

SHORT STUDIES

**JACOB'S BLESSING ON PHARAOH:
AN INTERPRETATION OF GEN 46:31-47:26**

BRIAN ALEXANDER MCKENZIE

Claus Westermann has done a great service for biblical studies by calling attention to the long-neglected concept of blessing in OT theology. Salvation consists of blessing as well as deliverance. God not only rescues man from oppression, danger, and evil; he also bestows positive benefits of many kinds.¹ Westermann correctly observes that blessing is an important theme in three of the four major divisions of Genesis. The primeval history (Genesis 1-11), which begins by introducing the concept of blessing at the climax of its first chapter (1:28), repeatedly notes that God continues to bless man.² The Abrahamic cycle (chaps. 12-26) centers on the promise of blessing and its fulfilment in the birth of Isaac; the Jacob-Esau cycle (chaps. 27-36) treats the "procedure of blessing and its consequences."³ Although Westermann is aware that Genesis concludes with two lengthy blessing passages (chaps. 48 and 49), surprisingly he gives no indication that blessing plays an important role throughout the Joseph cycle (chaps. 37-50).⁴

¹ Claus Westermann, *Blessing: In the Bible and the Life of the Church* (Overtures to Biblical Theology; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 15-24 and 26-63.

² Gen 5:2 ; 9:1. Westermann (*Blessing*, 30) suggests that even the genealogies of Genesis 1-11 are related to the theme of blessing since, in light of Gen 1:28, "blessing . . . signifies fertility." The close relationship between blessing and fertility is discussed in more detail in Claus Westermann, *Die Verheissungen an die Vater: Studien zur Vdtergeschichte* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976) 119-21 and 141-45.

³ Westermann, *Blessing*, 55.

⁴ Westermann (*Blessing*, 29), who identifies shalom as the major motif of the Joseph narrative, makes only a passing reference to the concept of

A study of Gen 46:31-47:26 will demonstrate that the theme of blessing has an important function in the Joseph cycle. This study will also show how the theme of blessing explains a number of perplexing aspects of Gen 46:31-47:26. First, it will explain why the author of Genesis included a report of Jacob's audience with Pharaoh, a report which does not contribute to the Joseph story's function of bridging the gap between Genesis 12-36 (set primarily in Canaan) and Exodus (which begins with an Egyptian setting).⁵ Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, this study will explain why the account of Joseph's agrarian reforms is included and given great prominence.

Before examining our passage, it is important to be aware of one aspect of the theme of blessing as it is developed in the long patriarchal section of Genesis. In the blessing of Abraham (12:1-3), which begins the patriarchal section, prominent references are made to the blessing of others besides Abraham and his descendants. Gen 12:3b states that blessing will extend to all nations through Abraham.⁶ It is especially

blessing in Gen 47:7-10 and no reference to 39:5. Even Westermann's recently completed third volume in his monumental commentary on Genesis (*Genesis 37-50* [BKAT 113; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982]) does not grasp the extent and full significance of the blessing theme in the Joseph cycle in general and in the interpretation of 47:13-26 in particular.

⁵ "The Joseph Story is a link between the call of the patriarchs and the call out of Egypt . . . answering the main question, how did Jacob's sons get to Egypt?" writes Donald Redford (*A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph: Genesis 37-50* [VT Sup 20; Leiden: Brill, 1970] 27). Similarly, Claus Westermann, *Handbook to the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969) 49 and Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (Englewood: Prentice-Hall, 1972) 208-9.

⁶ "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (marginal reading for 12:3b in the RSV). The Niphal form of *brk*, "to bless," in 12:3b also allows a reflexive translation as is found in the RSV and NEB. The NEB interpretation ("All the families on earth will pray to be blessed as you are blessed") is improbable since in Semitic thought words of blessing release power or incline God to act. (See J. Scharbert, "brk," *TDOT* 2.298-99, 304, and 287. But also see Anthony Thiselton, "Supposed Power of Words in the Biblical Writings," *JTS* 25 [1974] 283-99.) The RSV interpretation ("by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves") makes v 3b a restatement of v 3a. The major argument for interpreting the Niphal form of *brk* reflexively in v 3b is that the Hithpael form is used in the parallel passages of Gen 22:18 and 26:4. However, O. Allis, "The Blessing of Abraham," *Princeton Theological Review* 25 (1927) 263-98, cogently argues that the Hithpael form can have a passive as well as a reflexive meaning in both Hebrew and other Semitic languages.

important to note a second reference to the blessing of those standing outside the chosen line. Gen 12:3a states that those who bless Abraham will be blessed by God: "I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse" (RSV).

