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EPHRAIM AND MANASSEH: GENESIS 48 AND THE JOSEPH NARRATIVE

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A common theme in the book of Genesis revolves around the favored status of the younger son over his elder brother(s). Abel is favored over Cain, Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, and Joseph (then Benjamin) over the sons of Leah, Zilpah, and Bilhah. In Genesis 48, Jacob continues this trajectory by choosing and blessing Ephraim over Manasseh. A perusal of the text of chapter 48 raises a number of questions.¹ This essay will seek to answer one of them, namely, how one explains the prominence of Ephraim over Manasseh, by placing the discussion in the context of the relationship between a diachronic and synchronic analysis of the text. Indeed, critical scholars have often sought to explain the prominence of Ephraim over Manasseh as an etiology, situating it in a historical context that has indeed witnessed Ephraim's superiority over his elder brother via their respective eponymous tribes. While diachronic analysis occupies itself with seeking to explain the history behind the text and the compositional history of the text, this does not equate with interpretation of the text. This type of analysis is a worthy endeavor. However, one must recognize that while a diachronic analysis of the text might explain how the text took its present form, it does not necessarily explain the logic of the text itself. This essay will seek to demonstrate the inadequacy of the numerous diachronic approaches to chapter 48. It will argue instead that etiology and source theory, while part of a critical appraisal of the text, do not explain the narrative quality of this section and that a synchronic approach, even while acknowledging the composite nature of the text, can help explain the text and the function of the prominence of Ephraim over Manasseh.

1. This chapter involves a larger debate about the Joseph narrative. Interpreters have noticed the narrative artistry of the Joseph story. One must determine the extent to which the traditional pentateuchal sources are present in Genesis 37–50. Additionally, the extended, drawn-out conclusion found in 47–50 has evoked a number of theories about the factors that influenced the presence of these chapters.

Thus, the essay will proceed by 1) discussing the major issues that arise upon close analysis of chapter 48, 2) providing a discussion of critical approaches to this chapter, 3) and lastly by laying forth a synchronic approach which situates this chapter in its proper place in the Joseph narrative, located as it is between the Jacob cycle and the beginning of Exodus.

Issues with Chapter 48

The text of chapter 48 poses numerous problems for the interpreter who reads the text closely.² To begin with, the reader immediately notices an apparent redundancy between the start of this chapter and the ending verses of the previous chapter. After Joseph enslaves the Egyptians and following a note about the length of time that Jacob lived in Egypt, the text shifts to a time close to the death of Israel. It is during this time that Israel/Jacob asks Joseph to ensure that he is buried in the same tomb as Abraham and Isaac (verse 30). However, 48:1 begins with Joseph being told that his father is sick, something he would have presumably been aware of given the note in 47:29. Additionally, verses 3–7 seem to interrupt the flow of the chapter. Here, Jacob interjects a note about his encounter with El Shaddai (v. 4) and his adoption of Manasseh and Ephraim (vv. 5–6). Verse 7 also seems randomly to mention the death and burial of Rachel. Despite his recent adoption of the two sons of Joseph, Jacob does not even recognize them in verse 8. Also, since this presumably takes place towards end of Jacob's life, one might assume that he would already have seen Manasseh and Ephraim, since he has been in Egypt for almost two decades (47:28). This problem is compounded by the note in verse 12 that Manasseh and Ephraim were at Jacob's knees, which one might understand as sitting upon his knees. Westermann finds discontinuity in verse 13, which he supposes begins a section that was

2. Critical scholarship on chapter 48 has thoroughly outlined the many issues that arise when the text is read closely. See such discussions as Delitzsch or Westermann.

originally independent from the beginning of the chapter.³ Interpreters also note that the blessings of verses 15 and 16 could have been easily inserted in their present position, an argument which seeks also to explain the odd fact that Joseph attempts to correct Jacob's hands after the blessing itself.⁴ On top of all these issues, verse 20 explains further that Jacob instituted a blessing that sets up Ephraim and Manasseh as the ideal for blessing and reiterates that Ephraim was indeed given preference over Manasseh. The problems continue in verses 21 and 22. Jacob notes the nearness of his death in verse 21 and then in 22 continues by giving Joseph a portion (enigmatically: שכב אהר) taken from the Amorites. Lastly, this chapter also possesses issues of continuity with the chapter that follows since Jacob says that he is dying in verse 21, yet he still has strength to bless his sons in 49 and ask them also to bury him in Canaan at the end of chapter 49.

