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From a detailed analysis of the Joseph narrative suggest the provenance and purpose of the story.

We may be inclined to read the narrative of Joseph as 'a piece of wisdom literature[1' 2] or 'a kind of bildungsroman:[3'] the story of young man, sold into slavery by his brothers, who rises to prominence in his master's household before being wrongly cast into prison, and who – through the divine gift of dream interpretation – saves the nation, rises to a position of great importance and wealth and is thus able to redeem and forgive his brothers, and become reconciled with his father. It is our 'earliest example of a Rags to Riches story,[4'] and has, in the past century, spawned novels[5], movies[6] and musical theatre adaptations[7]. The story extends for the largest portion of the book of Genesis and its popularity and significance are well-established. Commentators have seen 'Christ prefigured by Joseph[8'] whose life is 'a type of pathway… from lowliness to exaltation, from slavery to liberty from suffering to glory[9].' But for all the space in which it occupies both in terms of volume of pages in the Genesis and in people's imaginations in later years, the story appears to have had a lesser impact among early Jews and Christians. 'Later Old Testament tradition lists only Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as patriarchs,[10'] and he 'almost never appears elsewhere in

[1] Goodhart, S., 1996. *Sacrificing Commentary*. Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, p.264.
[2] Berthoud, P., 2008. The Reconciliation of Joseph with his Brothers. *European Journal of Theology*, 17(5).
[3] Gelander, S., 2011. *From Two Kingdoms To One Nation*. Leiden: Brill, p.215.
[4] Booker, C., 2004. *The Seven Basic Plots*. London: Continuum, p.58.
[5] Mann, T. and Woods, J., 2005. *Joseph And His Brothers*. New York: Knopf.
[6] *Joseph: King of Dreams*. 2000. [DVD].
[7] *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. n.d. [DVD].

[8] Pascal, B. and Ariew, R., 2005. *Pensées*. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co.
[9] Boice, J., 2006. *Genesis*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books. p858
[10] Provan, I., Long, V. and Longman, T., 2003. *A Biblical History Of Israel*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press. p121.

the Old Testament outside Genesis and the first chapter of Exodus[11],' while in the whole of the New Testament, Joseph is mentioned only four times.[12] The extensive treatment given to the story in the letters of Ambrose[13] and the Midrash[14] *do* demonstrate its growing popularity, but these changing fortunes raise questions about both the provenance and purpose of the narrative, both as it was received then and now.

I propose that the reasons for this are both cultural and political. The Joseph Story does not fit well with contemporaneous wisdom literature. Instead, it has, in its sophistication, a feel that is almost prototypical of the modern novel, or self-help book, that has been popular since the 18th and 19th century. Furthermore, as a 'work of a single author[15] [16],' it promotes a model for success that is rooted in personal responsibility rather than collective unity, and is highly permissive towards cultural assimilation, neither of which would have been popular in the burgeoning Jewish nation of the late Old Testament era but must have struck a chord both with Christians and the Jews alike in subsequent times.

It is Redford's belief that 'the Prophets say nothing of the Joseph romance because the narrative was not yet in existence[17].' He places the composition of the story at 650-425 BC, which places it at the time of the Babylonian captivity. This also places the work in a similar time to that of the Sapiential books. Although there is an argument to be made that Joseph fits into the scope of Wisdom literature, or that there is some overlap[18], the story 'lacks

[11] Redford, D., 1970. *A Study Of The Biblical Story Of Joseph (Genesis 37-50)*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, p.249.
[12] Boice, J., 2006. p1265
[13] Ambrose, 2009. *The Letters Of S. Ambrose, Bishop Of Milan*. Whitefish, Mont.: Kessinger Pub.
[14] Redford, D., 1970. p66.
[15] Westermann, C., 1985. *Genesis 1-11 + 12-36 + 37-50*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
[16] Redford, D., 1970. p.28
[17] Redford, D., 1970. *A Study Of The Biblical Story Of Joseph (Genesis 37-50)*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, p.250.
[18] Evans, C. and Lohr, J., 2012. *The Book Of Genesis*. Leiden: Brill, p.257.

