

THE TRANSITION TO THE SECOND TRIP TO EGYPT: NARRATIVE DEVICES IN GENESIS 43:1-14

RONALD T. HYMAN

Ten of Joseph's brothers, all but Benjamin, went down to Egypt to buy rations of grain so they could survive the famine in the land of Canaan. They returned home with their sacks filled, but the official in charge in Egypt had kept Simeon in detention, and declared that if the others returned to Egypt they must bring Benjamin with them. Now, because the grain supply has been exhausted, the brothers must return to Egypt, and must secure the permission of their father to take Benjamin with them. At the end of Genesis 42, Jacob adamantly rejected a request from his eldest son, Reuben, to send Benjamin with him on a second trip. Genesis 43 begins at a point of stalemate.

This article will examine and comment on the first 14 verses of Genesis 43, a short but complete section that details the transition from the brothers' first trip to Egypt to the forthcoming second trip. The focus will be on several selected narrative devices used in these verses as a way to understand the characters' actions and the plot's development.¹ The article will show that these narrative devices are central to the story as vital elements in the narrative that help to create and enhance the tension necessary to hold the reader's or listener's interest.

ABRUPT CHANGE

In this transitional section between the two trips to Egypt three old situations change abruptly and worsen, two explicitly and one implicitly. All three changes appear in the first two verses. In the brief first verse of only three Hebrew words the text sets the large scene by announcing that *the famine was sore in the land*.

In the first part of the second verse, the text sets the specific local scene² by noting that Jacob's family has consumed all the supply of grain that the sons had brought home from Egypt.³ After these two explicit changes occur, Jacob, in the second part of 43:2, commands his sons to return to Egypt. Jacob says, *'Go again, buy us a little food.'*⁴

Pressure on the entire family group has become stronger because now the famine is worse and the large family has consumed its rations. In addition, although Jacob at the start of Chapter 43 has changed his words from what they were earlier in Chapter 42, he still does not permit Benjamin to go down to Egypt. Here he seems to be forgetting or is ignoring a fundamental point – "the man" who is lord of the land, in reality Joseph, has demanded that Benjamin must come to Egypt if the brothers want to buy more food. By maintaining his prior stance, Jacob worsens his relations with his sons. In sum, the situation has changed dramatically, and heightened family tension has suddenly appeared. The introduction of abrupt changes and resurgent tension will now propel the story forward.

DIALOGUE

With the start of the second part of verse 2 the role of the narrator changes. From that point through the end of verse 14 the text serves only to introduce the three speakers in the transitional section: Israel;⁵ Judah; and Joseph's brothers. For example, the text says, *and Israel said* and *and they said*. The three speakers speak a total of six times. The father addresses the brothers, while Judah and the brothers both address their father. The dialogue between them constitutes the second narrative device, and it serves the function of presenting the speakers' different perspectives on the situation at hand. The exchanges among the speakers take up 12.5 of the 14 verses. In this way, dialogue is the vehicle for advancing the story. The text adds no new facts and offers no commentary on the speakers' remarks. "Everything in the world of biblical narrative ultimately gravitates toward dialogue . . . a remarkably large part of the narrative burden is carried by dialogue . . ."⁶

INTENSIFYING INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE

Jacob has begun the dialogue with his directive to his sons to return to Egypt. Unexpectedly, Judah steps forward to speak on behalf of his brothers, thereby replacing Reuben, the eldest son, as their spokesman (another instance of the abrupt change device). Judah, in a straightforward tone, reminds his father of what "the man" said about Benjamin. By featuring a third narrative device, Judah reminds his father of Joseph's demand. The device here is a Hebrew construction that is not available in English. Grammarians

call this device the intensifying infinitive absolute. The English translation renders Judah's statement to his father as *The man **did earnestly forewarn us** [ha-ed he-id]* (43:3; the intensifying infinitive absolute is in bold face). The construction consists of a Hebrew verb root that is doubled in slightly different form as a way to emphasize the verb. Literally, Judah says that "the man" *forewarn, has forewarned*. A smooth English translation uses an adverbial modifier "earnestly" to indicate the intensity of the verb.⁷ The Hebrew verb root for *forewarn* appears only this once in the entire Book of Genesis, thereby adding to the emphasis already gained from using the intensifying infinitive absolute.