Genesis is not lacking illustrations of this principle. The restoration of fertility after Abimelech returned Sarah and gave Abraham gifts is apparently an example of the principle that blessing follows positive action towards Abraham or his descendants standing within the chosen line. Gen 20:14 and 17 are best interpreted in this way even though the term *brk* "to bless" is not present, since the concept of curse for curse and blessing for blessing is implicitly present in this chapter.⁷

A second and more explicit illustration appears in the Joseph cycle, the more immediate context of the passage to be exegeted. Gen 39:4-5 states that blessing came to Potiphar's household because Potiphar favoured Joseph and raised him to a place of prominence and authority. This text clearly indicates that the blessing of individuals in response to their treatment of Abraham or his descendents is present in the Joseph cycle as well as in the earlier Abrahamic cycle.

I. *The Structure and Meaning of Gen 46:31-47:6*

Gen 46:31-47:6 breaks down into two sections. The preparation of the brothers for an audience with Pharaoh (46:31-34) is naturally followed by the account of the audience and its results (47:1-6). Upon careful examination a more detailed structure is discernible. Gen 47:1-6 subdivides into three sections. The account of the brothers' audience (vv 2-4) is framed by verses in which the brothers and Jacob are referred to in the third person (vv 1 and 5-6).⁸ A related, but less

⁷ The practice of allowing events to speak for themselves in certain passages is not restricted to Genesis 37-50. See notes 30 and 2.

⁸ Although, the present analysis follows the MT for the order of 47:1-12, the conclusions reached would still be valid if the LXX order for this passage (vv 1-5a, 6b, an additional sentence, 5b, 6a, and 7-12) were original. (A readily accessible translation of the LXX version is given by *JB*; a more literal one is found in *NAB*.) It is not possible to follow E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (AB 1; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1964) 351, who adopts the LXX reading because a copyist, he argues, jumped accidentally from the first occurrence of "Pharaoh said to Joseph" (*NAB*) to a second appearance at the end of the additional passage in the LXX. This explanation based on homoioteleuton must be rejected because, if the scribe had skipped from v 5a to the end of the additional passage, then

marked distinction occurs between 46:31-32 and 46:33-34. Gen 46:33-34 and 47:2-4 both focus on the brothers' audience. The remaining passages concern apparently private audiences of Joseph with Pharaoh. Gen 46:31-32 anticipates Joseph's audience; 47:1 recounts it. Gen 47:5-6 describes Pharaoh's response given in a second audience and 47:11 presents Joseph's execution of the command given by Pharaoh in 47:5-6.

What is the function of this passage? Its primary significance lies in its contribution to the bridging function of the Joseph story which links Genesis 12-36 (set primarily in Canaan) and Exodus 1-15 (set in north-eastern Egypt).⁹ The account of the audience of Jacob's sons with Pharaoh informs the reader how Israel came to settle in the sensitive border province of Goshen in the eastern section of the Nile delta.¹⁰ The occupation of Joseph's brothers was repulsive to the Egyptians.¹¹

v 6b would also have been lost along with the additional LXX material. But v 6b is present in the MT. For other arguments favouring the LXX version see Lothar Ruppert, *Die Josephserzahlung der Genesis. Eine Beitrag zur Theologie der Pentateuchquellen* (SANT 11; Miinchen: Kosel-Verlag, 1965) 143 and S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (5th ed.; Westminster Commentaries; London: Methuen, [1906]) 370. For the MT version see Harold Stigers, *A Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 318, and Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 188.

⁹ See note 5.

¹⁰ It is generally agreed that Palestinian sojourners would not normally have been allowed to settle in Goshen (or the land of Rameses [47:11] as it became known in the Nineteenth Dynasty, at the end of the thirteenth century B.C.). See Robert Davidson, *Genesis 12-50* (Cambridge Bible Commentary; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1979) 283, and Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Old Testament Library; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) 399. But see Speiser (*Genesis*, 446) who claims that Asiatics "frequently" settled in Goshen in the northeastern Nile delta.

