

AN EXAMINATION OF JOSEPH'S ENSLAVEMENT OF THE EGYPTIANS IN GEN
47:13–26 IN LIGHT OF RELEVANT SLAVERY TEXTS ACROSS THE TANAKH

by

David J. Fuller, BCM

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AUTHOR: David J. Fuller

SUPERVISOR: Paul S. Evans

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David J. Fuller

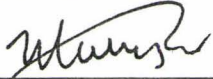
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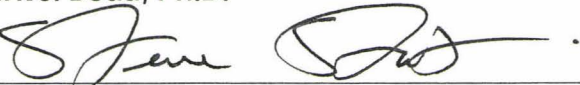
Primary Supervisor: _____


Paul S. Evans, Ph.D.

Secondary Supervisor: _____


Mark J. Boda, Ph.D.

Academic Dean Designate: _____


Steven M. Studebaker, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

An Examination of Joseph's Enslavement of the Egyptians in Gen 47:13–26 in Light of Relevant Slavery Texts Across the Tanakh

David J. Fuller
McMaster Divinity College
Hamilton, Ontario
Master of Arts (Christian Studies), 2013

An examination of scholarly perspectives on the ethicality of Joseph's enslavement of the Egyptians in Gen 47:13–26 reveals a debate over whether Joseph's actions were benevolent or oppressive. The majority of the scholars who evaluate Joseph negatively simply ignore the relevant historical data, and Brueggemann's case for its dismissal is unconvincing. However, one area of contention that has gone relatively unexamined is the relevance and implications of later canonical materials relating to slavery. Childs' Canonical Approach is employed in a modified form to honor the canon as the larger context in which a passage should be read. I argue that when examined in light of relevant slavery texts across the Tanakh, Joseph's actions in Gen 47:13–26 are not culpable on the basis of his employment of debt slavery, but can be read as being out of step with the ideal that emerges concerning resource distribution.

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Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
BDB	Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. <i>Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament.</i>
BI	<i>Biblical Illustrator</i>
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CC	Continental Commentaries
ChrCent	<i>Christian Century</i>
CTM	<i>Concordia Theological Monthly</i>
DBI	<i>Dictionary of Biblical Imagery</i>
DOTP	<i>Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch</i>
ExpTim	<i>Expository Times</i>
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
HBT	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
ITC	International Theological Commentary
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBQ	<i>Jewish Biblical Quarterly</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
JTSA	<i>Journal of Theology for South Africa</i>
LHB/OTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
NAC	New American Commentary
NDBT	<i>New Dictionary of Biblical Theology</i>
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDB	<i>New International Dictionary of the Bible</i>
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
OTL	Old Testament Library
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
RelSRev	<i>Religious Studies Review</i>
ResQ	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentary
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WC	Westminster Commentaries

WTJ
WW
ZAW

Westminster Theological Journal
Word and World
Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

CHAPTER ONE: PREVIOUS APPROACHES AND HERMENEUTICAL EXCURSUS

A. Introductory Comments

Joseph's enslavement of the Egyptians in Gen 47:13–26 stands as an example of a text that inspires varying responses, which for the most part can be separated into two vehemently opposed but equally strident camps. When one surveys the range of treatments of this passage, it becomes apparent that the evaluation of Joseph's enslavement of the Egyptians as either benevolent or cruel is a choice that rests on a number of underlying methodological and ideological factors. This chapter presents a summary of various interpretations of Gen 47:13–26, outlines the primary areas of contention regarding the purpose of this passage, offers some thoughts on the adjudication of some of the attendant hermeneutical disputes, and outlines the type of investigation to be performed by the present study.

B. Previous Approaches to Gen 47:13–26

This section will provide a review of some of the treatments of Gen 47:13–26 written during the last century. The treatments analyzed in this survey will be grouped according to the rubric of 1) source critical approaches, 2) recent positive treatments, and 3) recent negative treatments. For each source examined in this survey, particular attention will be paid to what it views as the main purpose of the passage, how it evaluates the ethicality of Joseph's actions (with evidence given), and its perspective on how the passage fits with the surrounding material.

1. Summary of Source Critical Treatments

Beginning with commentaries written at the end of the nineteenth century, it is readily apparent that the overriding interest of scholars writing in the critical tradition

was the reconstruction of the compositional history of the text under investigation, not the detection of the sentiments of the original audience or the place of the passage within the canon as a whole. Nevertheless, in the mountains of speculation generated regarding original life settings of sources, editorial glosses, double accounts and agenda driven arrangement of material by final redactors there was plenty of room for investigation of matters of historical context, musings on the purpose (or lack thereof) of the juxtaposition of different stories, and thoughtful probing of the political and ideological function served by a given account during the hypothesized time periods of its writing and placement with other materials.

Dillmann assigns the whole of vv. 13–26 to what he calls the C source.¹ He states immediately that the main point of the passage is to display the divergence between the devastating effect of the famine on Egypt with the way in which Joseph provided for Israel, while noting Joseph’s position of prominence in Egypt and how the Pharaoh benefited from Joseph’s administration.² It is also significant that he defends his chosen source division solely on the basis of lexical stock (though also claiming thematic continuity with the subject matter of ch. 41).³ Other points of interest include his incredulity towards the literality of the giving away of all the cattle in v. 17, asking, “what could Joseph have done with all the cattle?”⁴ Perhaps his most enduring contribution to the history of the interpretation of this passage is his detailed list of

¹ Dillmann, *Genesis*, 6–7. Regarding their arrangement in the story of Abraham, the A source is said to contain the “principal narrative,” the B source specially emphasises “specific incidents,” and the C source has a “picturesque vividness.” Based on Gunkel’s use of Dillmann’s lexical arguments to assign the passage to J, it is likely that Dillmann’s C corresponds to J.

² Dillmann, *Genesis*, 425. If Dillmann detects a disparity between Joseph’s treatment of his own countrymen and his treatment of the Egyptians, he does not elaborate on it.

³ On this source-critical mainstay see Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch*, 56–58. Whybray makes a convincing case that vocabulary statistics are an unhelpful way to determine sources.

⁴ Dillmann, *Genesis*, 425.

comparable land taxes in other ancient economies, used to make the point that a one-fifth tax would have been considered quite lenient in its historical context, in which elsewhere payments of one-half and even two-thirds of one's harvest were not unheard of.⁵

Dillmann concludes his treatment of the passage by dismissing the historicity of all the details of the story except for the enduring institution of the royal ownership of the land and the one-fifth tax. While he notes that the one-fifth tax is not attested in any historical sources, the concept of priest, warrior, and peasant castes are well known, as well as the fact that the common people were entitled to own land only at "a late date."⁶

While Gunkel voices similar conclusions regarding the purpose of the passage and the audience reception of Joseph's actions as did Dillmann, he contributes several unique observations. First is the awkward placement of the passage. Gunkel states that the two main themes of the Joseph novella as a whole are "Joseph's fortunes in Egypt," and "Joseph's relations with his family." As the second theme is entirely absent in vv. 13–26, it is only considered "disruptive" by Gunkel, who would rather see it placed with ch. 41 and is only able to explain its position by stating that while ch. 42 dealt with the first year of the famine, the events of 47:18 address the second year.⁷ As compared to Dillmann, Gunkel sees the purpose of this account as an "etiological legend" primarily conveying the origins of an economic condition in Egypt which is different from Israel.⁸ It is because of Israel's "national pride" that the origins of this kind of land ownership in Egypt are attributed to Joseph. Gunkel's cynicism regarding the historicity of the account is revealed in the following quote:

⁵ Dillmann, *Genesis*, 429–430.

⁶ Dillmann, *Genesis*, 430–431.

⁷ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 442.

⁸ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 442.

This contention, thus, sprang from the same source as the later contentions that Joseph was the creator of Lake Moeris, that Abraham taught the Egyptians astronomy, that Moses was the actual founder of all culture in Egypt, and that Plato borrowed from Moses.⁹

Gunkel also clearly states his understanding of the ethicality of Joseph's actions.

According to Gunkel, not only did the narrator of Genesis fail to see a potential dark side to Joseph's enslavement of the Egyptians, but it would be utterly fallacious for the modern interpreter to view Joseph's actions suspiciously, stating, "The whole passage emphasizes that everything Joseph does is to Pharaoh's advantage."¹⁰ Regarding the source divisions of the passage, Gunkel attributes it entirely to the J source, citing some of Dillmann's arguments regarding unique lexical stock. He also surveys and dismisses several studies that attempted to isolate doublets and separate strands within vv. 13–26, although he finds some grounds for suggesting the sale of the people was a later addition based on the centrality of the land seizure in vv. 22 and 26.¹¹

Skinner evaluates Joseph's actions equally positively, stating they served to, "revolutionize the system of land-tenure in Egypt for the benefit of the crown," by a "bold stroke of statesmanship."¹² While tentatively assigning the passage to the J source, Skinner finds traces of the word choices of both J and E, and makes a genuine break with his contemporaries by insisting that it is "not at all obvious" that it would be a better fit with ch. 41. Its unique etiological explanatory function could lead to it plausibly being viewed as a later addition.¹³ An interest in rhetorical shaping lacking in Dillmann and

⁹ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 442–444. Further on in his comments on the individual events in the passage, he considers events such as Joseph's accumulation of all the nation's money in a year and his collection of all the cattle (asking, "How did people plow?") as "a fairy tale" and "extremely naive."

¹⁰ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 443. He does not address the question of whether this arrangement was equally favorable to the Egyptian people.

¹¹ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 444.

¹² Skinner, *Genesis*, 498–499.

¹³ Skinner, *Genesis*, 499.

Gunkel is evident when Skinner makes sure to highlight that in vv. 18–22, when the people offer to sell their lands and persons, that the emphasis on the people’s initiative frees Joseph from the “odium” of the proposal.¹⁴ In his concluding evaluation of the passage, he rehashes Dillmann’s survey of higher surrounding tax rates in the ancient Near East, then briefly surveys some historical evidence for a period in which the peasantry worked the land which belonged to the crown, finishing with an uncertain musing that the passage may be either an “Egyptian legend” or a product of the “national imagination of Israel.”¹⁵ Writing for a more popular audience during the same period, Driver virtually repeats the conclusions of the aforementioned studies.¹⁶

Scholars operating under the critical paradigm during the second half of the twentieth century generally did not deviate substantially from the conclusions reached by their predecessors. However, several distinct emphases of thought are discernible. For some, it sufficed to merely observe that the passage functioned as a later insertion offering a fanciful explanation of the conditions of land ownership and taxation in Egypt; further speculation on the possible function or significance of the account was apparently irrelevant.¹⁷ Other scholars were perhaps more interested in addressing the types of moral questions that may have presented themselves in the minds of a popular reading audience. Representative of this approach is von Rad, who agrees with his forebears regarding the lack of continuity between 47:13–26 and its surrounding material, as it thematically is

¹⁴ Skinner, *Genesis*, 500.

¹⁵ Skinner, *Genesis*, 501. Skinner finishes this section by surveying two highly unlikely Egyptian parallels for a Joseph-like figure that could have served as a source for the tradition of the story.

¹⁶ Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 372–375.

¹⁷ Compare the hasty treatments given by Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*, 182; Van Seters, *Prologue to History*, 318. Redford tentatively places the passage in a group of later additions he terms the “Judah-expansion.” Only slightly less taciturn is Coats, *Genesis*, 298–300; Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*, 52–53. Coats intentionally states that the account does not intend to communicate anything about Joseph’s administrative capabilities and is simply a later etiological insertion that has no unity with the surrounding material.

more closely related to the events of chapter 41.¹⁸ When considering the broader significance of the passage, von Rad seems aware of the potential to ascribe malicious intentions to Joseph, calling it a, “showpiece in the arsenal of anti-Semitic polemic against the Old Testament.”¹⁹ However, it is then stated that the narrator clearly wished to portray Joseph as successful in saving the people of Egypt from a disastrous famine, although von Rad finds it “naive” to assume that Joseph himself was actually responsible for this example of administrative wisdom. Ultimately, he sees no purpose behind its placement in the passage other than an elucidation of foreign economic conditions, which would have aroused the curiosity of the narrator’s, “enlightened, awakened,” audience.²⁰

Likewise, Speiser states,

More than one modern writer has found in his report of the enslavement of the Egyptian peasant shocking proof of Joseph’s inhumanity...such censorious comments show little understanding of either history or literature...there is no evidence that Egyptian society would have found such changes to be anything other than constructive.²¹

A third category of scholars, however, can be isolated who cannot be accused of animosity towards the two groups previously mentioned, but extend their efforts in an additional new direction, specifically, the pinpointing of the circumstances of the composition of the account and its particular ideological function at that date related to the perpetuation of pro-monarchy rhetoric. Westermann is perhaps the most traditional of these writers. While he states that the surrounding materials, in their portrayal of Joseph’s alliance with the royal house that has resulted in provisions for his family assumes and

¹⁸ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 408.

¹⁹ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 410.

²⁰ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 410.

²¹ Speiser, *Genesis*, 353.

supports the institution of the monarchy,²² he specifically regards 47:13–26 as having no purpose in the overall narrative and solely existing to explain the taxational and property ownership situation in Egypt.²³ Westermann additionally goes to great lengths to find inconsistencies and faults within the narrative of 47:13–26 itself. For example, he claims that both vv. 20–22 and v. 26 are “conclusions,” that a contradiction is introduced by the mention of Canaan along with Egypt in vv. 13–15, and that a disparity exists between the actions performed in vv. 13–22 (to “alleviate the famine”) and in vv. 23–24 (“to provide seed for sowing.”) He also repeatedly criticizes the style as awkward and clumsy.²⁴ Regarding historical context, Westermann notes that, “generally from the first dynasty to the Ptolemaic period the king was regarded theoretically as the sole owner of land in Egypt.”²⁵ Not only does he find details of the story such as the cattle expropriation so ridiculous as to be unbelievable, he states regarding the people’s response in v. 25: “this would be so macabre or even so hypocritical a reaction that it could not even be attributed to the most inept of authors.”²⁶ While he notes in his conclusion that the idea that the passage may have originated in the Solomonic period under the guise of the legitimization of taxation is plausible, he reiterates his basic thesis that the account has no connection with the surrounding narrative and simply exists to make Joseph the originator of Egypt’s economic policy.²⁷

A more cynical perspective is taken by Vawter, who flatly states up front that the attribution of Egyptian abolition of private land ownership to Joseph is due to “bland

²² Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, 172.

²³ Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, 173.

²⁴ Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, 173. The rigid standard of consistency imposed by Westermann on the account would surely reduce most works of narrative to nonsense.

²⁵ Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, 173.

²⁶ Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, 176.

²⁷ Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, 176.

disregard” and “probably ignorance” of the historical facts. Interestingly, Vawter himself questions the morality of Joseph’s actions and suggests that the textual corruption in v. 21 is a result of a later editor desiring to soften Joseph’s apparently oppressive behaviour.²⁸ Noting that later OT materials prize human freedom, Vawter states “they indulged a dark and sardonic humor” concerning the idea that it was an Israelite who was responsible for Egypt’s adoption of a slave based system.²⁹ Like Westermann, Vawter finds certain details of the story inconceivable. For instance, he asks why the Egyptians had to trade their cattle to Joseph for grain and why they did not simply eat their own cattle. He states, “It would be frivolous to press the logic of the story in any detail.”³⁰

Carr devotes the bulk of his attention to the function of the account in a later monarchical compositional context. Beginning with the contrast between Joseph’s treatment of the Egyptians and of his brothers, to whom he responds and provides for graciously despite their prior abuse of him, Carr describes this to a response to a “northern antimonarchal movement” of the tenth century which decried Solomon’s forced labour practices.³¹ Noting that Joseph’s brothers offered to become slaves, yet only the Egyptians became slaves, Carr states:

This is a subtle argument in which objections to kingship are accounted for and displaced as an example of extreme subjugation of foreigners. In the process, the elements of royal ideology that stress the king’s provision for his subjects are stressed, while other elements of royal ideology, such as the emphasis on dominion and subjugation, are downplayed.³²

²⁸ Vawter, *On Genesis*, 449. This seems questionable, as it is hardly self evident that deportation is less undesirable than servitude. It is also poor textual criticism, as the variant of v. 21 can be handily explained through the ease with which the Hebrew letters *dalet* and *resh* can be confused.

²⁹ Vawter, *On Genesis*, 449.