indicators of Wisdom influence[19]': it is not 'a didactic story[20],' and does not 'communicate wisdom ideals[21].' Fox goes a little too far in his argument when he says, 'Joseph's experiences would provide little guidance to others who served in the royal court or wished to[22]. The calamities that strike Joseph on his path to greatness are more illuminating to a seeker after wisdom than Fox allows, although it is true that the story is too literary to be read as a straightforward blueprint for success. The fluctuating fortunes Joseph experiences are too much in the hands of others to be a how-to guide. Instead, the text can be seen as a 'wisdom novelette[23]' (J.P.H. Wessels), a 'political legend[24]' (George Coats), or a 'diaspora novella, whose purpose is to rationalise existence and provide a model for Jewish life there[25]' (A. Meinhold).

In many respects, the Joseph story is a romance. It is aristocratic in tone, refusing to challenge the foundations of the society it describes. It 'delights and entertains the rulers without bringing them face to face with realities they would sooner put behind them[26].' Joseph's adaptability, coupled with his honesty, faithfulness and patience, prove a guide, not only to Jews, but to all people trying to advance and make themselves welcome in an alien culture. Nevertheless, one may detect the faint echoes in the story of a more realist theme. This may appear unlikely since realist fiction did not emerge as a genre for another 2,000 years. However, one might speculate that such a work might well emerge out of an aspirational class of exiled Jew, keen to advance in status and position, and to make the best

[19] Fox, M., 2001. Wisdom in the Joseph Story. *Vetus Testamentum*, 51(1), p.26.
[20] Fox, M. 2001. P28.
[21] Fox, M. 2001. P29.
[22] Fox, M. 2001. P34.
[23] Fox, M. 2001. P27.
[24] Fox, M. 2001. P27.
[25] Fox, M. 2001. P27.
[26] Walder, D., 1995. *The Realist Novel*. London: Routledge, p.209.

of a life in exile that did not appear to have a fixed end. This would give rise to a specifically bourgeois-type set of attitudes. A parallel can be drawn with the eighteenth-century understanding of the story that spawned retellings of the Joseph story that were little more than 'secularized guides to the ideology of bourgeois life[27].' The chord that was struck in the emergent English middle-class in the 18th century, appears similar to the one that struck an aspirational exiled Jewish middle class of the 6th century BCE. Literature, in either case, becomes 'a means of taking stock of a new society[28].' This may go some way to explaining why God is not foregrounded in the Joseph story, why the supernatural, while not wholly absent, is mostly hidden.

Rindge notes that never once prays, speaking of God but never to God[29]. The observation is one of narrative presentation rather than actual performance, though. Religious practice 'is expunged from the lives of the protagonists… the pagans, Canaanites and Egyptians alike[30].' Indeed, God himself makes no appearance in the narrative[31], unlike many Genesis stories, where God speaks directly to 'Adam and Eve, Cain, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, and Jacob [32]'. For the most part, the story could be a secular one. There is nothing in the story that could not have been accomplished through, honesty and hard work. He succeeds through 'resourcefulness and integrity[33].' In this way, the story is similar to a sort of ancient Self-Help: With Illustrations of Character, Conduct & Perseverance [34].

[27] Wimbush, V. and Rodman, R., 2013. *African Americans And The Bible*. Wipf and Stock, p.223.
[28] Walder, D. 1995. P211.
[29] Rindge M. 2010. P92.
[30] Millgram, H., 2012. p.198.
[31] Millgram, H., 2012. p.198.
[32] Cook, C., 2020. *Hearing Voices, Demonic and Divine*. [S.l.]: Routledge. p59.

[33] Birch, B., 1991. *Let Justice Roll Down*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox Press, p.112.
[34] Smiles, S., 1867. *Self-Help, With Illustrations Of Character, Conduct And Perseverance, By Samuel Smiles, ...*. London: J. Murray.