¹¹ Contra John Skinner (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* [ICC; 2nd ed.; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1930] 496) who contrasts "shepherds" and "keepers of cattle." These terms are used synonymously in this passage. For Joseph's instructions (46:34) to make sense, this must be the case. It would be counterproductive for Joseph, who wants to convince the king that his brothers should settle in Goshen, to instruct them to represent themselves 'as keepers of cattle rather than as shepherds. Franz Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis* (Clark's Foreign Theological Library New Series; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1894) 2.343 correctly reads all of v 34 as part of Joseph's speech. This is a more natural reading of the passage than the hypothesis that "every shepherd is an abomina-

A second purpose of this passage can also be identified. A minor theme in the patriarchal section of Genesis is that the Israelites have always been a separate people. In the Abrahamic and Jacob cycles attention is given to the fact that Israel's ancestors avoided marital relationships with the inhabitants of Canaan (24:3; 26:34-35; 27:46-28:1). In the Joseph cycle Gen 46:34 (and also 43:32) reminds the Israelite reader that because of their "detestable" occupation they could not and did not mix with the Egyptians even when they lived in Egypt.¹² Thus this passage contributes to one of the minor themes of Genesis, a theme which would be of sociological and hence theological importance for every period of Israel's history after it settled in Palestine and especially when it found itself in exile in Babylon.

This passage is significant in a third way for the concerns of Genesis. It contributes to the theme that blessing comes as a result of positive action towards the chosen line. Pharaoh has just issued the benevolent command to settle Jacob and his sons in "the best of the land" (47:6 and 11). This raises the reader's expectation that blessing will come to Pharaoh as it did to Potiphar in Gen 39:5. As will now be seen, this expectation is heightened by the account of Jacob's audience with Pharaoh before the blessing upon Pharaoh is described.

II. *Gen 47:7-10: Jacob's Audience with Pharaoh*

The account of Jacob's audience with Pharaoh contrasts in many ways with the description of his son's audience in Gen 47:1-6. First, 47:7-10 possesses a formal conclusion in v 10 in contrast to the abrupt ending of vv 2-4. Secondly, although his sons were relatively passive, speaking only after they had been addressed, Jacob appears quite active, taking the initiative at the beginning of the audience (v 7b).

tion to the Egyptians" is an editorial gloss. Cf. von Rad (*Genesis*, 399), who attributes this to the narrator, and Skinner (*Genesis*, 496), who sees it as an "interpolation." Delitzsch (*Genesis* 2.343-44) gives a more comprehensive account than most commentators of the historical data relevant to Gen 46:33. Driver (*Genesis*, 370) provides a concise account: "There is independent evidence that swine-herds (Hdt. II. 47) and cow-herds were looked down upon by the Egyptians, but not that shepherds were. The cow-herds, in particular, from living with their herds in reed cottages on the marshes, were called 'marshmen'; they are represented on the monuments as dirty, unshaven, and poorly-clad, and were regarded as pariahs."

¹² This theme also reappears in the plague narratives of Exodus 7-15. Joseph's acceptance of an Egyptian wife (Gen 41:45) is not, strictly speaking, an exception to the rule of marital exclusiveness, since the prohibition was only against marriage with Canaanites.

Thirdly, this passage makes no contribution to the role of the Joseph story as a bridge between Genesis 12-36 and Exodus. The favourable impression that a man of Jacob's age--20 years more than the age Egyptians hoped and longed to attain¹³--would have made on Pharaoh cannot be seen as an additional factor in the decision to let Jacob and his sons settle in Egypt. This decision had already been made before Jacob's audience began (47:5-6).¹⁴ What then is the purpose of recounting Jacob's audience?¹⁵

Since any determination of the function or meaning of a text should begin with a grasp of points stressed in that text, it is appropriate to carefully examine Gen 47:7-10. There is evidence of chiasmus in this text which breaks down into five symmetrically arranged parts. Verses 7a and 10b introduce and conclude the account. The central section of the passage, which presents Jacob's great age (vv 8-9), is both preceded and followed by the statement "Jacob blessed [*brk*] Pharaoh" (vv 7b and 10a). Thus two points are emphasized in this passage, namely Jacob's age (since it occupies over half the passage and is found at its center) and the fact that Jacob *brk* Pharaoh (since it appears twice).