³⁰ Vawter, *On Genesis*, 450.

³¹ Carr, *Reading the Fractures*, 276.

³² Carr, *Reading the Fractures*, 276.

Carr also notes the theme of God's placement of Joseph (reminiscent of OT material linking the human and divine kingships) and the theme of the unity of the brothers (possibly related to the push for a unified monarchy). He states, "Rather than arguing for a direct subjugation of the tribes to a monarch's authority, the narrative argues indirectly, using the narrative frame of a patriarchal story to argue for 'brotherly solidarity.'"³³

To summarize the above survey of source critical treatments of Gen 47:13–26, it can be noted that in the works previously analyzed, the account is generally assumed to have no intentional relation to the surrounding materials, it is strictly etiological and perhaps legendary in nature in that it attributes a feature of the Egyptian governance to an Israelite patriarch, it may seem odious to modern readers but surely would have been considered benevolent by ancient readers, that it contains numerous inconsistencies, and for some it may appear to be the crafting of later monarchal propagandists.

2. Summary of Recent Positive Evaluations of Joseph's Actions

Due to the fact that the critical tradition was generally more interested in matters of compositional reconstruction than interpretation, it seemed prudent to categorize that discussion in a separate section. More recent scholarship, much of it coming from Evangelicals, has exhibited an attitude of healthy skepticism against the assumptions of the documentary hypothesis while showing a much greater sensibility for literary style and craft. Additionally, the studies examined below tend to emphasize the unity of the final form of the text while utilizing the same historical context data as the critical studies

³³ Carr, *Reading the Fractures*, 277; Weimar, "Gen 47, 13–26," 137–138. By contrast, Weimar pushes the date of the passage even further back, claiming it best addresses the issues related to urbanization and political hierarchy that formed the, "Hintergrund der gesellschaftlichen Spannungen innerhalb der nachexilischen Zeit," or, "Background of the social tensions within the post-exilic period." (Author's translation.)

surveyed above. Representative of this approach is Waltke,³⁴ who bases his approach to the Joseph story on an intriguing chiasmic structure which encompasses the whole of Gen 37–50. For Waltke, the account of 47:13–31 finds its pair in Joseph’s own enslavement in 39:1–23.³⁵ Regarding the function of 47:13–26 specifically, Waltke notes the contrast in fortune between the Israelites and the Egyptians that prefigures the events of Exodus. For Waltke, the difference between the Egyptian and Israelite responses to being enslaved point to the contrast between the harsh Pharaoh of Exodus and the wisdom of Joseph.³⁶ His appraisal of Joseph’s actions is entirely positive, noting Joseph’s “wise and judicious administrative capabilities,” emphasizing the Egyptians’ initiative in offering the sale of themselves and their land, noting the gratitude of the Egyptians, and relaying the frequency of ancient Near East tax regulations that exceeded one fifth of a harvest.³⁷ This is essentially identical to the conclusions of Sarna.³⁸ At the same time, he notes the disparity between the Egyptian enslavement and the later Israelite notions of land and kingship, citing 1 Sam 8:13–16, but in a way that simply draws a contrast between Egyptian and Israelite beliefs, not in a way that casts doubt on the morality of Joseph’s actions.³⁹ It is also of interest to note that while he does not interact directly with source critical treatments of specific passages, his attention to literary devices ends up

³⁴ Waltke, *Genesis*, 583–593.

³⁵ Waltke, *Genesis*, 583, 588–589. Beyond the theme of enslavement, several parallels can be noted between these sections. There is an emphasis on the enslaved seeking to find favor in the eyes of the master, in both accounts Joseph is a high ranking second-in-command, and even emphasis placed on food (39:6). It should also be noted that Waltke views vv. 13–31 as a unit, based on the continuity of Joseph’s leadership throughout both events of the famine administration and the burial request, as well as his service to Pharaoh and his father.

³⁶ Waltke, *Genesis*, 589.

³⁷ Waltke, *Genesis*, 590–591.

³⁸ Sarna, *Genesis*, 321.

³⁹ Waltke, *Genesis*, 591.

unintentionally debunking some of the alleged inconsistencies discovered by critical scholars.⁴⁰

As the above summary of Waltke is an outstanding example of current evangelical scholarship that combines historical criticism with literary and theological sensitivity, additional sources in this vein will be highlighted chiefly to the extent that they offer information that goes beyond his treatment or to the degree that they differ from his conclusions.

Perhaps the most detailed analysis of the various issues involved in interpreting Gen 47:13–26 is given by Mathews.⁴¹ Like Waltke, Mathews sees a natural connection between vv. 13–26 and vv. 27–31, but Mathews emphasizes the themes of life and death as connecting these two passages. Furthermore, regarding the continuity of subject matter with ch. 41, it is noted that Joseph’s rise to power was necessary for both the care of his family and the Egyptian nation.⁴² Mathews also seriously probes the Egyptian historical backgrounds of the account, interacting with numerous primary and secondary sources that provide data regarding the evolution of the Egyptian tax system.⁴³ Significantly, Mathews offers several responses to those who would question the ethicality of Joseph’s actions: The loss of the people’s freedoms happened gradually, the people themselves

⁴⁰ Waltke, *Genesis*, 590. For example, the threefold mention of “Canaan” in vv. 13–15 could well be a notice to Israel of “the fate they avoided” rather than an indication of the sloppy combining of multiple sources.

⁴¹ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 848–860.

⁴² Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 853.

⁴³ Hurowitz, “Joseph’s Enslavement,” 355–362. While Mathews footnotes the Hurowitz article, he does not mention Hurowitz’s central thesis, which is that the statement of the Egyptians in Gen 47:25 bears resemblance to legal formulae found in Mesopotamian documents. Also, although he notes relevant OT passages that describe some of the differences in the Hebrew land ownership system, he does not speculate on how later generations of readers may have viewed Joseph’s actions in light of these given standards.

initiated it, differing levels of debt slavery existed,⁴⁴ the people showed gratitude for the enslavement, and the tax was culturally lenient.⁴⁵ Mathews calls Joseph a “conscientious overseer.”⁴⁶

In a similar vein, Hamilton praises Joseph’s wise administration of the land. Interestingly, while he praises the leniency of the one-fifth tax, he mentions only in passing the obvious comparison with the Israelite system, which he assumes was a flat one-tenth.⁴⁷ Following the work of McKenzie,⁴⁸ he particularly emphasizes that Joseph blesses Pharaoh with land as a result of Pharaoh’s provision of Joseph with responsibility, possibly in fulfillment of the statements of vv. 7 and 10.⁴⁹ (Likewise, Humphreys emphasizes the ways in which Joseph benefits Pharaoh.)⁵⁰ Curiously, Hamilton mentions Samuel’s apparent disapproval of Joseph’s actions in 1 Sam 8:13–16, but quickly dismisses the thought with only the comment, “One would assume that the story approving of this practice (Joseph) would precede a second story condemning this practice (Samuel), rather than vice versa.”⁵¹

For Wenham, “The primary purpose of this account of Joseph’s measures is to show the severity of the famine and the desperate plight of the Egyptians that he

⁴⁴ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 851. Mathews uses this concept of a two-tier debt slavery system (differentiating between those who freely sold themselves into slavery and foreigners) as a springboard for his questionable assertion that the enslavement would only be temporary in nature.

⁴⁵ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 851.

⁴⁶ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 852.

⁴⁷ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 618; Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 850. Mathews notes that the current understanding of the significance of the “triennial tithe” of Deut 14:28 is “unclear.” This could potentially indicate that the Israelite tithe was in fact higher than ten percent.

⁴⁸ McKenzie, “Jacob’s Blessing,” 386–399. McKenzie does an excellent job of pointing out not only the tremendous good that Joseph did for Pharaoh, but more significantly that this episode is simply the continuation of a larger pattern of the overseers of Joseph (formerly Potiphar and the keeper of the prison) being blessed by Joseph. He argues that the dominance of the blessing-motif is a far more compelling interpretation of the account than the regnant critical view that it is simply an etiology.

⁴⁹ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 620. So just as Pharaoh gives Joseph land in v. 1–12, Joseph gives Pharaoh land in vv. 13–26.

⁵⁰ Humphreys, *Joseph and his Family*, 144–147.

⁵¹ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 619.

alleviated,”⁵² in connection with the nations receiving blessing through Jacob’s sons as predicted in Gen 28:14.⁵³ Perhaps his most significant contribution is his analysis of the relation between the different levels of bondage related in the account and the different types of slavery present in the Mosaic code.⁵⁴ He also argues that their enslavement resulted in the beneficial arrangement of Pharaoh being directly accountable for their provision.⁵⁵ As a final apologetic for Joseph’s actions he states:

The OT law itself does not envisage the destitute simply being bailed out by the more well-to-do. Rather, if possible, members of a family should help their destitute relatives, just as Joseph did, by buying their land and employing them as slaves.⁵⁶

In a manner similar to Mathews, Brodie begins his analysis by comparing 47:13–26 with vv. 27–31, noting that while each account features death (of the land and of Jacob), each also shows life being given (Joseph brings life to the Egyptians, and the Israelites are given a blessing).⁵⁷ He expresses dissatisfaction with the critical tradition of interpreting Gen 47:13–26 etiologically, and instead chooses to view the passage within the broader development of the concepts of “possessing” and “serving” the “land” within the book of Genesis.⁵⁸ Thus in relation to Gen 47, Brodie states, “At one level it is a subjection to servitude. At another, it is a recovery of an aspect of the primordial human relationship to the ground. Brodie additionally suggests that Joseph is placed in a “God-like” position of power and authority, as he is directly responsible for the people’s lives. He makes the significant observation that the one-fifth tithe could possibly correspond to the portion of

⁵² Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 447.

⁵³ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 447.

⁵⁴ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 448. He cites passages in which the offspring of the debtor are enslaved, their property is seized, and finally the debtor himself is enslaved. He also cites the counterbalancing factor of the Jubilee law.

⁵⁵ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 449.

⁵⁶ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 452.

⁵⁷ Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 398.

⁵⁸ Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 399.

the harvest the Egyptians were ordered to set aside in order to prepare for the famine in Gen 41:34.⁵⁹

Lowenthal makes the somewhat unusual suggestion, based on a minority text critical judgement, that Joseph did not in fact enslave the people, but rather chose to ignore their request for enslavement and only made them “feudal tenants,” which would have had the additional positive effect of flattening any class distinctions present in Egyptian society.⁶⁰ His conclusions and treatment are otherwise indistinguishable from those reviewed above. Fretheim addresses the passage with great brevity, merely noting that while there is nothing to be criticized in Joseph’s actions, they may have left the possibility of oppression open for later leaders.⁶¹ Wilson reiterates many of the above arguments, but focuses primarily on ways in which Joseph was the embodiment of the Israelite wisdom tradition in manners of statecraft.⁶² For Ron, Joseph’s actions were used by God in his sovereignty to prepare the conditions for the Israelite enslavement and their grand exodus.⁶³ In what is currently the most recent treatment of the passage, Sigmon suggests that it acts as a “sideshadow,” contrasting the fortunes of the Egyptians with those of the Israelites and displaying the fates that could have befallen them, had the story developed differently.⁶⁴

Therefore, to summarize the above positive treatments of Joseph’s actions, it can be observed that they mostly share the general characteristics of following the historical data provided by the critical tradition, of finding the account very relevant for various

⁵⁹ Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 402.

⁶⁰ Lowenthal, *The Joseph Narrative*, 128–129.

⁶¹ Fretheim, “Genesis,” 654.

⁶² Wilson, *Joseph Wise and Otherwise*, 190–195, 238–241.

⁶³ Ron, “The Significance,” 256–59. Ron also gives a representative survey of rabbinical Jewish treatments of the passage.

⁶⁴ Sigmon, “Shadowing Jacob’s Journey,” 469.

reasons in its immediate and book wide contexts, and speculating on what it teaches regarding contrasts between the Egyptians and Israelites, or displaying Joseph's wisdom.

3. Summary of Recent Negative Portrayals of Joseph's Actions

By way of contrast to the above section, some recent writers have found grounds to criticize Joseph's actions, some even claiming that there is evidence that the narrator of the passage intended it to be read as questioning Joseph's morality. It is helpful to note from the outset that nearly all of these studies rely on literary methods that place little emphasis on historical investigation or context. As a result, one suspects that in some cases the scholars are simply unfamiliar with the evidence of Joseph's actions being regarded positively when examined in their historical context. However, aside from this curious observation, multiple questions are raised regarding the function this account has in its larger context, our ability to craft convincing criteria for evaluating the perspective of a narrator, as well as the crucial matter of rhetoric and bias in the portrayal of events.

It should be briefly noted at the outset that certain negative portrayals of Joseph's actions seem to be largely emotional in content and lacking in serious argumentation which would lead to this conclusion. Such is the treatment of Clines, who offers only a dismissive question and hasty statement about slavery being oppressive.⁶⁵ Similarly dismissive is Towner, who writes off Joseph's actions as being harsh, finishing by suggesting the slavery of Exodus was "payback" for Joseph's behaviour.⁶⁶ This "payback" hypothesis is developed through a somewhat more careful historiographical lens by Steinburg.⁶⁷ Somewhat more thoughtful but equally terse is Kass, who makes his

⁶⁵ Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help?*, 54, 58.

⁶⁶ Towner, *Genesis*, 274.

⁶⁷ Steinburg, "Joseph and Revolutionary Egypt," 101–106. Steinburg suggests a dating of the Joseph account contemporary with the Hyksos period. He surmises that there was a mass buildup of

case against Joseph by contrasting Pharaoh's generosity towards the Israelites with Joseph's treatment of the Egyptians and arguing that Joseph's wisdom embodied pagan notions rather than Hebrew ideas.⁶⁸ Wildavsky condemns Joseph's actions for reasons largely similar to the above, but his extended summary of Jewish treatments of the passage and comprehensive comparison of Joseph with Moses do contribute to the larger discussion.⁶⁹

Janzen takes time to briefly note the importance placed on landholding in later canonical materials, but takes pains to emphasize the process of the "Egyptianization" of Joseph.⁷⁰ Observing that land promises play a significant role earlier on in Genesis, Janzen notes with disapproval Joseph's marriage to the daughter of a priest, his son's names that indicated forgetfulness of his past, and his references to his divining skills, suggesting that Joseph's wisdom was beginning to resemble the wisdom of his Egyptian peers.⁷¹ In a similarly brief treatment, Lerner notes that the desperate cries of the Egyptians may indicate that oppression is taking place, argues that Joseph's implementation of his policy in ch. 47 differs significantly from the plan set out in ch. 41, and observes that even Gen 25 stresses the importance of land ownership. Lerner also examines Joseph's relations with his father, Potiphar, and Pharaoh and states that in each

Egyptian outrage towards the Israelites which culminated in the overthrow of the Hyksos and the enslavement of the Israelites described in Exodus.

⁶⁸ Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom*, 630–635.

⁶⁹ Wildavsky, *Assimilation Versus Separation*, 139–161, 191–207. Wildavsky has some helpful comments regarding appeals to divine authority throughout the story, the "Egyptianization" of Joseph, and the differences in administrative hierarchies created by Joseph and Moses.

⁷⁰ Janzen, *Genesis 12–50*, 181–182.

⁷¹ Janzen, *Genesis 12–50*, 181–182. The reference to his divining is clarified by his attribution of his skill to God earlier on (40:8, 41:15) then to himself later in the story (44:15).

case Joseph displays a “narrow loyalty” to his direct master that precludes concern for others.⁷²

The approach taken by Turner in his commentary builds on that of his earlier dissertation, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*,⁷³ which argued that when closely examined, none of the “announcements” of plot end up exactly coming to fruition, and the various motifs break down when inspected carefully.⁷⁴ Accordingly, Turner states that the impoverishment and enslavement of the Egyptians constitutes a contradiction of the promise of blessing in Gen 12.⁷⁵ He also points to Pharaoh’s request for men to tend livestock in Gen 47:6, suggesting that when the cattle of the Egyptians was sold to Pharaoh in vv. 13–26, it was really going to Joseph’s brothers, overturning the promise of Gen 15:13. Turner finishes by noting Joseph’s purpose was the preservation of life, and highlights Judah’s actions in Gen 38 as a possible intentional parallel of this kind of goal being carried out in a misguided way.⁷⁶

A taciturn but compelling approach is taken by Reno, who acknowledges Joseph’s administrative wisdom but ponders if the account does not serve to illustrate the, “danger of a vision of salvation carried out on a grand scale.”⁷⁷ He notes that if one such as Joseph is relied upon for “renewal of life,” there is a danger in succumbing to the original temptation to believe that “our physical lives matter supremely.” Slavery can result from

⁷² Lerner, “Joseph the Unrighteous,” 278–281. Lerner finishes by reiterating the theory that the slavery of Exodus was payback by the Egyptians.

