientific when we do not acknowledge these assumptions. The task is to recognize our prejudices and then to attempt to suspend them and allow the text to speak for itself. It is only in this manner that we can hope to be truly objective in our investigation.

At this juncture I must state my assumptions and clarify the perspective that I bring with me to the text so that you, the reader, can judge whether or not I have succeeded in being objective. Most likely categorized as an "evangelical," I believe in the authority and inspiration of the Christian Bible as the Word of God given to us so that we might know the nature of God and pursue our relationship with him. As Carl Armerding puts it, "the Bible [is] the Word of God in the words of men."[9] Accompanying this view of Scripture is the assumption that, since God does exist, he can (and perhaps has) acted in miraculous and supernatural ways.

This having been said, it is possible to state the one assumption that we all must bring when approaching a text. We must allow the

[9]Ibid., p. 7.

text, as it has been received, to speak for itself and to prove (or disprove) itself. The attempt must be made to put all other assumptions, whether they be of inspiration or evolutionary textual development, to the rear so that the text alone may speak and be heard. Now it may seem illogical to assume the truth of a text before beginning to investigate it, but this is precisely the approach must be taken with any historical document.

This is *not* necessarily true of other types of documents such as a philosophical treatise or *apologia*. In those instances the whole thrust of the text is to attempt to prove a particular belief or perspective to be right. Yet the Old Testament never claims to be a proof of the existence of God. After all, it does not need to prove what it assumes! Rather the Old Testament speaks of the experience of the Israelites as expressed in the record of their past, their praises, and laments, as well as their personal contact with God in the form of prophecy.[10] The Pentateuch was written so that the people and their children would be able to hear of God's great acts and would fear him and learn to follow his law.[11]

The task of the critic must be to approach the text as open-mindedly and as objectively as one can and to allow the text to speak for itself. We must give the text the benefit of the doubt until and unless it is contradicted either by itself internally or externally by other

[10]This does not in any way suggest that the OT records what they *thought* they saw (which has then been construed as not necessarily being what *really* happened), but simply states that God chose to interact with the Patriarchs and the Israelites (rather than some other nation) and the OT records the historical events that involved those people.

[11]Deut. 31.9-13. The New International Version is used throughout this paper unless otherwise stated.

historical documents, artifacts, or records. K. A. Kitchen addresses this issue when he states,

> It is normal practice to assume the general reliability of statements in our sources, unless there is good, explicit evidence to the contrary. Unreliability, secondary origins, dishonesty of the writer, or tendentious traits—all these must be clearly proved by adduction of tangible evidence, and not merely inferred to support a theory.[12]

With these assumptions being recognized let us now look at the two major critical methods being practiced today: literary and form criticism. There are currently three works by evangelical scholars which give an even-handed analysis of the critical methods being used today.[13] Herbert Wolf's evaluation is the briefest of the three, but it is fair and includes a good summary of the history of the development of the documentary hypothesis. Duane Garrett's analysis is perhaps the most critical, but his discussion is limited to form criticism and his conclusions are limited to developing a method of source criticism which is compatible with evangelicalism. I will be relying most heavily upon Armerding's work, which is not only very thorough and fair, but also seeks to redeem biblical criticism so that the evangelical can utilize the critical tools available. I will deal here with only two of the major schools of thought and focus upon their positive traits since others have adequately critiqued them.

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[12]K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and the Old Testament*, (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1966) 29.

[13]Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, Armerding, *The Old Testament and Criticism*, and Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis*.

*Literary Criticism*

In its earliest stages, literary criticism was the practice of isolating and identifying various literary forms and themes. Following critics in other areas of research, such as the Homeric scholars, scholars of the Old Testament isolated various forms and themes and identified each independent theme and style as an independent source. Again, I would refer you to the three works I have previously mentioned for a critique of this and the other critical methods while focusing upon the useful traits of this method of investigation.[14]

Armerding defines the goals of the literary critic as the attempt to discern: "(1) clear structural or internal arrangements; (2) clear themes, and how these are developed; (3) the extent and literary history of separate units, if any; and (4) the stylistic features of those units which can be isolated."[15] These goals, as stated here, are completely compatible with an evangelical perspective of scripture. The difficulty begins, as Armerding points out, in the application of point three and the results of the investigation. It is not necessary to assume that the presence of two (or more) different styles within one text requires the presence of two (or more) different sources.

Furthermore, it is not necessary (and only rarely useful) to try to recreate the "literary history of separate units" as the source critics

[14]Cf. also Kitchen, pp. 112-138.
[15]Armerding, p. 23.

attempt. It is true that there are certainly sources which lie behind the Book of Genesis as we know it. This is true even if we assume a Mosaic authorship. But how these sources were transmitted and in what form are unattainable. The text, as it has been written/compiled, is valuable because it *has* been written in *this* form. If it were in another form it would have some other meaning.

> Because this literature has had a special history as the religious literature of ancient Israel, its peculiar features must be handled in a way compatible to the material itself. A corpus of religious writings which has been transmitted within a community for over a thousand years cannot properly be compared to inert shreds which have lain in the ground for centuries.[16]

So what of the literary critic's method is profitable? All of it, since it is not the methodology which is at fault, rather those who are misapplying it. As Armerding concludes,

> The methods used by the literary critics, though basically sound, have suffered from a serious over extension of their validity when tied to a theory of documentary sources that follows any preconceived developmental scheme for Israel's history or literature.[17]

The systematic study of a text in order to discern its structural form, the careful search for themes, and the analysis of stylistic features used in a text all work together to bring about a greater understanding of the biblical text as well as a deeper appreciation for both the complexity and unity of the text.

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[16]Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 73.

[17]Armerding, p. 41.

## *Form Criticism*

It must be stated at the outset that form criticism is fundamentally and fatally flawed. Form criticism, as defined by Gene Tucker, has as its ultimate goal the discovery of the oral stage of the text. "[F]orm criticism is a means of identifying the genres of that literature, their structures, intentions and settings in order to understand the oral stage of their development."[18] Tucker goes even further by stating, "the first basic principle of form criticism is that most of the literature of the Old Testament had a long and often complicated oral history."[19] Yet not only is it questionable that most of the Old Testament had this long oral history, there is no reason to assume that it is possible to recover that oral form (assuming it existed) without the aid of time travel and audio recording devices. This might sound like a trivial response, but I believe biblical study will be far more productive and worthwhile when we begin to focus upon the tangible and applicable rather than on the hypothetical and possible. The basic flaw of form criticism then is the underlying assumption that not only the oral source which is behind the received text, but also its form can be discovered and possibly recreated.

That having been said, the methods of the form critic can be very useful for understanding and interpreting the text, provided its limits

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[18]Gene M. Tucker, *Form Criticism and the Old Testament,* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), p. 1.

[19]Ibid., p. 6.

are understood and observed.[20] It is the initial stages of form criticism which are most useful to the evangelical critic, and these initial steps are, in fact, very similar to those of literary criticism. The focus is upon identifying and defining the structure, form, and type of a given text. Again, Armerding summarizes the major points.

> The steps [that form critics employ] are four: (1) analyze the structure of a given passage to define the literary or form-critical unit; (2) describe the genre, type, or form; (3) look for a *Sitz im Leben* or life-setting for the genre in general; and (4) determine the function or purpose of the unit by means of comparison with the history of that genre.[21]

The usefulness of these steps diminish as we progress through them. The first step, which parallels the first step in literary criticism, is sound. The important point to remember is that the scholar should allow the text to define its own units, rather than trying to superimpose a form foreign to its nature.

The second stage, as practiced by the form critics, is problematic since the form critic seeks to understand the genre or type of the *original form* rather than the form which is preserved in the present context (i.e., in the received text).[22] Again, we must remember the limitations of our methodology and the parameters which have been establish by the canon. It is appropriate to attempt to identify the form and genre of a given text within the context of the canon and the

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[20]Cf. esp., Garrett, p. 50 where he establishes five guidelines for the use of form criticism.

[21]Armerding, p. 49.

[22]Ibid., p. 50.

received text, but caution must be exercised. In the past Western forms and terms which are based in Western history and tradition have been applied to biblical and ancient Near Eastern texts which have little or no similarities.[23] The process must be the same as with structure: Let the text speak for itself. Once the text has defined its unit we can then listen to it to determine what the form and genre is.

The third step of the form critical method is useful for exegetical purposes when it is possible to recover the original setting, but it has often been abused so we must exercise caution.[24] This is more profitable in terms of prophecy and psalms than narrative. With narrative we can only look to the historical setting described by the author in order to understand the plot and story line. In terms of determining how these narratives functioned in the Israelite community it is important to remember Deuteronomy 31.9-13 where Moses commands that the law be read every seventh year so that all the people and their children, "may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God." The attempt to determine the function of a text in its historical setting has only limited usefulness and is possible only in the most obvious of situations.[25]

There is much to be gained from careful use of this method, but like any approach, it is important to bear in mind its limitations. The

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[23]The classic example of this is Hermann Gunkel's *The Legends of Genesis*, (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1901). See also Garrett, p. 49 where he correctly rejects Jolles' use of the term "saga" which he had borrowed from Icelandic traditions. (This use of saga is different from Gunkel's use of *sage*.

[24]Cf. Kitchen, p. 132.

[25]Cf. Armerding, pp. 55-56.

form critical method has been useful for evangelicals both in terms of the study of whole books, such as Kline's study of Deuteronomy and Wolf's study of 2 Samuel in comparison with other ancient Near Eastern texts, but there is much more to be done.[26] Having given this brief review of these two methods, I will proceed to define a new methodology, which draws from these and other methods, while seeking to work within the context of the canon.

## *Stylistic Approach*

Stylistic approach (hereafter referred to as "SA") is a method of approaching the text which seeks to understand and appreciate the material within its canonical context, while applying appropriate critical tools so that the scholar can then interpret and apply the text for use by today's church. It must be made clear that the interpretation and application of the text follows from the approach, but it is not the goal of SA. The goal of SA is to approach the text in such a way that we may analyze and investigate the text on its own terms. The result will then be to have prepared the text so that the church, layman, preacher, or teacher may use it and apply it in his or her own life.

Perhaps it is appropriate to think of SA as the binding of a book of which we are not always aware, but is nonetheless always there holding

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[26]Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963) and Herbert M. Wolf, "The Apology of Hattushilish Compared with Other Political Self-Justifications of the Ancient Near East" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1967; Ann Arbor Mich.: University of Michigan Microfilms 67-16, 588) as cited in Armerding, p. 64.

the work together. In the same fashion SA provides the binding which holds the analysis of the biblical text together. That binding is the acceptance of the text as a whole which has been purposefully written and brought together. Within this vital and yet often unseen binding the various methods of analysis may then be employed.

Often the greatest difficulty for someone new to the world of biblical criticism is the preponderance of terms which may be both similar and conflicting. Consequently I have tried to choose terms that have little or no present bias, and I will define my terms as we work through the method. I begin with the term "stylistic approach."

I have eschewed the term "criticism" not because criticism is bad, but because of the connotations that it carries. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that we must approach the text with an open mind, allowing it to speak for itself in its own terms. We will then take a given text and analyze it by a set of stated criteria governed by a set of stated assumptions.

I have defined it as "stylistic" because I want to focus on the text as it stands in its complete form. This is a literary method, but it is not at the expense of the historical aspect. After all, these are historical documents we are studying. So my approach is to view the text as a whole, historical work written within a certain context, yet I do not attempt to reconstruct the development or prehistoric stages of the text. I will begin by stating my assumptions or parameters for analysis and then define the steps to be taken in analyzing the text.

I assume the received, Masoritic text of the Old Testament and the canon as the structure within which all discourse must be conducted. There are occasions when it will be necessary to appeal to other ancient versions at points where the text is difficult, and this is appropriate. I will not assume the non-existence of God nor will I assume that all supernatural events described are to be attributed to anything other than actual events as witnessed by those involved. That is to say that I will accept the testimony of the text as valid until either internal or external evidence proves otherwise; and I will hold this to be true for both historical, natural, and supernatural occurrences.

This approach shares similar features with the "canonical method" as defined by Brevard Childs, but there are certain differences which must be made clear.[27] Childs accepts with little reservation the results of the historical critical method, finding fault only in the fact that the critical methods have not produced anything of value for the spiritual needs of today.[28] In practice what this means is that in Childs's commentary on Exodus the first portion of each chapter is devoted to traditional application of the historical critical methods while in the latter portions he writes paying little attention to the results of the critical approach and working within the canon as he seeks to find theological meaning in the passage at hand.[29]

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[27]Cf. especially Childs (1979), pp. 71-83.

[28]Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), pp. 91-96.

[29]Brevard S. Childs, *Exodus* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974).

In contrast to Childs, SA works within the framework of the canon while *rejecting* most of the conclusions (but not the necessarily the methods) of the historical critical approach as being pertinant to the process of exegesis. By setting these parameters for study we will be able to experience a full participation with the text. When we find an anomaly in the text, the response will be to understand what the author is trying to say by creating that situation rather than a response of positing a derivational history. Only after all other alternatives have been tried will we attempt to reconstruct the text. By approaching the text in this manner we will allow it to speak for itself, from its own time into our own.