Diachronic Approaches

The appraisals of chapter 48 by critical scholarship often result in a combination of source-critical and traditio-historical explanations for the idiosyncrasies of this narrative. Once one reads chapters 46–50, especially after the coherency of chapters 37, 39–45, one might understandably regard these last chapters of Genesis as a composition stitched together from varying historical and literary locations. In fact, this is exactly what Westermann and Kingsbury resort to in order to explain the complications of chapter 48.⁵

3. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, trans., John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 182.

4. Westermann, *Genesis*, 188.

5. See especially, *ibid.*, 211-4. Also note Kingsbury, "Ephraim," 129-32. Although Kingsbury specifically seeks to explain the blessing of Ephraim over Manasseh, his initial discussion of the chapter is similar to Westermann.

Westermann, for the most part, emphasizes the source-critical nature of this section in the Joseph narrative. To begin with, Westermann notes that 47–50 are meant to conclude the Jacob narrative, such that the reader expects the imminent death of Jacob, while instead receiving multiple, convoluted deathbed sequences.⁶ Westermann argues that 47:29–31, 48: 1–22, and 49:1–28 are texts that purportedly express the last wishes of Jacob before his death. Since they cover similar ground, they stem from separate sources. The note in Genesis 47:28, in Westermann’s estimation, comes from the Priestly source. Without this note, the scenes that take place in all non-Priestly sections occur immediately after Jacob comes to Egypt. The supposed ambiguity of 48:8 (מִי־אֵלֶּה) becomes clear since this is a proper question for the patriarch who is now meeting his grandsons for the first time.⁷ Verses 3–6 were placed in their current context from the Priestly source and interrupting the continuity between verse 2 and 8.⁸ Verse 7 was later added, repeating almost verbatim 35:16, 18.⁹ Other than adherence to the prevalence of the Priestly source in 47:28, Westermann does not explicitly reference the presence of the Yahwistic and Elohist sources here. However, he does argue that one can explain the two “blessings” (1–12; 13–20) by hypothesizing different contexts for them.¹⁰ Thus, Westermann explains the tensions and discontinuities by positing differing sources.

Horst Seebass gives a helpful summary of the source-critical explanations that have proliferated regarding this passage. He notes that Wellhausen and Noth both explained the complexity of this passage by positing a unified passage interrupted by later additions.¹¹ Seebass

6. Westermann, *Genesis*, 181. Westermann argues further that the Joseph narrative hints at Jacob’s death multiple times.

7. *Ibid.*, 186.

8. Westermann goes so far as to say that all exegetes agree that verses 3–6 use the language of P. see 184.

9. *Ibid.*, 186.

10. *Ibid.*, 193.

11. Horst Seebass, “The Joseph Story, Genesis 48, and the Canonical Process,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35 (1986): 32.

finds this explanation lacking, preferring instead to posit the fusion of J and E. He argues for a few minor changes that make the narrative completely coherent for him. First, he argues that 47:28 is a note from P and that 47:29–31 form the beginning of the Yahwistic source, which consists of 47:29–31 followed originally by 48: 20 $\alpha\beta\gamma$ and after which followed 9b–10, 13, and 17–20 $\alpha\beta$.¹² As a result, most of the rest of the chapter (48:1, 8–9a, 10b–12, 21, and 15) come from the Elohist source.¹³ Thus, this section of E, like its counterpart in 49: 2–28 $\beta\alpha$, shows the patriarch’s ability to speak about the future of his family.¹⁴ In sum, if one peruses the scholarly literature which concerns itself with Genesis 48, one is likely to find appeals to source division in order to explain the heterogenous nature of the text.

Other approaches seek to explain the problem of the blessing of Ephraim over Manasseh via etiology. Understandably, the fact that the tribe of Ephraim became more important than the tribe of Manasseh has resulted in attempts to situate Ephraim’s superiority in a historical context. Yet, one needs to move beyond etiology in order to explain all the intricacies of Genesis 48. As Edwin Kingsbury notes, scholarship usually explains the prominence of Ephraim over Manasseh as either numerically or politically superior.¹⁵ Kingsbury is right that both of these aspects of superiority are present within scholarly explanations of this issue, although his distinction between the two does not always hold.¹⁶ Even more uniquely, Mowinckel argues that the etiology here explains Manasseh as a product of Ephraim’s expansive tendencies in the pre-

12. Seebass, “The Joseph Story,” 34. Verse 28, given its concern with chronology, most often receives the Priestly label (e.g. Delitzsch, *Genesis*, 355). Delitzsch also believes that one can divide the rest of the narrative between J and E.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Kingsbury, “Ephraim,” 129. See Kingsbury for a discussion of the texts that are important for a reconstruction of the premonarchical tribal histories of Ephraim and Manasseh. Carr, *Fractures*, 354 provides an example of a politically-charged interpretation.