Two verses later, when the brothers speak together they also use the intensifying infinitive absolute twice. In reply to their father's criticism of them for telling "the man" about Benjamin, the sons say:

*The man **asked straitly** [sha'ol sha'al] concerning ourselves, and concerning our kindred, saying 'Is your father still alive? Have ye another brother?' and we told him according to the tenor of these words; could we **in any wise know** [ha-yado'a neda] that he would say, 'Bring your brother down'?' (43:7).*

In this way, the transition section offers three intensifying infinitives absolute to emphasize that the decision that Benjamin accompany them on a trip to Egypt is the decision of "the man" in Egypt. The brothers could not have known that he would demand to see Benjamin. The two intensifying infinitives absolute used by the brothers together in one verse are significant in that they emphasize that "the man" asked them questions because he wanted to know about their father and other brother (42:15, 20, 33, 34).

Note that in the text itself Joseph does not ask about his father or Benjamin, but only asks, *'Whence come ye?'* (42:7). The brothers answer that question correctly and even unnecessarily add the purpose of their trip to Egypt. Their additional words are perhaps an indication of the discomfort of their position in Egypt. When Joseph attacks his brothers as being spies, the brothers deny the charge but again volunteer information, this time about themselves and Benjamin (42:7-15). The giving of more information than requested, a sign that the respondent is uneasy and off balance, is reminiscent of the exchange between the serpent and Eve, who says more than requested when questioned by the serpent (3:1-3). Perhaps Joseph did ask his brothers directly about

their younger brother later, as they said in their report to Jacob (42:31-34, 43:7). On the other hand, perhaps the brothers are deceiving their father again, as they did when they presented a bloody garment to him to imply that Joseph was killed by a wild beast (37:32). Maybe their report to their father is just another attempted self-justification. Either way, the brothers correctly reported to their father that "the man" told them they must bring Benjamin to Egypt (42:15-16).

The infinitives absolute emphasize the recurring central theme of asking and knowing in the Joseph story. Joseph asks and knows, but the brothers do not, and this disparity in knowledge is at the center of the narrative's conflict, as well as the source of the suspense in the story. The disparity is a matter that needs to be resolved as the plot develops.

In addition to their substance, or content, the intensifying infinitives absolute stand out for the reader or listener simply in quantitative terms. There are 50 such constructions in the entire Book of Genesis,⁸ which consists of 1,534 verses, or about one intensifying infinitive absolute for every 31 verses. Yet in this transition section of only 14 verses, Judah and his brothers use intensifying infinitives absolute much more frequently, a little less than once every five verses. The above-average, active use of this narrative device is indicative of the tension existing between Jacob and his sons, leading the sons to emphasize strongly their points about Benjamin to their father.

DOUBLING

We return to Judah's remarks in verses 3, 4, and 5 to identify another narrative device in this transitional section. After using the intensifying infinitive absolute about "the man" forewarning the brothers that Benjamin must come to Egypt, Judah begins carefully and specifically to lay out to his father two available options for action: If his father will send Benjamin along with the other brothers, then they will go to buy food. If his father will not send Benjamin along, then they will not go to buy food. Judah finishes by repeating what "the man" said to the brothers. An analysis of Judah's short remarks shows that they constitute an example of a fourth narrative device; doubling, in which events, or words, or people, or other items appear twice in some manner.

Readers and listeners have noticed for centuries that doubling is a prime characteristic of the Joseph story. Beginning with Genesis 37, events, especially dreams, occur in pairs or doubles.

- Joseph has two dreams (37:5, 9);
- the wife of Potiphar, Joseph's master in Egypt, twice tries to seduce Joseph, saying, '*Lie with me*' (39:7,12);
- Joseph twice loses his outer garment, once in 37:23 to his brothers and once in 39:15 to Potiphar's wife;
- Joseph is twice thrown into a pit [*bor*], once as a youth by his brothers (37:24) and once by Potiphar (40:15);
- Pharaoh's two jailed officials, the butler and baker, each has a dream for Joseph to interpret (40:9, 16);
- the chief butler waited two years to tell Pharaoh about Joseph (41:1);
- Joseph interprets Pharaoh's two dreams (41:1,5);
- Jacob-Israel (who has two names) twice commands his sons to go down to Egypt to buy food (42:2, 43:2).

One scholar offers a "deeper, structural doubling" within the story's plot in which Joseph metes out "measure for measure" to his brothers what he himself had suffered in the past.⁹ Another author presents an alternate interpretation that centers on Joseph's dreams as they "relate to the innermost fears of the brothers and the underlying source of the tensions between them."¹⁰

In his short reaction to his father (43:5), Judah speaks a doubling wrapped inside a doubling. That is, Judah reports Joseph's forewarning demand (bring Benjamin); then offers an option to his father (if you send Benjamin, we will go to buy food); then offers a second option, which is a negative doubling of the first option (if you do not send Benjamin, we will not go to buy food), and then repeats Joseph's forewarning demand, to create a doubling of the demand. In short, Judah mentions a Demand, an Option, an Option, and a Demand. That is, there is a doubling of the Demand, and that doubling surrounds the two Options.