It is this less tangible goal of allowing the text to speak for its self that lies at the heart of SA. Further into the study I will map out a general four-step methodology for approaching a given text, and it will become apparent throughout this work that there is a great amount of continuity between each step. This is natural since a good piece of writing exists as a cohesive unit in which the genre, structure and language of the piece all work in close harmony with one another, and as such does not readily lend itself to deconstruction. This means that at certain points we will have to set aside our generic framework for an analytical structure which is better suited to the genre or structure of the text under scrutiny. The dream reports are such a case and consequently I will employ a different structure for analyzing them. It is important, however, to outline the general process while emphasizing that the main strength of SA is its ability to allow the text to reveal

itself in its own form and manner without imposing a foreign structure onto the text.

### *The Methodology of Stylistic Approach*

The methodology of SA involves four steps: (1) identify the literary unit and its structure, (2) identify the genre of the text, (3) analyze the content and identify the themes of the text, and (4) analyze the stylistic and rhetorical features present. The general principles behind these four steps can be applied using other analytical structures as I will show by using this four-step structure of SA to examine the JN as a whole (though in brief), and then I will utilize a different structure guided by the same principles in order to analyze the dreams of the JN in particular. At this point I will present each step and briefly discuss the pertinent issues. The details of using the method and the importance of approaching the text in a sympathetic manner will become apparent later in the introduction and in the body of this work.

1. Identify the literary unit and its structure. 2. Identify the genre of the text. These steps cannot be easily separated. Units are formed not only by length and structure, but also by content.[30] It is important that the text be allowed to define its own units. The tendency is to find analogous forms from our own culture as discussed

[30]This is in contrast with Garrett who holds that "texts should be categorized primarily according to form not content" (p. 50). The text is a living thing, and the structure and the content are dependent upon one another.

earlier, but the task of the critic in these initial stages is to be passive and to allow the text to reveal itself.

In determining genre it is necessary to look to literature that is contemporaneous with the biblical material, either within the Bible itself or elsewhere in the ancient Near East. Each text must be understood on its own terms. Psalms should be interpreted as poetry (of its own unique sort), and narrative which proports to be history should be dealt with as such. Now, it is true that within the context of narrative history there are a variety of forms, and this must be taken into account; 1 and 2 Kings are clearly of a different sort of writing than is Genesis which is different from Daniel. But it is imperative that the analyst allow the text to inform him as to what is its structure, form and genre.

3. Analyze the content and identify the themes of the text. At this point the analyst needs to interact deeply with the text, reading and rereading it so as to glean all that the author intended. It is also at this point that issues of historicity and contextual problems are addressed. Once the content has been analyzed it is then possible to identify the major theme of the text. The major theme(s) will be supported and carried along by the structure, and so this step serves as a check to step one.

4. Analyze the stylistic and rhetorical features present. The Old Testament contains many wonderful and varied methods for conveying ideas and concepts. Some of these devices are foreign to Western

thought and have only been discerned in the last several centuries, such as the concept of Semitic parallelism. At this stage the analyst seeks to uncover the way in which the biblical author has utilized these linguistic, structural and rhetorical devices. This is often the most difficult task since the author may be utilizing a device unknown to western literature which will only be uncovered by careful scrutiny and comparison with other Near Eastern literature.

### *An Introduction to the Joseph Narrative*

Since the focus of this paper is upon the stylistic analysis of the six dreams found in the JN, I will spend the body of the paper applying the principles of SA to the dream reports themselves. It is important, however, to see that this approach works with the structure of the text itself so I will use SA to *briefly* work through the JN as a whole by way of an introduction to the body of the paper in which I will then apply SA to the much smaller units of the dream reports. It will become clear that there is a great amount of fluidity between the various steps and levels as the analysis of the dreams will shed light on the structure and theme of the JN.

1. Identify Literary unit and its structure. The Joseph story has enjoyed a unique status during the critical era which was not afforded to other portions of Genesis. Gen. 37-50 is considered by most to be a cohesive and coherent whole with the only exceptions being the possible insertion of the Judah episode (chapter 38) and Jacob's blessing in chapters 48 and 49. As we might expect, students of the school of

literary and form criticism have found various sources underlying the text;[31] but as we have seen, this approach is no longer tenable.

Recently there have been several works which have argued for the clear unity of all of Gen. 37-50. Most notable are the works of Garrett, Wolf, and John H. Sailhamer.[32] Each author has correctly pointed out that chapter 38 is a vital portion of the story explaining not only why it is that Joseph gains the birthright (1 Chron. 5.1),[33] but also provides part of the reason for the ascension of Judah to power. This is further emphasized by the birth of Perez and Zerah, which parallels the account of Jacob and Esau.

> The strange births of Perez and Zerah, following the pattern of special favor on the younger son, is a sign that the miraculous history of the chosen line has now come to Judah alone among the twelve.[34]

Garrett's assessment, though accurate, is a bit enthusiastic and must be tempered by 1 Chron. 5.1,

> "[Reuben] was the firstborn, but when he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph son of Israel; so that he is not enrolled in the genealogy according to his birthright, though Judah became prominent among his brothers and a ruler came from him, yet the birthright belonged to Joseph." (New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])

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[31]Claus Westermann, *Genesis 37-50: A Commentary trans.* John J. Scullion S.J. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), pp. 19-24 gives an excellent summary of the history of the exegesis of the Joseph story. Garrett (pp. 169-173) offers an excellent critical review of recent approaches.

[32]See n. 5 above as well as Sailhamer, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary Vol. 2: Genesis*, ed., Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), pp. 225-284, esp. pp. 230-232.

[33]Wolf, p. 122.

[34]Garrett, p. 176.

So Gen. 37-50 form a complete unit, within which there are other smaller units. It must also be noted that although the Joseph story forms a separate unit within Genesis, it is still part of the organic whole contributing to and furthering the themes of God's presence with the patriarchs and the fulfilling of God's promises to them.

Within this larger unit is a clear chiastic pattern as both Rendsburg and Garrett have shown.[35] There are differences between their findings, largely because Garrett's structure is very detailed and specific; but they coincide on most points. Rendsburg bases most of his patterning on linguistic evidence which is sometimes unconvincing (e.g., p. 87, point vii.), but based upon content his outline still proves valuable. I have followed Rendsburg's form altering only "D" which he has as beginning with chapter 40. But based upon the use of the dreams to progress the narrative forward, I have placed the parameters of D as including all of chapter 41 and no more.[36]

| | |
|---|---|
| A | Joseph and his brothers, Jacob and Joseph part (37.1-36) |
| B | Interlude: Joseph not present (38.1-30) |
| C | Reversal: Joseph guilty, Potiphar's wife innocent (39.1-[40.23]) |
| D | Joseph hero of Egypt ([41.1]-57) |
| E | Two trips to Egypt (42.1-43.34) |
| F | Final test (44.1-34) |
| F' | Conclusion of test (45.1-28) |
| E' | Two tellings of migration to Egypt (46.1-47.12) |
| D' | Joseph hero of Egypt (47.13-27) |

[35]Garrett, p. 172 and Rendsburg, p. 80.

[36]Rendsburg, p. 80. This change actually only effects one point of Rendsburg's defense (iii., p. 89) and is over ruled by contextual considerations.

C Reversal: Ephraim firstborn, Manasseh secondborn of (47.28-48.33)

B' Interlude: Joseph nominally present (49.1-28)

A' Joseph and his brothers, Jacob and Joseph part (49.29-50.26)[37]

The only points that require clarification are C and C', the "reversals." In both instances Rendsburg finds that the opposite of what should be the proper action (Joseph being found innocent and Ephraim getting his birthright) occurs. Furthermore, he finds that in both cases Joseph's superior is "ultimately responsible for the reversals whether it be his master Potiphar or his father Jacob."[38]

2. Identify the genre of the text. Among the unique features of this passage is not only its length, but also its detail and character development. This is one of the features which led Gunkel and others to distinguish the JN from the rest of Genesis. In his study of Genesis, Gunkel not only began the method of form criticism, but he also instigated the study of genre within the Old Testament.

Gunkel has defined four types of narrative genre: "saga," "legend," "novelette," and "history," which need to be addressed briefly.[39] The first of these is "saga." Often translated from the German *sage* as "legend," Gunkel contrasts saga with history and defines the genre as

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[37]Ibid., p. 80.

[38]Ibid., p. 86-87.

[39]Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis, übersetzt und erklärt,* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 3d ed., 1964) as cited by Tucker, p. 24. Also Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis.* Gunkel defines several other genres, but these four alone, "legend," "saga," "novelette," and "history," are pertinent to this work.

originating from oral tradition and deals with the private lives of the central character(s).[40] "History treats great public occurrences, while [saga] deals with things that interest the common people, with personal and private matters, and is fond of presenting even political affairs and personages so that they will attract popular attention."[41]

At this point the question arises as to how Gunkel might know what would appeal to the "common people" of biblical times. The interests of people vary from person to person, ethnic group to ethnic group, place to place, and time to time. What is the basis for his value judgment concerning the aesthetic tastes of the common man? One other objection must be raised concerning this point. Gunkel argues that Genesis reports no "great political events, but treats rather the history of a family."[42] Clearly Gunkel does not appreciate the importance of the family in the Near Eastern culture where, to this day, family groups and political parties are often one and the same. Furthermore, whether one assumes a traditional Mosaic authorship of Genesis or a dating to the court of Solomon, within the nation of Israel the political units where precisely the tribal groups whose family history Genesis records.

Finally, Gunkel states that "the clearest criterion of [saga] is that it frequently reports things which are quite incredible."[43] This is an understandable statement considering the content of the book of

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[40]Tucker, p. 30.
[41]Gunkel, p. 5.
[42]Ibid.
[43]Ibid., p. 7.

Genesis, but it betrays Gunkel's *a priori* assumption that the miraculous cannot occur, an assumption which the ancient Israelites clearly did not maintain. Based on this criterion one might (and many have) also say that 90% of the Bible is saga.

Gunkel attempts to justify the biblical author, saying that many things seemed possible to the people of the biblical period which we now know are impossible and that, after all, "[saga] is by nature poetry, its aim being to please, to elevate, to inspire and to move."[44] While I agree that the biblical author sought to please his audience, I would argue that the author had a higher motive, which was to teach his people about their God and his love for them acting throughout history. And in so doing he was recording, not a story to please the people, but "great public occurrences"[45] which is their history.

The second form defined by Gunkel is legend. Legends which are distinct from *sage* are stories normally dealing with either holy men, holy places, or holy ceremonies; and they serve to justify the status of their subjects.[46] Examples of this genre would be the stories about Elisha, Sampson and David's battle with Goliath. "The pattern for the understanding of legend," according to Tucker, "usually is found in the lives of Christian saints, such as *Acta Martyrum* or the *Acta Sanctorum*."[47] The same criticism that applied to his use of saga applies here as well.

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[44]Ibid., p. 10.
[45]Ibid., p. 4.
[46]Ibid., pp. 38-39.
[47]Ibid.

The "novelette" or "novella" is especially pertinent to this study since the Joseph story has been identified by Gunkel and many others as this genre. The term originated in fourteenth-century AD Italy to refer to a fictitious work about realistic events which is told in fewer pages than a novel, but is longer and more drawn out than a short story. The common example is the *Decameron* by Boccaccio. There are certainly some characteristics of the JN which fit this description; but there are also certain key differences, not the least of which is the author's belief that he is retelling history and *not* fiction. Humphreys argues that regardless of the author's intention, what the author *really* wrote was what "happens" in real life rather than "what happened."[48] In other words, we can still use the definition of novella since we as educated, modern men know that it is fiction, even though the author thought he was writing history. This is characteristic of the form critical approach as the critic seeks to conform the text to his categories rather than allowing the text to define the categories.

Another trait of the novella which the Joseph story seems to match is the length of the text. The Joseph story is a longer and more sustained narrative than any other in Genesis; and the author has developed the characters to a greater extent than in other episodes in Genesis, but this is to be expected with a work of greater length. If we take all the episodes of Abraham, from chapter 12 through 25, we would see here an extended story with significant plot and character development just as we find in the JN. It is only because the form critic

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[48]W. Lee Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family: A Literary Study*, (Columbia; University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 19. For further criticism of the use of the term "novella" cf. Garrett, pp. 48-49.

has already divided the rest of Genesis into intangible fragments of text that he cannot see the depth and breadth of other passages. So although novelette or novella may be a convenient handle, it is a rather useless term and should be, as Garrett has so eloquently stated, "jettisoned."[49]

Finally, Gunkel defines "history" as originating as written literature, the result of "a kind of scientific activity" dealing with public events.[50] Tucker struggles with the term "history" at this point since history "since the Enlightenment...has been seen as a strictly humanistic and scientific discipline" which is therefore objective, and biblical "history" is, by their definition, subjective.[51] The biblical genre of history does not simply record a series of events, but also interprets these events and attributes a theological cause to them. This is perhaps the most useful definition that Gunkel and Tucker provide.