⁷³ Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*.

⁷⁴ Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, 175–183. Regarding Gen 47:13–26, Turner makes the interesting observation that the land given to the family is not in Canaan, and they have to purchase the only plot they own in Canaan, representing another twist from the expected outcome (171).

⁷⁵ Turner, *Genesis*, 204.

⁷⁶ Turner, *Genesis*, 204.

⁷⁷ Reno, *Genesis*, 286.

the mistaken notion that “the sustaining goods of creation” can be equated with “the bread of life.”⁷⁸

A complex yet deeply cynical tone pervades Watson’s treatment of this passage in *Text, Church and World*. He begins by questioning the sincerity of Joseph and Pharaoh’s ascriptions of divine action, noting that in multiple cases it rests on them being the interpreters of God’s will.⁷⁹ Watson questions why Joseph sold grain back to people who had freely given it for storage,⁸⁰ and firmly decides that welfare of the people had taken a back seat to turning of a profit in Joseph’s mind, thus making his claim of a “divine mission”⁸¹ seem insincere. Watson creates an intriguing reading of the dialogue between Joseph and the Egyptians, noting that after the Egyptians’ initial request for food was denied with Joseph’s demand for their cattle, they returned with a much more submissive spirit, thankfully offering their land and their bodies in bondage.⁸² Commenting on 47:25, Watson states, “So disoriented are the people by the disasters that have befallen them that they are actually *grateful* for this normalizing of their oppression.”⁸³ As it relates to the surrounding material, Watson argues that 47:13–26 serves as a “foil” that can “subvert” the portrait of Joseph in the surrounding family drama, as the narrator has deliberately isolated the account from ch. 41 in order to protect Joseph’s reputation.⁸⁴ Watson hesitates to condemn the perspective of the narrator unilaterally, noting that the text can

⁷⁸ Reno, *Genesis*, 286.

⁷⁹ Watson, *Text, Church and World*, 66–67.

⁸⁰ Watson, *Text, Church and World*, 67–68.

⁸¹ Watson, *Text, Church and World*, 68.

⁸² Watson, *Text, Church and World*, 69. Watson states, “Joseph has devised a mechanism for internalizing what was supposed to be an emergency measure.”

⁸³ Watson, *Text, Church and World*, 70. Later, Watson seems to question this portrayal given of the people, noting that a suspicious view does not belong to the narrator, going so far as to state, “to speak stridently of ‘oppression’ in this context is...to commit an error of literary taste.” He also notes how the passage is presented quickly in a fairly flat tone, and the only characters are the emotionless Joseph and the nameless crowd of Egyptians. Watson then compares this episode with the account of the Israelite’s distress in Exod 1–2, noting the disparities of their portrayals. (72)

⁸⁴ Watson, *Text, Church and World*, 70–71.

be praised for the way in which it illustrates the mechanisms of the rhetoric of oppression.⁸⁵ Watson finishes with some methodological reflections, noting that while his “critical” reading does not provide an entirely holistic perspective on the account, its set of interests allow for a much better “sharpness of focus,” and equally importantly, a reading that not only engages with the world created by the text but the outside world as well.⁸⁶ While presupposing that it is theologically imperative to maintain a critical gaze on Joseph’s actions, Watson suggests that one can see Joseph’s dominance being marginalized by his familial replacement by Judah as the bearer of leadership.⁸⁷

Fung makes several observations regarding Gen 47:13–26 that seem to have gone unnoticed by most other serious treatments of the passage. Most significantly, he carefully analyzes thematic connections relevant to 47:13–26 as they occur elsewhere in the Joseph narrative. He notes that the choice between enslavement and death (47:15–19) has already been broached by Judah in ch. 37 and ch. 44.⁸⁸ Fung likewise argues that a direct link between Joseph’s claims of divine right to power (45:8–11) and his treatment of the Egyptians can be found based on recurring patterns of “subservience for survival” in the story.⁸⁹ However, this would invalidate the claims of those who argue that Joseph’s enslavement of the Egyptians was a “deviation” rather than “derivation” of his divinely given position of authority.⁹⁰ Stating that the Egyptians end up being the subjects of Joseph’s domination rather than the brothers (as one would have expected), Fung ponders

⁸⁵ Watson, *Text, Church and World*, 74.

⁸⁶ Watson, *Text, Church and World*, 74–75.

⁸⁷ Watson, *Text, Church and World*, 75–76.

⁸⁸ Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 35, 38. Fung further observes that while Joseph considers his relatively luxurious slavery as evil, he is all too eager to accept the Egyptian’s offer of slavery instead of death, a situation that somewhat mirrors his own.

⁸⁹ Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 72. To give but two examples, note that Reuben has Joseph thrown into a pit in order to save him from a more immediate death, while Judah makes the suggestion to sell Joseph into slavery, also to avoid killing him.

⁹⁰ Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 85.

whether Joseph directs his anger at the Egyptians instead of the brothers.⁹¹ He notes that in ch. 45 Joseph dismissed the Egyptians before proclaiming his domination over Egypt, and that he emphasized that theme instead of his domination over his brothers. He states:

Therefore, it is not unfair to compare the pit of slavery Joseph suffers at the hand of his brothers and his dreams of domination when he delights over the Egyptians. Joseph's attempt to avoid offending his brothers becomes an indictment of his domination, because it reveals its true meaning, that is, slavery.⁹²

Returning to his earlier claim related to “subsistence for survival,” Fung states that Joseph's interpretation of his own enslavement as fulfilling a larger purpose (in ch. 45) is actually built upon the underlying belief that some kind of hierarchy of authority is necessary for survival, and thus the reality of his enslavement of the Egyptians is masked by a soothing justification.⁹³

For the purposes of the present study, the ideologically and philosophically informed treatment of Brueggemann will be treated as the prototypical conversation partner. Brueggemann views the interaction of Joseph, Jacob and his sons, and the Crown in Gen 47 as a dire example of the seductive danger of aligning oneself with imperial power. In his examination of chapters 46–47, Brueggemann's primary interpretive lens is the three themes he observes: the family theme, the imperial theme, and the theme of tension between family and imperial interests.⁹⁴ When discussing 47:13–26, he notes that the family theme is absent and he actually agrees with the scholars mentioned above in stating that the purpose of the narrative is to highlight the administrative wisdom of Joseph. However, Brueggemann detects a suspicious undertone in the passage; he shows misgivings about the slavery of the Egyptians to Pharaoh, noting that stores of food are

⁹¹ Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 86.

⁹² Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 88.

⁹³ Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 199–200.

⁹⁴ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 352.

also, “potential sources of oppression.”⁹⁵ Furthermore, Brueggemann casts doubt upon whether this can be favourably compared to the slavery of the Exodus, stating:

Joseph’s shrewdness shows that entering the world of the empire brings dangers with it. The Egyptian empire offers food and therefore life. But it is never far from exploitation, oppression, and slavery. As though to set the stage for the Exodus, the result of Joseph’s tax reform is that citizens sell their persons to the throne (contrast Lev. 25:35–55)...The tightly administered program of this text is not far removed from the imperial policies of Exod. 5:5–19.⁹⁶

Brueggemann goes on to argue that Joseph’s brothers also find themselves wound up in this trap of compromise with the power of the throne, as their offer to participate in the royal machine (verse 6), leads to a precarious situation. Brueggemann states:

The grant has a price. It is to join the royal world. It is an irony worth noting that Egyptians suffer in their survival as slaves, Israel pays for its royal position. Either way, economics puts persons in danger...there is within this settlement a deep tension.⁹⁷

This connection with the imperial powers seems problematic, as Brueggemann finishes this section by arguing that the brothers are caught between, “the promise to Israel and to the royal power.”⁹⁸ Very helpful in fleshing out why Brueggemann produces this reading of the text are his other writings in which he brings together the broader political and philosophical framework in which he situates his approach to the text (see below).

In summary, aspects shared in common by all of these negative evaluations of Joseph’s actions include a general lack of emphasis on historical critical data, an ideological predisposition against forms of political hierarchy, a harsh gaze that locates

⁹⁵ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 356.

⁹⁶ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 356.

⁹⁷ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 357.

⁹⁸ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 357, Brueggemann, “Alien Witness: How God’s People Challenge Empire,” 28–32. In this article Brueggemann voices the same critique of Joseph’s actions in an even more strident tone. Here he explicitly refers to 47:13–26 as an “ironic” narrative, calls Joseph’s policy a “monopoly,” states that once Joseph has control of all the food reserves he uses this as a “weapon,” and dismisses the Egyptian people’s expression of gratitude as a sign of the “totalizing” effect of the “imperial narrative.” Brueggemann also directly addresses this passage in *Interpretation and Obedience*, 263.

instabilities in the large scale themes of the book, an almost psychoanalytic suspicion of the motives of Joseph, and a surprising optimism regarding the reader's ability to discern the narrator's redactional sensibilities.⁹⁹ With relatively few exceptions,¹⁰⁰ serious discussion of issues relating to methodology and philosophical foundations are lacking, but the implicit rejection of historical interpretation, the emphasis on political concerns, and identification of ironic reversals of expectations that characterize all of the above "negative" treatments of the passage ensure that they can all accurately be grouped under the broader rubric of "postmodern" biblical criticism.¹⁰¹

C. Critical Reflections and Directions for Future Study

Several interrelated methodological questions are raised when one considers the large scale trends throughout the various approaches to Gen 47:13–26 surveyed above. The following sections will outline some of these areas of contention, sketch possible related lines of future research, and note their relevance for the present study.

1. The Role of Historical Criticism

The first noticeable methodological disparity between the various treatments of the passage is the place and nature of historical criticism. For those operating under the source critical paradigm, the process includes a reconstruction of the history of the composition of the text, often resulting in a considerable lapse of time being posited between the events described in an account and its composition. Additionally, the account is often assumed to have a certain purpose, generally etiological or political. This would seem to be insufficiently nuanced, as it rather uncritically collapses the ultimate referent

⁹⁹ This can be manifested as either the reader identifying the narrator's intended perspective, or the reader "seeing through" and exposing the narrator's attempt at softening or distorting the facts.

¹⁰⁰ See the extended discussion of Brueggemann below.

¹⁰¹ Adam, *What is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?*, vii. Thus, the opposition of the terms "Historical Critical" and "Postmodern" in the title of the present study is vindicated.

of the passage into a single issue with little in the way of supporting evidence other than projected contemporary concerns and prejudices. Furthermore, it is based on an atomistic isolation of the account from its immediate literary context, presupposing (on questionable linguistic grounds) an independent origin.¹⁰² An equally contentious issue is the historicity of the account, the argumentation behind which involves a complicated web of assumptions regarding the Israelite use of folkloric material, as well as the accuracy of the Egyptian cultural descriptions within Genesis.¹⁰³

Evangelical employment of historical criticism is generally somewhat more chastened in its optimism regarding the modern day scholar's ability to precisely date an account's composition, and generally confines historical speculation to the background data of the implied date of the larger section of the book as whole.¹⁰⁴

Interestingly, with a few exceptions, many of those examined above who assessed Joseph's actions negatively showed little evidence of interaction with literature expounding the historical background of the passage. Brueggemann stood alone in taking time to articulate the philosophical basis of his purposeful avoidance of the traditional elevation of historical context to being the most important piece of data in a given act of

¹⁰² This of course, raises the question of whether the meaning of an account is to be found by examining it in isolation from its surrounding material, or whether it only finds its purpose when compared with the writings preceding and following it. If one grants the legitimacy of source critical scholarship, it raises the question of whether the ultimate meaning of an account lies in its original context or its placement by the final redactor. These questions, of course, are themselves presupposing certain understandings of the location of a "ground of meaning," whether it be in the mind of an author or is fixed in a text itself. For discussion of the philosophical concerns related to this issue, see VanHoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, especially pp. 43–147.

¹⁰³ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 50–55. Mathews provides a helpful overview of the argumentation and explanatory frameworks of both the maximalist and minimalist schools of thought regarding the Joseph story, concluding with an optimistic appraisal of its historical accuracy and a tentative dating of the passage to the Hyksos period.

¹⁰⁴ In clarification, evangelicals do not as a rule chop the Joseph story into tiny pieces and assign separate dates for different parts. They instead presuppose the authorial unity of the composition and seek to date the Joseph novella as a whole.

interpretation.¹⁰⁵ While a more comprehensive treatment of these matters will follow in a later section of this chapter, it would not be amiss at this point to also note that while some seem to almost be simply unaware of historical treatments of the passage, others (as exemplified by Brueggemann)¹⁰⁶ would likely question the priority given to historical criticism due to its alleged atomizing and relativizing tendencies.¹⁰⁷

2. Literary “Back-References”

A second common trait of many of the above treatments that bears further critical inspection is the positing of “back-references” to earlier events in Genesis that 47:13–26 is alleged to constitute a development of or an intentional contrast towards. A difficulty arises in the validation of these references. With little in the way of criteria to work from other than thematic repetition or shared vocabulary, these assertions are plagued with the problem of both subjectivity and questionable relevance. Furthermore, when one sees the same reference posited to support two contradictory conclusions, it becomes apparent that some kind of criteria needs to be formulated to determine whether a given reference is intentionally positive or ironic.¹⁰⁸ This practice of “back-referencing” is likely just as much an issue concerning commentary writing as it is something related to different interpretive methodologies.

¹⁰⁵ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 5–6. For a further evaluation of Brueggemann’s outlook, see below.

¹⁰⁶ Fung, *Victim and Victimizer*, 34–38. Fung is a rare example of one who evaluates Joseph negatively, yet does overview sources that judge Joseph’s actions to be benevolent on historical critical grounds.

¹⁰⁷ Adam, *What is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?*, 45–47. Once again, this attitude can accurately be considered to fall into the category of postmodern thought.

¹⁰⁸ The pragmatics of attacking this problem lend intuitive plausibility to some form of interpretive non-foundationalism. One’s evaluation of the development of a theme in the account at hand as either positive or ironic rests on one’s evaluation of Joseph’s actions, but much of the argumentation regarding the ethicality of Joseph’s actions is dependent on one’s reconstruction of the thematic development of the book. Thus the evidence evaluation process often appears more web-like than linear.

Perhaps a short excursus further exploring one of these examples will shed light on the disparity of perspectives and depth of investigation that exist concerning this issue. One commonly posited “back-reference” for Gen 47:13–26 is Gen 12:3. For many, Gen 47:13–26 constitutes a fulfillment of the promise to Abraham that his offspring would be a blessing to “all the families of the earth” (ESV).¹⁰⁹ Others would instead consider the account to be at best a severely stunted realization of the Abrahamic blessing.¹¹⁰ The argumentation underlying this “ironic” view of the development of the blessing promise in Gen 47 is largely grounded in a negative predisposition towards Joseph’s enslavement of the Egyptians, and can be quickly summarized in the following terse quotation of Clines, who states, “The second element, ‘Be a blessing’, is an almost complete disaster, the one foreigner to benefit unambiguously from the patriarchal family’s existence being the pharaoh who now rules a nation of slaves.”¹¹¹ Additionally, Turner writes:

Either scenario questions the predictions in the ancestral narrative that Abraham’s descendants would be a blessing to the nations...Forfeiture of one’s land and forced enslavement might be preferable to starvation, but they are hardly blessings.¹¹²

In keeping with the discussion of interaction with historical critical data above, Clines and Turner either are unaware of or reject the overwhelming evidence that Joseph’s actions would have been viewed positively in their implied historical setting and presuppose a negative judgement on apparently intuited grounds.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ McKenzie, “Jacob’s Blessing on Pharaoh,” 395–398; Waltke, *Genesis*, 592; Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 452; Wilson, *Joseph, Wise and Otherwise*, 194.

¹¹⁰ Clines, *What Does Eve do to Help?*, 58–59; Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, 172–173; Turner, *Genesis*, 204.

¹¹¹ Clines, *What Does Eve do to Help?*, 59.