16. For example, Delitzsch does not necessarily distinguish between the two, i.e. Ephraim became more politically powerful in part because it became more numerous. See Delitzsch, *Genesis*, 362.

Israelite period and not as an originally separate tribe.¹⁷ However, McKane argues that the etiology draws its significance from an actual transfer of power and prominence from Manasseh to Ephraim, an important aspect of this narrative that is lost if one merely regards Manasseh as an outcropping of Ephraim.¹⁸

Kingsbury himself chooses to focus on the cultic aspects of this passage to determine the original situation for the transference of power from Manasseh to Ephraim. First, he argues that although one cannot distinguish between J and E in this section, they are nevertheless present.¹⁹ He then argues that the cultic material of verse 20 is the oldest portion of the text because it interrupts the narrative and because of its poetic form.²⁰ Moreover, he asserts that the prominence of Ephraim over Manasseh was present in the cultic material that J and E utilized.²¹ As a result, Kingsbury extends the etiology further back into the period of the Judges via an analysis of the cultic centers prevalent in the Pentateuch and Former Prophets.

Genesis 48:20 plays a central role in Kingsbury's argument. The verse differs somewhat between the reconstructed LXX text and the Masoretic Text. First, after closely paralleling the MT, the LXX witnesses the plural 2nd plural pronoun ὑμῖν contra the MT's בְּךָ. Although some propose emending the MT to align with the LXX, Kingsbury argues against it for two reasons: the cultic formula of the blessing makes the singular expected (cf. Num. 6:23–26) and the blessing should be understood as distributive.²² The LXX also differs in that it provides a passive verb for the יִבְרַךְ of the MT by providing the future passive εὐλογηθήσεται. Kingsbury, due to the lack of the אַ particle and the witness of the LXX, argues that one should revocalize the form of

17. Cited in McKane, *Studies*, 98. McKane cites an article by Mowinckel titled "Rahelstämme und Leastämme."

18. McKane, *Studies*, 98.

19. Kingsbury, "Ephraim," 130.

20. *Ibid.*, 131.

21. *Ibid.*, 130.

22. Kingsbury, "Ephraim," 130.

ברך as a Niphal. He bolsters his argument by using the blessing found in portions of the text labeled as Yahwistic.

A number of issues arise concerning Kingsbury's interpretation. First, a direct object is not always marked with the object marker. Second, in conjunction with an understanding of the preposition כ as denoting means and with implied divine subject of the verb, one need not emend the text. Kingsbury's argument depends on the fact that he already interprets the passage as cultic and that this cultic interpretation is central to his argument about the ancient nature of the etiology. Most problematically, however, he uses the reference to the J blessing formula as a means for arguing for the Niphal in this verse. Yet, his argument depends on the dating of this cultic blessing prior to the J source.²³

Once Kingsbury extends the dating of the etiology back into the period of the Judges, he seeks to use the textual data from Numbers, Joshua, and Judges (discussed above) to place the etiology within a specific historical location. First, Kingsbury argues that the second census in Num. 26:28–37, in which Manasseh is more numerous than Ephraim, predates the one found earlier in Num. 1:32–35.²⁴ He also dates the lists in Josh. 14:4 and 16:4 (where Manasseh is listed first) prior to the period of the Judges. In this way, he argues that one must look for the etiology after the period of the conquest.²⁵ Next, he argues for a specific situation within the period of the Judges as the occasion for the etiology with reference to the time of Deborah and Gideon. First, the material about Deborah shows Ephraim's prominence, while Manasseh is divided (Machir and Gilead, cf. Num. 26:29).²⁶ Second, Gideon's tie to Shechem and the tension

23. *Ibid.*, 132. Admittedly, Kingsbury probably does so to show that the translator rendered the Niphal of his *Vorlage* with a similar form to that found in verse 20 of the Greek. If so, there was no need to mention the J source.

24. *Ibid.*, 133.