Many scholars, including many form critics, have critiqued Gunkel's definitions; and I will leave the bulk of that to others, but I would like to point out the underlying principle which invalidates the use of these terms.[52] With each definition there is the assumption that the text is a fabrication which, if it is based in truth at all, has only a small fact as its core much like a grain of sand at the center of a pearl. And with it also is the assumption that the form critic has better knowledge of what really occurred than the author had. This

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[49]Garrett, p. 171.
[50]Gunkel, pp. 4-5.
[51]Tucker, p. 36.
[52]Garrett, pp. 35-50 and Kitchen, pp. 130-138.

assumption is possible because the form critic's method is based upon a Hegelian based view of religion and upon a Western understanding of literature. But as K. A. Kitchen points out, "the idea of a unilinear evolution from smaller, 'primitive,' literary units into larger, more complex entities (and of growth of a work by gradual accretion) is a fallacy from the mid-third-millennium BC onwards, as far as Ancient Oriental literature is concerned."[53]

All this having been said, the question of genre still remains. Following the guiding principal that any parallels for a text must be found in literature which is contemporaneous with the biblical material, Garrett has determined that the genre of the JN can be best described as a "migration epic."[54] The migration epic "tells the story of how a people came to be in the land where they found themselves. Although the story involves the migration of a group of people, a single heroic figure is at the center of the epic."[55]

Garrett finds the *Aeneid* as a parallel to the Joseph story. In each case a calamity has forced the people to move. In the *Aeneid*, it is the fall of Troy; and in Genesis it is the famine. The parallels are further detailed by Garrett so I will not go into detail here, but what makes his argument for "migration epic" convincing is that 1) it is paralleled in ancient literature and 2) it takes into account the content and structure of the story itself. The genre of the Joseph story is then to be classified as a migration epic. It should be noted that the use of the term "epic" is

[53]Ibid., p. 131.
[54]Garrett, pp. 177-181.
[55]Ibid., p. 178.

not intended in any way to comment upon the historicity of the narrative; rather it is used as a descriptive term.

3. Analyze the content and identify the themes of the text. Many scholars in the past have pointed out that the JN contains many points of contact with ancient Egypt.[56] As Westermann puts it, "there is no narrative in the Old Testament that reflects so immediately and vividly acquaintance with and wonder at a foreign land."[57] For example, the prominence of cows in Pharaoh's dream is significant in that sheep rather than cattle were the major commodity in Palestine; but in Egypt cattle are the major herd animals, just as the author has portrayed it in the story.

That Joseph was made to shave his beard and given fine linens to wear in Pharaoh's court is in complete accordance with Egyptian custom[58] as is the process of his installation as vizier of Egypt. "The narrator describes Joseph's installation by describing ceremonies, customs, and laws that were actually practiced in Egypt."[59] And finally, the name given to Joseph by Pharaoh and the name of his wife are both authentically Egyptian; and the use of interpreters in the court emphasizes the difference in languages. All of these elements combine

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[56]For an exhaustive discussion of the Egyptian background see D. B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50) (VT Sup 20)*, (Leiden: Brill, 1970), pp. 187-243.

[57]Westermann, p. 29.

[58]Wolf, p. 124.

[59]Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961) 377.

to create a vivid image of Joseph within the land of Egypt and give the narrative the strength of an authentic setting.

Although the JN forms a cohesive unit, it is not fully independent of the material which precedes it in Genesis nor is Genesis complete without the Joseph story. The main theme to be found in the last half of Genesis is that God is present with his people and he is fulfilling his promises. The major contrast between the Joseph story and the rest of Genesis is that God is not physically present. Throughout the first 35 chapters of Gen. God presents himself to the patriarchs either in some form or he speaks to them directly. In Gen. 35.9-13 God appears to Jacob and blesses him, changing his name and telling Israel that he will father a great nation, even nations! Yet God does not appear to Joseph.

God is certainly present throughout the narrative and even Tucker notes "one can see that God is at work on the human heart,"[60] but God is also present in the activity of humans. It may be that Gunkel was correct in suggesting that the Joseph story would appeal to the common people, but it is not because the author is sharing insider's gossip. It is because Joseph endured the experience of all of us. He never wrestled with God or spoke to his angels. He simply believed that God had a greater plan for him, and trusted that God would finish what he had begun.

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[60]Tucker, p. 40.

Even when Joseph was far from average as he interpreted the dreams of others, he gave God the credit. And when he finally revealed himself to his brothers and forgave them of all the atrocities that they had done to him, Joseph proclaimed not just his own faith but also the faith of the future nation saying, "It was not you who sent me here, but God" (Gen. 45.8).

There are other supplemental themes which are at work in this story, but they serve only to accent the humanity and to bring out the divinity. The story of Joseph is nothing less than the gospel. The God who created us also has a plan for us, and he will deliver us from the darkest dungeon to draw us to himself. This is the message that runs deep and strong throughout the Joseph story and Genesis. It is the truth which the nation of Israel and the Christian church have clung to ever since: God has a will for me and it is not the world that decides my fate. It is God.

4. Analyze the stylistic and rhetorical features present. Within the JN there are many devices which are employed to develop the story. This fourth step is the broadest of the four categories since "stylistic and rhetorical features" can be anything from word play such as we have with Joseph's name and the brothers "adding to their hatred for him" (verse 5)[61] to the use of a particular type of narrative genre within the larger framework such as the account of Joseph and Potiphar's wife or Jacob's blessing.

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[61]Cf. below.

The JN is particularly rich in its variety of stylistic elements, and it would beyond the scope of this study to discuss them in detail here. Yet what this cursory discussion points out is the overlap between the various stylistic layers. As we work our way through the four steps of SA, we find that the process must begin again when we reach step four, since there we find smaller complete units within the larger framework. The dream reports are such units.

# CHAPTER II
# DREAMS IN THE JOSEPH NARRATIVE

By focusing on the dream reports which are at once both independent units within and an integral stylistic feature of the JN we can see how SA can be applied to texts of varying size and structure. This is the where the difference between SA and other forms of criticism is most clearly seen. When most critical methods are finished with the text there is little left to examine for style, but with SA the analyst is able to focus on the devices and features which the author uses to bring out the theme and message of his story. A device which is peculiar to the Joseph story in contrast to the rest of the Bible is its use of dreams.

## *Dreams in Genesis*

Throughout history mankind has been fascinated by dreams. In the last century it was Freud and his psychoanalytical approach to analyzing dreams which captivated us, but in the past dreams were understood as a separate part of this reality. Dreaming was a place in which the future was revealed and where gods spoke directly to man. This latter form of dream is found occasionally throughout the ancient Near East, but it occurs most frequently in the Bible. This is the

predominate form in the book of Genesis with only those dreams which occur in the Joseph story being mantic dreams.

Message dreams involve God or, as in the case of some biblical passages, his messenger speaking directly to the dreamer; and there is no need for interpretation of the message conveyed. Examples of this type can be found in Genesis, for instance Gen. 28.10-17. The passage describes Jacob's dream of a "stairway" with angels ascending and descending on it and the LORD standing at the top as he speaks to Jacob and blesses him.

Message dreams of this sort follow a simple two-part form as defined by Oppenheim: "[1] the description of the setting of the dream, informing us who experienced it, when, where, and under what noteworthy circumstances; and [2] the content of the dream itself. It should be noted that the latter is always imbedded in the former which thus forms a 'frame.'"[62] Gen. 28.10-17 is a clear example of a message dream.

The message dream is different than a vision in that the one who receives the vision is awake. Most of God's direct interaction with his people in Genesis occurs in the form of a vision. This includes those passages which simply state "then the LORD said to..." (e.g., Gen. 7.1; 8.15; 9.1,12; 12.1) and instances when an angel of the LORD appears and

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[62]A. Leo Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East: With a Translation of an Assyrian Dream-Book, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 46,* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1956) 186.

delivers a message (e.g., Gen. 16 and 18). It is useful to identify such passages as Gen. 12.1 ("The LORD has said to Abram, 'Leave your country...'") as visions since any interaction with God necessarily goes beyond normal discourse and therefore must be distinguished in some way. This descriptive definition also enables the analyst to sidestep for a moment the questions concerning theophanies when working with a passage such as Gen. 18.[63]

Within the book of Genesis the term מחזה, "vision," occurs only twice: Gen. 15.1 and 46.2.[64] The latter occurrence is unique since we are not told that Jacob falls asleep. Rather it is described as "a vision at night." That this should be considered a vision rather than a dream is supported by Oppenheim's assertion that in message dreams "it is customary...to stress that the person who is to experience the dream has gone to bed and is deeply asleep."[65] The use of the term "vision *at night" alludes* to the parallel in Gen. 26.24 where there is no explicit mention of Isaac's being asleep and God encourages Isaac, telling him not to worry. It is the same here where there is no mention of Jacob's falling asleep, and God's message to Jacob is that he not be afraid to do as he is instructed. So while there is a parallel in both form and

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[63]The questions concerning theophany are certainly valid and important for interpretation, but there are moments when it is profitable to discuss such passages without having to use terms which are loaded with theological meaning. Vision is then appropriate as a descriptive rather than theological term.

[64]No other term for vision is found in Genesis or in the Pentateuch as a whole. Within the Pentateuch מחזה occurs only two other times. Both occur in Number 24 within Balaam's oracle in reference to the one "who sees a vision from the Almighty [שדי]."

[65]Oppenheim, p. 187.

content, the term "vision" helps to create a distinction between this episode and those dreams which preceded it in the JN.

The second class of dreams is described by Oppenheim as the "symbolic" dream.[66] The form is the same as the message dreams, but the message is conveyed in a cryptic manner.

> In these dreams--in spite of the baffling variety of their contents--a series of more or less rational activities, actions, and gestures are performed for the benefit of the dreamer, as a rule silently and with gods, stars, animals, and objects of every description as actors.[67]

Only momentary reflection is needed to see how perfectly this description fits the six dreams found within the Joseph story.

Although we will discuss in detail later the content, form and meanings of the dreams, it is important to note the clear correspondence with Oppenheim's definition. Each dream contains commonplace items which are imbued with special meaning by the way in which they are employed in the dream. In the case of Joseph and Pharaoh's dreams the symbols perform certain actions. In the case of the baker and wine steward the symbols are representational, and they are acted upon in order to convey the message. The grapes being made into wine symbolizes the steward's return to his position and the bread being eaten symbolizes the eating of the baker's flesh after his execution.

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[66]Ibid., p. 206. Oppenheim notes that this term should not be confused with any meaning it may have in modern, psychoanalytic interpretation of dreams.

[67]Ibid.

Richter goes into further detail than Oppenheim concerning biblical dreams using the dreams of Gen. 40 in order to discern a literary pattern.

1. Anzeige des Traumes
2. Traumeröffnungsformel
3. Traumkorpus
4. Deutung
5. Erfüllung[68]

Richter's paradigm is quite useful and demonstrates a respect for the text's own form and structure. Consequently I will employ his paradigm in analyzing the dreams while continuing work within the mind-set of SA. As with all structural studies we must allow for variances from the pattern, and we shall see shortly that Joseph's own dreams offer such a deviation.[69] While there are certainly other visions and dreams within Genesis, the dreams found in the JN are unique in that they are the only "symbolic" dreams found in the book and as such they deserve careful consideration.

## *Joseph's Dreams*

The author of Genesis wastes little time in getting into the heart of the story. By verse two of chapter 37 the reader is introduced to the young man Joseph, and we are immediately told two things about him: (1) he brought a bad report (דבתם רעה) about his brothers and (2) his

[68]Wolfgang Richter, "Traum und Traumdeutung im AT: Ihre Form und Verwendung," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 7.2 (July, 1963), 204.

[69]Cf. George W. Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt: Structural and Theological context for the Joseph Story*, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Quarterly, 1976) 12-15 for appropriate criticism of Richter's rigid approach.

father "loved Joseph more than any of his other sons" (verse 3). Talk about developing a plot quickly! Verse 4 states explicitly what we knew intuitively from the preceding information that "they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him (דברו לשלם)," [70] a phrasing which is reminiscent of Joseph's "bad report" of his brothers. Thus the scene is quickly set for the conflict, but the impression is that everyone had a hand in the trouble that is about to occur. "No single figure is responsible for the alienation of the family. To the contrary, all share the burden of the broken relationships." [71]

The catalyst for the brother's action is Joseph's dreams of being exalted to a position of authority over his family. The two dreams parallel one another in both vocabulary and syntax, and they also follow closely Richter's formula as he has shown in his article "Traum und Traumdeutung im AT." [72]

(1) Die Anzeige des Traumes (The report of the dream). This first section is a simple report that someone has had a dream and it is usually part of the narrative (i.e., it is in the third person). Verse 5 begins by stating "Joseph had a dream (ויחלם יוסף חלום)" while verse 9 maintains the same structure, but substitutes עוד in place of "Joseph" (עוד ויחלם חלום). Both clauses begin with the *waw-resultitive* form [73] which

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[70] My translation.