¹¹² Turner, *Genesis*, 204.

¹¹³ Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, 16. It is unclear whether Clines and Turner believe that the narrator intended the plot twist of 47:13–26 to be a foil to the promise of 12:3 or that this would simply be the logical choice of a savvy, informed modern reader. Turner indicates a mild epistemological nihilism (and possible bias towards Neo-Freudian views of the unconscious) towards such a question,

The opposite argument is made by Waltke and Wenham with similar brevity (but aided by superior attention to matters of historical context).¹¹⁴ However, McKenzie carefully develops a thesis that the sheer amount of prosperity brought to Pharaoh by the economic reforms of Joseph ensures that it was the realization of the blessing foreshadowed in 46:31–47:6 and 47:7–10.¹¹⁵ His two supporting arguments are the continuity of the pattern of the blessing of Joseph’s superiors¹¹⁶ and the lack of other suitable explanation of the purpose of the account.¹¹⁷ McKenzie considers these factors so strong that they override the absence of the word “bless” from 47:13–26.¹¹⁸

While McKenzie is surely correct in stating that the absence of the explicit use of the word בָּרַךְ does not negate the implied presence of the concept, several other features of the earlier accounts of Joseph bringing blessing to his superiors bear examination. When the accounts of 39:1–6 and 38:19–23 are compared, key shared words and phrases include not only the aforementioned “bless,” but also וַיְהִי יְהוָה אֶת־יוֹסֵף (“And the LORD was with Joseph,” vv. 2, 21), and עָשָׂה יְהוָה מַצְלִיחַ (“the LORD made it succeed,” vv. 3, 23). Additionally, with slightly different terms, both accounts convey the idea of the master giving complete control to Joseph (vv. 4, 22), and the master’s lack of concern about anything that Joseph oversaw (vv. 6, 23). While all of these elements are absent

stating, “It is not one of my aims to discover the original intention of the author(s). No author can be fully aware of the ‘meaning’ of his or her work or the effect it will have on its audience.” (p. 16) For further discussion of the issues involved, see the examination of Brueggemann’s work below.

¹¹⁴ Waltke, *Genesis*, 592; Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 452.

¹¹⁵ McKenzie, “Jacob’s Blessing on Pharaoh,” 395. He states, “If this consideration is valid, the blessing upon Pharaoh in 47:13-26 is anticipated by three events in the Joseph cycle, namely Pharaoh’s elevation of Joseph, Pharaoh’s favour to Jacob and his other eleven sons, and Jacob’s verbal blessing of Pharaoh.”

¹¹⁶ These being Potiphar (39:1–6), the prison keeper (39:19–23), and Pharaoh. He assumes rather than argues that Joseph “blessed” the Egyptian people as well.

¹¹⁷ McKenzie, “Jacob’s Blessing on Pharaoh,” 396–398. This objection is somewhat weak, as his only other material for interaction is the earlier etiological views of source critical scholars.

¹¹⁸ McKenzie, “Jacob’s Blessing on Pharaoh,” 395.

from 47:13–26, a more suitable parallel may be found in the initial appointment of Joseph by Pharaoh in 41:37–46. Although the “complete control” and “lack of concern” motifs are present here (41:40), the distinctive vocabulary of the earlier accounts is missing. From this information alone it is difficult to ascertain whether the narrator meant to imply continuity with these earlier accounts, or whether by deliberate withholding of earlier terms he or she meant to convey that there was something different about Joseph’s interaction with Pharaoh.¹¹⁹ One also wonders if the Egyptian people were as “blessed” as was their Pharaoh. Other examples of similar thematic argumentation likewise suffer from the same vagueness of relevance and bias.¹²⁰

3. The Relevance and Implications of Later Canonical Materials

Third, an issue related to the above section is that many of the above treatments practice what could be termed “forward-referencing,” providing examples of items later in the canon that relate to the events and institutions discussed in the passage. Considerable disparity exists among the above treatments regarding not only the weight given to later canonical perspectives, but even the discernment of the perspective of the later canonical materials. Furthermore, most of these treatments collapse entire canonical

¹¹⁹ While conducting an indepth examination of this observation is beyond the scope of the present study, it is interesting to note that after 39:23, the name יהוה drops out of sight for the rest of the book except for one mention by Jacob in 49:18. Similarly, the entire Joseph novella features the name אֱלֹהִים chiefly in dialogue, except for one lone theophany to Jacob in 46:2, which stands in stark contrast to the frequent use of the name as the subject of action by the narrator earlier in the book. The evaluation of the implications of these omissions stands susceptible to the same concerns about discerning the rhetorical intention of the narrator given above.

¹²⁰ Turner, *Genesis*, 204; Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 358; Reno, *Genesis*, 286; Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 399–401. For example, Turner further suggests that Joseph’s actions in 47:13–26 may be paralleled somewhat with Judah’s actions in Gen 38 in that both of them acted to preserve life in less than ideal ways. As far-fetched as this may seem, it is tempting on this basis to construct a pattern extending through Genesis of attempts to preserve life that were founded in less than ideal strategies, such as lying about one’s wife being a sister (12:11–20; 20:1–18; 26:7–11), stretching the truth to quickly end uncomfortable encounters (33:13–14), and throwing someone into a pit instead of killing them (37:22). Unfortunately, verifying the thematic continuity of these accounts would be very difficult. Brueggemann and Reno connect the account to the deception of Gen 3, while Brodie appreciatively notes its similarities with the blessings of creation in Gen 1–2 and Abraham’s acquisition of land in Gen 23.

themes down to a few choice proof texts, rather than thoroughly surveying the voices and nuanced developments of these issues throughout the canon. It is this particular issue that has served as a launching pad for the investigation of the present study. That the later canonical materials can be interpreted in different ways is illustrated by the fact that both Wenham¹²¹ and Brueggemann¹²² appeal to the slavery regulations of Lev 25 to make exactly the opposite points. For Wenham, the reference clarifies the benevolent nature of Joseph's action, while for Brueggemann, it confirms that his deeds were condemned by the Mosaic law.¹²³ For others, later canonical materials are relevant but their contrasting perspectives do not bear on one's evaluation of the passage at hand. For example, Waltke mentions the importance of land ownership for Israel, citing 1 Sam 8:13–16, but instead chooses to view this as simply reflecting on the Egyptian mentality rather than casting doubt on the unqualifiedly positive evaluation of Joseph's actions he gives.¹²⁴ Mathews insists that the passage be evaluated according to "the cultural standards of its time,"¹²⁵ but also states that the later materials of the OT indicate that slavery should be abolished, citing the work of Webb.¹²⁶ Contrariwise, Janzen notes the account of Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kgs 21 and notes the importance of land ownership in Israel, then connects this with the earlier emphasis on "land" in Gen 12 and apparently feels justified in condemning

¹²¹ Wenham, *Genesis 12–50*, 452. Wenham states, "If possible, members of a family should help their destitute relatives, just as Joseph did, by buying their land and employing them as slaves (cf. Lev 25:13–55). This was viewed as a great act of charity..."

¹²² Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 356. Brueggemann states, "As though to set the stage for the Exodus, the result of Joseph's tax reform is that citizens sell their persons to the throne (contrast Lev. 25:35–55)."

¹²³ Examining the quotes from Brueggemann and Wenham in the above notes, it appears that the point of contention between them is whether the Egyptians were sold to Joseph personally or to the throne, with Brueggemann's implication that a monarchical (as opposed to personal) ownership of slaves would be in violation of the law.

¹²⁴ Waltke, *Genesis*, 591.

¹²⁵ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 851–852.

¹²⁶ Webb, *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals*.

Joseph's actions on these grounds.¹²⁷ Therefore, the place and relevance of later canonical material in the evaluation of a passage seems to be a ground of contention. It should be noted at this point that while the source critical approaches were criticized above for being unduly atomistic in their understanding of an account's meaning based on its context, some of the evangelical approaches, in their emphasis on historical context seem to fall prey to a similar tendency, to not consider the larger context of the canon as a whole. Conversely, it would seem imperative to inquire as to whether it is inappropriate to view earlier accounts through the lens of later canonical materials. Such an inquiry would raise the larger question of the function of the canonical shape as a whole, as well as its purpose in providing the larger horizon in which to view the individual books and smaller sections. The interpretation of certain types of OT literature is only considered to be carried out in a "Christian" sense when it is illuminated in light of later canonical materials. This would also raise the question of how to stratify the contextual "meanings" of a passage, including the immediate purpose of an account (whether in the source critical or traditional historical sense), its function in the larger context of the book, and its relation with later materials. The fact of an account being situated within the canon provides a context broader than the boundaries of the book itself, but exactly how this larger context should be used to contextualize and cast light on individual passages is a difficult issue.

4. The Purpose of the Account in its Immediate Context

A fourth issue related to the point discussed directly above is the discernment of the purpose of the narrator in the juxtaposition and arrangement of different accounts. Bringing to mind the first issue mentioned above, many of the source critical treatments

¹²⁷ Janzen, *Genesis 12–50*, 180–181.

did not see any purpose for the passage within its context, viewing it as a rather useless insertion. After dismissing it for being of foreign origin, little effort was typically expended in discerning how the redactor sought to fit it in the larger passage. While some of the accounts surveyed above contend that the narrator used the pericope of 47:13–26 in its context to portray Joseph’s administrative wisdom and others argue that it provided a sharp depiction of oppressive behaviour,¹²⁸ these positions generally are difficult to line up and compare. This is due to the fact that one encounters scholars who decide the narrator was unaware that some could view Joseph’s actions oppressively,¹²⁹ scholars who argue that narrator was trying to camouflage Joseph’s questionable behaviour,¹³⁰ and theoretically, an argument could be made that the narrator deliberately was counterbalancing the positive portrait of Joseph found elsewhere. Thus, questions are raised not only regarding the intention of the narrator, but to what degree the reader is entitled to judge his motives or “see through” his crafty scheme.¹³¹ Although the application of a rhetorical critical methodology may be helpful in solving this particular problem, it is beyond the scope of the present study, despite its relevance to the secondary literature generated around Gen 47:13–26. A minor but tangentially related issue is the place of appeals to divine sovereignty regarding God’s larger plan for Israel’s stay and eventual slavery in Egypt. Does God’s purposing in advance to work through a

¹²⁸ As is clear from a number of the treatments surveyed above, this is often based on a positive or negative comparison of Joseph’s treatment of his brothers with his treatment of the Egyptians. For but one example, see Sigmon, “Shadowing Jacob’s Journey,” 465–466.

¹²⁹ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 443. See discussion in survey of previous approaches above.

¹³⁰ Watson, *Text, Church and World*, 70. Concerning the insertion of 47:13–26 into ch. 47 instead of ch.41, Watson states, “The placing of this passage already aids the concealment of the gap between Joseph’s pious rhetoric and socio-political reality.”

¹³¹ For discussion of the questions raised by postmodern literary theory regarding the role of the reader in the use of a text, see Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 148–196.

particular situation mean that it (and the actions of the people who bring it about) must be judged to be good?¹³²

D. Postmodern Hermeneutics: The Thought of Walter Brueggemann

As observed above, many scholars whose work can be situated within the broader movement of postmodern biblical interpretation do not necessarily concern themselves with lengthy prolegomena revealing their methodologies, metaphysical presuppositions, and copious accompanying supporting argumentation. The above survey isolated Brueggemann as an exception to this trend, as he does polemicize against what he sees as the inadequacies of traditional historical criticism and sets forth the reasons for his particular approach. The following section will attempt to succinctly summarize, contextualize, and critically dialogue with some of the most significant ideas underlying his approach to biblical texts, concluding with some provisional explorations of how the issues raised by advocates of postmodern literary theory relate to the present study. This effort is necessarily tentative, as Brueggemann's work as a whole tends toward vagueness and stubbornly resists systemization. Furthermore, the issues involved with evaluating the claims of the postmodern thinkers, and even more compellingly, the modes and methods of argumentation that should be used to carry out such a project, lie nestled at the theoretical foundations of the present study yet are far beyond its scope.

¹³² Ron, "The Significance of Joseph's Agrarian Policy," 256–59. Ron insightfully notices the close textual and historical connection between the slavery of the Egyptians and the slavery of the Israelites in Exodus, but adopts a flat-line sovereigntist reading of the passage that denotes Joseph's actions as "good" because they were setting up the future enslavement of the children of Israel and thus were unconsciously carrying out God's plan. It would seem difficult to make any kind of ethical evaluation possible when sovereignty renders the issue of human responsibility null.

1. The Failure of the Enlightenment Project

In multiple places, Brueggeman explicates or at least alludes to the emphasis placed on universal, context-free, and objective knowledge by the influential philosophers of the Enlightenment, and the current attitude of skepticism towards the existence or at least acquisition of such knowledge.¹³³ In his analysis of the underpinnings and motives behind the Enlightenment project, Brueggemann relies heavily on the work of Toulmin.¹³⁴ A similar case is put forward by Adam, who seeks to broadly describe the attitudes of the diverse array of postmodern thinkers in contrast to their modernistic predecessors.¹³⁵ For the purposes of the present study, the lengthy recitation of the development of the particular model of certitude favored by modernity will be eschewed, but of considerable importance is comparing Brueggemann's particular brand of skepticism towards modernistic rationality with that of other scholars advocating a postmodern approach to knowledge. Brueggemann is at his most transparent regarding a positive articulation of his beliefs in *Texts Under Negotiation*, where he succinctly states:

Our knowing is inherently *contextual*...It follows that contexts are quite *local*, and the more one generalizes, the more one loses or fails to notice context...It follows from contextualism and localism that knowledge is inherently *pluralistic*, a cacophony of claims, each of which rings true to its own advocates.¹³⁶

¹³³ Brueggemann, *Interpretation and Obedience*, 28–29; *Texts Under Negotiation*, 3–12; *Theology of the Old Testament*, 7–15, 61–64. For a similar narrative presentation, see McGrath, *A Passion for Truth*, 163–189; Murphy and Kallenberg, “Anglo-American Postmodernity,” 27–41; Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 57–122.

¹³⁴ Toulmin, *Cosmopolis*. The significance of Toulmin is that he contextualizes (and thus provides materials for the deconstruction of) the political motivations that led to the emphasis on universal rationality that spurned tradition and revelation during the seventeenth century.

¹³⁵ Adam, *What is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?*, 1–16.

¹³⁶ Brueggemann, *Texts Under Negotiation*, 8–9.

But lest these three theses be taken as a cry of absolute epistemic nihilism, they are tempered with Brueggemann's pledges that he is not as radical as Rorty or Lyotard,¹³⁷ that his apparent advocacy of relativism is descriptive rather than prescriptive, and that the hegemonic pretensions of objectivism are more dangerous than relativism.¹³⁸ Questions raised but left unanswered at this point would include how Brueggemann differs from Lyotard,¹³⁹ if in fact contextualizing one's message entails accepting all of the governing assumptions of the spirit of the age,¹⁴⁰ and if pragmatically analyzing ethical outcomes is a valid way of determining ontological truth. However, for all his postmodern posturing, Brueggemann is not able to entirely escape questions of ontological truth. His use of moral arguments against certain positions certainly raises the question of how one may adjudicate between opposing moral positions. More fundamentally, while a more nuanced treatment of the limitations of human rationality and potential shortcomings of all efforts at knowledge might excuse him from this simple question, he seems unable to provide materials to answer the simple challenge to affirm that his own suspicion of "large truths"¹⁴¹ is in fact true. As McGrath states,

¹³⁷ Brueggemann, *Texts Under Negotiation*, 8.

¹³⁸ Brueggemann, *Texts Under Negotiation*, 10.

¹³⁹ While some Christians nod appreciatively to Lyotard yet regard the Christian narrative as being somehow ultimate, Brueggemann would seem to extinguish that possibility when he later proclaims, "this [the Christian] posture does not claim to be objectively true."

¹⁴⁰ It is also relevant to question whether Brueggemann's diagnosis of western culture as being "postmodern" is in fact correct. The widespread popularity of scientism and movements such as the New Atheism bears witness to a culture that is far more hyper-modern than postmodern. To give an example from but one subject area, Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 227, suggests that while the diagnosis of theorists such as Kuhn may be correct, the prescription has hardly been adopted, stating, "But what, then, of the postmodern relativist's claim that science, as well as history, is non-realist and subjective? It does not appear to be widely appreciated outside the field of philosophy of science—especially by postmodernist theologians who continue to invoke the authority of Thomas Kuhn and to talk freely of paradigms, as though this notion were accepted or even well-defined—that after an initial stir *Weltanschauung* analyses had already been widely discredited by philosophers of science by the late 1970's. Contemporary philosophy of science is post-positivist, post-Kuhnian, and generally realist."