Doubling also appears in the two-verse exchange between the brothers and their father (vv. 6-7). In verse 6, which immediately follows Judah's speech, Israel (as Jacob is now identified) speaks again, this time asking a rhetorical question that criticizes his sons. Rather than choosing one of the two options offered by Judah, Israel complains about the sons' poor behavior toward him.

He says, *'Wherefore dealt ye so ill with me, as to tell the man whether ye had yet a brother?'* (43:6). The sons answer their father's rhetorical question by asking him their own rhetorical question (43:7), thereby creating a doubling of rhetorical questions back-to-back. (See the above section on the Intensifying Infinitive Absolute for the complete quoted verse.) The sons' rhetorical question serves as the sons' self-exoneration from any blame for requiring the brothers to take Benjamin to Egypt. The sons are, in effect, saying that "the man" in Egypt is to blame, rather than they.

Other doublings also stem from that exchange. Israel's complaint here creates a doubling of the complaint regarding the sons that he himself had voiced just nine verses earlier (42:36). Moreover, from the point of view of resistance to their father, the sons in verse 7 create a doubling of Judah's opening reply in vv. 3-5. The other sons are supporting Judah, but they do not offer any other options to Israel that might lead to a way out of the current stalemate. Because of the lack of an available option that Israel might accept, Judah returns to the dialogue in verse 8, even though he has not been directly addressed by his father, in order to provide a third option. Sensitivity to the device of doubling facilitates this explanation of Judah's uninvited reappearance in the transitional section.

One net result of the question in verse 6 is to deepen Israel's image as a complainer, a self-portrayed victim, and a helpless leader under siege due to his sons' behavior. (We must consider the extent to which the image of Israel as complainer is valid.) In any case, this sets the readers and listeners up for a surprise later in the transitional section.

The deeper examination of verse 7 reveals that the sons, in their rhetorical reply to their father, double their own prior behavior toward Joseph in Chapter 37. After the text twice states that the brothers came to hate Joseph (37:4-5) and after Joseph tells the brothers his dream (37:6-7), the brothers ask Joseph two rhetorical questions in 37:8. Each question contains an intensifying infinitive absolute: *'Shalt thou **indeed reign** [ha-malokh timlokh] over us? or shalt thou **indeed have dominion** [mashol timshol] over us?* Thus, verse 7 serves as a double doubling; that is, a doubling of Israel's rhetorical question to the sons in 43:6 while simultaneously doubling the brothers' own rhetorical questions to Joseph in 37:8.

Additional doublings occur in verses 8-14. Judah creates a doubling when he quotes his father's key words in 42:2 (v. 8), saying to his father, '*Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go, **that we may live, and not die** . . .* [ve-nihyeh ve-lo namut]' (the quoted words from 42:2 appear in bold face). Judah in verse 10 ends his second three-verse speech to his father to express his impatience, annoyance, and frustration with all the talk and quibbling over the need to go to buy more food. There in 43:10 he explicitly uses the Hebrew term for double, or twice, or second time, saying, '*For except we had lingered, surely we had now returned a second time.*' Judah's second speech is effective in that in the very next verse Israel relents.

Israel speaks the final four verses of the transitional section (43:11-14). He changes his mind about Benjamin, apparently due to Judah's preceding plea. (This change is another instance of the first narrative device, abrupt change.) Israel takes charge of the situation, as the head of the family should do. He lists six items for his sons to take along as a present to "the man" in Egypt, with the hope of influencing the latter's treatment of Israel's sons: Balm, honey, gum, ladanum, pistachio nuts, and almonds – all choice fruits of the land. Three of these are doublings of the gum, balm, and ladanum carried in the caravan which took Joseph to Egypt (37:25).

Israel also directs his sons to take double the amount of their money, in case the return of the money to their sacks was a mistake. He ends the transitional section with two words that are a doubling of the Hebrew verb for "bereave," saying, '*If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved*' (43:14).

Joseph tells Pharaoh that a double dream, like Pharaoh's, is a sign that '*the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass*' (41:32). Whether that comment is indeed the motivation for the abundance of doublings in the Joseph story, it remains true that doubling is a major narrative device in the transition section. It undoubtedly is not just a random coincidence within this section of Genesis and especially so at the end of verse 14.