[71] Coats, p. 12.

[72] Richter, pp. 207-209. See above.

[73] Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990) 477. Grammatical terminology will follow that established by Waltke and O'Connor except where noted.

is common in biblical narrative,[74] yet there is more to these reports than the simple statement that Joseph dreamed a dream.

Both Coats and Richter point out the extensive use of the root חלם in verses 5, 6, and 9, but it is Coats who recognizes that verse 5 offers a summary to the whole dream account.[75] There are three sections of this dream account as reported in verse 5: (1) "Joseph dreamed a dream," (2) "he told it to his brothers," (3) "they hated him all the more." Each section corresponds to an enlargement in the following verses with the dream and his report of the dream to his brothers combined in one unit in verses 6 and 7. Their response is contained in verse 8 where the author repeats verbatim the phrase at the end of verse 5: ויוספו עוד שנא אתו. Von Rad suggests that the occurrence of the phrase in verse 5 is a repetition of the phrase in verse 8.[76] It is possible to see now, in light of the parallel structure being used, that the author intentionally duplicated the phrase in order to create both the symmetry of idea and to emphasize the brothers' reaction. The root יסף is also intentionally duplicated in this context as a play on Joseph's name. Rachel had named Joseph praying that God might add to her another son (Gen. 30.24). In this case it is fuel to the brothers' anger which is being added.

(2) Die Traumeröffnungsformel (The dream's opening formula). The opening formula of the dream usually consists of either an emphatic or an imperative call to attention. In verse 6 the author uses

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[74]Ibid., p. 543.
[75]Richter, p. 207; Coats, p. 13.
[76]von Rad, p. 348.

the 2 m. pl. Qal imperative form of שמע followed by the particle נא ("Hear, I pray..."),[77] whereas in verse 9b the emphatic particle הנה ("Behold!") is used to alert the audience.[78] Both forms introduce what follows and therefore serve the same general function, but they are distinct in that שמע introduces the dream report whereas the הנה begins the actual report or telling of the dream itself. As Richter points out, the particle הנה is also used within the body of the dream report, but in that context it is simply used to move the story forward rather than as an introduction.[79]

(3) Der Traumkorpus (The body of the dream). The author uses only one sentence apiece to relate the two dreams, conserving time while speeding the plot ahead to its crisis point. The dreams are clearly symbolic, corresponding exactly to Oppenheim's definition.[80] The meaning of the dreams is the same in each, yet the images used are different. In the first dream Joseph sees sheaves of wheat which his brothers had bound bowing to his own sheaf. In the second the image is of eleven stars and the sun and the moon bowing to Joseph himself.

The first dream is revealing in that the image of the sheaves of grain foreshadows Pharaoh's dream and the famine which brings about Joseph's rise to power in Egypt and the fulfillment of this dream.[81] Only

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[77]Waltke and O' Connor, pp. 578, 579.

[78]The NIV is somewhat misleading in its translation of v. 9b since it translates the particle הנה as "Listen" which (erroneously) suggests a parallel with v. 6.

[79]Richter, p. 207.

[80]See above, p. 32.

[81]The suggestion that the later struggle for a monarchy is portrayed in this story and particularly in these dreams is not a tenable position. Cf., von Rad, p. 352; Coats, p. 15, n. 17.

the brothers are included in this dream just as it was the brothers who were the first in the family to bow to Joseph when they went down to Egypt in order to buy grain.

It is worth noting that the number of sheaves bowing down to Joseph's sheaf is not reported, whereas in the second dream Joseph told his family that there were eleven stars which bowed to him. Since Joseph was seventeen at the time[82] it may be that Benjamin was not yet old enough to be in the fields working the harvest, in which case the dream might also be taking into account the fact that Benjamin did not go down into Egypt with his brothers on their first journey.[83] It does seem certain, however, that the absence of his father and mother in the first dream corresponds to Jacob's absence in the initial trips to Egypt.

The second dream is unique in that it utilizes astronomical images. Von Rad suggests that there is a mystical or astrological meaning to the dream. "In the vision of the stars one must not think of single stars, but of constellations, for the number eleven must be connected with the ancient notion of the eleven signs of the zodiac."[84] But most scholars, including von Rad's own disciple George W. Coats[85] and colleague Claus Westermann, find little support for such a position stating simply, "Any mythical meaning...is remote."[86]

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[82]Source critics identify 37.2 and 41.46 as P material due to the reference to Joseph's age and suggest that these are awkward insertions. But if the story is read as a whole unit it becomes clear that these serve as reference points allowing the reader to grow and age with Joseph. Cf., von Rad, p. 375.

[83]This is purely speculative, but worthy of consideration.

[84]von Rad, p. 347.

[85]Coats, p. 14, n. 15.

[86]Westermann, p. 39.

A more troublesome question is the reference to Joseph's mother. The connection between the sun and the moon and Joseph's parents is certainly obvious, but it is Jacob who poses the question, "Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to you?" (Gen. 37.10). It is clear from Gen. 35.18 that Rachel, Joseph's mother, died while giving birth to Benjamin. It is crucial to the story that this be so, since Jacob loved them and worried for their safety precisely because Joseph and Benjamin were the sons of his precious and now departed Rachel. So, if this is assumed by the author what are we to make of the apparent reference to Rachel in the dream? Driver and von Rad argue that this is evidence of another source ("E") in which Rachel was not yet dead,[87] but this is not the only solution.

The question of Joseph's mother has challenged scholars throughout the centuries. The medieval rabbinic scholar Rashi understood the passage in two ways. The first interpretation is that it is a reference to Bilhah "who had brought him up as though she were his own mother."[88] The second interpretation understands Jacob's reading of the dream in a literal manner so that his statement is intended to soothe the anger of his other sons. "Jacob's intention was to make his sons forget the whole matter so that they should not envy him, 'Shall we come, etc.' just as it is impossible in the case of your mother, so the remainder is absurd."[89]

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[87]S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, (London: Methuen & Co., 1926) 322 and von Rad, p. 352.

[88]Rashi, *Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtorot and Prayers for Shabbath and Rashi's Commentary*, (London: Shapiro, Vallentine & Co., 1948) 181.

[89]Ibid.

Jacob's reaction certainly was one of astonishment and it could be that the idea of Joseph's deceased mother paying homage to her son added to his incredulity: but the intent of the imagery seems to be that the whole family, not just the brothers, would bow before Joseph.

> If the dream does indeed foreshadow the concluding elements in the plot of the Joseph story, then one may conclude that the allusion to the mother in verse 10 need not suggest that Rachel was still alive and that, as a consequence, this dream breaks the unity of the context. To the contrary, it simply facilitates the sun-moon motif at the center of the dream as a symbol of the family.[90]

(4) Deutung (Interpretation). The meaning of Joseph's dreams seems fairly obvious to any reader, yet there is no explicit interpretation such as we later find Joseph interpreting dreams for Pharaoh and his servants. Oppenheim says that "there are...a few instances of 'symbolic' dreams in which interpretations can be dispensed with" and "[s]uch are the self-explanatory dreams of Joseph."[91]

The fact that the meaning of these dreams is so clear has led many, if not all, commentators to interpret Joseph's telling the dreams to his brothers and father as an act of arrogance. Redford, who sees the second dream as "secondary expansion," suggests that the author may have intended the duplication to help bring out the character of Joseph

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[90]Coats, p. 14.
[91]Oppenheim, p. 206.

since "Joseph must be made to appear a presumptuous prig."[92] Sarna is similarly judgmental when he writes of Joseph's "egoistic boyish dreams,"[93] and Westermann describes the retelling of the dream as "Joseph's childish boasting."[94] Yet there is another interpretation worth considering.

In all other examples of symbolic dreams, save one, someone is called in to interpret the dream for the dreamer no matter how obvious the symbols may appear. We need only look to Genesis 41 for an example. Pharaoh's dreams are not difficult to interpret at least loosely, yet not only could Pharaoh not interpret them himself, but none of Pharaoh's magicians or wisemen could interpret them either.[95]

Oppenheim lists two Egyptian dreams as the only other occurrences of "self-evident 'symbolic' dreams."[96] These two dreams are also the only two occurrences of symbolic dreams in all of Egyptian literature, but only one of them actually has the dreamer interpreting his own dream. In Prince Bekhten's dream he sees a god fly out of his chapel as a gold falcon and head towards Egypt. This he instantly recognizes upon awaking as the god's desire to return to Egypt.[97] In Oppenheim's second example the Pharaoh Tanutamun has a dream in which he saw two snakes, one on either side of his bed. He then awakes

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[92]Redford, p. 70.

[93]Nahum Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 254.

[94]Westermann, p. 38.

[95]It will become apparent in further discussion that it was intended by God that the magicians would *not* be able to interpret the dreams.

[96]Oppenheim, p. 206.

[97]"Dream of the Prince of Bekhten," Ibid., p. 251, no. 18.

and asks what has happened and his courtiers, rather than "professional dream-interpreters," interpret the dream for him.[98] It is unique in that it is a layperson who interprets the dream, but in all other respects this dream account is similar to others in that it is *not* the dreamer who interprets the dream.

Based upon this evidence we can say that there is one example (excluding Joseph) of a dreamer interpreting his own dreams. It is therefore possible that the author of the Joseph story is following this Egyptian parallel, but the "Dream of Prince Bekhten" is the exception rather than the rule. If, on the other hand, we consider the bulk of the evidence then it is most likely that the author's original audience would have assumed that Joseph, upon having this dream, would seek out an interpreter. Joseph may not, in fact, have been aware of the meaning of his dream, but was actually seeking his brothers' help in interpreting it. Joseph would then be guilty of naïveté rather than being a "presumptuous prig."

Furthermore, it is clear that the author intentionally avoids a direct interpretation, using instead the incredulous reaction of his brothers and father to provide the meaning of the dreams. By removing the formal act of interpretation and replacing it with the rhetorical queries of Joseph's family, the author emphasizes their reaction. The hatred of the brothers for Joseph and the tension within the family is increased to the breaking point, setting the stage for the brothers' treachery.

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[98]"Dream of Tanutamun," Ibid., no. 17.

A word should be said in this context regarding Joseph's bringing a "bad" or "evil" report to his father about his brothers. On the surface this too would appear to be an example of Joseph's self-righteous attitude, but is it not an even greater comment on the character of his brothers? By verse 12 it seems that all of them except for Reuben are ready to kill him. That is not the action of the average, good-natured shepherd. Verse 2 subtly implies what was explicitly stated about Simeon, Levi and Reuben in chapters 34 and 35. They were, if not wicked then, crude men who had each brought their father's wrath upon themselves, as would Judah in chapter 37, by doing things which were utterly despicable to the Lord. So when Joseph brought back an evil report about them it was because they were doing something sinful.

Now before anyone decides to paint a cherubic Joseph, it is also clear that Joseph, at least to some degree, earned his brothers' dislike. When he reported about his brothers' evil deeds, he was probably trying to stay within his father's favor as much as he was fulfilling the, as yet unwritten, law of Lev. 5.1. As his father's favorite son of his favorite wife Joseph received gifts and did not always have to do the harder labor of grazing the flocks. It is the exceptional teenager of any culture and age that does not let such attention and privilege go to his head. There were certainly reasons for his brothers' hatred of him.

(5) Erfüllung (Fulfillment). More obvious than the absence of an interpreter for Joseph's dreams is the lack of fulfillment and resolution. Just when it appears that God intends to exalt Joseph he is hauled off to Egypt where he disappears for a full thirty verses. When Joseph does appear on the scene again he seems to be living up to the promises of the dreams, but again hopes are quickly dashed as he is sent off to jail. And even after it looks like he has finally been "discovered" by the butler, chapter 40 ends with the hollow words, "The chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph; he forgot him." Where is the fulfillment of his grand dreams?

(6) The function of these dreams within the narrative. The absence of Richter's fifth step is purposeful and serves a twofold purpose within the narrative as a whole. (1) It is masterfully used to build tension as Joseph gets seemingly closer and then farther from achieving his position of authority. Suspense is built up over the chapters as the audience waits for the resolution and fulfillment of the dreams of chapter 37. (2) Although the telling of the dreams occurs in the first ten verses of the story, the presence of Joseph's dreams is found throughout the narrative, moving the plot forward to its completion. Even when Joseph is exalted to the position of vizier over all of Egypt, the audience is waiting, eagerly waiting for the completion of the cycle. Where is his family? Will they not bow to him? Then his brothers arrive seeking food for their father's family. But what of his father? Was not he to bow also? And so the first verses of the narrative propel the entire narrative, moving it onward at a stately, yet exciting, pace.