The true significance of *brk* in this passage has often been missed. It has, for instance, been translated as "paid respects" and "took his leave" in vv 7 and 10 respectively.¹⁶ Similarly, Roland de Vaux states that in this passage *brk* "ne signifie pas plus que 'presenta ses compliments' comme dans I Sam. 13,10; 2 Reg. 4,29."¹⁷ These are just two examples of a significant modern trend.¹⁸

¹³ J. Vergote, *Joseph en Egypte: Genese chap. 37-50 a la lumiere des etudes egyptologiques recentes* (Orientalia et Biblica Lovaniensia 3; Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1959) 200-201, reports there are "27 temoignages oil it est dit qu'un personnage a atteint Page de cent dix ans ou dans lesquels le voeu est exprime de vivre cent dix ans sur terre. On est donc en droit de conclure que les cent dix ans etaient consideres comme Page ideal par les Egyptiens."

¹⁴ Similarly, Ruppert, *Josephserzahlung*, 149.

¹⁵ It is not sufficient to appeal to the fact that Jacob's audience would naturally be associated with the audience of his sons. This association would influence the location of the passage once the decision was made to include it, but it does not explain why this decision was made.

¹⁶ Speiser, *Genesis*, 348-49.

¹⁷ Roland de Vaux, *La Genese* (SBJ 1; Paris: Editions du Cerfs, 1953) 204.

¹⁸ Similarly, Driver (*Genesis*, 371) interprets *brk* as "saluted" and Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977) 446,

Although this position is willing to grant that Jacob offered an ancient counterpart to "God save the king" at the beginning and end of the audience, it holds that this was nothing more than a formal courtesy. The basis of this interpretation appears to be the assumption that no writer would depict Jacob, the father of a lowly band of shepherds, as having the presumption to bless the visibly superior king of Egypt.¹⁹

This interpretation has not gone without challenge, however. Joseph Scharbert, for instance, asserts,

The pattern A (inferior) *brk* B (superior) appears relatively rarely. According to Gen. 47:7, 10 (E), Jacob "blesses" Pharaoh at the beginning and at the end of their interview. Here, "to bless" certainly has in mind a wish for blessing directed to God.²⁰

Although Scharbert does not give any supporting argumentation, this can be supplied, in part, by Clyde Francisco

Verses 7-12 have the characteristic style and vocabulary of the Priestly account. . . . Although Speiser contends that to bless may, like the word *shalom*, mean either to greet or to bid farewell (cf. 2 Kings 4:29), it is doubtful that it carries such a meaning in a Priestly context. The verb *barak* usually means to bless and certainly carries this significance here.²¹

The observation that *brk* usually means to bless is correct and of some significance, but by itself this would not be conclusive. The second argument, being based on the assumption that vv 7-10 come from the P document, will not settle the issue since other scholars, such as Scharbert (see the above quotation), attribute them to E.²² Furthermore, Francisco's argument is not cogent for the growing number of

is content with "paid respects" while Stigers (*Genesis*, 319) will allow *brk* at most to carry the idea of peace but not of "blessing with the sense of benediction." Similarly the *NAB*, *SBJ*, and *NIV* (margin), but not the *RSV*, *NASB*, or *NEB*.

¹⁹ Although supporters of the "greeting" interpretation generally do not reveal the reasoning behind their position, this is likely the most significant consideration. For instance, J. Blenkinsopp, "Genesis 12-50," in *The Pentateuch* (ed. L. Bright; London: Sheed and Ward, 1971) 130, writes, "Jacob's audience with Pharaoh rings true enough, though we may doubt whether he would have blessed the divine monarch, source of life, blessing and every good to his subjects."

²⁰ Scharbert, "*brk*," 291.

²¹ Clyde T. Francisco, "Genesis," *Broadman Bible Commentary*, (rev. ed.; ed. C. J. Allen et al.; Nashville: Broadman, 1973) 1.275.