¹⁴¹ Brueggemann, *Texts Under Negotiation*, 9. Brueggemann states, "It is impossible to voice large truths."

“Postmodernism thus denies in fact what it affirms in theory. Even the casual question ‘Is postmodernism true?’ innocently raises fundamental criteriological questions which postmodernism finds embarrassingly difficult to handle.”¹⁴² At the same time, this critique relies on giving the benefit of the doubt to the very argumentative framework the postmodern thinkers declare is itself time-bound and bankrupt.

2. The Skepticism Toward Historical Criticism

Most significantly for biblical interpretation, Brueggemann’s declaration of the sounding of the funeral bells of universal rationality entails a high degree of skepticism towards its main method of reading texts: historical criticism. In *Theology of the Old Testament*, Brueggemann notes that historical criticism has long been dominated by anti-supernatural and developmental assumptions.¹⁴³ In *Texts Under Negotiation*, he more specifically states:

The end of modernity requires a critique of method in scripture study. It is clear to me that conventional historical criticism is, in scripture study, our particular practice of modernity, whereby the text was made to fit our modes of knowledge and control. As we stand before the text, no longer as its master but as its advocate, we will have to find new methods of reading.¹⁴⁴

While he does not specifically develop this thesis, he footnotes several articles and books that he apparently considers to have satisfactorily argued for that point.¹⁴⁵ Of the four sources mentioned in the previous note, Wink and Wyman state their cases in a fairly similar fashion and can be considered together, while Burnett and Phillips use a different argumentative vocabulary. Wink’s main points are that historical criticism is not helpful

¹⁴² McGrath, *A Passion for Truth*, 195.

¹⁴³ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 102–105.

¹⁴⁴ Brueggemann, *Texts Under Negotiation*, 11.

¹⁴⁵ Immediately after making the above statement, Brueggemann cites Burnett, “Postmodern Biblical Exegesis,” 51–80; Phillips, “Exegesis as Critical Praxis,” 7–49; Wyman, “The Historical Consciousness and the Study of Theology,” 91–150. Earlier on he referred to Wink’s attack on historical criticism in *The Bible in Human Transformation*.

for addressing texts that call for an individual faith response, that objectivism is erroneously intellectual and hypocritical, that questions not addressable by the method began to be considered irrelevant, that historical criticism became isolated from the life of the church, and that its original purpose, that of being a lone voice to counter the hegemonic pretensions of the church has itself become the dominating discourse and thus its very identity is in question.¹⁴⁶ Likewise, Wyman argues (building on the work of Troeltsch) that a historian's stance toward his "sources" necessarily robs them of authority, that assumptions regarding present-day analogies and cause and effect rule out supernatural intervention, and thus that this method intrinsically entails adopting the relativizing gaze of historicism.¹⁴⁷ The first point that should be made in response to these writers is that historical method does not necessarily entail a dismissal of the supernatural.¹⁴⁸ The use of historical criticism to attack orthodoxy should no more lead the church to abandon it than the fact that atheists use logic to attack the existence of God should make the church skeptical of logic. Most of the other criticisms voiced by Wink entail the question of posing alternatives. Since the practice of historical criticism has largely been driven by the assumption that texts have a stable meaning that is to some degree determinable by seeking the intention of a historical author, they must be contextualized in order to be understood properly. A more compelling critique of historical criticism would have to begin with an undermining of these presuppositions regarding the locus of textual meaning and the priority of authorial intention.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Wink, *The Bible in Human Transformation*, 1–15.

¹⁴⁷ Wyman, "Historical Consciousness and the Study of Theology," 94–99. He then develops these points further, elucidating precisely how they prove destructive for orthodoxy.

¹⁴⁸ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 240.

¹⁴⁹ This is not to argue that the interpretive process, particularly within the community of faith should be reduced to a mechanical process. The legacy of patristic hermeneutics bears witness to a tradition that rightfully saw the need for certain virtues on the part of the interpreter, as would be entirely appropriate

In contrast to Wink and Wyman, the essays of Phillips and Burnett are written in a distinctly postmodern tongue, making their work more obscure but also more attentive to the foundational questions of authors and texts mentioned above. Phillips begins “Exegesis as Critical Praxis” by simply noting the state of disarray within the modern academy as it regards the accusations of the political and ideological dimensions of the conventional practice of historical criticism, while assuming the success of the poststructuralist toppling of the reader into a situation-produced consciousness and the text into a network of indeterminate signs.¹⁵⁰ He further develops an attack on the conventional understanding of the reader by noting that while the modern consciousness viewed the reader as a centralized subject capable of objective knowledge, this belief is temporally and culturally situated itself. The postmodern mentality would dismiss this optimism towards the human capacity for knowledge, its perspective being heavily influenced by Marx’s attention to the effects of social production on humans and Freud’s emphasis on the internal struggle of conscious and unconscious desires.¹⁵¹ Phillips then identifies the main problems of modern historiography as being its emphasis on method and assumption of referentiality that together creates a totalizing structure and narrative. By way of contrast, a postmodern approach to history would necessarily take into account things like economic conditions, modes of production, the foundations of its own narratives, and epistemic context.¹⁵² Then the perennial question of whether postmodernism can be assumed to claim a bird’s eye view of “truth” is raised, and

for dealing with a text that calls for an individual faith response. However, further examining this topic is beyond the scope of the present study.

¹⁵⁰ Phillips, “Exegesis as Critical Praxis,” 7–15. Much of this essay is taken up with a comparison between historical criticism and structuralism, with musings on how structuralism acts as a hinge between historical and postmodern modes of criticism that are not directly relevant to the present study.

¹⁵¹ Phillips, “Exegesis as Critical Praxis,” 20–24.

¹⁵² Phillips, “Exegesis as Critical Praxis,” 25–28.

Phillips affirms that suspicion must be leveled at the particular historical and cultural contexts that produced postmodern discourse as well, but he nevertheless insists on the “dispersion of other narratives.”¹⁵³ The final section directly invokes the Derridean notion of texts continually finding new meanings in new contexts, though only skirting the subject of authorial intent, then moves to Foucault’s attack on the reader as a quasi-transcendental subject and declaration of the act of reading as site of social production of knowledge and power.¹⁵⁴ Briefly evaluating of this article, it should be cheerfully confirmed that social and cultural situatedness does limit and direct human inquiry, and likewise the presence of “gatekeeper” propaganda and marginalization of certain voices within the academy is a live issue. At the same time, in the move of attacking historical criticism as being simply the product of certain cultural circumstances, one necessarily similarly marginalizes other perspectives as well; feminist, postcolonial and other voices can likewise be relegated as mere byproducts of various kinds of social conditioning. In the face of the almost complete denial of the interpretive “free will” of the reader,¹⁵⁵ it also would seem arbitrary to nonetheless insist on the legitimacy of all available perspectives; a more consistent adoption of the above viewpoint would render them all mute. This trend towards interpretive determinism has been noted by Fry, who argues that in addition to Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, Darwin should be added to this traditional list of “masters of suspicion” due to his championing of determinism from a socio-biological perspective.¹⁵⁶ At the same time, this radical re-contextualization of the knowing subject is itself a claim that deserves more serious investigation and interaction,

¹⁵³ Phillips, “Exegesis as Critical Praxis,” 28.

¹⁵⁴ Phillips, “Exegesis as Critical Praxis,” 28–33.

¹⁵⁵ Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 51–52. Carson provides a helpful starting bibliography of scholarly work critical of the Freudian paradigm and its successors.

¹⁵⁶ Fry, “Lecture 1 Transcript,” paragraph 31.

if only because it is a foundational assumption for this kind of postmodern discourse. While an analysis of the historical development of philosophical and psychological views of the self/subject is beyond the scope of the present study, this area should be noted as an argument in need of further exploration for the purpose of clarity and making headway in the broader debate between modern and postmodern hermeneutics.

Burnett's article "Postmodern Biblical Exegesis" covers similar ground, arguing that while historical criticism need not be considered dead, it will need to shed its longstanding assumptions of referentiality, determinate meaning and adopt insights from poststructuralism concerning the linguistic inscription of text and self, the social inscription of language, and the material effects of writing.¹⁵⁷ He then indulges in a lengthy excursus summarizing the work of Fish, most notably his assertions that texts are essentially created by readers ascribing formal properties to and thus "writing" them, but that this action of readers is determined by a larger community. Briefly considering objections to this extreme position, Burnett argues that even if all the gaps in our historical knowledge were filled, scholars would still be left with the impossible task of determining appropriate conceptual models and justifying them, thus the present situation of scholars interpreting the exact same data differently. In support of this, Burnett cites Lyotard's statements about the politics of the natural sciences. However, Fish somewhat uncritically assumes that communities are stable entities that provide meaning, thus making his project vulnerable to the gaze of the intertextualist critique that all writing is a pastiche of arbitrarily projected irretrievable fragments of previous works.¹⁵⁸ Burnett then turns his attention to the work of White, who argues that the work of a historian is a

¹⁵⁷ Burnett, "Postmodern Biblical Exegesis," 51–54.

¹⁵⁸ Burnett, "Postmodern Biblical Exegesis," 54–63.

poetic one, creating a narrative framework for their material and a discourse about a historical discourse. This discourse is necessarily never free of ideology, since its contextualized nature means that it will be involved in distributing power hierarchically.¹⁵⁹ The implications of this for the practice of historical criticism are that every institution has a stratification of discourses, and all writing is the relation of at least two discourses.¹⁶⁰ Most significantly for the present study, a footnote discussion at this point affirms the indispensability of traditional historical criticism as the starting place for deconstructionist readings, citing authoritatively none other than Derrida.¹⁶¹ The essay finishes with some rather mundane musings on the power relationship between the church and biblical scholarship, along with a lackluster cry to embrace, “the dawn of an infinite number of voices calling to one another from within the intertextual web which they are interminably reconfiguring.”¹⁶²

As was the case with the Phillips article examined above, there are aspects of this essay that deserve a resounding affirmation, others that need to be stringently qualified, and still others that simply need to be noted as areas that require further investigation for the progress of the larger methodological discussion. Once again, it should be affirmed that all interpretive work is inherently contextual and finite, and needs to be realized as such. Likewise, the conscious and unconscious exercise of rhetorical and institutional power is a reality faced by all who inhabit the academic and ecclesial worlds. At the same time, the out of hand dismissal of even the goal of understanding authorial intent seems hasty, as does the complete discounting of textual meaning and the denial of any interpretive

¹⁵⁹ Burnett, “Postmodern Biblical Exegesis,” 63–66.

¹⁶⁰ Burnett, “Postmodern Biblical Exegesis,” 66. Ironically, that is exactly what the present study is attempting to do at this point.

¹⁶¹ Burnett, “Postmodern Biblical Exegesis,” 73–74.

¹⁶² Burnett, “Postmodern Biblical Exegesis,” 67–71.

“free will” to the reader. In fact, if one describes interpretation as deterministic based on a pragmatic, “descriptive” reading of the situation, then it would seem hypocritical to turn around and complain about the ethical issues regarding the exercise of discursive power, since such conditions are part and parcel of human life. However, accepting Lyotard’s writing on the exercise of institutional power in the natural sciences may be erroneous in light of his later comments regarding the writing of *The Postmodern Condition*.¹⁶³ In terms of its relevance to the present study, the most potent statement made by Burnett was his surprising assertion that postmodern exegetes need to pay more attention to the work of historical critics as a starting point; the apparent ignorance of the historical-critical consensus among postmodern voices noted above seems to be in blatant violation of this Derridean(!) mandate. Finally, there seems within the work of both Phillips and Burnett a strong tendency towards questionable dichotomies, a trend towards reductionistic all or nothing solutions when dealing with the inevitable practical anomalies created in the discerning of the roles of the author, text, and reader. There is a difference between an author’s historical and psychological intention and our ability to determine or access this meaning; to collapse the difficulties of the latter into the existence of the former would seem to confuse an epistemological problem with an ontological problem.¹⁶⁴ Just because absolute certainty is impossible does not legitimate

¹⁶³ Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, 26. Anderson quotes a later interview of Lyotard’s in which the latter admitted that he invented a number of stories, referenced books he had never read, and flatly stated *The Postmodern Condition* was the absolute worst book he had ever written.

¹⁶⁴ The cogency of this critique necessarily rests on the essential soundness of the larger western metaphysical tradition, assuming an outside reality exists that has some intrinsic categories. It is this basic distinction upon which Vanhoozer relies in his critique of Derrida in *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 211–213. Referencing the infamous Searle/Derrida exchange, Vanhoozer assumes that if Derrida cannot have absolute knowledge, he will have none at all. This is vociferously contested by Valler, who insists that Derrida correctly chides Searle for using pragmatic experience of the use of language to provide the foundations for a general theory. Thus, Valler, “Eluding the Strong Man,” 16, states, “It is the fact of undecidability as a mathematical and philosophical problematic which for Derrida precludes the possibility

complete nihilism. In fact, the positing of the interpretive act as being “fractured” or “incomplete” itself relies upon a projected and unrealistic fantasy of a “perfect” interpretive situation, the even theoretical possibility of which would seem to stand at odds with the analyses of Phillips and Burnett.

Coming back to Brueggemann, a distinct uncertainty hangs over his relationship with the sources surveyed above. It is unclear whether he means to imply that he wholeheartedly endorses all that they describe, which would seem inconsistent with his actual interpretive practices, or whether he merely finds their writings loosely helpful, in which case he does not specify exactly what he accepts and what he rejects.¹⁶⁵ For example, in multiple places,¹⁶⁶ he cites, apparently authoritatively, the “minimalist” historiographical work of Van Seters and Thompson, apparently without considering the alternative schools of thought and critiques of their work that exist.¹⁶⁷ It is also difficult to determine his views on the nature of the author, text, and reader. He does not seem to directly address the topic of authorial intent, and his understanding of texts seems to allow them far more unity than they are given by practitioners of source criticism. He likewise emphasises the situatedness of the self (see above), but still allows it considerable interpretive abilities and freedoms. In *Texts Under Negotiation*, his insistence that the Bible is read in a manner dismissive of received “system[s] of thought,”¹⁶⁸ would seem to clash with the determinism of the self advocated in the

of deriving ontological knowledge...he is able to expose those contradictory theorems destabilize the working assumptions of this trajectory of Western metaphysics.”

¹⁶⁵ For some tentative musings on the difficulties of utilizing historical criticism, see Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 726–729.

¹⁶⁶ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 5; *Theology of the Old Testament*, 74.

¹⁶⁷ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 50–55. In light of the articles surveyed above, it is ironic that he even considers modernistic historiography a valid starting point for much of his work.

¹⁶⁸ Brueggemann, *Texts Under Negotiation*, 58. His comments about the self on pp. 60–61 do not serve to further clarify this matter.

articles above. Additionally, his desire to focus on ambiguity and “Freudian slips”¹⁶⁹ within texts would seem to trespass the poststructuralist view of texts as indeterminate seas of signifiers, as one would have to be able to determine what a text was generally about before stating what parts of it clash with the whole.¹⁷⁰ Finally, his oblique dismissal of historical criticism in his writings actually violates one of the points made by Burnett outlined above.

Brueggemann’s interface with power structures is also difficult to untangle. In *Theology of the Old Testament*, he states:

The reader should understand that the present writer is unflagging in his empathy toward that revolutionary propensity in the text. This is a long-term interpretive judgment, rooted perhaps in history and personal inclination as well as in more informed critical judgement. For that I make no apology, for I believe it is not possible to maintain a completely evenhanded posture, and one may as well be honest and make one’s inclination known.¹⁷¹

Later on he looks at the issue of justice in the Old Testament in great detail, consciously echoing the words of the liberation theologians in advocating Yahweh’s “preferential option for the poor” and insisting that the Mosaic law teaches that justice is “to redistribute social goods and social power.”¹⁷² However, this neo-Marxist strand of economic teaching is apparently deliberately balanced by the more conservative perspective found in Proverbs.¹⁷³ The previous essays he cited did not specifically focus on the ideological aspects of poststructuralist criticism, except to advocate an interpretive pluralism towards political voices. It is therefore challenging to situate Brueggemann

¹⁶⁹ Brueggemann, *Texts Under Negotiation*, 58–59.