Nevertheless, Joseph's religious commitment'[35] is never in doubt. He remains faithful to God when he is struck by misfortune. At the beginning of the narrative arc, he is embedded deep within his own culture, elevated in society. His success seems a consequence of his privilege. He is highly-favoured by his father: 'Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children[36].' Significantly, his father is named Israel here, not Jacob. However, Joseph's rise depends first upon him being cut off from the accidental trappings of success. To emphasise this point, it is his brothers: the co-founders of the tribes of Israel, who first threaten to kill him, and then sell him into slavery. They 'stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves[37]' his ketonet passim[38]. It is the symbol of paternal favour, protection and authority. It is 'the garb of rule[39]' that they remove: in essence, it is his nationality. The fragility of custom is further emphasised when he is essentially abandoned by Israel/Jacob, who all-too-readily jumps the conclusion that 'Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces[40].' He seeks neither to recover his body or verify the report. Joseph becomes stateless. Without the protections of home, he must thrive as best he can. His first fall is precipitous, swift and complete. But he is not wholly ostracised: 'The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man[41].' The second clause is the corollary of the first, a point that the New International Version makes explicit: 'The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered[42].' Jacob had loved Joseph because 'because he was the son of his old age[43],' although we may speculate whether his being the firstborn of Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel. He receives

[35] Rindge M. 2010. P102
[36] Genesis 37:3
[37] Genesis 37:23
[38] RUDOLPH, S., 2020. Sources & Resources: How Colorful was Joseph's Coat? *Tradition,* **52**(2), pp. 133-141.
[39] Kass, L., 2006. *The Beginning Of Wisdom*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p514
[40] Genesis 37:33
[41] Genesis 39:2
[42] Genesis 39:2 NIV
[43] Genesis 37:3

favour because of who is, not what he does. Similarly, God was with Joseph not for anything that he did, rather, he was chosen notwithstanding his faults and habits.

The way that the story of Joseph reimagines the relationship between humanity and an all-powerful, but concealed God, means that it is fitting that it should be placed in the latter part of Genesis, rather than among the Ketuvim. If the thrust of Genesis is to bridge the gap between the beginning of time and the modern era of the Hebrews, it is logical that the last section should accord with and set out the parameters 'of the human race living in a special relationship with the biblical God[44].' We do not walk with him as we might have in Eden; he appears to very few. If this absence was to be the experience of God's people in the world, what would it have profited them to wait on his constant advice before acting? God had not abandoned Joseph and nor were his believers to suppose that he has abandoned them. Even when he does not speak, they may have faith that he is working for them. Thus, the story of Joseph presents a dynamic God operating in a dynamic world. It presents of a providential God working tirelessly, behind the scenes in everybody's lives, to ensure that good comes from bad. This has been identified as a 'revolutionary theological doctrine[45]'; the God revealed in the story of Joseph is 'something new: that is the hidden hand of Providence [46].' Thus, the physical separation between God and humans that begins in Genesis 3 is concluded by Genesis 50. There is nothing fantastic about Joseph; his experience of God fits with the reality of our own.

How Providence manifests itself in the world is dramatized in the story of Joseph, but mostly this is hidden from the reader. Instead, Joseph stumbles his way towards great success in

[44] Kass, L. 2006. P514
[45] Millgram, H., 2012.
[46] Millgram, H., 2012.

Egypt, negotiating the setbacks of false imprisonment and abandonment with fortitude and patience. Torn from his family and his culture and all the trappings and practices of his religion, Joseph succeeds, not through earthly things, but through his faith in God. Through his faith, there is a strong alignment between his actions and God's will. There are none of the errors that mark the journeys of his father, grandfather or great grandfather. He works tirelessly, lacking resentment; is faithful to his master; is scrupulously continent in the face of temptation; is faithful in prison, rising to a trusted position; is patient when seemingly forgotten and is always honest in his dealings. His worldly success is a consequence of his living in faith, but the vicissitudes of worldly events demonstrate that these are not the things on which his faith can be founded. When Joseph does mention God, it is with regard to the interpretation of dreams. God intervenes and provides him with the meanings. Thus, God is presented as the great interpreter; the only one who can read and understand the story of a human life within the span of that life and stretching across the narrative of time. The Jews living in exile did not have the power to anticipate the significance of their lives in the short span of time they we are allotted or to understand why God had permitted them to be taken from their land. Their only hope was to thrive, succeed and trust in God that some kind of restoration would be forthcoming in time.