25. Kingsbury, "Ephraim," 133.

26. *Ibid.*

that revolves around the power that he and his son wielded from there betray more tensions between these two tribes. Tension becomes explicit in Judges 12:1–6.²⁷ Lastly, Ephraim’s connection with Bethel and the gathering there in Judges 20 display the rise of Ephraim over Manasseh during this period.²⁸

Yet, Kingsbury specifies the occasion even further. Having noted the association of Manasseh with Shechem and Ephraim’s relation to Bethel, he argues for the motivation of the move. Both of these locations served as “amphictyonic centers.” Since Shechem served as the center first and Bethel subsequently, Kingsbury ultimately argues, in conjunction with an etiological understanding of Genesis 35 and with the mention of Luz in 48:3, that the etiology arose as a way of legitimating the shift of the center from Shechem to Bethel.²⁹

The approach of Kingsbury poses major methodological issues. His construal of the etiology separates one verse from the passage as the key to explaining the origin of Ephraim’s superiority over Manasseh. Kingsbury’s explanation of the etiology is no doubt compelling. Not only does it make seek to explain the convoluted nature of Genesis 48, but it also places each relevant text surrounding the provenance and prominence of the tribes within a specific construal of the history of the tribes. However, one should not fail to notice that the argument depends on a progression of tenuous contentions. One wonders whether there is a better way to understand the complexities of the chapter via their function in the narrative.

Synchronic Analysis

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., 136.

Others have argued for a narrative understanding of the text as a means of exploring the complexities that it contains. Indeed, one might argue for the need to comprehend the way in which the parts interact together in their current location. In his article on the complexities of chapter 48, Seebass gives a helpful synchronic analysis of chapter 48 before he moves into the familiar discussion about its diachronic nature.

To begin with, Seebass insightfully proposes an interrelatedness between 47:28–31 and 48:1. As opposed to Westermann, who posits separate origins, Seebass notes that the texts as they stand relate to one another. For example, in verse 47:31 after Joseph promises to return Jacob to Canaan for burial, his father bows to him, an action which Seebass argues implies a continuation into the narrative of 48:1³⁰ Second, Seebass argues that the disqualification of Reuben as firstborn remains an unresolved tension until verse 48:21a.³¹ He argues that when read in this way, one cannot fail to notice the way in which two seemingly separate sections (47:28,29–31; 48:21–22) encapsulate the larger part of chapter 48.³² To this, one might also add that both of these sections emphasize a concern with the Promised Land itself (47:28–31, burial plot; 48:21–22, Joseph’s inheritance which honors him as firstborn). Seebass adds that the latter section introduces a theme that aligns with the larger pentateuchal emphasis on the Exodus and entrance to the land.³³

The bowing of Joseph before Jacob again signals an implied continuance in the narrative.³⁴ Similarly, in lieu of an understanding which posits the insertion of the blessings of verses 15 and 16, Seebass finds two functions that the blessing of Joseph in 15b serves beyond

30. Seebass, “Joseph,” 29.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Seebass, “Joseph,” 29.

merely positing a different source. First, that Joseph should receive a blessing makes sense in view of his larger role in the narrative surrounding Jacob and his progeny, who also are heirs to the promises to the patriarchs.³⁵ Second, this blessing serves to function as a prelude to the blessing of Joseph's sons in verses 18ff.³⁶ One might also argue that the distinction between blessing a patriarch and blessing his offspring is not clear in Genesis. The patriarchs are often blessed with and through their children.

Meir Sternberg provides a helpful discussion of the narrative use of the motif of old age as it unfolds throughout the book of Genesis. Each successive patriarch witnesses an evolving understanding of old age. To begin with, with Abraham's old age there is a sense of liveliness and "virility." For example, chapter 24 begins with a note about Abraham's old age, in the following chapter Abraham takes Keturah as a wife and begets more children.³⁷ Abraham also deals wisely with his offspring to avoid familial strife (e.g. sending the unfavored sons away with compensatory gifts).³⁸

With Isaac, however, one finds that he does not measure up to his father. The Isaac portion adds the element of physical blindness, a motif which parallels his blindness to the Jacob's destiny over Esau.³⁹ Additionally, whereas Abraham successfully secured a marriage for Isaac from the midst of his family, his favorite son Esau ends up marrying Canaanite women, and after being chased away for his trickery that Jacob ends up marrying within the family.⁴⁰ So,

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1967), 349. Although the episode might have originally taken place at an earlier stage in Abraham's life, I mention it here as a way of noting the proximity of Abraham's old age in chapter 24 to the obtaining of more heirs in chapter 25. This association appears again in Jacob's death scene in chapter 48.