## *The Servants' Dreams*

After an initial period of success in Egypt Joseph is thrown in jail having been framed for attempted rape. Chapter 40 follows directly from chapter 39 and assumes Joseph's captivity (albeit a captivity with privileges).[99] The chapter begins by informing the reader that the butler and baker of "the king of Egypt" had offended their master. By referring to Pharaoh as "the king of Egypt" and omitting the rank of the butler and the baker the author accentuates the distance between their positions.[100] No mention is made of their offenses because the author wants the reader to focus on the subsequent activity and to enforce the notion that the officials have been brought there as part of God's sovereign plan for Joseph, and therefore any of their personal details are incidental.

While verse 1 of chapter 40 reports that the officials offended the king, verses 2 and 3 tell us of Pharaoh's reaction to the event and what action he took against them. In verse 2 he is "angry" and in verse 3 Pharaoh puts them "in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the same prison where Joseph was confined." Westermann is probably correct when he suggests that the servants were "under custody" because "they were under investigation, not serving a prison

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[99]Contra E. A. Speiser, *The Anchor Bible: Genesis*, (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1964) and von Rad (pp. 369-370) and others who place this chapter after 37.36 and suggest that it "shows no awareness of *J*'s account in 39" (Speiser, p. 308).

[100]Westermann, pp. 73-74.

term. The Pharaoh has not yet come to a decision about punishment."[101] Thus, they came to be in the same prison as Joseph and, as verse 4 states, "the captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, and he attended them."

A note concerning the positions that Pharaoh's servants held is appropriate here.[102] The terms שׂר המשקים and שׂר האופים literally mean "prince of the cup-bearers" and "prince of the bakers" respectively. שׂר means "prince" or "chieftain" and is used throughout the Old Testament to refer to men within the court of a king most often in the role of counselor, noble, or official.[103] Interestingly the first instance of this word in the Old Testament is Gen. 12.15 in reference to officials in Pharaoh's court. המשקים is a masculine noun derived from the root *שׁקה in the Hiphil meaning "to cause to drink."[104] האופים is a substantive participle derived form the root אפה meaning "to bake."[105]

Joseph Offord, in his article "The Princes of the Bakers and the Cup-Bearers,"[106] relates evidence from Egyptian papyri and monumental inscriptions which shed full light upon the roles of Pharaoh's servants in the JN. The Hood Papyrus, for example, lists five different specific types of bakers as well as listing another position

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[101]Ibid., p. 74.

[102]For discussion concerning the use of the term סריס "eunuch/servant" in reference to these officials cf. Redford, p. 51.

[103]Francis Brown, *The New Brown - Driver - Briggs - Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1979) 978. [Here after abbreviated "BDB."]

[104]Ibid., p. 1052.

[105]Ibid., p. 66.

[106]*Palestine Exploration Fund* (1918) 139-142.

simply as "baker."[107] There are also records of the court bakers for several different Pharaohs which relate the type and quantity of the bread made for the court as well as the names of several chief bakers.[108] Among these records Offord singles out one Neferhotep who was in charge of the bake house and is referred to in the papyri as the "store-chief." From this Offord concludes that "Neferhotep was chief baker to Seti I"[109] and is parallel to the figure we find here in the JN.

The evidence offered concerning the chief steward is similarly explicit. The hieroglyphic equivalent of this office is translated as "scribe of the drink table" since, as Offord points out, "nearly every Egyptian official was scribe of *métier*, because he had the custody and distribution of the things under his charge."[110] Furthermore, Offord cites Edouard Naville's finding of an Egyptian official's epitaph which says that "Pharaoh's butler was 'Osiris the butler of the sovereign in the South and in the North.'"[111]

These findings taken together justify Calvin's comment that "by the butler and the baker we are not to understand any common person of each rank, but those who presided over the rest."[112] The baker and butler in Joseph's jail were princes among their people, high ranking court officials who had many men who worked beneath them. As von

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[107]Ibid., pp. 139-140.

[108]Ibid. These records are listed in the Rollin Papyri.

[109]Ibid.

[110]Ibid., p. 141.

[111]Ibid.

[112]John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948) 306.

Rad observes, "Such positions in close proximity to the Pharaoh were both sought after and dangerous."[113]

Bearing this in mind, Joseph's change in position from being "in charge of all those held in the prison" (39.22) to his "attending" or "serving" these new prisoners is logical and is not a demotion. The prison itself was most likely reserved for those of higher rank since it is referred to as both the place where "the king's prisoners were confined" (Gen. 39.20) and as "the house of the captain of the guard" (Gen. 40.3). The captain of the guard was Potiphar himself (Gen. 39.1), so it seems that in throwing Joseph into this particular jail Potiphar managed to keep Joseph within his domain, eventually assigning Joseph to serve the officials.[114]

Von Rad contends that such an action was a step down in status for Joseph. "His position as the slave to prisoners was accordingly as low as possible."[115] Yet this is contrary to the evidence. Far from being a demotion, Joseph's serving such important figures of the court was the equivalent of serving Potiphar himself. Coats maintains this position on another level by showing that Joseph's position to Potiphar and to the servants is equivalent for reasons of maintaining symmetry with the preceding chapter. Joseph's "position is not a menial slave. His position

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[113]von Rad, p. 370.

[114]So Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (Chicago: InterVarsity, 1967) 193. Cf. also Calvin, p. 306. "Even Moses ascribes such a measure of humanity to Potiphar, that he committed the butler and baker to the charge of Joseph." It is curious that Potiphar is no longer mentioned by name, but this is undoubtedly to avoid disturbing the focus of the narrative upon Joseph and the officials. (Cf., Coats, p. 22).

[115]von Rad, p. 370.

is one of responsibility, analogous to his relationships with Potiphar in the previous scene."[116] It is in this position of service to the officials that Joseph sees their distress and interprets their dreams.

The author again uses a pair of dreams to move the narrative ahead while at the same time reminding the reader of what caused Joseph to be brought to Egypt in the first place. On this occasion there are two different dreams dreamed by two different people in contrast both to Joseph and Pharaoh who each had two versions of the same dream. Both are symbolic dreams, but rather than the symbols (e.g., stars or sheaves) acting in some way before the dreamer, each of the dreamers themselves interacts with the symbols.

(1) Die Anzeige des Traumes. The report of the dreams is again found as part of the narrative and is contained in Gen. 40.4b-8. On this occasion the report is much longer than in Gen. 37 and can be broken into two sections, the first containing verses 4b-5 and the second verses 6-8. The first section is the actual report and follows the pattern of Gen. 37.5. The second section is an expansion of the formula and is utilized by the author to characterize the situation of the officials.[117]

In verse 5 there is the same preponderance of the verb חלם and its derived noun חלום that was found in 37.5 as well as the use of the *waw-resultitive*. This report is unique in that it tells us two extraordinary

[116]Coats, p. 23.

[117]This not to suggest that it is an insertion from a secondary source. Genesis 37 represents the brevity with which the dream formula can be used. In contrast, this passage is an expansion of that compact package.

things: (1) both men dreamed a dream on the same night and (2) each dream "had a meaning of its own"! This last phrase, which is literally "each according to the interpretation of his dream," is somewhat troublesome. Few scholars comment on this phrase, but it did catch the interest of Rashi who said that each man dreamed not only his own dream, but also the interpretation of the other's dream which is why here it is stated that "the chief baker saw that he interpreted well."[118] In other words, the chief baker was able to make such a judgment because he had seen the butler's interpretation in his own dream. While this is a good example of the rabbinic method of interpretation, it seems an unlikely solution.

Nahum Sarna has addressed this issue and he finds two possible solutions. "The Hebrew can be variously taken to mean that the interpretation turned out to be appropriate to the content or that each dreamed as if his dream were a prediction."[119] Both of Sarna's interpretations are valid. The officials were convinced by the weight of their dreams that they were prophetic, but with that conviction came the knowledge that each dream had an appropriate interpretation and so they were distraught since there was no one there who could provide it. Verse 5 of chapter 40 functions in the same manner as 37.5.

I have already shown how the three sections within verse 5 contain a condensed outline of what was to follow in the narrative. Verse 5 of chapter 40 operates in a similar, albeit more subtle, manner.

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[118]Rashi, p. 194.
[119]Sarna, p. 277.

The first statement of verse 5 is that both officials had a dream on the same night. This corresponds to the subsequent retelling by both the butler and the baker. Whereas in 37.5 the second statement was that Joseph told his brothers of his dream, here it is that each dream had an interpretation which Joseph would subsequently supply. Therefore the meaning of this phrase is "that the interpretation turned out to be appropriate to the content" of the dream. Verse 5 is therefore a summary of the events to come in the subsequent verses.

The fact that both men had a dream on the same night is also unique to this story. While the repetition of symbolic dreams, such as is the case with Joseph's and Pharaoh's dreams, is common in the ancient Near East. Oppenheim remarks that the report of two people having either the same or confirming dreams on the same night existed in the late classical world and is exemplified by Acts 9.10-16.[120] Rather than this evidence suggesting a later date for the text, Oppenheim uses it to shed light on other ancient texts from Mesopotamia. In those examples the dreams were experienced by a number of people, in one instance by an entire army![121]

The dreams of the baker and the butler are similarly unique. Both men dream a dream, on the same night, and the dreams are similar enough to evoke a strong conviction of their importance and yet their meanings are shrouded from the officials. "This is the repetition of

[120]Oppenheim, p. 209.
[121]Ibid.

the dream, which underlies its importance and can hardly fail to attract the attention of the most obtuse of recipients of the divine message."[122]

Although the officials each had a different dream that was unique to themselves and their situation, the dreams were similar and clearly told of their future. But who was there to interpret for them? The text tells us that when Joseph saw them the next morning they were "dejected" or "vexed."[123] Von Rad points out that "if they had been free, many possibilities would have been available for learning the meaning of the dreams,"[124] but as it was they were incarcerated with a foreigner as a servant. Perhaps the clearest indication of their distress is the fact that they were willing to confide in this servant.

Westermann and von Rad point out that dream interpretation was a highly developed art in ancient Egypt and so the servants's surprise and doubt must have been great when Joseph responded to their report asking, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" and then urged them to tell him their dreams. Verse 8b offers an explicit theological statement the likes of which has been curiously absent from this narrative. Westermann phrases it in this manner: "The Joseph story is entirely secular; God is rarely, but then deliberately, mentioned."[125] Such a statement can be helpful in interpreting the text if we are careful with the terms.

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[122]Ibid., p. 208.
[123]Plural participle of *זעף (BDB, p. 277a).
[124]von Rad, p. 371.
[125]Westermann, p. 79.

The JN is secular in the sense that the major topic of the story is the life and activities of Joseph and little mention is made of his religious practices. For example, did he offer sacrifices to the LORD? The author does not tell us these details. In this respect the JN is very different from the rest of the patriarchal stories. God does not appear to Joseph in visions, neither does he send angels to our hero. When God does communicate with Joseph it is in the form of a symbolic dream which, although fairly straightforward in meaning, is not the same as speaking with God face to face.

The lack of visions is a reflection of the changing relationship between God and his people rather than a creation of the author's own imagination. The JN is the turning point in the transition from God's direct contact with the patriarchs to his more subtle but equally active interaction with the growing nation of Israel.[126] From this point forward God will speak to only a select few from among his congregation. Granted others will see his presence and hear God's voice as the Israelites did at Sinai, but from this point onward God only articulated his will for the nation through a very select few. As God tells Moses in Exodus 19.9, "I am going to come to you in a cloud so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you." Joseph was not one of those select. As Sailhamer states, "Whereas Abraham sees the course of future events 'in a vision' (15.1),

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[126]This is not intended to suggest a dispensationalist view, but should be viewed as an "administrative" adjustment. As far as the author is concerned God still reveals himself in visions, but Joseph is given as the example of the average man.

Joseph discerns (41.39) the course of the future in the mysterious dreams of others."[127]

Instead, Joseph is closer to the average person. While we could hardly describe Joseph as mundane, his interaction with God is the impersonation of every man's life and interaction with God. Although God reveals his plan for him in two dreams Joseph is not visited by angels or spoken to from a burning bush. There is a noticeable absence of miracles in the JN, giving the reader the sense that this could happen to him. God had a plan for Joseph just as he has a plan for us, but we must be patient knowing that God slowly but surely worked out his will for Joseph and he will do the same for us. Further encouragement comes from the fact that although God did not speak directly to Joseph, God used him to bring his nation to safety. And so he will use us, sometimes on a grand scale, sometimes smaller, but always for his will.

Exemplifying his dependence upon God within this secular environment Joseph asks, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" countering, "the view that only experts can explain dreams, that only the persons who have studied and grasped the dream books can unravel them"[128] and recognizing the true source of the gift. Von Rad agrees stating, "Joseph means to say that the interpretation of dreams is not a human art but a *charisma* which God can grant."[129] Joseph having offered his gift to the prisoners, they consent to tell him their dreams.

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[127]Sailhamer (1990), p. 237.
[128]Westermann, p. 75.
[129]von Rad, p. 371.