¹⁷⁰ It should be clarified at this point that within Brueggemann’s own implicitly pragmatist system, he is able to identify such “slips” within texts. The question being raised by the present is whether such a system is the ideal way to approach interpretation, or if it is in fact internally consistent, owing to the presence of such factors as pragmatic ethical judgements as mentioned above.

¹⁷¹ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 74.

¹⁷² Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 736. As evidence, he cites Exod 12:35–36; Exod 16:18, and the provisions for widows, orphans, and aliens in Deuteronomy.

¹⁷³ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 740.

within the wider realm of postmodern critics who would deliberately bring political assumptions to bear on the text. For him to claim accuracy in identifying a liberating voice in the text would be to violate the assumptions of textuality found in Phillips and Burnett. Furthermore, political criticism of the Bible has progressed through different stages; while some identify voices in the text critical of imperial hegemony, others have instead argued that some of the canonical materials instead reflect the inevitable process by which the rhetoric of the oppressor is ingrained into the oppressed, thus leading to writings which unwittingly reinforce the domination from which they seek to escape.¹⁷⁴ Even the advocate of postmodern criticism, Adam, admits that a postmodern critic cannot consistently claim to have an absolute grasp on the ideological perspective of a text, and they can merely critique a potentially oppressive use of a text.¹⁷⁵ Therefore Brueggemann is at most a very soft postmodernist, as he seems reasonably certain of his own readings of texts.¹⁷⁶

3. Areas for Further Exploration Relevant to Gen 47:13–26

Ironically, Brueggemann's rather soft adoption of postmodern interpretive practices puts him in a situation where he pays lip service to Derridean dogma, yet the fruits of his hermeneutical labour do not differ significantly from more conventional approaches. Had he more wholeheartedly followed the ideas set forth in the essays by Phillips and Burnett that he cited, his work would show more evidence of benefiting from their emphasis on the practical difficulties of accessing the intention of the author,

¹⁷⁴ Schussler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word*, 4–5. Schussler Fiorenza here is specifically speaking of empire studies.

¹⁷⁵ Adam, *What is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?*, 48–49.

¹⁷⁶ This issue is addressed by Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 382–395. He states, “The basic problem with the postmodern liberation of the reader is that it fails to free readers from themselves.” Also relevant are the comments in Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 440, 450, regarding the types of argumentation that undergirded earlier feminist and liberationist criticism.

determining the message of the text, and trusting the interpretive activity of a reader that is historical and culturally conditioned if not completely determined. Similarly, the drive towards interpretive plurality in Phillips and Burnett is not mirrored in Brueggemann, who seems to assume a measure of legitimacy for his own views. The following section will offer some examples of ways in which a more explicitly postmodern literary approach could be relevant to the present study.

The first area of exploration is the cloudiness of authorial intent. As mentioned above, due to the fact that postmodern thinkers tend to allow epistemological problems to become ontological problems, their writings often appear to deny the existence of a historical author. However, if one reads them as addressing the pragmatic difficulties in ascertaining authorial intention, their work is directly relevant for elucidating the difficulties faced in the interpretive process. An example of this is found in the first paragraph of Barthes' seminal essay, "The Death of the Author."¹⁷⁷ Barthes states:

In his story *Sarrasine*, Balzac, speaking of a castrato disguised as a woman, writes this sentence: "It was Woman, with her sudden fears, her irrational whims, her instinctive fears, her unprovoked bravado, her daring and her delicious delicacy of feeling." Who is speaking in this way? Is it the story's hero, concerned to ignore the castrato concealed beneath the woman? Is it the man Balzac, endowed by his personal experience with a philosophy of Woman? Is it the author Balzac, professing certain "literary" ideas of femininity? Is it universal wisdom? Or romantic psychology? It will always be impossible to know, for the good reason that all writing is itself this special voice, consisting of several indiscernible voices, and that literature is precisely the invention of this voice, to which we cannot assign a specific origin: literature is that neuter, that composite, that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes.¹⁷⁸

This would seem to describe almost the same difficulty elucidated in section C.2 above, in which the narrator is largely silent regarding God's activity and all descriptions of the

¹⁷⁷ Barthes, *Image Music Text*, 142–148.

¹⁷⁸ Barthes, *Image Music Text*, 142.

divine are placed in the mouths of Joseph and other characters, rendering indeterminate the question of whether Joseph (or the Egyptian people) are to be taken as a reliable mediators of divine intentionality or if in fact their references to God's work can at times be taken as rhetorical legitimizations of their own agendas (or cries of desperation), rendering dubious their theological accuracy.

In a similar fashion, many would recognize that in pragmatic terms, texts are always viewed, consciously or unconsciously, in relation with other texts, such that the mere fact of having knowledge of another text will change how that text is read. This situation is articulated by Marshall, who is quoted by Burnett:

Supplementarity applies in the history of ideas too. If one cannot really understand Derrida without reading Hegel, then Hegel is at once outside and inside Derrida, a supplement made necessary by Derrida himself. To "introduce" the past, one must actually return to it. Derrida is introduced (in)to Hegel and Hegel is introduced (in)to Derrida. It is not clear what "earlier" would mean in such a case, nor does Melville shrink before the speculative possibility of weighing "Derrida's influence on Hegel." We cannot understand the history of ideas without thinking, without ourselves having ideas, and we must therefore necessarily turn to those among us who have ideas and stimulate thinking.... What Kant or Hegel or Heidegger means must constantly be readjusted in the light of what thinkers like Lacan or Bataille struggle to make of them. This is just what tradition is—not a linear series of fixed opinions safely encrypted, but a mobile dance of vampire-like figures that, by feeding on the blood of the living, not only gain new life for themselves, but welcome their victims into perpetual fellowship.¹⁷⁹

While allowing that the above quotation may have somewhat overstated its case in terms of turning a (descriptive) unavoidable situation into a dubious ontological statement, the conclusion is clear: texts cannot but be read in light of later materials. This would be relevant for the difficulty addressed in section C.3 above, as the precise relevance of later canonical materials seems to be a ground of disputation. If one grants that access to a text is always mediated through its "afterlives" of accumulated later related materials, this

¹⁷⁹ Burnett, "Postmodern Biblical Exegesis," 53.

concept would seem to have application for the Christian approach to the biblical canon; despite the diachronic reconstructions projected onto the voices within the collection of writings, the mere fact of their situatedness requires that “later” writings will influence the interpretation of “earlier” ones, and in synchronic fashion the various voices will be brought into direct dialogue with each other.¹⁸⁰ This idea will be more fully developed (though not within a poststructuralist framework) in chapter 2.

Burnett’s summary of the thought of Fish (see above) is also relevant to the present study as it pertains to the reader’s role in the production of meaning. In section C.2 above, the question was raised regarding the possibility of establishing criterion for discerning intended themes and their patterns of development through Genesis. Fish flatly denies any voice to the historical author in this instance, stating (as quoted by Burnett):

The extent to which this is a decisive break from formalism is evident in my unqualified conclusion that formal units are always a function of the interpretive model one brings to bear (they are not “in the text”). Indeed, the text as an entity independent of interpretation and (ideally) responsible for its career drops out and is replaced by the texts that emerge as the consequence of our interpretive activities. *There are still formal patterns, but they do not lie innocently in the world; rather, they are themselves constituted by an interpretive act* [italics mine]. The facts one points to are still there...but only as a consequence of the interpretive (man-made) model that has called them into being. The relationship between interpretation and text is thus reversed: interpretive strategies are not put into execution after reading; they are the shape of reading, and because they are the shape of reading, they give texts their shape, making them rather than, as is usually assumed, arising from them.¹⁸¹

The above quotation from Fish speaks directly to the dilemma encountered earlier, when contradictory developmental schemas were posed for the same themes, and multiple

¹⁸⁰ It is difficult to locate scholarly writing that develops this concept further. Aichele’s *The Control of Biblical Meaning* proves frustrating in this regard, as it repeatedly poses the question of how the boundaries set by the canon shape the interpretation of individual passages without articulating a robust theoretical framework for how this kind of influencing takes place, except to indicate a tendency towards personal resistance to the idea of canon as a controlling force.

¹⁸¹ Burnett, “Postmodern Biblical Exegesis,” 55–56.

themes having contradictory results for the interpretation of Gen 47:13–26 have been proposed in the secondary literature that as accumulated around the passage. The fact that these “formal patterns” spoken of by Fish are created by the reader rather than the author can be seen in the fact that they arise as a result of different scholars approaching the text with different methods and therefore different questions. As in the two cases suggested above, while it may be premature to adopt Fish’s extreme position of denial of authorial intentionality and inherent meaning in a text, it would appear that he has accurately diagnosed the situation encountered above, that is, multiple posited conflicting lines of development throughout Genesis with little in the way of an adjudicating discourse available.

4. Final Thoughts on Brueggemann’s Approach

Brueggemann proves difficult to evaluate, as his own work seems to be fairly conservative in its approximation of postmodern interpretive practices. Thus, it is difficult to identify the precise areas of agreement and disagreement between him and the sources he approvingly cites, particularly regarding postmodern views of the nature of the author, text, and reader in the interpretive process. While the postmodern critique of the modernist attempt at obtaining universally valid knowledge is laudatory as a descriptive exercise treating the practicalities of interpretation, the case is severely overstated when the epistemological difficulties of interpretation are projected onto one’s ontology, thus creating an author who is mute, a text that is indecipherable, and a reader that lacks any free will and is fated to blind determinism. Brueggemann is inconsistent in his application of the postmodern sources he cites. However, these ideas are relevant to the difficulties faced in this study and present a challenge to any scholar who is inclined towards

overconfidence in the areas of the accessibility of authorial intention, the stability of the meaning of a text, and the autonomy of the reader.¹⁸² Therefore, there does not seem to be any good reason to follow Brueggemann in arbitrarily cloistering oneself from certain angles of historical critical investigation in the name of preserving the integrity of the text and the ethical purity of its application.

E. Conclusion

The literature review conducted in this chapter showed that two distinct schools of thought exist regarding the ethicality of Joseph's actions in Gen 47:13–26. These two schools of thought show few signs of familiarity with each other's work or willingness to enter into discussion regarding the foundation disagreements between their respective approaches. Historical critical investigation has reached a consensus that Joseph's enslavement of the Egyptians in Gen 47:13–26 would have been considered pragmatically expedient and seen as benevolent by its original reading audience. The excursus on Brueggemann's postmodern approach to biblical studies concluded that he is somewhat inconsistent in his application of the harder forms of postmodern literary theory that he routinely cites authoritatively. Furthermore, based on its reductionistic approach to the possibility of correctly interpreting a text and questionable

¹⁸² While constructively sketching a way forward is beyond the scope of the present study, it should be mentioned that the foundational issue that should be examined is probably the Cartesian subject/object distinction, which in making the thinking self the foundation for all knowledge, essentially set in motion a trajectory of thought that was, in an effort to be consistent with its own foundations, guaranteed to eventually arrive at the skepticism found in postmodernism today. So Carson, *The Gaggling of God*, 59, states, "This is quite different from a view that holds that there is an omniscient God (who by definition truly knows everything), so that from his perspective all human beings are 'objects,' and all their true knowing is but a subset of his knowing." However, the lack of empirical evidence for such a view (by definition) necessitates its retreat into verification by internal consistency which opens itself to the potential critique of being merely pragmatically driven by a desire for metaphysically grounded truth, and thus the question of which types of argumentation should be given greatest priority is opened once more.

presuppositions regarding the nature of the author, text, and reader, there are good reasons to be suspicious of postmodern literary theory.

While neither approach alone is sufficient, this study will argue that Joseph's actions in enslaving the Egyptians were tolerable, but his practice of resource distribution was ultimately out of step with the perspectives given by relevant slavery materials across the canon. The next chapter will lay out the methodology to be employed in the present study, which will concern itself with dispute over the relevance and implications of later canonical materials discussed above.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

A. Introduction

The methodology for the present study will be a modified two stage canonical approach, building on the work of Childs. As his influential work in the area of biblical studies both addresses and exhibits many of the problems inherent in biblical theology and canonical exegesis today, an overview of his writings in these areas will be conducted. Next, there will be a discussion of some of the difficulties present in his thought, with provisional solutions to those difficulties posed. Finally, the specific methodology of the present study will be articulated, a two stage approach that seeks to plot out the development of themes relevant to a passage throughout the canon, then read the passage in light of those canonical themes.

B. An Overview of Childs' Methodology

1. Preliminary Concerns

Not only does the diversity of the output of Childs create difficulties for ascribing to him a static methodology, but many scholars have found it difficult to ascertain a concrete method from any of his works.¹ In fact, Childs can be found making statements that cast doubt upon the assertion that the Canonical Approach can be properly considered a "method."² For example, Childs states, "In the end, I would rather speak of a new vision of the text rather than in terms of method,"³ and he gives this theme a more detailed treatment in his *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*:

¹ One example would be O'Connor, "How the Text is Heard," 94-95.

² For an example of a misunderstanding of this basic goal of Childs, see DeClaisse-Walford, *Reading from the Beginning*, 8.

³ Childs, *The New Testament as Canon*, xvii.

I am unhappy with this term [“canonical criticism”] because it implies that the canonical approach is considered another historical critical technique which can take its place alongside of source criticism, form criticism, rhetorical criticism, and similar methods. I do not envision the approach to canon in this light. Rather, the issue at stake in relation to the canon turns on establishing a stance from which the Bible can be read as sacred scripture...one should not confuse this one aspect of the canonical approach [formal guidelines] with the full range of responsibilities comprising the exegetical task. A canonical Introduction is not the end, but only the beginning of exegesis.⁴

It may then be accurate to state that, for Childs, the term “Canonical Approach” functions as a stance of deliberately using the canon as a foundation and a lens for the tasks of biblical theology and exegesis, with all the ensuing debates over the legitimacy of the canon and the place of reconstructions of the accretion of its various parts. The diagram below would seem to make the most sense of the place of the importance of canon in Childs’ thought.⁵



However, this overarching importance of the canon does not prevent other concerns from being addressed in apparently diverse ways,⁶ and still does not fully cover all of his

⁴ Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 82–83. Nevertheless, the use of the term “method” still permeates his work. The most explicit connection between “canon” and “exegesis” is found in his *The New Testament as Canon*, 48–56, which includes a section titled, “Methodology of a Canonical Exegesis.”

⁵ In order to further nuance the given diagram, it should be noted that Childs does distinguish the task of Old Testament theology from that of biblical theology in *Old Testament Theology*, 10–11. However, the differences are limited to the focus on one out of the two testaments, a greater emphasis on dogmatic theology within biblical theology, and the obvious concerns raised by the synthesis of both testaments in biblical theology. Childs states that the hermeneutical approach is identical for both.

⁶ Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 149–222. In the third section of this book, appropriately entitled “Testing a Method,” Childs gives three examples, and diversity of the processes of enquiry is evident. He examines Ps 8 and Exod 2:11–22 by a similar process of first providing an exegesis of the passage in its direct OT context, examining the ways it is directly utilized in the NT, then summarizing the history of interpretation before giving some theological reflections. The Exodus passage is given a nearly word-for-word identical treatment in the commentary *Exodus*, 27–46, with the addition of source critical data at the beginning. Meanwhile, Childs’ last example in *Biblical Theology in Crisis* is Prov 7 and its implications for sex. After treating the passage in its immediate context, he brings it into conversation with the similar subject matter found in the Song of Songs and Gen 39 before briefly touching on relevant NT material. Although there is nothing inherently wrong with either of these approaches, a problem is created when he fails to explain why or how he comes to choose which one to apply in a given circumstance.

work.⁷ It is helpful at this point to refer to the insightful pronouncement of Driver, who, in his discussion of accusations of ambiguity levelled at Childs, states:

If anything, Childs' work is repetitive, especially in rehearsing this main point...To put Childs' career thesis in other words, the historically shaped canon of scripture, in its two discrete witnesses, is a Christological rule of faith that in the church, by the action of the Holy Spirit, accrues textual authority...But neither is it an easy thesis to unpack and defend.⁸

Similarly, Harrisville seeks to defend Childs. He states:

To all this Childs refuses to attach the designation 'method'...The term 'canon' (without the article) suggests not a new exegetical technique but a *context* from which the literature is to be understood and interpreted. Attention to this point could have saved his critics space and effort.⁹

In his last published article, "The Canon in Recent Biblical Studies,"¹⁰ Childs addressed some of these concerns, fleshing out the multiple implications of the attention given to the nature and role of the canon in both English and German scholarship as well as giving his own reflections on which of these different exploratory frameworks were the most fruitful avenues for academic investigation and ecclesial edification.