²² Similarly, Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 36.

scholars who hold that the Joseph story is not the product of a compilation of various source documents.²³

Fortunately, there are considerations which can resolve the issue of the meaning of *brk* in 47:7-10. First of all, since this term usually means "to bless,"²⁴ it is slightly more probable than not that *brk* carries this meaning in vv 7 and 10. Secondly, it is not necessary to choose between "to bless" and "to greet" since *brk* can carry both senses²⁵ and thus be translated as "to greet with a blessing" or "to bless in greeting." Thirdly, given the protocol of ancient Near Eastern society, it is unlikely that Jacob's sons would have entered Pharaoh's presence without offering some sort of formal greeting.²⁶ The fact that

²³ This position is ably presented by George W. Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt Structure and Theological Context for the Joseph Story* (CBQMS 4; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1976) 2, 4, and 77. A similar conclusion is suggested by R. N. Whybray, "The Joseph Story and Pentateuchal Criticism," *VT* 18 (1968) 522-28. Cf. Redford (*Biblical Story of Joseph*, 250-53), whose detailed study upholds a multiple source theory for the Joseph story, and Westermann (*Genesis 37-50*, 6-14) for a comprehensive treatment of the question.

²⁴ Speiser (*Genesis*, 203) acknowledges this fact even though he prefers to interpret *brk* as "to greet" in 47:7-10.

²⁵ Similarly Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 189. Westermann (p. 190) presents a second argument based on the observation that *brk* always carries the meaning of blessing in situations involving death or extended temporal separation: "Für Jakob ist es, auch wenn er hier dem Pharaon zum erstenmal begegnet, die Situation des Abschieds. Er steht vor seinem Tod; an dem Segen, den der aus dem Leben Scheidende weiterzugeben hat, erhält auch der Pharaon des ägyptischen Reiches Anteil." This argument, however, is not cogent since the larger context indicates Jacob was 17 years away from his death at the time of this audience (47:28a) and since the immediate context provided by 47:9 need not be interpreted as an expectation of impending death as will be seen in the last third of note 29.

²⁶ The present argument does not require that the formal greeting of the sons be in the form of an explicit blessing. The el-Amarna letters (c. 1400-1360 B.C.) usually begin with a formal greeting although not necessarily in the form of a blessing. Note, for instance, the beginning and ending of letter 288: "To the king, my lord, my Sun-god, say: Thus says Abdiheha, thy servant. At the feet of the king, my lord, seven times and seven times I fall. . . . [To] the scribe of the king, my lord, [Thus] says Abdiheha, the servant. . . . Take in very (?) clear words to the king . . ." (D. Winton Thomas, ed., *Documents from Old Testament Times* [New York: Harper and Row, 1961] 43-44). This letter indicates that it was important to offer greetings even in proxy audiences with Pharaoh. Cf. 1 Sam 25:24 and 2 Kgs 4:37. Also see Thomas, *Documents*, 39, 214-16, 251, and 262.

the author of the Joseph story includes Jacob's greeting of blessing cannot thus be attributed to a desire for completeness. Since it is impossible to identify any reason why the narrative would emphasize that Jacob "paid respects" at the beginning and end of the audience, *brk* should be interpreted as "to bless" or "to greet with a blessing" in our text.²⁷

The import of Jacob's audience with Pharaoh can now be easily grasped. Verses 7 and 10 assert that Jacob blessed Pharaoh. The reference to Jacob's age apparently serves to heighten the significance of this blessing.²⁸ A man whose closeness to God and favour in God's eyes is attested by his attainment of an age greater than any Egyptian dared to hope for blesses Pharaoh.²⁹ Gen 47:7-10 is thus designed to teach that Pharaoh received a powerful blessing through Jacob.

²⁷ This argument should also be cogent for those holding a multiple-source theory for the Joseph story. No matter what sources vv 2-4 and 7-10 are attributed to, it must be granted that the redactor probably made a conscious decision to include the references to blessing in vv 7 and 10.

²⁸ Ruppert, *Josephserzahlung*, 149-50, mistakenly views 47:9 as asserting the shortness of Jacob's life and thus sees a contrast between it and 47:28 which presents Jacob's long life. This tension leads Ruppert to conclude that v 9 (and thus vv 8 and 10 also) must be attributed to a different author (PS) than v 28 (P).