(2) Traumöffnungsformel. In this context there is no need for an emphatic or imperative to be used since Joseph has asked to hear the dreams. What we do find, however, is that *Joseph* uses the particle נא in asking the servants to tell their dreams (ספרו נא לי). The overwhelming sense is one of urgency and anticipation developed both by their visible distress (verses 6, 7) and Joseph's pressing request that they tell him their dreams.

The opening phrase of the dream report contains not only the "catchword"[130] (בחלומי), but also calls the hearer into the narration using the particle הנה, saying "Behold! A vine was before me!" Verse 16 follows the exact same pattern. After the introductory statement that the baker would tell his dream since the butler had had a favorable interpretation, he opens in the same manner as the butler, but this time the call to attention is "strengthened by a personal pronoun and its intensifier"[131] (אף אני בחלומי). The baker also calls the audience to attention by using the particle הנה.

The same pattern was used also in Gen. 37.9b; and I mentioned there that הנה, although used elsewhere in Joseph's dream report, serves a special function as a call to attention in the opening formula of the report.[132] In these examples the author uses the particle in a rhetorical manner to grab the listener/reader's attention. You can almost picture the butler with his right arm outstretched declaring, "Behold! A vine

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[130]Coats, p. 24.

[131]Ibid.

[132]Ibid., p. 15. Coats shows that הנה is a call to attention by comparing 37.9 with vv. 6 and 7 of chapter 37.

was before me!" Such use of the language evokes mental images of an oral exposition, but whether this is because the author is recording a tale that was originally in oral form or because he is expertly using language to create this effect is a question which cannot be answered. Ultimately, all that we can say with absolute assurance is that the effect has been dramatically achieved.

(3) Traumkorpus. The dreams of the butler and the baker are distinguished from the other four dreams in this narrative because they each had different dreams with opposing meanings. In spite of this the dreams are remarkably similar, both in style and in content. This has led von Rad to conclude that "[t]hey are artificial dreams, i.e., what is seen in them has already been greatly stylized and raised to the dimension of the rational."[133]

While "artificial dreams" might be a rather drastic description since it implies non-reality, von Rad is correct in the sense that the author has fashioned the dreams and their contents in a manner which conveys their meaning as well as furthers the form of the narrative. "Stylized they are in that they form a pair of contrasts, a picture of success and a picture of failure."[134]

Detailing the contrast is a series of related, parallel elements which serve to bring out the similarities and differences of the two servants and their fates. The central symbols of each dream relate to

[133]von Rad, p. 371.
[134]Westermann, p. 75. This paragraph is based upon his observations.

the profession of the dreamer. The butler dreamed of making wine and taking it to Pharaoh while the baker dreamed of carrying "all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh" (Gen. 40.17). In the butler's dream the action, which would take numerous months of growing, harvesting, and fermenting, is compressed into a few moments. "As soon as [the branches] budded, it blossomed and its clusters ripened into grapes" (Gen. 40.10). Even the process of making the wine itself becómes a matter of simply squeezing the grapes into Pharaoh's cup.[135]

Within the butler's dream are two pairs of triplets which describe the entire action of the dream.[136] The first set of triplets details the action of the branch as it *budded*, *blossomed* and *ripened* with fruit. The second set of triplets concerns the butler's action in response to the branch's action. In verse 11 he *takes* the grapes, *squeezes* them, and *gives* the cup to Pharaoh. The verbs in both verses tumble upon one another in quick succession impressing upon the reader the speed with which everything occurs. "The rapidity of the action suggests imminent fulfillment."[137]

The action thus dramatically concludes with the butler placing the cup of wine in Pharaoh's hand. Since there was always the possibility of poisoning in even the friendliest of courts, the handling of the wine was reserved for one, trusted servant. That the butler's dream should

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[135]The dream clearly intends that wine was served to Pharaoh, but Driver (p. 337) notes a text from Edfu which says "that grapes squeezed into water formed a refreshing beverage, which was drunk by the king."

[136]Westermann, p. 75.

[137]Sarna, p. 278.

conclude with his handing the cup to Pharaoh is a sure sign to Joseph that the butler would be reinstated to his former position.

The baker's dream report is marked by its brevity in contrast with the butler's report. There is only one verb contained within the account (verses 16b*c*-17) and it tells of the only action which occurs in the dream: the birds eating. The focus of the dream is entirely upon the birds devouring the bread from atop the baker's head. Von Rad fails to grasp the importance of his own observation that "[t]he baker's dream is...quite simple and transparent in its pictorial content; as an occurrence in daily life it is palpable."[138] What *is* unlike the daily occurrence? The birds were eating out of the baker's basket. This is the focus of the dream, and thus it is the focus of Joseph's interpretation that the baker would lose his head.

Within each dream the number three is significant, symbolized in one case by branches and in the other by baskets. We have seen earlier how this theme is reinforced in the butler's dream report by the use of two sets of three verbs. I will discuss this in further detail in the following section, but for now it is important to note how the author used the symbolic vehicles of both dreams and the verbal elements of the first dream to emphasize the number three which Joseph interpreted as the three days which were to elapse before the dreamers' sentences would be fulfilled.

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[138]von Rad, p. 371.

(4) Deutung. Joseph's interpretations are at once simple and subtle. There is a delicate balance which must be maintained in this discussion. Working within the framework of SA I am assuming, as the text does, that although Joseph's ability to interpret is a gift from God it must have a base in reality. That is to say, an interpretation which said that the butler would be reinstated as a palace guard would be suspect since there is nothing within the dream which in any way suggests this.

Most critics, on the other hand, choose either extreme. For example Vawter believes that Joseph's interpretations are a simple matter of allegory as a result of the author's construct. "Not, one might conclude, that [Joseph's] task was all that difficult: for the purposes of the story the 'dreams' have been made more or less to order, and their sense is fairly transparent."[139] Von Rad, on the other hand, does not try to understand how Joseph decided that the three branches would be equivalent to three days.[140]

The truth lies somewhere in the middle. Von Rad is perhaps closest when he says that "[i]n taking the decisive elements and passing over the unimportant and insignificant parts, [Joseph's] charismatic power becomes evident."[141] There is no doubt that the text understands Joseph's ability to interpret the dreams as being a gift from God; this is made explicit by Joseph's rhetorical question of verse 8. The mechanical workings of that gift are left to speculation, but von Rad's

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[139]Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading*, (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday & Co., 1977) 406.

[140]von Rad, p. 371.

[141]Ibid.

suggestion seems likely. Joseph, by divine guidance, chose those elements which had significance. At this point the true inspiration of Joseph would become apparent as he revealed what those elements meant.

### *The Butler's Dream Interpreted*

I have already mentioned that the butler's dream report focuses upon the handing of the cup to Pharaoh. Sarna points out that Joseph "cannot help noting that in the dream the cupbearer is actually performing his duties in the presence of Pharaoh."[142] Since this is an action reserved for the chief butler Joseph was able to conclude that he would be reinstated to his former position. The text points to this as Joseph's key to understanding the dream when Joseph says, "Pharaoh...will restore you to your position and you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer" (Gen. 40.13).

After interpreting the butler's dream, Joseph immediately requests that the butler remember him and have him released from captivity. Joseph's request is reasonable since it would be expected that the interpreter of a favorable dream would receive some sort of reward.[143] "The professional diviner and dream interpreter expected to be paid for his services, as is illustrated by the case of Balaam in Num.

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[142]Sarna, p. 278.
[143]Westermann, p. 76.

22.17ff."[144] His request is rooted in his conviction that his interpretation is accurate and correct. Westermann states that the "perfect of the two verbs can be described as *perfectum confidatae*: 'to express facts which are undoubtedly imminent and therefore, in the imagination of the speaker, already accomplished' (Ges-K §106n)."[145] From a rhetorical perspective "by immediately commending himself to the butler, as if he was already restored, [Joseph] shows how certain and indubitable was the truth of his interpretation."[146]

### *The Baker's Dream Interpreted*

The focus and interpretation of the baker's dream is more subtle than that of the butler's dream. Here the focus of the action was upon the birds eating off of his head. All activity is around his head and this led Joseph, assisted by God's counsel, to conclude that his head would be "lifted off" and his flesh eaten by the birds.

Horst finds further clues to the meaning of the baker's dream in the type of bird that would have been pecking at him. According to Horst the birds were most likely *Aasgeier*, Egyptian vultures. Such birds are carrion eaters and so, says Horst, Joseph would have been familiar with such birds and the meaning would be clear to him. "Die Vögel, die er im Traumbild gesehen hat, sind eben die gleichen, die sein

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[144]Sarna, p. 278.
[145]Westermann, p. 76.
[146]Calvin, p. 309.

Fleisch von ihm wegfressen werden."[147] Although we can never know for certain what type of bird was in the dream, Horst's suggestion helps us to understand the way in which Joseph utilized all the evidence at his disposal. There is no way, however, to understand how Joseph knew of the baker being impaled on a pole other than by revelation. In this manner we can see that Joseph relied both upon observation and revelation.

The recurrence of "three" in the dreams is very significant and is reinforced throughout the narrative with a variety of rhetorical features.[148] The method by which Joseph determined that the three branches and baskets symbolized three days is not revealed by the author, and we must again assume that it was a combination of divine guidance and keen observance of detail. In terms of the latter, it is likely that Joseph was aware of the fact that Pharaoh's birthday was to be celebrated in three days. Driver notes that in the Ptolemaic period "the birthday of Pharaoh was celebrated with a great assembly of priests of all grades, and a granting of amnesties to prisoners."[149] So that fact coupled with the recurrence of three in the dreams presumably led Joseph to the interpretation that in three days each would be judged accordingly.

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[147]P. Thomas Horst, "Der Traum des Bäckers," *Bibel und Liturgie* April-May, 1957, 206.

[148]See above, p. 58.

[149]Driver, p. 338. Redford (pp. 205-206) places weight on the fact that there is no evidence for the celebration of birthdays within Egypt before the first millennium B.C., but that does not negate the evidence of this text.

There is almost complete parallelism between the two interpretations.[150] In each instance Joseph first interprets the occurrence of three as the number of days until their judgment. Next he tells that within three days each will have his head "lifted" (נשא)[151] Both verses 13 and 19 contain the same construction for the independent clause (שלשת ימים ישא פרעה את ראשך בעוד) with verse 19 adding only מעליך "from upon you." The only difference in the two interpretations is the addition of Joseph's petition to the butler, but "the symmetry of construction is nevertheless unmistakable."[152]

Perhaps the most notable feature of Joseph's interpretation is the play on the expression "lift your head." In the first two instances (verses 13 and 19) Joseph uses the phrase to declare the fate of the servants. In the first instance Pharaoh would lift the butler's head in order to restore him to his position. "This expression goes back ultimately to an actual custom in an audience: the petitioner stands or kneels with bowed head while the one on the throne takes him under the chin and raises his head (cf. 2 Kings 25.27; etc.)."[153]

In the second instance the baker's head will be lifted also, but his will be lifted "from off you." In this case the meaning is grotesquely literal. The next phrase concerning the baker's future is difficult, and there is discussion concerning whether he was to be hanged or impaled on a pole after being beheaded. "In any case the violation of the corpse

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[150]Coats, p. 25.
[151]See below.
[152]Coats, p. 25.
[153]von Rad, p. 372.

is a special severity, especially for the Egyptians who took such great pains with the corpse."[154] Ultimately, the meaning of the text and the play on words is clear. While one servant was exonerated and raised to his former position, the other came to a violent end.[155]

(5) Erfüllung. The remainder of chapter 40 relates the fulfillment of the servants' dreams as Joseph interpreted them. The third use of נשׂא occurs in verse 20 in a more neutral sense as the narrative states that "[Pharaoh] lifted up the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in the presence of his officials" (Gen. 40.20). In light of the preceding discussion verse 20 serves as a powerful understatement.

We can visualize Pharaoh holding court, summoning the two men before him as the hall is crowded with people and Pharaoh showing both his mercy and his wrath. Verses 21 and 22 explicitly state the precision of Joseph's interpretations, using his own words and further emphasizing the fact saying that all this had occurred "just as Joseph had said to them in his interpretation" (Gen. 40.22). The passage concludes by telling us that the cupbearer "did not remember Joseph; he forgot him."

(6) The function of these dreams within the narrative. The dreams of chapter 40 are expertly used by the author to build and rebuild the tension within the story that was first developed in Joseph's

[154]Ibid.

[155]For further discussion cf. Vawter, p. 407.

own dreams in chapter 37. At the same time the author makes a theological statement concerning God's sovereignty in all matters.

Chapter 40 never mentions nor does it allude to the dreams of chapter 37, but the reader is reminded of them everywhere. It is because of Joseph's dreams that he has found himself in Egypt, and it is ironic that he who was the dreamer is now the dream interpreter. The dreams themselves are symbolic in type and function in the same manner as Joseph's, foretelling the future through the images of everyday symbols. They are presented in a pair, just as were Joseph's and carry through both of them a numerical theme (three) as did Joseph's (twelve).