2. How Exegesis is Informed by the Canonical Approach¹¹

Based on the above extended quotation from Childs and the basic layout of his *Exodus* commentary, it could be reasonably inferred that, for Childs, the exegetical task really starts with all the traditional source, form, and redactional-critical tools, which are

⁷ Somewhat difficult to categorize are his *Isaiah* commentary and *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah*, which make no apparent use of the canonical approach. In the case of the *Isaiah* commentary, discerning a basic purpose or focus is quite difficult.

⁸ Driver, *Brevard Childs, Biblical Theologian*, 4.

⁹ Harrisville, "What I Believe," 13.

¹⁰ Childs, "The Canon in Recent Biblical Studies," 33–57. In his overview of the explosion of interest in the canon that occurred between the 1960's and 1990's, Childs notes that in general, study of the canon in English tended towards a history-of-religions approach that subsumed theological concerns to political concerns, while German scholarship showed an encouraging trend towards integrating areas such as biblical theology and the dogmatic resources of the churches. In his closing reflections he emphasizes the importance of balancing and integrating the human and divine aspects of scripture.

¹¹ This summary of Childs' thought first examines his approach to exegesis, then biblical theology. However, it is worth noting that the methodology of the present study inverts this order.

then governed by and used to inform a “canonical” reading. Whether or not this task is always accomplished consistently or skilfully is disputed, as is apparent from the work of Xun.¹² Fowl doubts whether it is even possible.¹³ A helpful starting point for ascertaining Childs’ intended harmonious unity of historical criticism and canonical approach is found in *Introduction to the Old Testament*:

Throughout this Introduction I shall be criticizing the failure of the historical critical method, as usually practised, to deal adequately with the canonical literature of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, it is a basic misunderstanding of the canonical approach to describe it as a non-historical reading of the Bible...The whole point of emphasizing the canon is to stress the historical nature of the biblical witness...the particular medium through which this experience has been registered.¹⁴

This basic attitude seems to be a more nuanced version of the notes given on Old and New Testament context in the introduction to *Exodus*,¹⁵ which seem to indicate that in the case of the Old Testament context, a “canonical” reading is at one level simply looking at the passage in question in the context of the final form of the text instead of a previous fragmented literary or pre-literary source. A similar mindset seems to be at work in the methodology section of *The New Testament as Canon*, where Childs spends most of the section discussing the importance of the structure and intratextual relationships of the

¹² For extended discussion see Xun, *Theological Exegesis in the Canonical Context*, 111–166. Xun notes that, for Childs, the bringing together of the historical-critical method and canonical approach theologically represented the merging of the human and divine components of scripture. He states, “In ascertaining that Childs prefers to see the Bible as Scripture to seeing the Bible as part of human culture, we noticed one of his weaknesses: Childs is not very good at constructing a relationship between Scripture as the word of God and Scripture as the human word...For Childs, the investigation of the historical background of the biblical texts becomes an acceptable yet secondary tool for his canonical theological exegesis...Childs recognizes the usefulness of historical criticism to a certain limited extent, as a preliminary step in the process of biblical interpretation.” (165–166)

¹³ Fowl, “The Canonical Approach of Brevard Childs,” 176. Fowl states, “If (as Childs says) the canonical approach is not another tool like source, form and redaction criticism, can Childs continue to employ these tools once he has rejected the paradigm on which they are based. Childs often appears to exercise the historical-critical method on one level and then to do biblical theology on a level informed solely by the church’s confession of the canon. Here, again, Childs perpetuates the bifurcation between faith and reason he sought to eliminate.”

¹⁴ Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 71.

¹⁵ Childs, *Exodus*, xiv–xv.

final form of a given NT book.¹⁶ Thus, it can be discerned that Childs' emphasis on canon has multiple implications for the analysis of a passage, including simply looking at the purpose of its placement in the overall structure of the final form of a book,¹⁷ finding explicit citations or discussions of it elsewhere in the canon, and drawing it into conversation with related material and examining the implications of the interplay of the passages.¹⁸ However, the problems that arise here are consistency and comprehensiveness. At different times, Childs seems to focus on one or more of the listed implications of a canonical approach for exegesis, without clear criteria for favouring one or ignoring the other. For example, within the *Exodus* commentary alone, as previously mentioned, in the section discussing Moses' slaying of the Egyptian, the New Testament passages mentioned are the ones that directly comment upon the story (Acts 7:23–29, 35; Heb 11:24–28).¹⁹ Meanwhile, after the history of tradition and original context behind the Book of the Covenant (which includes a small amount of interaction with the materials relevant for various laws elsewhere in the OT),²⁰ the only interaction with relevant New Testament materials is restricted to two pages, which are set as part of the “History of Exegesis” section.²¹ Thus while it seems unfair to criticize Childs for something he did not intend to do, it would have been helpful for him to delineate some criteria for the

¹⁶ Childs, *The New Testament as Canon*, 48–53. “Intratextual relationships” here means explicit purpose statements, stated addressees, implicit contexts, and the like.

¹⁷ Childs, *Exodus*, xiv–xv. Concerning the “Old Testament Context,” Childs states that he seeks to work with the text in its final form and polemicizes against the fragmenting effects of traditional source criticism.

¹⁸ As the following discussion should indicate, even when Childs delineates these tasks (as in *Exodus*) a criterion for relevant material is lacking. For example, it would be helpful if he explained whether he intended to work within NT passages that explicitly cited the OT passage under discussion, or merely alluded to it or covered overlapping subject matter. While an explosion of interest in the NT use of the OT has occurred since *Exodus* came out, this still seems unduly inconsistent.

¹⁹ Childs, *Exodus*, 33–40.

²⁰ Childs, *Exodus*, 468–469. For example, in the section on the slave laws (21:1–11), mention is made of some of the slightly different slave laws in Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

²¹ Childs, *Exodus*, 490–491.

material he intended to interact with, instead of the arbitrary approach taken in *Exodus*.²² Questions can also be raised as to whether every single passage in the Bible can be situated in the canon so comfortably or even relevantly.²³ It is also instructive to observe how others have attempted to appropriate and utilize his work, as it illustrates not only the breadth of possibilities inspired by his writings but also the shortcomings others have sought to mend.²⁴

It is also instructive to note an example of Childs' own exegesis, from his *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*. In a section entitled "Exegesis in the Context of Biblical Theology,"²⁵ Childs examines Gen 22:1–19, the "Akedah." In a manner reminiscent of *Biblical Theology in Crisis* and *Exodus*, Childs gives this text a four part treatment: "The Old Testament Exegetical Debate," "The New Testament Witness," "The

²² Kittel, "Brevard Childs' Development of the Canonical Approach," 4. Kittel represents a vast swath of scholars when arguing that the central aim of this venture is fraught with contradiction, stating, "The canonical approach to interpretation requires a paradoxical attitude: on the one hand, it is the canon, the final deposit, which is important. On the other hand, the 'post-critical' age demands that we understand what we can of the process by which that canon was achieved. How these two factors are to be held together, and what the controls are, and exactly the way in which knowledge of earlier stages obtained by historical critical methods is to be used - these are problems not fully explicated in the early chapters of the *Introduction*."

²³ Brueggemann, "Brevard Childs' Canon Criticism," 314. Brueggemann states, "Several reviewers of his *Introduction* raised the possibility that the canonical shape of the OT might actually include some texts that make no sense, that have no meaning, because they were included without any hermeneutical reflection. Childs says that this is indeed possible."

²⁴ The diversity of ways in which Childs' work has been recontextualized can be seen by comparing O'Neal, *Interpreting Habakkuk as Scripture*, which uses a similar format to Childs' *Exodus* and was intended to test the results of Childs' statements on Habakkuk in *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, with Lyons, *Canon and Exegesis*, which conducts a seemingly straightforward exegesis of Gen 18–19, followed by a brief examination of the theme of "justice" in the rest of the OT in the light of that passage. Lyons gives no methodological explanation as to how what he is doing can be classified as "canonical exegesis." For an appropriation of Childs' work for the purpose of biblical theology, see Scalise, *Hermeneutics as Theological Prolegomena*, which heavily incorporates modern philosophical theology. Also of note are the two volumes of essays, *Theological Exegesis and Canon, Theology, and Old Testament Interpretation*. Some of the material found in these collections is described below.

²⁵ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 323–348. No apparent explanation of the purpose of this section is given, except apparently to give an example of how exegesis can provide material for biblical theology. The two examples given are Gen 22:1–19 (examined here) and Matt 21:33–46. It is interesting to note that while Gen 22 is analyzed using an abbreviated version of the same format used in the *Exodus* commentary, the Matthew passage is given no explicit section on the history of exegesis, and this is possibly subsumed into the initial section on NT context (which has three parts, "Synoptic Analysis," "The Demise of Allegorical Interpretation," and "A Traditio-Historical Trajectory.")

History of Exegesis,” and “Genesis 22 in the Context of Biblical Theology.”²⁶ The following section will summarize and critique relevant aspects of this analysis.

After surveying conventional source critical treatments of the passage, it is then noted that most modern exegetes show uncertainty as to how they could fit such a passage into the context of the whole Bible, and thus rigor and precision is needed to bring legitimacy to the practice of biblical theology.²⁷ Childs then outlines his solution to the dilemma:

This multifaceted text has been shaped throughout its lengthy development in such a way as to provide important hermeneutical guidelines for its theological use by a community which treasured it as scripture. By carefully observing how the editors dealt with elements which they deemed unrepeateable (*einmalig*) but which they reckoned to be representative or universal in application, a basic hermeneutical direction is provided by which to broaden theological reflection beyond the Old Testament itself.²⁸

From here, several observations are given regarding the location and features of the passage. Its place in the larger Genesis narrative means that it obviously becomes part of the development of the theme of the “promise,” and in the final form vv. 15–18 certainly assist in that role. Additionally, the statements given in v. 1 and v. 14 are said to be “canonical features,” with v. 1 giving the reader information that was not available to Abraham, and v. 14 providing a lexical connection to v. 8, regardless of its purpose in its (assumed?) original context as an “aetiological saga.”²⁹ It is then noted that this verb (the Qal prefix 3ms of רָאָה) is in its Niphal form a frequent indication of a theophany, and thus the account “provides the guarantee for God’s continual presence among his

²⁶ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 325–36.

²⁷ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 326.

²⁸ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 326. Whether or not he was successful in carrying out this mandate will be evaluated below.

²⁹ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 327.

people.”³⁰ The final point made in discussing the Old Testament context is that three of the main words of Gen 22, “ram,” “burnt offering,” and “appear,” appear together in a similar cluster in Lev 8–9 and 16, connecting the two contexts of worship.³¹

After looking at relevant New Testament materials and constructing a brief history of interpretation from the patristic to reformation period, Childs turns to placing the passage in the context of biblical theology. After noting that mere historicism cannot address the problem, he quickly notes that the story was a one-time occurrence and it needs to be understood in the context of a culture that frequently practiced child sacrifice. He also dismisses the questions of Abraham’s discernment of God’s voice and the background of human sacrifice in Israelite worship as being irrelevant.³² Childs then restates his thesis that the data of both testaments clearly state that the central theological point of the account is the tension between the divine command and the promise, with Abraham’s faithfulness to follow through in obedience. Following Calvin, the contribution of Paul emphasizes that “grace and reward are basically incompatible,” and that it was the faith of Abraham and not his works by which he was justified. Furthermore, this element of grace was foreshadowed in Genesis when the ram was supplied by God, a theme further developed in the legislation of Leviticus.³³ Next, Childs makes the intriguing statement that an element of reader response is required in all Christian theologizing, but that this must be done within appropriate “canonical restraints”; this would avoid a simplistic identification of the suffering of Isaac and Jesus. Texts such as Isa 53 would prevent Isaac from being equated with the “suffering

³⁰ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 327.

³¹ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 327–28.

³² Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 334.

³³ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 334–35.

servant,” while conversely viewing Abraham’s experience in canonical focus allows for a legitimate parallel to be made with modern Christian faith.³⁴

Several points can be made by way of critique of Child’s handling of the passage. Paradoxically, Childs in this case manages to uncritically swallow most of the critical tradition, yet does not seem to find a use for it in his interpretation of the passage. While there is nothing objectionable concerning the observations about the function of v. 1 in the account, it seems audacious to claim it as a “canonical feature,” particularly considering that this insight is by no means unique to Childs or available only to those practicing a canonical approach. This assertion also extends to the remainder of the section. Drawing the link between the identical verbs in v. 8 and v. 14 does not seem to be particularly “canonical,” except for the emphasis on the final form of the text. Childs’ argument about the parallel uses of the verb “to see” in the Niphal is potentially fallacious. *ראה* occurs over one thousand times in the Hebrew Bible, and with so many occurrences, it seems hasty to claim parallels of meaning when the claimed parallel is in a different stem. It is unclear why Childs chose these uses of the verb when other uses in the Qal would provide equally intriguing parallels (for example, it is used to describe the LORD “seeing” the state of his people in Deut 23:15, 32:36). Likewise, there is nothing objectionable about the identification of the word cluster parallel in Leviticus, but as with the above observations, such practice is considered commonplace in language studies as a matter of clarifying lexical and grammatical features, and cannot be claimed as a special insight of a “canonical approach.” Finally, while it would be unnecessarily harsh to criticize Childs for something he did not set out to do, it is unclear why he only chose the

³⁴ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 336.

lexical and grammatical parallels he did when examining the passage in this way; one might reasonably expect when the terminology of “canon” is employed that comprehensiveness and exhaustiveness would be the order of the day when seeking out relevant material, and this observation is equally applicable to the New Testament section.

3. Biblical Theology and the Canonical Approach

From the outset it should be acknowledged that Childs must have seen some elasticity inherent in his approach to biblical theology, as in *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* he states,

The approach to the Old Testament which I have outlined differs from the strategy and the emphasis of my previous book, *Old Testament Theology*. There I organized the material topically and explored the particular contours by which the biblical material was construed within its canonical context...In this volume I attempt to focus in more detail on the descriptive task of relating the Old Testament witness to the history of Israel, of course, according to its canonical form, but also according to the methodological reflections on the problems of history.³⁵

Accordingly, this section will examine the methodologies used in *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* as well as *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*. The opening chapters of *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* identifies four problems in OT theology: 1) The tension between theology and the history of Israel’s religion, with the associated problem of the choice of dogmatic categories, 2) The difficulty of making theological pronouncements concerning a text with diverse sources, 3) The tension between the source-critical search for the “earliest” purpose of a text and its actual reception by the original community,³⁶ and 4) The association of the

³⁵ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 101.

³⁶ Questions can be raised here regarding which community is given precedence. Brueggemann surveys some of the debate between Barr and Childs, with Barr criticizing Childs’ preference of the MT

Old Testament either with Judaism or with the New Testament.³⁷ In the next section, “A canonical approach to Old Testament theology,” Childs states that a canonical approach sees the “object of theological reflection” to be the text of the Old Testament, but that it should not be separated from the events it refers to, and that it should work “within canonical categories.”³⁸ He then states that there are three points where a canonical approach could productively contribute to the present problems: 1) As for the debate over the organization of materials, Childs states that much previous writing, while helpful, relied on the presupposition that they were working from “a closed body of material which is to be analysed descriptively.”³⁹ Regarding his contribution, Childs states that the organizing task is free to introduce dogmatic or historical categories, stating, “The real issue lies in the quality of the construal and the illumination it brings to the text.”⁴⁰ 2) Childs wishes to hold the opposing instincts to describe material as a “faith-construal of

over the LXX (OG) and Childs responding in almost fideistic terms. Furthermore, if the judgements of the church indicating the priority of the MT are to be accepted, why must their allegory be so quickly dismissed? See Brueggemann, “Brevard Childs’ Canonical Criticism,” 318, 321. Similar concerns are voiced by McDonald, *The Biblical Canon*, 470–471. Furthermore, Barr elsewhere argues that it would be more accurate to differentiate between several different definitions of “canon.” See Barr, *Holy Scripture*, 75–79; *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, 393–394. Commenting on this tendency in Childs’ thought, Harrisville, “What I Believe,” 12, states, “‘Process’ and nothing else explains Childs’ preference for the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament, in which more than one critic believes he detects a chink in his armor.”