38. Ibid.

39. Sternberg, *Poetics*, 349

40. Ibid.

it is that by the time one reads of Jacob's deathbed narrative, one expects a specific outcome. In verse 28, one reads that Jacob lived to be 147 years old, well shy of the lifespan of the two former patriarchs.⁴¹ Sternberg argues that Jacob should be understood in relation to both patriarchs. His adoption of the two sons might harken back to Abraham's obtaining of more offspring in his old age, whereas Jacob's blindness (a note which easily explains his question in verse 8) might remind the reader of that of Isaac's. Thus, Sternberg argues that the reader suspects a poor outcome when Jacob offers to bless the two youths.⁴² When Jacob switches his hands, the reader might easily suspect he is fulfilling his favorite role as the trickster.⁴³ Yet, Sternberg argues that Jacob's response to Joseph's correction actually shows that he has a deeper spiritual insight that goes beyond and holds true in spite of his blindness.⁴⁴

The insights which these two scholars give regarding the passage might prompt one to reconsider the extent to which a diachronic analysis undoes the work of an editor.⁴⁵ The approach of Westermann, among others, has all but ignored the synchronic elements of the passage.⁴⁶ For example, Westermann explains that Jacob's question upon seeing the boys ("Who are these?") makes sense when one removes the P note of the seventeen years Jacob spent in the land. However, the text itself provides another explanation as it stands. Jacob's eyes are failing (v. 10). Similarly, the insertion of 3–6(7) and 15–16 do not entirely obstruct the passage. The mere fact the narrative resumes after Jacob dialogues does not immediately mean that one should see them as a later insertion. One wonders where 3–6 (7) could have been inserted that would

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., 351.

43. Ibid.

44. Sternberg lucidly comments about Jacob's hand-switch: "[r]emarkably, therefore, his action [of switching his hands] is both in and out of character."

45. Seebass, of course, still makes an effort at a diachronic analysis in his project of trying to explain the canonical process.

46. Again, I am not questioning the composite nature of the text. Rather, I want to point out that a synchronic analysis fruitfully explains the composition itself.

have sufficed.⁴⁷ Similarly, one can posit a separate source for verses 15 and 16 since Joseph receives the blessing, but one must acknowledge the interconnectedness between patriarchal blessings and their offspring. The synchronic approaches given above seem to point to a certain purpose for the current arrangement of material.

As if there were not enough complexities in chapter 48, it is situated within a complex portion of story of the people of Israel. The Joseph narrative serves a number of functions in the context of Genesis and within the Pentateuch. For example, the Jacob cycle does not reach its conclusion in like fashion to the patriarchal cycles before it. Abraham dies, and Isaac the child of the promise carries the mantle of the promise. Isaac dies, and despite his own favoritism for Esau, Jacob becomes the promise-bearer. The Joseph narrative begins in chapter 37, yet most of the narrative continues while Jacob is still alive. Thus, the reader comes to expect the conclusion of the Jacob narrative throughout the ensuing chapters, while concurrently looking for a resolution between Joseph and his brothers. One should not be surprised that after the resolution of the fraternal strife and a focus on Joseph the narrative returns to Jacob, this time with Joseph at his side. On top of this, Jacob still acknowledges the promise merely by the fact that he wants to rest with his fathers in the Promised Land.

Indeed, the narrative involves more than the familial strife. It revolves around a chosen people, one to whom God had promised the land of Canaan. This people, unfortunately, somehow ended up outside the land. As early as Genesis 15, the reader expects the children of Abraham to become “sojourners in a land that does not belong to them.” Thus, the Joseph narrative explicates the circumstances around which the chosen family ends up in Egypt. Yet,

47. Admittedly, the insertion of verses 15–16 before Joseph’s interferences does seem illogical. However, if one assumes that the redactor purposefully wove these passages, one might more fruitfully attempt to explain the current position of verses.

even how they arrive there, that is the famine and Joseph's provision, continues the theme in Genesis in which threats to the promise are overcome.