This does not stop Rindge comparing Joseph unfavourably with Daniel as a model for how 'a minority group such as the Jews might relate to a foreign imperial power under which they live[47]'. Because Daniel 'resists the claims of empire[48]' Joseph is presented as an 'unfortunate example of extreme assimilation[49].' Joseph 'assists in the survival and growth of Pharaoh's

[47] Rindge, M., 2010. Jewish Identity under Foreign Rule: Daniel 2 as a Reconfiguration of Genesis_41. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 129(1), p.95.
[48] Rindge, M., 2010. p.97.
[49] Rindge, M., 2010. p.95.

empire… with practical advice[50] and does not challenge 'the right of Pharaoh to rule[51],' which presumably Rindge believes he ought. Daniel retains his Jewish identity, accepting lesser gifts from King Nebuchadnezzar than those bestowed upon Joseph by the Pharaoh. Genesis 41:45 gives a fair indication of Joseph's seeming assimilation: 'Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnathpaaneah; and he gave him to wife Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On. And Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt[52].' He receives Pharaoh's ring, a symbol of his power, and in a repetition of the giving of the ketonet passim he arrays 'him in garments of fine linen, and put a gold chain around his neck[53],' and he rides in the second chariot[54]. Joseph becomes fully embedded into Egyptian cultural life at many levels, a move that draws scorn from the Philo and criticism from Rindge[55]. The claim, however, that Daniel received lesser rewards in no way invalidates the worth that was due to Joseph. It shows merely that Daniel was rewarded by a foreign imperial power, and so was Joseph. They are comparably treated. The difference may be more subtle than he suggests, but it points to a differing purpose in each text. The book of Daniel is reliably dated in its 'present canonical form approximately in the middle of 164 BCE[56]. This was at the time of the Jewish wars of independence, a period of ascendant Jewish nationalism and national success[57]. Daniel's 'moderate resistance[58]' is natural for a nation that feels a certain swagger in its walk. It may not be an appropriate for all Jews living in exile at all times.

[50] Rindge, M., 2010. p.95.
[51] Rindge, M., 2010. p.95.
[52] Genesis 41:45
[53] Genesis 41:42
[54] Genesis 41:43
[55] Rindge, M. 2010. p95.
[56] Metzger, B., 2006. *The Oxford Companion To The Bible*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.
[57] Buchanan, G., 2005. *The Book Of Daniel*. Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock Pub. P413
[58] Rindge, M., 2010. p.95.

Joseph's seeming submission to the power of Egypt may well have reflected a more cautious, pragmatic attitude of Jews at the middle of the Babylonian captivity.

For an exiled people living in an alien culture, some practices, some structures of thought must necessarily be dispensed with. The Joseph story explores what is most needful, what can be set aside and what must be retained for a people to thrive as a people in this situation. The answer is: faith in a providential God and trust in the principles of self-reliance and hard work. Joseph epitomises an undying faith existing in a strange land. Throughout Joseph's life, he remains faithful. We are not to suppose that he acted very differently in prison than in Pharaoh's court. Indeed, the narrative would hardly permit that, unless the point being made was that this is a man who has faith when destitute but forgets God when he finds wealth. Literature is full of such stories, but here, too little emphasis is placed on Joseph's supposed arrogance to be a satisfying moral point. Finally, he becomes reconciled to his brothers and his father by the end of the story. Rather than him being restored to the nation, the nation is restored to him. It might not be necessary or wise to act like a Maccabee or a Daniel to retain one's identity. The story of Joseph takes a pragmatic view towards the former practices but retains Jewish faith as it looks forward to the future.

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