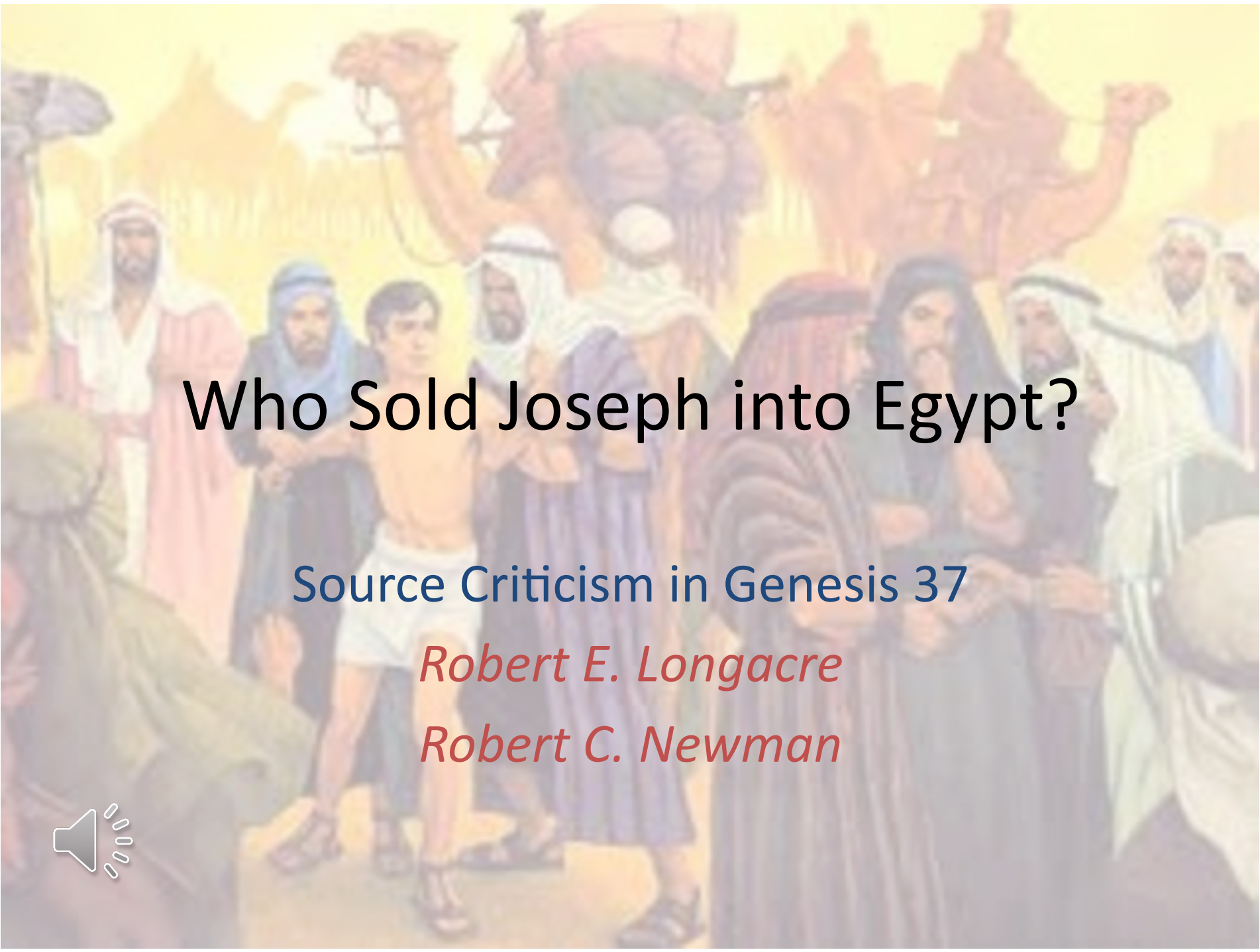




Who Sold Joseph into Egypt?

Source Criticism in Genesis 37

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JEDP Theory

- The documentary hypothesis claims that the Torah is made up of (typically) four sources:
 - J, E, D, and P.
- These sources are said to be identifiable in a particular passage by:
 - Differing styles
 - Differing names
 - Presence of Repetition
 - Presence of Tensions/Contradictions

A Classic Passage

- The narrative of Joseph being sold into Egypt in Genesis 37 is alleged to be a classic example of a passage which can be so analyzed.
- This passage is claimed to be an editorial combination of sources J and E.
- Though these sources have similar styles, we have these name differences here:
 - Israel/Jacob for Joseph's father;
 - Ishmaelites/Midianites for the slave traders.