The differences between chapter 37 and 40 are clear and help to highlight Joseph's status. In chapter 40 Joseph interprets the dreams, and they are fulfilled in a very short span of time. In chapter 37 Joseph's family interprets the dreams through shocked rhetorical questions, and the dreams have yet to be fulfilled. We can imagine Joseph's frustration as he sits dejected after months of waiting for the butler to remember him and thinking, Great! I can interpret the dreams of others, but I can't see my own dreams being fulfilled.

The author again offers an opportunity of hope in chapter 40 only to have that hope dashed by the end of the chapter. In spite of all this, however, the message of the passage and its function is to demonstrate that God reigns supreme even in an Egyptian prison. This is clear throughout the passage. God has brought these two men into Joseph's

path and provided Joseph with the ability to interpret their dreams--dreams which undoubtedly were sent from God for the primary purpose of Joseph's interpreting them.

Chapter 40 is the catalyst which anticipates and precipitates all the action that follows. As a result of Joseph interpreting the butler's dream his divining gift became known to one who would be in a position not only to bring about his release, but also to afford him an opportunity to exercise the gift of interpretation that God had given him. When Pharaoh has a dream and no one in the court can interpret it, the butler then remembers what Joseph had done and can testify to the credibility of Joseph's talent. Since the dream and its interpretation hinged upon Pharaoh's action, he too knew that Joseph's interpretation had come to pass. Although the scene ends with Joseph having been forgotten, it also ends with the stage set for the grand events which follow.

### *Pharaoh's Dreams*

After building the reader's interest to a crescendo our author wastes no time in moving the story to its dramatic climax: Joseph's rise to power. Although chiastically the test of Joseph's brothers is the center of the narrative, the dramatic climax is here, in chapter 41.[156] Indeed, chapter 41 seems to be the fulfillment of Joseph's dreams, and it is to the credit of the author that he is able to utilize the tensions of

[156]Westermann, p. 85.

the familial reconciliation to draw the reader along as he shows how Joseph's family comes to bow before him. As the climax and the final occurrence of dreams within the narrative, chapter 41 contains many features which reach back and echo the dreams of chapter 37 while at the same time looking forward to the events which ultimately bring Jacob and his family to Egypt.

Unlike chapters 37 and 40, chapter 41 has no introduction and the author immediately begins to report Pharaoh's dreams. This is possible since all the central characters have already been introduced or mentioned in the preceding chapters, but "above all the interpretation of the dreams in prison anticipates the interpretation of the dreams at court."[157] Joseph's request to the butler that he not forget him, the closing statement of chapter 40 that the butler *had* forgotten him, the minimal nature of the transition ("When two years had passed..."), and the fact that the plot of chapter 41 requires that Joseph be in prison at the time of the Pharaoh's dreams are evidence of the mutual dependence of chapters 40 and 41.[158]

Westermann points out similarities in structure between Pharaoh's dream report and other ancient dream reports and courtier stories involving kings, finding four steps in these accounts. "(1) A person of lower rank is called before a person of higher rank to answer a difficult question or to solve a problem [41.14]. (2) The person of higher rank puts the question that no one else has been able to answer

[157]von Rad, p. 374.
[158]Coats, p. 25.

[41.15-24]. (3) The person of lower rank solves the problem [41.25-36]. (4) This person is rewarded [41.39-40]."[159] That chapter 41 fits into this type needs no exposition other than the references I have indicated, but Westermann is mistaken when he says that this similarity of pattern "is proof that behind chapter 41 stands a narrative that was once passed on independently."[160] While the author may be utilizing styles and motifs popular in his day as a vehicle to convey his story, it is clear, as I have just shown above, that these chapters are dependent upon one another and are not only a coherent whole, but they would be wholly incoherent if taken separately. So by utilizing SA we are able to appreciate and take into account the author's historical and cultural context as well as the unity and uniqueness of the text as we have received it.

(1) Die Anzeige des Traumes. The most unique feature of this passage is that the dreams are told twice, once as part of the narrative (verses 1-7) and then as the formal report to Joseph (verses 17-24). On a superficial level the narrative account acts as the announcement that someone has had a dream. As was the case in the other two episodes, the report is found within a narrative context; and like the account of chapter 40 it also serves to set the scene. Whereas the second half of the dream report in chapter 40 contained a condensed outline of the events to follow, verses 1-14 work in a linear fashion, giving an account of the events which lead up to the formal report and interpretation of the dreams by Joseph.

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[159]Westermann, p. 85.
[160]Ibid.

Verses 1-14 serve to set the stage for the following action in three ways. (1) The author tells us that Pharaoh had a dream and this suggests to the reader that we should expect Joseph to be called in to interpret just as he did for the servants in chapter 40. This is the Anzeige des Traumes. (2) Verse 8 informs us that none of his magicians or wise men could interpret the dreams. This prepares the reader for the theological statement of verse 16, which is a reiteration of Gen. 40.8b. (3) The retelling of the dreams and the inability of the magicians and wise men to interpret the dream reminds the butler of his dream and the young Hebrew who interpreted it, thus bringing the plot to the moment when Joseph is dramatically plucked from prison and taken to the royal palace.

The question arises as to why the author told the whole dream account rather than simply stating, "Pharaoh had a dream," as in Dan. 2.1. The Daniel episode also serves to show the sovereignty of God concerning matters of dreams as opposed to the inability of the learned men, but there we have the main figure going to the king himself and asking leave to interpret for him. This is not possible for the JN since Joseph was in prison whereas Daniel was a servant in the court of Nebuchadnezzar and had ready access to the king. A further difference is that in Daniel the King demands that his would-be interpreters tell him what he dreamed, whereas in our passage "Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them" (verse 8b). This highlights the second point that only God can divine the true nature of dreams.

I stated above that chapter 41 depends upon chapter 40 and so the author utilizes the longer, narrative introduction to explain how Joseph goes from jail to being in Pharaoh's court. This is not an incidental matter of a redactor attempting to smooth together two separate sources. It is central to Joseph's rise to power and the fulfillment of his dreams. Pharaoh's recounting of the dream to his sages reminds the butler that he had once had a dream and that a Hebrew servant had interpreted it for him. "As it often actually happens, a similar situation reminds the Pharaoh's chief cupbearer of the scene in prison which he had forgotten."[161] The butler then tells Pharaoh of the incident knowing that Pharaoh himself was witness to (and unknowingly, the mediator of) the fulfillment of his dream. Thus Joseph enters once again and takes center stage.

As I have suggested above, the body of the dream report does not actually begin until verse 15. Coats understands verses 1-7 as the actual dream report and consequently has to say that this "indicate[s] a significant change in structure over against the earlier dream speeches" since "this one does not appear as a speech from Pharaoh."[162] It is clear from the discussion above that verses 1-7 are best understood as the announcement of Pharaoh's dream and as a part of the introduction which leads to the moment when Joseph enters Pharaoh's court.

This report follows that of chapter 40 in that Pharaoh himself announces to Joseph that he has had a dream (verse 15) just as the

[161]Ibid., p. 88.
[162]Coats, p. 25.

servants told Joseph their troubles in 40.8. Pharaoh goes on to tell Joseph that he has heard of his talent in interpreting dreams. Von Rad suggests that "Pharaoh first considers [Joseph] a scientific specialist..., but one who is quite superior who does not need to exert himself."[163] The author's intent in describing the dreams and the magicians' failed attempts to interpret them is made clear as Joseph assures the Pharaoh that the ability to discern dreams is not his own, but it is rather a gift from God. "It is not in me, but God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." The author is again showing that all gifts come from God rather than from man's attempt to gain them through study. Westermann's comment comes back to us that "God is rarely, but then deliberately, mentioned."[164] We might also add that God is always, often quietly, present.

(2) Traumeröffnungsformel. The opening formula of Pharaoh's dream speech follows that of both the butler and the baker. There is both the use of בחלמי ("in my dream," spelled *defevtiva*) and the particle הנה, although here it occurs with the first-person pronoun since he is the subject of the sentence ("In my dream, behold I was standing on the edge of the Nile"). The use of חלם and הנה is common to all of the dream reports in the JN and clearly shows a pattern of what vocabulary was used within the genre of dream reports. More specifically, the opening formula of both the servants' reports and Pharaoh's dream report suggest that there is at least one particular formula which was frequently used.

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[163]von Rad, p. 375.
[164]Westermann, p. 79.

(3) Traumkorpus. There is very little difference in terms of content between the account of verses 1-7 and verses 17-24. The additions are adjectival as Pharaoh emphasizes that the cattle were "scrawny and very ugly and lean."[165] His horror is evident as Pharaoh exclaims, "I had never seen such ugly cows in all the land of Egypt!" "Such elegant variation as this is fully explicable on psychological grounds: Pharaoh, like most people recalling a dream, waxes hyperbolic at the memory of the fantastic images."[166] The author's talent shines brightly as he shows the impact of the dream upon Pharaoh by contrasting it with the objective account of verses 1-7, utilizing small changes and additions which are characteristic of a personal speech.

Pharaoh's two dreams are remarkably similar to the others we have encountered thus far. They are symbolic in nature and involve the repetition of numbers in various symbols in order to represent a period of time. The central symbols are the two sets of seven cattle and the two sets of seven heads of grain. Redford suggests that the use of grain as a symbol is a digression.[167] That is to say, the cattle are more appropriate as a symbol for agricultural prosperity (and subsequently also for agricultural ruin) and that the redactor added the grain in order to complete the theme of doublets. "The second dream was fabricated under the influence of the dictum that double dreams are an indication of the speed and certainty of fulfillment."[168] The importance of the

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[165]Coats, p. 25. Cf. Redford (pp. 79-80) who details precisely the differences between the two texts.

[166]Redford, p. 80.

[167]Ibid.

[168]Ibid.

double dreams is made explicit by Joseph's statement in Gen. 41.32, but Redford is mistaken when he states that "the dream of the ears of grain is inferior in concept to that of the cows."[169]

Many scholars have pointed out that cattle husbandry was an integral part of Egyptian agricultural life and was practiced from the greatest antiquity onwards. "We must apparently consider the cows which are coming up out of the water as water cows which have been raised in Egypt from the most ancient times down to the present."[170] Coats further points out that the "cow is the grazing animal characteristic of Egypt in contrast to the sheep in Palestine."[171]

The importance of cattle to the Egyptian herdsman was paralleled by the importance of grain to the ancient Egyptian farmer. Grain was *the* agricultural crop in Egypt to the extent that the Nile valley was considered the bread basket of the Mediterranean. Roughly two millennia later Josephus refers to Egypt as the "granary" of the Roman Empire and tells us that Egypt sent enough grain to sustain all of Rome for four months out of the year.[172] This fact is borne out by the text itself: "And all the countries came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the world" (41.57). So not only is there no reason to suspect that either dream was a secondary creation, but the dual images of cattle and grain form a type of merism which

[169]Ibid., p. 70.

[170]von Rad, p. 375.

[171]Coats, p. 87.

[172]Josephus, *Jewish War, Vol. III*, trans. H. St. J. Thackery, (London: Heinemann, 1928), II. 386. It was due to this fact, says Josephus, that Vespasian sought control of Egypt in consolidating his bid for the throne, c. 69 (IV. 605).

signified that the famine and drought would be complete and utter in its devastation.

The parallels to Joseph's dreams are considerable. In both episodes the basic action is repeated only a different set of symbols is substituted. In Joseph's case both the sheaves and the stars bow to him (or his representative), and in Pharaoh's dreams the cattle and the heads of grain "eat" or "devour" the other cattle and grain. Furthermore, the report of the second dream of each pair (that is the stars and the grain dreams respectively) is shorter, bringing the episode to its climax and impressing upon the dreamer the importance of the occasion.

There is a recurrence of doublets throughout this episode beginning with the use of two accounts of the dreams. Furthermore, not only are there two dreams each with its own distinctive symbol (the cattle and the grain), but within each dream there are two sets of symbols (the "fat" or "good" versus the "ugly" or "withered"). It will also be shown below how the author even presents the interpretation in two parts. The doubling of the vital elements within the story serves to drum into the reader the weight and importance of this episode. It is the dramatic climax of the story worthy of all the height and tension that the author can bring to bear. Redford's comment on the repeated accounts of Pharaoh's dreams extends in application to chapter 41 as a whole. "[T]he stressing of Pharaoh's dreams by presenting them twice

to the reader in detail is quite necessary, it could be argued, since they introduce the major turning point in the plot."[173]

(4) Deutung. The formal interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams is contained within verses 25-32. Joseph, however, does more than simply inform Pharaoh of the meaning of his dreams. He goes on to tell Pharaoh how he must prepare for the coming disaster. This is found in verses 33-40, and I shall address it at the end of this section. I mentioned a moment ago that Joseph presents his interpretation to Pharaoh in two sections. The first is a summary (verses 25-27) and the second is a detailed expansion (verses 28-31). Both parts begin with the assurance that God has decided what he will do and the interpretation as a whole concludes with the assertion that the two forms of the dream indicate God's resolve to act.