²⁹ The work of Gustave Lefebvre, "L'age de 110 ans et la vieillesse chez les Egyptiens," *Comptes Rendus de l'Academie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* [Paris] (1944) 107-19, provides examples indicating an intimate connection between advanced age and divine favour in Egyptian thought. During the reign of Ramses II (New Kingdom), Bakenkhonsou (died c. 1233 B.c. according to Gustave Lefebvre, *Histoire des Grand Pretres d'Amon de Karnak* [Paris: Librairie Orientaliste de Paul Geuther, 1929] 134) sought the aid of Amon-Re to reach 110 (p. 110). Bakenkhonsou's successor also prayed to Amon for this privilege (p. 111). In the 5th dynasty (Old Kingdom), one of Pharaoh's officials wrote, "j'ai passe 110 annees de vie que m'a donnees le roi" (p. 108). Since the idea that the Pharaoh was the divine son of the sun god had developed by the 5th dynasty (Kenneth A. Kitchen, "Land of Egypt," *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* [ed. M. Tenney; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975] 2.234), this text suggests the link between longevity and divine favour was firmly rooted in Egyptian thought. (This conclusion is not invalidated by the research of George Posener, *De la divinite du Pharaon* [Cahiers de la Societe Asiatique; Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1960] 22, who presents a nuanced interpretation in which the pharaoh was not actually divine in his own right but rather the earthy representative, "l'image vivante, le fils, le substitut, etc." of the god.) Lefebvre's examples do not indicate whether a blessing from a man of 110 years or more was seen as being especially significant. Jacob's reference

A powerful blessing should have a significant effect. The reader of Genesis does not have long to wait before this blessing bears fruit. Within three verses of the conclusion of the report of Jacob's blessing of Pharaoh, there is an extensive account of Joseph's agrarian reforms.

III. *Gen 47:13-26: Joseph's Agrarian Reforms*

This passage breaks down into four sections of increasing length, each of which describes one aspect of the blessing which came to Pharaoh through the work of Joseph, one of Jacob's sons. In 47:13-14 Joseph collected all the money of Egypt and Canaan and brought it "into Pharaoh's house." In the next section (vv 15-17), all the livestock of the Egyptians was traded for food. Although it is not explicitly stated, it is clearly implied that Pharaoh was again the beneficiary.

In the much larger third section (vv 18-21), Pharaoh gains both land and slaves through Joseph's management. In this section three explicit references (vv 19, 20a, 20c) emphasize that the land became Pharaoh's. Verse 22, an appendage to the third section, indicates that only the priestly land was exempt from this process of royal acquisition.

In the final section (vv 23-26), Joseph sets up an arrangement whereby Pharaoh received one-fifth of future harvests. This additional benefit is stressed by its twofold repetition (vv 24 and 26). This final section, which also reinforces the fact that the land became Pharaoh's and the people his slaves (vv 23 and 25), ends as did the third section by noting that the priestly lands did not come under Pharaoh's control.

Gen 47:13-26 should be interpreted as the fulfillment of the blessing on Pharaoh anticipated by both Gen 46:31-47:6 and 47:7-10. The absence of the term "blessing" in Gen 47:13-26 does not imply that the concept is also absent. As Redford has noted, the narrative of the Joseph story is often allowed to convey its meaning without the

to the shortness of his life compared with his ancestors likely indicates that he expected to live for a number of additional years, thereby heightening the impression that a great degree of divine favour rests on him. The references to the shortness, trouble, and sojourning of Jacob's life (47:9) only pertain to his life before coming to Egypt where his sorrow at the loss of Joseph is healed (46:30), his sojourning is replaced by land *possession* (47:11), and he can expect to live for a number of additional years. Gen 47:28 notes Jacob continued to live for seventeen additional years in Egypt.

addition of explicit editorial comments.³⁰ Since Gen 47:13-26 immediately follows two passages which raise the reader's expectation of a blessing for Pharaoh, it would appear that the author (or, if one wishes, the final redactor) thought that the full meaning of the agrarian reforms, which place the stress on Pharaoh's gains, would be sufficiently clear.