The Joseph narrative adds a further element: the eponymous tribes of the sons of Israel. The evolution of the sons of Israel into the tribes of Israel also becomes a feature with which the Joseph-Jacob narrative deals. By the time one reaches Genesis 49, Exodus is nearly at hand. The growth of the family into a nation begins. Thus, chapter 49 also prepares the reader for the explosive growth of the people into a formidable population. Yet, the tribal organization also hints at a return to the land, a return that is inevitable and by which the Israelites lay claim to the land promised to Abraham.

Given the myriad of purposes that Genesis 37–50 fulfills, it should not surprise the reader that the text found therein manifests in a complex form.⁴⁸ The story of the patriarchal promise continues. The story of Jacob continues. The prominence of Joseph continues. The prelude to the Exodus, to the theophany that follows, and to the preparation for the entrance to the land marches on. Thus, the Joseph narrative, including the narrative of chapter 48, should not merely become a text for diachronic dissection since one can detect intentionality in its current arrangement. Rather, one must emphasize the continuance of themes that are prevalent within the rest of Genesis and see the way in which the different compositional layers fulfill important functions within the narrative of chapter 48 and the book as a whole.

Conclusion

48. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, the question of the form of the Joseph narrative is a very important one for interpretation. Westermann gives a survey of the approaches. Ultimately, the complexity of the narrative seems to point to the resolutions that it must bring and the way in which it sets the stage for the beginning of Exodus. One can posit an approach whereby someone tied the major sections of the Joseph narrative with a conclusion to the Jacob cycle (Westermann) or one can suppose that the party responsible for 37, 39–46 is also responsible for concluding the Jacob-Joseph material in 47–50. Either way, the material serves a function and was not thrown together carelessly.

Many of the issues posed by chapter 48, which critical scholarship seeks to explain diachronically, serve a function in the larger narrative trends of Genesis. However, a synchronic analysis can help illumine the text, pointing to a logic that extends beyond the individual compositional layers. The text has a redactional unity. The redundancy of the end of chapter 47 with the beginning of chapter 48 is necessary because these chapters serve two functions in the larger narrative. Chapter 47 ensures that Jacob, the last patriarch, will rest with the former two. It also explains how Jacob does not need to be brought with the Israelites, like Joseph, in the Exodus narrative. Chapter 48, however, functions to ensure Jacob's blessing of his favorite son by blessing his two boys. On top of this, the adoption in the place of Reuben and Simeon picks up the note of their failures earlier.⁴⁹ Jacob's mention of Rachel in verse 7 makes sense in two regards. After the end of chapter 47, the reader finds out that Jacob shall rest beside his fathers and not his beloved wife, whom we know from Genesis 35 to be entombed somewhere else. Verse 7 acknowledges this choice. Also, one might expect Jacob to be reminded of his beloved wife at the sight of his most beloved son.

The fact that Jacob fails to recognize his grandsons does not necessarily mean that this is his first encounter with them, since the reader finds out in verse 10 about his poor eyesight. Also, although scholars argue for the redundancy of the adoption central to verses 1–11 and the blessing of 12–20, they in fact accomplish two separate narrative functions. Verses 1–11 help to resolve the problem of Reuben and Simeon and to explain the importance of Ephraim and Manasseh as tribes. Verses 12–22 show Joseph's blessing through his sons, namely that they will become great among their fellow Israelites, so much so that they will be incorporated into a

49. Simeon (ch. 34) and Reuben (35:22).

blessing for Israel (verse 20). The last two verses then solidify Joseph's favored status in Jacob's eyes.

With all these narrative trends so analyzed and the complexity of chapter 48 laid out, one can properly assess the setting of Ephraim over Manasseh. In fact, the preferred status of the younger son happens with each generation of the patriarchs all the way through to Joseph. So strong is this trend, that it even continues into the latter parts of the Hebrew Bible.⁵⁰ With this trend in mind, a synchronic explanation for the origin of Ephraim over Manasseh results from an acknowledgment of the manner in which Genesis spurns firstborn status on numerous occasions. Although an etiology might explain the prominence in history, a literary trend explains the continuity of the superiority of the younger son. Gerhard von Rad himself notes that the material, although understood etiologically, cannot simply be regarded as "coded tribal history."⁵¹ Thus, although one can posit purely etiological grounds for the precedence of Ephraim over Manasseh, the synchronic analysis of the text fruitfully explains the prominence as it stands.⁵²

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50. For a discussion of this theme, see Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son* (New Haven: Yale, 1993).

51. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 411.

52. Again, etiology is a valid explanation of the prominence itself. However, one should understand that this does not explain the entirety of chapter 48.

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