Verses 25 and 28 are both used to introduce the interpretations to follow and both conclude with the statement that God has told Pharaoh what he is about to do. In verse 25b the verb is נגד in the Hiphil, "to declare" or "make known."[174] The only difference between 25b and 28b is the verb used to express God's method of revelation and the use of the accusative marker את.[175] In verse 28b the verb used is the Hiphil of ראה, "to cause to see."[176] Westermann understands verse 28b as forming an *inclusio* with verse 25b, but in light of the discussion which follows these verses are best described as introductory formulas.

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[173]Redford, p. 79.
[174]BDB, p. 616.
[175]Waltke and O'Connor, pp. 161 and 627.
[176]Ibid., p. 908.

I have already showed concerning 37.5 that the biblical author will occasionally make use of a summary statement to introduce a longer explanation of the event in question. In 37.5 there was the statement "Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more." This is followed in verses 6-8 with a more detailed description of his reporting his dream and his brothers' response. We have a similar situation here as verses 25-27 serve as the summary and verses 28-32 expand on the report of the preceding verses. Driver appears to be the only scholar to have recognized this, observing that verses 29-32 are "[t]he meaning of the dreams explained more particularly."[177]

Joseph first equates the seven good cows with seven years and the seven good heads of grain with seven years and thereby shows that they are one and the same dream. He continues in verse 27 to explain that the seven ugly cows and the seven worthless heads are "seven years of famine." There is no way to determine how Joseph knew that the seven cows/heads of grain represented seven years, except that it is likely that one would think of agricultural cycles in terms of years, and that is clearly what the dreams are dealing with. Yet Westermann's statement that "[t]he narrator perceived that a sound intelligence and a sharp faculty of observation are enough for Joseph to be able to interpret the dream" goes too far.[178] While from our perspective we might try and understand the methods of reasoning that Joseph would have used to interpret the dream, the narrator emphatically wants the

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[177]Driver, p. 342.
[178]Westermann, p. 91.

reader to understand that it is only by God's revelation that Joseph is able to interpret the dreams. "'I cannot do it,' Joseph replied to Pharaoh, 'but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires'" (41.16).

Verses 28-32 proceed to expound upon the sparse detail of verses 25-27, explaining that the seven good years will be of "great abundance," but that "all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten" during the seven years of famine which will follow the plenty. Westermann describes this passage as an "announcement of misfortune" which parallels the prophetic proclamations of woe.[179] His argument is convincing in that Joseph is certainly proclaiming what is to come as an historical fact. "What happened in the dream is transferred into the realm of historical reality."[180] Yet there is no reason to divorce this section from the formal interpretation, since Joseph is simply continuing to reveal the message of the dreams rather than adding further comment as we find him doing in the following passage.

The interpretation concludes with the statement already alluded to numerous times in this paper: namely, that "the reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon" (41.32). Joseph is confident that this is true and states it emphatically, but it also reminds the reader that Joseph himself had a pair of dreams each of which had the same meaning. The author has brought us right up to the edge of the climax, drawing back into the immediate context the opening scenes

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[179]Ibid.
[180]Ibid.

with Joseph's dreams of being elevated to a position of greatness. As all these images crowd into view, Joseph acts upon his conviction that Pharaoh's dreams are God's assurance of what is to come, and so he proceeds to counsel Pharaoh as to what action he should now take.

In offering the Pharaoh advice as to how he should act upon what God has revealed to him, Joseph goes beyond the interpretation which was requested of him. He is showing by his own action the faith that he has in his interpretation and consequently urges Pharaoh to also have such faith. Von Rad astutely points out that there is a deeper theological meaning that should not be missed. "The fact that God has determined the matter, that God hastens to bring it to pass, is precisely the reason for responsible leaders to take measures!"[181]

Joseph's suggestions are extremely practical and show the skill that undoubtedly led to his initial rise in Potiphar's house. We would not be far afield to suggest that administration and not the ability to interpret dreams was actually Joseph's greatest gift. After this incident we find no further reference to Joseph interpreting dreams, yet there is every indication that he continued as a skilled leader and administrator in Egypt for the rest of his life. The importance of this cuts two ways. (1) It emphasizes that Joseph's ability to interpret dreams was a divine gift; therefore God alone enabled Joseph to rise in power, since he alone gave him the ability to interpret the dreams. (2) Joseph's greatest gift was of administration which, although seeming mundane in contrast to interpretation of dreams, further distinguishes Joseph from the

[181]von Rad, p. 376.

prophets and identifies him as one to whom all God's people might relate.

Joseph's advice is sound and meets with approval from Pharaoh, and just as Potiphar recognized Joseph's ability and set him above his household, so too Pharaoh saw the value of his advice and set him over his kingdom. Even while the emphasis shifts from divine interpretation of dreams to the practical concept of storing a fifth of the harvest, the author brings the reader back to the source of all of Joseph's ability: God. He further emphasizes this by putting the words in the mouth of Pharaoh. "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?" Pharaoh further recognizes that the ability to interpret the dreams was not by Joseph's own talent saying, "God has made this known to you" (verse 39).

The question of whether Pharaoh was attributing this to Joseph's God or to "the gods" is moot, since it is clear that the author and the reader know the source, and Pharaoh's comment is intended as a rhetorical device which draws our attention back to the LORD, lest we begin to attribute more to Joseph than he deserves. Joseph's presence in the same jail as the butler, his remembering Joseph, Pharaoh's calling Joseph to interpret the dream, and the interpretation itself were all brought about by God's guiding hand, working throughout to complete what he had begun with two dreams placed within Joseph.

(5) Erfüllung. Gen. 41 provides not only the fulfillment of Pharaoh's dreams, but also the beginning of the fulfillment of Joseph's

dreams. Verses 39-45 relate Pharaoh's elevating Joseph to his position as "the grand vizier, i.e., the authorized representative of the king himself."[182] This is the first stage in the fulfillment of Joseph's dreams. Coats argues that "Joseph's ability as a counselor and administrator functions as the primary reason for the Pharaoh's decision to elevate him to a position of power,"[183] but I have already noted that it is Pharaoh himself who recognizes that Joseph is guided by God. Furthermore, the author intends to show a balance. God had placed Joseph before Pharaoh and blessed him with the interpretation, but it is up to Joseph to seize the opportunity and to use the gifts of intelligence and administration that God had given him.

As vizier Joseph is in a position which would require his family to bow before him, but where is his family? As we have seen before the author artfully keeps the reader in suspense, waiting for the other shoe to drop, for the last note to be played. We do not have long to wait because the remainder of chapter 41 tells how Pharaoh's dreams were fulfilled and the stage is set for Joseph's brothers to come to Egypt seeking food and to bow before "the man who is lord over the land."

Joseph was diligent during the seven years of plenty as he "traveled throughout Egypt" ensuring that there was plenty of storage space and that the grain was being collected accordingly. Thus we have further example of a dedicated worker, of one who is gifted in the tasks of organization and implementation. Pharaoh's investment in raising

[182]Ibid., p. 377.
[183]Coats, p. 27.

this Hebrew slave from the dungeon to the second highest post in the land returned to him an hundredfold. Verses 53 and 54 state explicitly that Joseph's interpretations had been accurate. "The seven years of abundance in Egypt came to an end, and the seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had said" (Gen. 41.53-54a).

(6) The function of these dreams within the narrative. The dreams of Pharaoh elevate the story to its highest level of action. From this point forward the author will use his talents to focus the reader's attention on the personal and emotional drama which Joseph and his family endure as they go through the difficult process of reconciliation. But the dreams function like an elevator which carries us up to our destination. The dreams bring the story to the point at which we can focus on the personal drama which has been building beneath the surface since the first statement that Israel loved Joseph and his brothers hated him.

The author has carefully crafted these dreams to bring into the reader's mind all that has gone before so that everything becomes focused on this moment when Joseph interprets the king's dreams and is appointed his second in command. The use of two symbolic dreams instantly draws us back to the dreams which opened the story, and the symbol of the second dream brings to mind the sheaves of wheat that bowed to Joseph's sheaf. Joseph's assertion that the reason Pharaoh had two dreams is because God has firmly decided the matter teases us with the knowledge that something is about to happen. Joseph's dreams will

be fulfilled. "The matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon."

Although there are nine more chapters left in the story and the structural center is still three chapters away, the episode of Pharaoh's dreams puts to an end Joseph's struggle and hardship. No longer must he sit in prison wondering what will become of him, wondering if his God has forgotten the dreams he sent. Yet where is his family? Surely Joseph yearned to see his beloved father again, but again the author skillfully plays out his tale as an angler lets out the line and allows the fish to dance before reeling him in. So the dreams of Pharaoh bring us to a new height in the story, bringing portions to a close, but opening up still more possibilities to the reader.

# CHAPTER III
# CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the JN is unique in the number and types of dreams that are contained within it. By approaching the text in a sensitive manner and allowing it to reveal itself to us we have seen how the author has deftly used these six dreams in order to further the plot and to convey the message of God's constant, though subtle, interaction in the lives of his people. I will conclude our discussion of the dreams in the JN by examining all six of them together in order to understand the function of these dreams within the JN as a whole.

## *The Dreams of the Joseph Narrative*

All three sets of dreams follow closely the pattern for dream reports discerned by Richter with the only exception being the lack of an explicit interpretation and an immediate fulfillment of Joseph's dreams. Each dream is classically symbolic with ordinary actions being performed by ordinary objects in an extraordinary manner for the dreamer, the very nature of which has impressed the dreamer with its importance.[184] Even where the dreams of the two servants involve

[184]Oppenheim, p. 206.

them in the action, the objects involved and the actions themselves are still symbolic.

The only acceptation to Richter's form is Joseph's dreams, which lack the immediate fulfillment normally associated with dream reports. This apparent inconsistency is intentional and purposeful. The reason is obvious as the author uses Joseph's dreams to bind the whole narrative together by delaying the complete fulfillment of them until late in the story when his father finally arrives in chapter 46. Each successive dream report brings the reader's mind back to these first accounts and to the fact that they are not fulfilled. The tension is great and is a tribute to the author that he is able to sustain the intensity throughout the epic.

Each dream episode is used by the author to move the narrative to a new level within the plot. Joseph's dreams set the stage for all the action which follows and flows through the story as a golden thread through a brilliant tapestry. His dreams are the catalyst which causes his brothers' anger to flare and ultimately sends him off in slavery to Egypt. The dreams of the butler and baker eventually lift Joseph out of slavery and bring him into the palace where God has provided an opportunity for him to use his gifts and talents. In the palace Pharaoh's dreams take Joseph and the story to its highest social level as the king names Joseph grand vizier. Whether one thinks of them in terms of an elevator taking the story to new, higher levels or as a catalyst which precipitates each great reaction in the plot, the dreams in the JN are the living frame upon which this glorious epic hangs.

## *Stylistic Approach*

As this study has shown, the biblical text is full of intricate stylistic devices and beautiful, carefully chosen language. Yet this beauty is often obscured when we seek to superimpose upon the text our own modern literary standards and expectations. The goal of SA is to approach the text in such a way that it is possible to analyze the text using all our critical skills while maintaining such a respect for the text that it is given primacy. By approaching the JN from this perspective I have shown how the author has created an intricate story carefully using the three sets of two dream reports to move the plot forward. There are other stylistic devices present and each can and should be approached and analyzed in a similar manner, with great care being taken to structure the analysis around the structure of the text itself.

The purpose in developing SA was not to create a new methodology, but to take those methods which are valuable in evaluating and interpreting a text and to apply them in a manner which respects the unity of the text. In so doing I have attempted to establish a middle ground not of compromise, but of respect. We need to accept the text of the canon which is held sacred by so many while at the same time using the methods and tools which have so diligently and faithfully been developed by those who consider it an ancient document worthy of all respect and honor. Ultimately the goal is to again open up and bring back to life a text which has moved so many millions throughout the millennia.

I believe that this study, as small as its scope was, has shown the possibilities that are available when such an approach is used. We have seen how the author carefully uses the dream motif throughout to add structure, tension, and climax to the story. Within the dream episodes there is beautiful language being used to evoke images within the reader's mind. There is parallelism which lends further support within the larger structure. And there is word play, repetition and symbolism.

SA allows us at once to view the text both holistically and critically. It is a freeing and enlightening endeavor to bring to bear all the knowledge and advancement which biblical studies have made in the last century while still working within a defined context. SA enables the evangelical and the scholar (as well as the evangelical scholar) to begin to speak to one another as we seek common ground within the context of the canon and a common cause in the attempt to understand the Bible. The Babylonian Talmud likens an uninterpreted dream to an unopened letter.[185] The Bible is a letter from God. How long will we continue to study its envelope?

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[185]*Berakhot,* 55a. As cited by Oppenheim, p. 206.

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