A Classic Passage

- We also have two stories:
 - A “Reuben” story, in which Reuben acts as Joseph’s protector;
 - A “Judah” story, in which Judah is the “protector.”
- Speiser, in the Anchor Bible *Genesis*, claims:
 - J uses name Israel, features Judah as Joseph’s protector, and identifies the Ishmaelites as those who bought Joseph from his brothers;
 - E uses name Jacob, has Reuben as Joseph’s protector, and says the slave traders were Midianites, who found Joseph in the pit, and sold him.



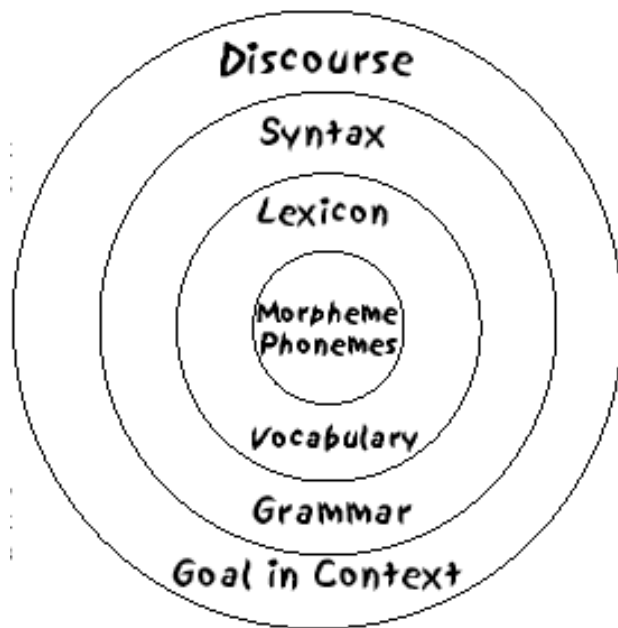
The Problem



Is the Account Unified or Composite?

The Problem

- Is Genesis 37 a unified passage by a single author, which has Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery?
- Is Genesis 37 a “deceptively smooth” combination of two sources, one of which has Joseph sold by his brothers to the Ishmaelites and the other has Midianites take Joseph from the pit and sell him as a slave in Egypt?



