

Pentateuch 8

Joseph Cycle

C. THE JOSEPH STORY:

- A** Joseph and his brothers;
Jacob and Joseph part (37.1-36)
- B** Interlude: Joseph not present (38.1-30)
- C** Reversal: Joseph guilty, Potiphar's wife innocent (39.1-23)
- D** Joseph hero of Egypt (40.1-41.57)
- E** Two trips to Egypt (42.1-43.34)
- F** Final test (44.1-34)
 - X** Judah's gesture of atonement for Benjamin
Joseph reveals himself to his brothers
- F'** Conclusion of test (45.1-28)
- E'** Two tellings of migration to Egypt (46.1-47.12)
- D'** Joseph hero of Egypt (47.13-27)
- C'** Reversal: Ephraim firstborn, Manasseh second born (47.28-48.22)
- B'** Interlude: Joseph nominally present (49.1-28)
- A'** Joseph and his brothers;
Jacob and Joseph part (49.29-50.26)

Motifs

- I. Words and Symbols
 - A. E.g. "Wind"
 - B. For Joseph cycle:
 - 1. "Hand"
 - 2. Joseph's clothing
 - 3. Descents and ascents [sheol]
 - 4. NB: Historical narratives are not only reporting facts. Meaning is central.
- II. Genesis 37:1-11
 - A. What is the great tip off (in the whole story) that Joseph is not being a brat?
 - 1. ?

2. 3 sets of double dreams
 3. Remember former oracles from God.
 4. How is Joseph sustained throughout story?
 5. Therefore, Joseph comes with the word of God and they reject it.
 - a) However, ends with all 11 brothers under his wings.
- B. Given this first account, and keeping the whole story in mind, what is the Joseph story about?
1. ?
 2. Argument from Patriarchal progression
 - a) Abraham=promise
 - b) Jacob=promise established through election¹
 - c) Joseph=servant-kingship means to complete purpose of promise and election.

III. Judah Themes

- A. Genesis 49:8-12
1. Judah is preeminently emphasized with Joseph. Why? [importance of asking questions] Let's keep that as a working hypothesis.
 2. B and C on outline
 - a) Genesis 38—Is this just a foil for Joseph?
 - b) Why Judah? [Does he need to go through life like Jacob?]
- B. 38:1 Now it was at about that time that Yehuda **went down**, away from his brothers and turned aside to an Adullamite man—his name was Hira.²
1. Judah –v.26
 2. Deception–v.31
 3. Life of Judah away from brothers in v.38 [big chunk of time]³

¹ Notice this is not election to pass by the nations, but to bless them.

² Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy ; a New Translation with Introductions, Commentary, and Notes* (New York: Word Publishing, 1995), Ge 38:1.

³ Yehuda and Tamar (38): Chap. 38 has been the subject of many discussions, for it seems to be out of place. It interrupts the story of Yosef at a crucial dramatic spot, and is not chronologically fully consistent with it (Yehuda ages considerably; then we return to Yosef as a seventeen-year-old). Some feel that the suspension in the drama helps to raise tension; others argue that this is the only possible place to put an important tradition about the important brother. While these and other arguments may have their merit, one may discern some significant thematic connections as well, both within the context of the Yosef story and of Genesis as a whole.

The episode first of all demonstrates the growth of Yehuda as a character who is central to the Yosef novella. Already in Chap. 37 he had demonstrated active leadership, albeit in a questionable cause. There he actually saved Yosef's life, in contrast to Re'uven's unsuccessful and ultimately self-centered rescue attempt. As the one who basically assumes responsibility, he will be made to undergo an inner development in the narrative, and again becomes the one to take charge of the youngest son (Binyamin, in Chaps. 43 and 44). The missing piece that begins to explain his nobility in this regard (Chap. 44) is the present chapter. Yehuda here learns what it is to lose sons, and to want desperately to protect his youngest. Although his failure to marry off Tamar to the youngest son leads to public humiliation (twice, actually), his response shows that he immediately accepts blame: "She is in-the-right more than I" (v.26). Such an interpretation is further confirmed by the restriction of the word "pledge" to here and 43:9. Yehuda has learned what it means to stake oneself for a principle.

4. Tamar
 - a) Signet and staff
 - (1) Loss of status [divested]
 - (2) This goes with his life theme
 - (3) Duping by Tamar
 - (a) Notice goat theme
 - (b) 38:26= moment of recognition/reinstatement of authority
 - b) Notice birth narrative v.27
- C. 42:37ff & 8
 1. Compare Reuben and Judah
 - a) Comfort? Selfish?
 - b) This helps us to see the purpose of ch.38
- D. Now look at 44:18ff
 1. Longest speech in Genesis; Center of Joseph narrative
 - a) v.20—father loves him; not the same Judah [see also Joseph’s dinner test]
 - b) All rhetoric leads to v.33
 - (1) Look at response (forget the (dumb) chapter division)
 - (2) Thus, Joseph–Judah story
- E. Now ask, “Why is Judah given kingship?”
 1. Does God want a king that becomes the surety for his people from Sheol?
 2. Does God want a group of people who give themselves that the nations would be delivered?

Only after we have been informed of Yehuda’s change can the narrative resume with Chap. 39. True to biblical thinking, redemption may start only after the crime has been punished (e.g., the Samson story, where the hero’s hair begins to grow immediately after his imprisonment).

Actually the chronology works out quite well. We are told via 41:46, 53–54, that about twenty years elapse between the sale of Yosef and his meetings with the brothers in Egypt; this often signifies a period in biblical parlance and could encompass a generation or a bit less. Since Yehuda was quite possibly a father already in Chap. 37, the present story could well end just before the events reported in Chap. 43—in other words, Yehuda reaches full inner maturity just in time.

The other function of this story seems to be to carry out the major theme of Genesis as we have presented it: continuity and discontinuity between the generations. What is at stake here is not merely the line of one of the brothers, but the line which (as the biblical audience must have been fully aware) will lead to royalty—King David was a descendant of Peretz of v.29. This should not be surprising in a book of origins; we noted the possible mention of Jerusalem in 14:18. Apparently a popular early theme, connected as we have noted to the power of God in history, continuity/discontinuity is repeated in somewhat similar circumstances in the book of Ruth (which contains the only other mention of “begettings” outside of Genesis and Num.3:1).

The narrator has woven Chaps. 38 and 37 together with great skill. Again a man is asked to “recognize” objects, again the use of a kid, and again a brother (this time a dead one) is betrayed. [Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*; a New Translation with Introductions, Commentary, and Notes (New York: Word Publishing, 1995).]