ALLITERATION AND RHYMING

To identify examples of a fifth narrative device we shall return to the narrator at the beginning of the transitional section. Here we deal with alliteration and rhyming. It is impossible in an English translation to replicate Hebrew alliteration and Hebrew rhyming. Therefore, it is impossible for readers of an

English translation to notice them on their own. Suffice it to state here that in Genesis 43:2 the text, after the sudden announcement about the famine becoming severe, introduces the father's command to his sons with both alliteration and rhyming in two words. That is, in *their father* [*avihem*] and *to them* [*aleyhem*] there is alliteration in that the two words each begin with the letter "aleph" vocalized with the same sound "ah". Those two words also rhyme in that each ends with the sound "em." When speaking, the father continues the rhyming in his first three words, *go again* [*shuvu*] and *buy for us* [*shivru lanu*], which all end with the sound "u." The result is that after noting the abrupt changes in external conditions in the first verse, the reader and listener encounter in verse 2 five words with alliteration and rhyming back-to-back. In verse 3, Judah continues the alliteration and rhyming when quoting Joseph's two words, *your brother* [*aheykhem*] and *with you* [*itkhem*]. In verse 4, Judah rhymes two more words, *our brother* [*aheynu*] and *with us* [*itanu*]. In the fifth verse Judah repeats the alliteration and rhyming from verse 3.

In his second speech, which he directs to his father again, Judah uses alliteration based on the conjunctive prefix "vav [and]" for four verbs in a row: *and we will arise, and go, and live, and not die.* (43:8). In that same verse, Judah continues with more alliteration with the Hebrew word "gam [also]": *also we, also you, also our children.* In his closing speech, Israel continues the rhyming with the sound "u" of eight command verbs in a row – *do* [*asu*], *take* [*kehu*], *carry down* [*horidu*], *take* [*kehu*], *carry back* [*tashivu*], *take* [*kehu*], *arise* [*kumu*], *go again* [*shuvu*] (43:11-13). Note that the last *take* refers to the permission to take Benjamin along on the trip to Egypt. In verse 14, his last verse, which ends the transitional section, Israel rhymes two words *unto you* [*lakhem*] and *your brother* [*ahikhem*] with the "em" sound again. In sum, the devices of alliteration and rhyming permeate the entire transitional section by highlighting sounds and letters that create a sense of unity among the 14 verses.

ALLUSION TO THE PAST

Finally, a sixth narrative device, allusion, is also present. Allusion serves to enhance the meaning or significance of both the current item and the past item through similarity or contrast. Allusion also serves as a device to maintain the attention of the reader and listener. In verse 43:2, Jacob commands

his sons to go again to Egypt to buy emergency rations. This command, particularly its key word *buy*, alludes to Jacob's first command to go down to Egypt (42:2). The second command is weak when contrasted with the prior one. It does not expressly indicate the desperate context of a severe famine combined with the end of the emergency rations. More significant is the absence of any recognition that "the man" in Egypt told his sons, as they reported to their father, that they must bring Benjamin with them if they want further rations of grain. The allusion to the first command in the prior chapter helps make this situation clear to the sons – they must challenge their father and resist him.

Further, a deeper examination of verse 6 reveals that Israel alludes to at least two related passages. First, he echoes his most recent prior complaint about the sons' poor behavior toward him (42:36). Second, he alludes to his criticism of Simeon and Levi for their poor behavior after the rape of their sister Dinah (34:30). Likewise, a further examination of verse 7 reveals that the sons, in their reply to their father, allude to their own prior behavior toward Joseph, as mentioned earlier.

Understanding the implicit meaning of his father's command, Judah steps forward to resist him, and subsequently all the other sons do so, too. When the resistance in verses 3,5, and 7 fails and Israel still does not permit Benjamin to go to Egypt, Judah steps forward again to offer his father another option (quotation from Jacob in bold face):

*Send the lad with me, and we will arise, and go, **that we may live, and not die**, both we, and thou, and our little ones. I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him; if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever' (vv. 8-9).*

Judah, by partially quoting his father in this new, third option, not only creates a doubling of his father's words in verse 42:2, but also commits himself to the future of the larger family. He does so while at the same time alluding, by contrast, to the rash, and subsequently rejected, offer from Reuben (42:37). Judah offers to be responsible for Benjamin forever, and his speech with its use of doubling and allusion is successful.

In verses 43:11-13, Israel relents and takes charge of preparations for the return trip to Egypt and alludes to the caravan that took Joseph away. Not

only does he send a variety of the choice fruits of Canaan for the man who is dispensing rations of grain, he ironically prepares a present for and alludes to his missing favorite son. This allusion is not lost on the reader and listener. The choice fruits of the land will not be going via a caravan of traders but to Joseph via a caravan of his brothers. Israel also alludes to Judah's prior, second speech. He uses the verbs *take*, *arise*, and *go back* to remind the sons by allusion of the words spoken by Judah in 43:8-10.