A Proposed Solution

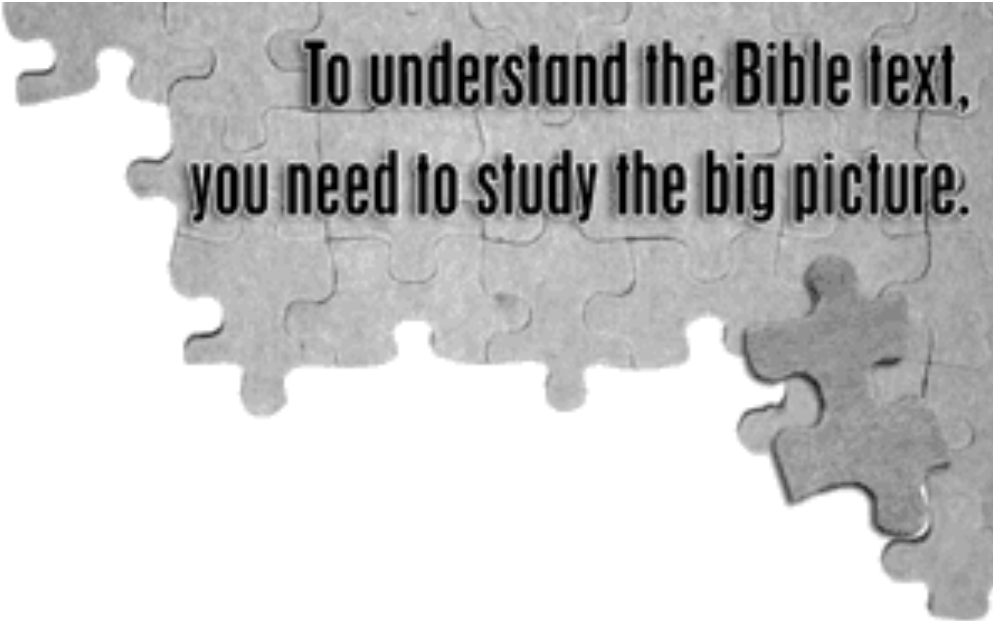
Discourse Analysis Points to Unity

Suggestion

- The “smoothness” is not “deceptive” but evidence of the narrative’s discourse unity.
- Contemporary discourse analysis, when applied to this ancient text as we do to present-day texts, can explain the text as it stands.
- The text’s features can be shown to fall within the range of *effective* narrative style by a single author.

Procedure

- Examine Genesis 37 in the context of the Joseph story as a whole.
- Examine in order the:
 - Macrostructure(s) of the Joseph story;
 - Typically recursive nature of the text;
 - Its conventions for participant identification;
 - Its ways of indicating the high point of a story by special stylistic devices.



To understand the Bible text,
you need to study the big picture.

Macrostructure(s)

What are Macrostructures?

- A macrostructure is the overall plan by which we can see the parts in relation to the whole.
- (1) What is the Joseph story all about?
- (2) How does the overall plan indicate the features seen in the parts?
 - Inclusion/exclusion
 - Balance
 - Amount & type of elaboration

Macrostructure in Joseph Story

- Appears to be explicitly given here; note these passages:
- Gen 45:4-7: *⁴ So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors.*
- Gen 50:20: *As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.*

Macrostructure in Joseph Story

- Summarizing these verses: The brothers intended to harm Joseph by selling him as a slave into Egypt, but God made this part of his plan to save Jacob's clan and others from death by famine.
- We can reduce this macrostructure to its component parts.

Component Parts

- (1) Brothers' *intent* to harm Joseph;
- (2) The *perpetrating* of the crime;
- (3) God's *plan* to make Joseph a savior;
- (4) The *actual deliverance* & how it happened;
- (5) The *severity of the famine*.

Wider Context

- The Joseph story is part of the *toledot ya'aqob*, “the life and times of Jacob.”
- While most of Genesis 37-50 is the Joseph story, other parts of Jacob’s family receive attention here:
 - Gen 38 is about Judah and Tamar, not Joseph.
 - The blessing of Ephraim & Manasseh in Gen 48 is the end of the Joseph story proper.
 - Gen 49-50 deal with larger concerns.

Broader Macrostructure

- If we take Gen 49 (the blessing/testament of Jacob) as crucial and climactic, we have some material for deducing this broader structure.
- The pronouncements re/ the futures of the 12 clans are given in 49:3-27 (25 verses):
 - 5 verses each refer to Judah and Joseph (10)
 - 2 to Reuben and 3 to Simeon & Levi together
 - 1 each to Zebulun, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Benjamin
 - 2 to Issachar, 3 to Dan

Broader Macrostructure

- When we look at the details of these predictions, Judah & Joseph are to be the especially favored ones.
- Doesn't this shed light on the whole *toledot* section, even the story of Joseph within it?
- The Joseph story is really one of *three J's*:
 - Joseph
 - Jacob
 - Judah
- But there is also the matter of Reuben & Judah.

Reuben & Judah

- Reuben, the firstborn, is characterized as giving inconclusive leadership in times of crisis (e.g., in Gen 37) and given to ineffectual emotional outbursts (37:30, 42:22, 42:37).
- Judah, by contrast, emerges as the hero in Gen 44, where he volunteers to remain as a slave in place of Benjamin, finally convincing Joseph that his brothers have changed and leading him to reveal himself to them.

Reuben & Judah

- Seen in this light, the Reuben and Judah passages are required by the macrostructure of the story, which would not be complete (in light of Gen 49) if they were not *both* there.
- So, if by the normal devices of story-telling, a subplot (Reuben vs Judah) is worked into our story in a way to explain one of the major emphases of the story, what is the need for dividing the story into incompatible sources?
- Yet we still need to deal with Jacob vs Israel, and the Midianites vs the Ishmaelites.