There are two other considerations which confirm the validity of this interpretation of Gen 47:13-26. First, this passage appears to be the third in a series of blessings which came to various Egyptians through Joseph. After coming to Egypt, Joseph worked for three different individuals, namely Potiphar, the keeper of the prison, and Pharaoh. Gen 39:1-6, which begins this series, sets the pattern by *explicitly* stating that Potiphar received a blessing upon his house because he showed favour to Joseph. Although the term *brk* is not present in Gen 39:19-23, this passage indicates that the keeper of the prison relieved himself of numerous administrative burdens by placing Joseph in a position of authority. There is no reason why the pattern established in Gen 39:1-6 to illustrate Gen 12:3a should fail when Joseph is elevated to the highest authority by Pharaoh (41:39-45). If this consideration is valid, the blessing upon Pharaoh in 47:13-26 is anticipated by three events in the Joseph cycle, namely Pharaoh's elevation of Joseph, Pharaoh's favour to Jacob and his other eleven sons, and Jacob's verbal blessing of Pharaoh.

Secondly, there is no other adequate explanation for the inclusion of an extensive account of Joseph's land reforms.³¹ This passage does not contribute to the bridging function of the Joseph story.³² It is

³⁰ Redford (*Biblical Story of Joseph*, 247) notes that the author of Genesis 37-50 "lets the story convey his message without trying to ram it down the readers' throats at every turn of the plot." Cf. note 7.

³¹ Many commentators, overlooking the key provided by the emphasis placed on Jacob's blessing of Pharaoh in 47:7-10, have either offered no explanation for 47:13-26 or have ventured into speculative interpretations which bear little relationship to the themes and concerns of Genesis. For instance, Davidson (*Genesis 12-50*, 287) writes, "But why trace this system of land tenure back to Joseph? It could be that to the writer this is but another illustration of Joseph's wisdom and political skill. It is also possible, however, that he is taking an ironic delight in tracing to Joseph a system which made slaves of the Egyptians in a land in which the Hebrews themselves were to be slaves."

³² A favorite explanation of the function of Gen 47:13-26 during the past century was to see this passage as a contribution to the bridging func-

not possible to follow Coats who, seeing no theological import in this passage, suggests that it was included for aetiological reasons.³³ Although the formula "until this day" is present in the final verse of the passage, Childs has demonstrated that throughout the OT the biblical formula, "until this day," seldom has an aetiological function of justifying an existing phenomenon but in the great majority of cases is a formula of personal testimony added to, and confirming a received tradition.³⁴

Gen 47:13-26 is not an exception to this general rule. The basic aspects of the story are not presented from an aetiological perspective. In addition, "until this day" only appears as a secondary element in the final verse of the passage. Apparently its function is to confirm the factuality of the story concerning the agrarian reforms. The only visible

tion of the Joseph story. For example, R. S. Candlish, *The Book of Genesis* (3rd ed.; Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1884) 550-52, writes, "The account of Joseph's conduct [in Gen 47:13-26], as ruler in Egypt, is an altogether irrelevant, not to say impertinent, interruption, unless we hold that it is brought in with a view to its bearing on the fortunes of Israel. ... It concentrated authority in one royal head. And so it made it easier for the Pharaoh who was Joseph's friend to secure the peaceful settlement of the family in Goshen; while it also made it easier, long afterwards, for the Pharaoh 'who knew not Joseph' to enslave and oppress the nation into which the family was then fast growing." Similar explanations are presented by M. M. Kalisch, *Genesis (Historical and Critical Commentary on the Old Testament 1; London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Robert, 1858) 699-704*, and W. H. Griffith-Thomas, *Genesis XXXVII-L: A Devotional Commentary* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1909) 142-43 and 147-48. Three considerations are against this interpretation. First, it does not explain why 47:13-26 does not immediately follow chapter 41. Secondly, this view assumes Pharaoh was relatively powerless before the reforms took place. However, a king who could exact a tax of one-fifth of the harvests for seven years (41:34, 48) would likely have the power to settle a band of 70 shepherds and their flocks in Egypt. Thirdly, 47:13-26 gives the impression that Pharaoh only got control of the land during the seventh year of the famine. (The fact that it is only at the time of the sale of the land that there is any concern for seed to plant [47:19 and 23] suggests this event took place in the final year of the famine.) Thus, the settlement of Jacob and his household in Goshen, which took place during the famine (47:12), apparently occurred *before* Pharaoh had gained control of the land and people of Egypt.