In his next and final verse (43:14), Israel bids farewell to his sons with a blessing for a safe and successful trip, saying, '*God Almighty [El Shaddai] give you mercy before the man, that he may release unto you your other brother and Benjamin.* With use of the name God Almighty Israel alludes to the two instances when that term was previously connected to him directly. When Jacob set out to the house of Bethuel, Rebekah's father, to find a wife from within the greater family, Isaac blessed his son Jacob, saying, '*And God Almighty bless thee and make thee fruitful . . .*' (28:3). In the house of Bethuel Jacob found Rachel, Joseph's mother. Israel's use of the name God Almighty also alludes to the time He renamed Jacob as Israel, saying '*I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply*' (35:11). Israel then ends his speech to his sons with two forms of the Hebrew for "bereave," saying, '*If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved,*' as indicated above in the section on doubling. These doubling words of Israel also constitute a double allusion, an allusion to his mother, Rebekah, and to himself. In the first allusion, Rebekah urges her son to flee from the anger felt by Esau, his brother. Rebekah, the first person in Genesis to use the verb "bereave," says to Jacob, '*Why should I be bereaved of you both in one day?*' (27:45). Israel also alludes to what he himself said to his sons after they returned from Egypt, accusing them of bereaving him of Joseph and Simeon (42:36).

COMMENTARY

This part of the article offers comments on the question of the benefit of being aware of some of the narrative devices used in Genesis 43:1-14. The short response to this question of benefit is that the readers or listeners gain a greater opportunity to appreciate the richness and flavor of the narrative. They can realize what is helping to keep their attention as they come to recognize some of the story's intricacies of plot and style. Knowing what is hap-

pening and how it is happening, two aspects of every story, run parallel to the substantive theme of knowing in the Joseph story. As mentioned earlier, knowing is a central theme in the Joseph story from Chapter 37 to Chapter 50. What influences the audience of this story are the events of the plot line and the manner used to tell it. In short, both the "what" and the "how" of a story are the necessary keys to knowing. Such knowing, in contrast to mere knowledge of the plot line, leads to understanding the meaning of the text and fuller enjoyment of this section of Genesis when reading or listening to it.

Knowledge about the narrative devices employed in the Joseph story leads to the realization that they do not appear in a sequential, linear manner. On the contrary, the narrative style features the continuing interweaving of devices that yields an exponential result, especially because various events and words serve simultaneously as multiple-purpose devices. Thus, the presentation of multiple viewpoints yields depth and makes for a strong narrative.¹¹

In sum, a reader or listener benefits from understanding the richness of the transitional section, which presents a complex interweaving of several narrative devices, as shown above. No doubt even more exists to be discovered in this short but complete scene in Genesis, a section too long ignored or passed over quickly by scholars and readers of the twisting plot. Mimicking Joseph's brothers who were eager to buy additional rations, these other people also have rushed down to Egypt.

NOTES

1. S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989) p. 197.
2. See: J. Licht, *Storytelling in the Bible* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, the Hebrew University, 1978) p. 28-33 & 50.
3. I will use the name last used in the text for Jacob-Israel.
4. The translations used in this article are from the Jewish Publication Society, 1917.
5. The only name used explicitly for the father in this transitional section is Israel
6. R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981) p.182. See also, M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) pp. 365-440; and M. Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979) pp.40-62.
7. B. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990) p. 580-591.
8. B. Goddard, *The Origin of the Hebrew Infinitive Absolute in the Light of The Infinitive Uses in Related Languages and Its use in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Harvard Divinity School Dissertation, 1943) pp. 126-134.

9. J. Ackerman, "Joseph, Judah, and Jacob," in K. Gros Louis, ed. *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*, Volume II (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982) pp. 86, 90.
10. M. Soller, "Why No Message from Joseph to His Father?" *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 26 (1998) p. 159.
11. A. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983).



עשה תורתך קבע

THE TRIENNIAL BIBLE READING CALENDAR DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF CHAIM ABRAMOWITZ

April	Amos	8 – 9
	Obadiah	1
	Jonah	1 – 3
	Micah	1 – 7
	Nahum	1 – 3
	Habakkuk	1 – 3
	Zephaniah	1 – 3
	Haggai	1 – 2
	Zechariah	1 – 4
May	Zechariah	5 – 14
	Malachi	1 – 3
	Psalms	1 – 15
June	Psalms	16 – 45
July	Psalms	46 – 75
August	Psalms	76 – 105