Recursion in Narrative



Recursion

- Discourses are not simple linear sequences of sentences.
 - Sentences clump into paragraphs
 - Paragraphs cluster into more complex units
 - These units may form embedded discourses which combine to form the main discourse.
- In narratives, this structure of story within story, sub-plot within plot, is common.
- In a story of any great complexity, the main episodes are themselves stories with their own narrative structure.

Embedded Narratives in the Joseph Story

- Joseph sold into Egypt (chap 37)
- Joseph's rise in Potiphar's house (39:1-6)
- Joseph's ruin thru sexual harassment (39:7-23)
- Joseph interprets the courtiers' dreams (40)
- Pharaoh's dreams & Joseph's rise (41)
- Brothers' 1st trip to Egypt to buy grain (42)
- 2nd trip, Judah's speech, Joseph revealed (43-45)
- Jacob & his clan come to Egypt (46)
- Jacob's blessing on Ephraim & Manasseh (48)

Evaluating the Episodes

- The longest episodes are:
 - Pharaoh's dream & Joseph's rise (chap 41)
 - 2nd trip, Judah's speech, Joseph revealed (43-45)
- Both are high-points (or peaks)
 - 41 is climax of Joseph's story, God's faithfulness
 - 43-45 resolves problems of Joseph's family
- What is the meaning of *our* episode of Joseph being sold into Egypt (chap 37)?

Evaluating Chapter 37

- A recognized universal of narrative structure is that a story must have an *inciting incident*.
 - If there is to be a story, something out of the ordinary & unpredictable must happen.
- Here in Gen 37, we meet a dark & vicious happening in Jacob's family:
 - Selling younger brother into slavery
 - Subsequent cover-up
- This is the inciting incident in the whole Joseph story.

Inciting Incident

- Like a peak (or high point), an inciting incident is not routine narration, but is narration marked by special features that underscore its dramatic placement in the story.
- We can expect that certain features of ch 37 will reflect a heightened style and mode of narration which may in themselves aggravate the difficulties of analysis in the chapter.

Conventions for Participant Identification



Participants

- In narrative discourse, participants are introduced, integrated into the story, and identified as either major or minor characters.
 - Major characters continue for most or all of the narrative;
 - Minor characters figure only in particular sections
- Participants, once introduced & integrated, must then be tracked, taken on or off stage, and sometimes phased out of the story.

Language-Specific Conventions

- How this is done varies somewhat from language to language, or culture to culture.
- A reader in language B may misunderstand the conventions in language A, and read as clumsy, incoherent, or disorganized what a reader in A would see as coherent or even elegant.
- Certain parts of the Hebrew Bible have suffered such ethnocentric & biased judgment by scholars who speak modern European languages.

Introduction of Characters

- In Hebrew Bible, not introduced casually, if they are to be at all important, but come on with a certain amount of fanfare.
- (not true of minor participants referred to by social role, e.g., Joseph's steward in ch 43)
- Regular practice in Hebrew is to have multiple initial presentations for a participant who is important for an episode or more.
- For example...

Multiple Initial Presentation

- Joseph:
 - 37:2-3: named 3x, plus age, occupation, circumstances, relation to father
 - 39:1-4: multiple re-introduction after Judah/Tamar material in ch 38
- Unidentified man in Gen 37:15-17:
 - Important in directing him to Dothan & brothers
 - Called “a certain man,” “the man” (2x)

Multiple Initial Presentation

- Potiphar:
 - 37:36: named, official, captain of guard
 - 39:1-6: re-named, described as above, an Egyptian man, his master the Egyptian
- Potiphar's wife:
 - 39:7-18: dominates scene; his master's wife (2x, 7-8), his wife (9)
- Cupbearer & Baker:
 - 40:1-2, 5: seems very repetitious in English
 - Good example of difference in Hebrew technique from European languages

Differing Names

- The narrator will often vary references to a person.
- Joseph's brothers:
 - Many places as "Joseph's brothers"
 - When thematic spotlight is on Israel, called "sons of Israel"
 - When spotlight on Reuben or on Judah, they are referred to as "his brothers"
 - In peak passage ch 43-45, not referred to at all, then called "the men" until Joseph reveals himself.

Differing Names

- Divine names:
 - Yahweh used only in the two low-points of the story: right after Joseph is sold as a slave, and when he has been imprisoned after the false accusation by Potiphar's wife.
 - Elohim is used elsewhere
- Israel/Jacob:
 - Not like Abraham (where Abram no longer used)
 - Suggest here Jacob used to emphasize him as a suffering, feeling human; Israel his dignity, office.