³³ Coats, *Canaan to Egypt*, 53. Similarly, Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 192 and 198 and von Rad, *Genesis*, 410-11.

³⁴ Brevard S. Childs, "A Study of the Formula 'Until this Day,'" *JBL* 82 (1963) 292.

explanation for the inclusion of the story of Joseph's agrarian reforms is that it was intended to fulfill a theological role by demonstrating that substantial blessing came to Pharaoh.

It is thus best to interpret Gen 47:13-26 as a blessing upon Pharaoh.³⁵ If this interpretation is rejected, then Jacob's blessing of Pharaoh is left unfulfilled, a major pattern in the Joseph story is broken, and Gen 47:13-26 remains without an adequate explanation.

Conclusion

A brief exposition of the meaning of Gen 46:31-47:26 will serve as an appropriate conclusion to this study. A major function of this passage is to contribute to the bridging function of the Joseph story. It explains how, through Joseph's skillful use of the fact that his brothers were shepherds by occupation, Jacob and his sons came to settle in Goshen, a north-eastern border province that would not normally have been available to them. In this way the passage contributes to the transition from the patriarchal stories to the account of the exodus.

A second function is served by this passage. The account of the brothers' audience places additional stress on the fact that Israel was separated from the Egyptians by her occupation. This makes a con-

³⁵ Of all the works consulted for this paper only three showed any awareness of the theological meaning of Gen 47:13-26. Commendation must be extended to M. Kline, "Genesis," *The New Bible Commentary: Revised* (ed. by D. Guthrie and J. A. Motyer; 3rd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) 112, who entitles 46:28-47:27 as "Israel, Blessed and Blessing." Kline supports his interpretation with the observation that "the economic measures instituted by Joseph were viewed by the Egyptians themselves as a favour, indeed, as their salvation (cf. v. 25) in the desperate famine emergency." He does not, however, note that Pharaoh is seen as the primary recipient of blessing in vv 13-26 or that this is in response to Jacob's blessing in the first half of the chapter. Although W. L. Humphrey ("The Joseph Story," *IDBSup*, 490) approaches this interpretation, he does not grasp it firmly: "Israel is seen functioning as a source of blessing for the nations (cf 12:1-3). This narrative [the Joseph story] is remarkably open to the possibility of creative interaction with the Egyptians; it is in Egypt that the sons of Israel find sustenance, it is for the pharaoh (47:13-26) that Joseph works, and the patriarch Jacob himself blesses the Egyptian ruler." Finally, P. Ellis (*The Yahwist: The Bible's First Theologian* [Notre Dame: Fides, 1968] 48) identifies 47:13-26 as a contribution to the "Blessing on the Nations" motif. Unfortunately, Ellis does not expand on this suggestive note nor does he offer any support for its validity.

tribution to one of the minor themes of Genesis, the distinctiveness of the Israelite line.

Thirdly, the passage illustrates the principle set forth in Gen 12:3a. Nations and individuals bring blessing upon themselves by their response to the chosen line. Pharaoh's twice recounted command to settle Jacob and his sons in the best of the land (47:6 and 11) awakens the reader's expectation that a significant blessing will fall on Pharaoh. The account of Jacob's audience, which stressed that Jacob blessed Pharaoh, provides further preparation for the reader's proper interpretation of Joseph's agrarian reforms as a divine blessing upon Pharaoh.

The concluding chapters of Genesis are thus highlighted by three, not just two, major blessing passages. The blessing of Pharaoh by Israel (47:7-10 and 13-26) precedes the blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh (48:8-22) and the blessing of the twelve tribes (49:1-27).

16 The Links Road, Apt. 102
Willowdale, Ontario M2P 1T5
Canada

This material is cited with gracious permission from:

Westminster Theological Seminary
2960 W. Church Rd.
Glenside, PA 19038
www.wts.edu

Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: thildebrandt@gordon.edu