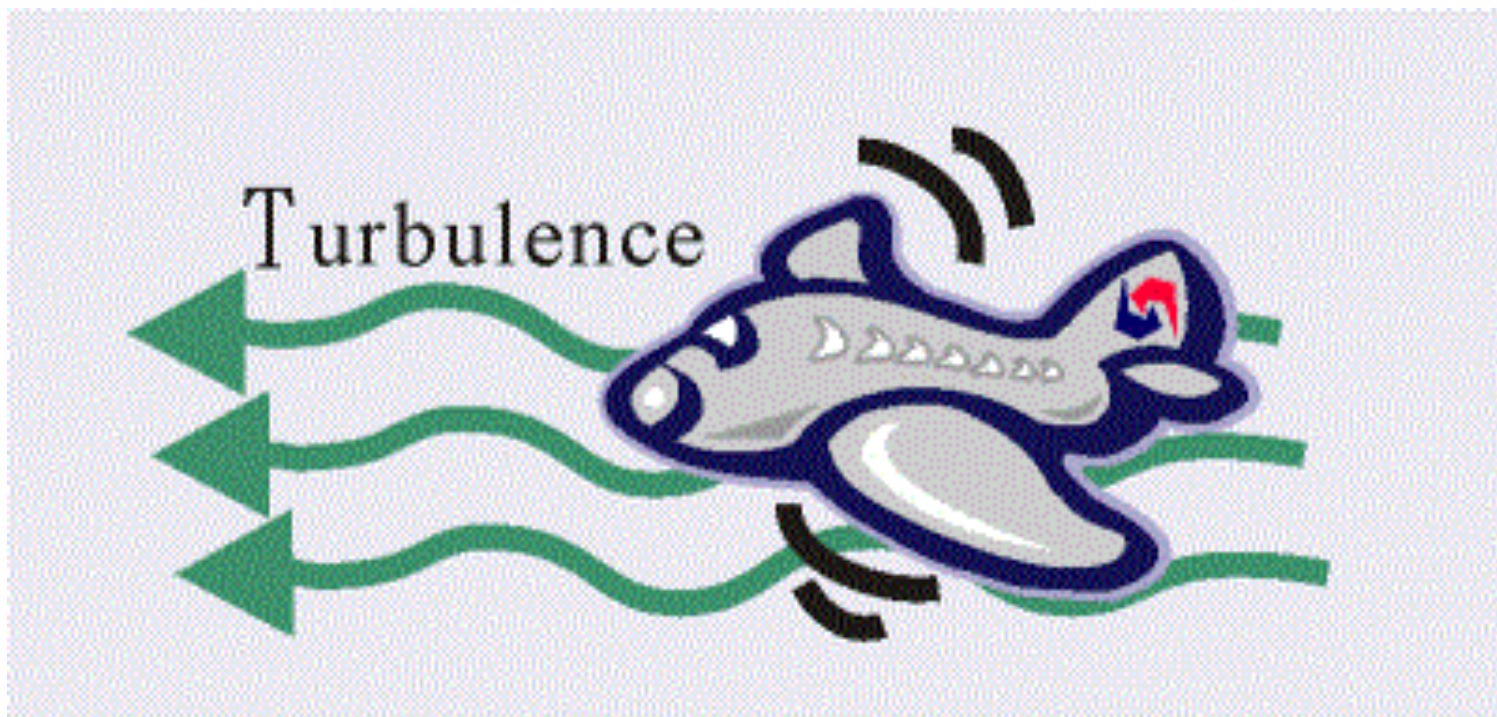
Differing Names

- Ishmaelites/Midianites:
 - Ishmaelite (37:25, 28b; 39:1)
 - Midianite (37:28a, 36)
 - If they refer to the same group, there is no problem here.
 - Is there any evidence the two names overlap? Yes; in Judges 6-8 Gideon fights Midianites; in discussion of spoil, Jdg 8:24b calls them Ishmaelites.
 - Longacre suggests Ishmaelite was used somewhat as we use Bedouin today, as a broader term.

Multiple Initial Presentation

- Ishmaelites/Midianites:
 - If they don't refer to same group here, then writer does not give proper introduction to Midianites.
 - If they do refer to same group, then author follows his usual method.
 - But why does author mention Midianites (37:28) in an almost misleading way ("certain Midianite merchants")?
- This leads to another point of discourse theory, the unusual features of peaks or high points.

Peaks as 'Zones of Turbulence'



Peaks or High Points

- Structure at a peak is not the same as routine narration.
- The narrator makes an effort to be sure the peak does not go by too fast.
- Some form of rhetorical ‘underlining’ is used:
 - The event-line is packed or extended in length
 - The stage may be crowded with participants
 - There are shifts in tense, sentence length, or more (or less) dialogue

Applied to Genesis 37

- This chapter is the inciting incident of the Joseph story, and inciting incidents have peak-like characteristics.
- Besides this, Gen 37 is an embedded narrative of which:
 - 37:5-11 is inciting narrative (Joseph's dreams)
 - 37:12-17 Joseph seeks his brothers
 - 37:18-22 their conspiracy (tension increases)
 - 37:23-28 is the peak (the crime)
 - 37:29-35 is post-peak (the cover-up)

Gen 37:23-28 as Peak

- Opening verbs anticipate crescendo of activity
- Details added: cloak (23), pit (24), empty (24), caravan (24)
- Repetition of name Joseph (3x in v 28)
- Suggest that delayed identification of Ishmaelite caravan (mentioned, 25), identified as Midianite (28) is an example of suspense-at-peak.

Gen 37:23-28 as Peak

- Parallelism between peak and previous episode (conspiracy)
 - Brothers see Joseph from afar (18)
 - Consider how to dispose of him (19-22)
 - Explode into activity on his arrival (23-24)
- Peak
 - Brothers see caravan afar off (25)
 - Consider how to use caravan (26-27)
 - Spate of activity on caravan's arrival (28)

Gen 37:23-28 as Peak

- Story is an artful construction just as it stands (i.e., without dividing into “sources”)
 - The caravan, first sighted at a distance as Ishmaelite (= Bedouin?), proves on closer inspection to be Midianite, and Joseph is sold to them.
 - The suspense is artful and effective.
 - Reuben (away on an errand) misses sale, is very concerned, but joins in cover-up.

Conclusions



Who Sold Joseph?

- Careful attention to discourse structure of Gen 37, in context of whole Joseph story, fits traditional view: his brothers sold him.
- This fits Joseph's words in 45:4-5, where he twice refers to their having sold him.
- Also fits 50:17-21, where brothers ask forgiveness for treating Joseph so badly and Joseph agrees "you intended to harm me."

Macrostructure

- The macrostructure indicates the Joseph story is a story of God's providence, working good for Joseph when his brothers intended evil.
- It is a subset of the Jacob story, and the blessing on Judah and the curse on Reuben in Gen 49 is partly explained by a subplot in the Joseph story; there is no need to invoke discrepant sources J and E.

Recursion & Embedded Narratives

- The Joseph story (Gen 47-50) is made up of a number of embedded sub-stories.
- Gen 37 functions as the inciting incident for the whole Joseph story, but also contains narrative sub-elements within, of which the crucial verses 23-28 are the local peak, with typical peak characteristics.

Conventions of Participant Identification

- Hebrew narrative regularly introduces important characters by multiple references to them, which often seems repetitious & redundant to speakers of European languages.
- If Ishmaelites & Midianites refer to same group, then the Midianites are properly introduced; if not, they are not properly introduced.
- The use of multiple 'names' for characters seems to be common in Hebrew usage (as, say, in Russian novels), and need not point to diverse sources.

Devices in High Points

- A peak is typically a zone of turbulence and analytical difficulty.
- The peak in Gen 37:23-28 features
 - Slowing down to build tension
 - The ‘death-toll’ like repetition of ‘Joseph’
 - Parallelism between 37:16-24 & 25-28
 - Delayed identification of traders
- Thus no need to see contradiction in naming of traders.

Conclusion

- The “smoothness” is not “deceptive” but evidence of the narrative’s discourse unity.
- Contemporary discourse analysis, when applied to this ancient text as we do to present-day texts, can explain the text as it stands.
- The text’s features can be shown to fall within the range of *effective* narrative style by a single author.

The End