³⁷ Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*, 5–6.

³⁸ Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*, 6. This section lasts from pp. 6–15, in which he ruminates on such diverse topics as the essentially “Christian” character of Old Testament theology, its relationship with Judaism and biblical theology, the relationship between the final form of the canon and historical reconstructions of its composition. On p. 15 he states, “By accepting the scriptures as normative for the obedient life of the church, the Old Testament theologian takes his stance within the circle of tradition, and thus identifies himself with Israel as the community of faith... There is no one hermeneutical key for unlocking the biblical message, but the canon provides the arena in which the struggle for understanding takes place.”

³⁹ Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*, 15.

⁴⁰ Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*, 16.

history,” or a “reconstructed scientific history,” in balance.⁴¹ 3) Contra Pannenberg, Childs emphasizes scripture over history as the medium of revelation.⁴²

Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments devotes substantially more space to addressing matters of method. In providing an apologia for his emphasis on the canon, he makes some of his most helpful remarks regarding the multiple implications of the focus on canon within his work, calling the term a “cipher.”⁴³ This word signifies the long and complicated process of the creation of the canonical materials, as well as the use and treatment of these materials within a given religious group. Additionally, it notes the theological reasons that these materials were made permanently authoritative. A final outgrowth of the use of this term is the way these same authoritative materials are received in the modern context.⁴⁴ Although Childs explicitly rejects allegory,⁴⁵ after a protracted discussion he states that there is great legitimacy of looking at all of scripture in light of Christ.⁴⁶ In the chapter, “Canonical Categories for Structuring a Biblical Theology,” Childs states that it is important to examine the “continuity and discontinuity” between the witness of the history of Israel in the Old Testament and the work of Christ in the New Testament.⁴⁷ Most relevant for the present study, Childs begins the section entitled “The Discrete Witness of the Old Testament” with a chapter covering “Methodological Problems.” It begins by outlining a three step process: 1) “To establish the initial setting of a witness within the history of Israel,” 2) “To follow a trajectory of

⁴¹ Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*, 16.

⁴² Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*, 16.

⁴³ Driver, *Brevard Childs*, 27. Driver comments on this, stating, “Instead of maintaining a distinction, Childs actively exploits the polyvalence of the word canon, which for him is an expansive cipher.”

⁴⁴ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 70–71.

⁴⁵ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 84.

⁴⁶ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 87.

⁴⁷ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 93.

its use and application within Israel's history," and 3) "To discern the unity and diversity of Israel's faith within the Old Testament."⁴⁸ He also provides three helpful assertions regarding the role of history: That Israel's perspective is prioritized over that of other nations (contra the comparative religions approach), that the biblical materials are considered a "witness" rather than a "source," and that this is regarded as "canonical" history, that is, history from Israel's point of view as compared to an illusory neutral viewpoint.⁴⁹ Considering the impasse between conservative and liberal scholars, Childs presents four proposals to overcome the watershed caused by the use of historical criticism. They are the inner and outer dimension of Israel's history, the legitimacy of divine and human agency, the "oscillati[on] between the past, present, and future," and the reality of foreground and background material.⁵⁰ He then criticizes the alternative historical proposals of Cross and von Rad,⁵¹ and ends with a final plea for the legitimacy of the canonical approach against those who champion diachronic criticism, stating that the results of diachronic criticism are still utilized and contribute to the different uses of a passage before it reached its final context, although they are not determinative of the final "canonical" meaning of a passage.⁵²

C. Further Considerations

As is clear from the above summary of Childs' approach, his thought had several areas of tension in it, and at other times he simply outlined undeniable areas of contention for those involved in the theological task. While the area of concentration of the present

⁴⁸ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 97.

⁴⁹ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 98.

⁵⁰ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 100–101.

⁵¹ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 102–103.

⁵² Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 104–105. It is perhaps here that Childs most clearly addresses the relationship between a canonical approach and historical criticism.

study somewhat differs from most approaches to biblical theology in that it selects its themes topically for the purpose of illuminating a specific passage,⁵³ there is a clear overlap of intent in terms of the examination of themes and the wrestling with issues such as the tension of questions concerning the place of historical criticism and the balance between the original form and final form of a passage. Additionally, it is necessary to define, if not objectively defend, one's chosen form of the canon and which stage of development will be the object of study. As was noted in the above section, Childs' precise place for historical criticism was unclear, and he additionally did not precisely delineate what constituted "canonical" exegesis or show rigour and comprehensiveness in carrying out such a task. The methodology of the present study, as outlined below, will attempt to overcome these tensions in Childs' work by clearly defining the place of historical criticism, clearly laying out the implications for the descriptive of exegesis as "canonical," and providing a framework within which relevant canonical materials will be analyzed comprehensively, as opposed to the piecemeal approach found in the fruits of Childs' investigations.

D. A Modified Two-Stage Canonical Approach

1. Overview

The following section will seek to elucidate and explore the aims and difficulties of the intended methodology of the present study. As it seeks to constitute a fresh step in the appropriation of Childs' work, central to the discussion will be clarification of intent and the marking of appropriate boundaries for the scope of the present study. In short,

⁵³ By certain definitions the approach taken in the present study would fall outside the bounds of strict biblical theology. Thus Kaiser, *Towards an Old Testament Theology*, 9–10, lists four types of methods: 1) structural, or dogmatic, 2) diachronic, 3) lexicographic, or based on individual sources, and 4) thematic. While the continuity would be imperfect, the present study would likely have the most in common with the thematic approach.

this is an approach to interpreting a passage that has two steps. First, appropriate canonical themes relevant to the passage at hand will be chosen and their development(s) charted across the OT. Second, the passage at hand will be read in light of the developments related to these themes and thus situated within the relevant materials of the canon.

2. The Selection and Charting of Appropriate Canonical Themes

Clearly, some criteria beyond mere intuition must be invoked to select appropriate canonical themes through which to read the passage at hand. While admittedly simplistic and prone to abuse, identifying key words within a passage could serve as a useful starting point. A broader view may highlight a theme that the passage is generally understood to contribute to in the context of the book as a whole. It must be acknowledged at this point that any exercise of this method will be necessarily selective, as the number of thematic lenses that a given passage could be viewed through could be potentially enormous. For example, for the purposes of the present study, while the criterion of “slavery” could be justified relatively easily on lexical grounds (Gen 47:21, 25), it could be just as legitimate to situate it within the OT’s material regarding tithing based on the amount of argumentation grounded on comparisons between 47:24, 26 and later Israelite tithing regulations found in previous approaches to the passage (see previous chapter), but that particular issue is beyond the scope of the present study.

The process of putting together information gleaned from relevant passages into a coherent whole has not been particularly well documented. Implicitly, it would seem to be the case that many have assumed that the results of standard exegesis are to be compiled and compared to create a coherent whole. However, a scan of the articles in the

New Dictionary of Biblical Theology reveals more kinds of arrangement at work than simple chronological procedure. For example, the article on “City” proceeds by a brief note addressing historical cities in the ancient Near East, then groups the OT materials under the two headings of “Semi-nomadism and urban life in the OT,” and “Jerusalem and Babylon in the OT.”⁵⁴ Similarly, the article on “Blessing/Curse” gives an involved historical summary of blessing and cursing in other ancient Near Eastern cultures before dedicating separate sections to Deuteronomy and the rest of the OT.⁵⁵ A cursory examination of many other articles in that volume reveals them to be arranged by aspects concerning a particular topic, not biblical chronology. Therefore, sifting and stratifying of the material has been the decisive point in its presentation. By way of contrast, the article on “Law” proceeds by looking at the topic throughout the course of how it is treated in the Pentateuch, the Former Prophets, the Latter Prophets, and the Writings, taking an approach that is determined by the shape of the canon rather than grouping materials by broad emphases.⁵⁶ While there is no need to insist that one approach is qualitatively better than the other, it is the latter method of arrangement that will be pursued in the present study.

After the relevant passages have been explored and compared, the challenge arises of articulating an illustrative schema that can accurately handle the perspectives found in the investigation. For example, to invoke the disputed and convoluted issue of the monarchy, one could possibly chart a developmental progression of attitudes toward the institution, as though at different times the text is to differing degrees positive or

⁵⁴ Arnold, “City, Citizenship,” 414–415.

⁵⁵ Evans, “Blessing/Curse,” 397–401.

⁵⁶ Kruse, “Law,” 629–636.

negative throughout the implied chronology of the canon. Alternatively, some⁵⁷ have suggested that due to the various conflicting traditions found within even individual books, it is not even meaningful to speak of a given book or passage to have a determinate perspective; rather, it would be a more accurate descriptive tool to plot multiple competing perspectives towards the institution throughout the canon. For the purposes of the present study, it will suffice to state that the materials concerning a particular topic will be examined and evaluated on the basis of which one seems to make the best sense of the witness of the text itself.⁵⁸ A word of clarification is necessary at this point. As noted above in the survey of methodological approaches used in the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, many concepts that are discussed in the OT may have multiple uses, symbolic or otherwise. Therefore, where a given concept is clearly used frequently for different purposes, it would seem prudent to differentiate these purposes and examine the progression of their occurrences separately, as well as taking into consideration its broader context in redemptive history.

When charting materials that stretch across the canon, the question inevitably arises of how to organize materials that have been treated with various historical reconstructions. While the present study intends to survey and interact with traditional

⁵⁷ Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 27–28. Dempster supplies the following memorable quote from Murphy, “Questions Concerning Biblical Theology,” 82–83: “It is neither possible nor desirable to find a unity in the literary witness. The proof of that is that fact that no one has succeeded in capturing the alleged unity. The great variety of the literature, which practically everyone admits, prevents any unity worthy of the name. One cannot expect a unity from a literature that was composed of oral and written traditions over a period of a thousand years.”

⁵⁸ When different texts seem to be giving differing viewpoints on a theme, it can be helpful to judge whether they are in fact addressing somewhat different issues or if in fact a progression of a theme is taking place. For example, when one examines the secondary literature that has accumulated around the slave laws of the Pentateuch (see ch. 3), a great deal of the developments postulated between the various sections of the codes are based on a somewhat uncritical assumption of genuine contradiction taking place.

diachronic criticism, its own structuring of the materials will follow the final form of the Tanakh. This is similar to the approach of Boda, who states:

It is the canonical form and shape of the Old Testament that will structure this study. This means, first of all, that it will focus on the canonical form of the various books of the Old Testament, rather than on critically determined precanonical levels. For instance, the Torah will be investigated...in terms of the message of its canonical units, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Second, it will focus on the canonical shape of the books of the Old Testament, which means the canonical place of books will be taken into account in the study...For instance, because the Torah is placed first in the Old Testament, it will be treated as an introduction to the canonical collection.⁵⁹

On a more practical methodological note, Boda also provides some helpful thoughts regarding the identification of relevant material. Earlier approaches that relied strictly on word studies to analyze theological concepts were overly simplistic and based on a faulty understanding of language, and thus it is necessary to take into account not just relevant lexemes, but also the range of “collocations and images” that provide relevant content to the theme in question.⁶⁰ Additionally, this emphasis on the final form of the Jewish Hebrew Canon,⁶¹ as opposed to the book order found in the Septuagint that has been followed for the modern Christian Bible can be defended on the basis that it is likely the New Testament writers favored the Jewish divisions of the OT books, even as they read and wrote in Greek.⁶² Some scholars have objected to this utilization of the Tanakh order, however. Dempster describes the conclusions of some scholars, highlighting Gunneweg⁶³ as being representative, that argue that, “the Tanakh’s hermeneutical lens highlights the Torah’s interpretive priority, which in his view results in a ‘legalistic understanding of

⁵⁹ Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, 5.

⁶⁰ Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, 6–7.

⁶¹ Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 666; Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, 9. Despite the variances in book order found within differing versions of the Tanakh, a general stability exists within each subsection.

⁶² Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, 8–9. Boda also notes some variances in ordering of books found in various collections of the Tanakh. For further discussion, see Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 37–43.

⁶³ Gunneweg, *Understanding the Old Testament*.

the canon', as opposed to the more prophetic Christian view."⁶⁴ Nonetheless, the Jewish ordering of the OT books does not dictate an exclusively legalistic analysis of their contents. Dempster highlights several scholars who have worked on the Tanakh from a Christian perspective, and states of their detractors, "A notable oversight in these views is the failure to view the Tanakh as one text and not just as three."⁶⁵ Significantly, from the perspective of Christian theology, the concept of progressive revelation provides strong grounds for reading the OT in a progressivist rather than law-centered manner. On this topic the thoughts of systematician Erickson are worth quoting at length:

A final criterion relates to the matter of progressive revelation. If we understand God to have worked in a process of accomplishing redemption for man [*sic*], revealing himself and his plan gradually, we will weight later developments more heavily than earlier ones. The assumption is that we have transient forms in the earlier cases, and that the latest case is the final form. If there is an element of absoluteness about it, we may conclude that the latest case expresses the essence of the doctrine in which the earlier varieties participated by way of anticipation... In some cases, the essence of a doctrine was not explicitly realized within biblical times.⁶⁶

Erickson later clarifies and nuances his use of the word "progressive":

We should also note that this revelation is *progressive*. Some care needs to be exercised in the use of this term, for it has sometimes been used to represent the idea of a gradual evolutionary development. This is not what we have in mind. That approach, which flourished under liberal scholarship, regarded sections of the Old Testament as virtually obsolete and false; they were only very imperfect approximations of the truth. The idea which we are here suggesting, however, is that later revelation builds upon earlier revelation. It is complementary and supplementary to it, not contradictory.⁶⁷

While this concept of progressive revelation is enlightening for the present study, it is somewhat nebulous as employed in systematic discussion. Erickson does not clarify if

⁶⁴ Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 37. He also notes the equally damning words of Gese: "A Christian theology...[may] never sanction the masoretic canon since this would virtually sever continuity with the New Testament." (38)

⁶⁵ Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 38.

⁶⁶ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 123–124. Erickson then notes slavery as an example of a doctrine whose ideal was not realized within the Bible itself.

⁶⁷ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 197.

this progression in revelation is found in the original forms (and diachronic origins) of the biblical texts, in the historical events and experiences recounted in the biblical texts, or in one of the canonical shapes into which the biblical materials have been arranged.

Most significantly for the present study, the concept of progressive revelation has specifically been applied to biblical theology by Vos. In the introduction to his *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, Vos compares the concepts of Revelation and Redemption, noting that while redemption is by nature carried out chronologically, revelation constitutes the analysis and understanding of that redemption and as such, for this time revelation has ceased while redemption continues.⁶⁸ History is the theater of this revelation, and this process is progressive and organic. Helpfully employing the illustration of a plant or tree, Vos handily answers the claim that earlier phases of revelation are relativized or imperfect by noting that although a seed grows gradually into a tree, one does not argue “that in the qualitative sense the seed is less perfect than the tree.”⁶⁹ Additionally, at different times this revelation may progress with differing amounts of continuity or rapidity. As Vos states, “Where redemption takes slow steps, or becomes quiescent, revelation proceeds accordingly. But redemption, as is well known, is eminently organic in its progress. It does not proceed with uniform motion, but rather is ‘epochal’ in its onward stride.”⁷⁰ Proceeding to address potentially false conclusions drawn from the diversity of scripture, Vos instead stresses the rich complexity of God’s truth: “It is urged that the discovery of so considerable an amount of variableness and differentiation in the Bible must be fatal to the belief in its absoluteness...but infallibility

⁶⁸ Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 5–6.

⁶⁹ Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 7.

⁷⁰ Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 7.

is not inseparable from dull uniformity.”⁷¹ Therefore, based on the Christian understanding of revelation as unfolding the progress of redemption, a linear rather than law-centered approach to the Tanakh can be considered a legitimate object of study.⁷²

That said, it is important to clarify that the present study does not intend to claim that such an approach to the Tanakh is the only proper way it should be studied.⁷³ Rather it is choosing the Tanakh as an object of study in order to investigate the literary effect created by its ordering of the books, to analyze the shaping of this particular canon. In response to those who claim that the structure of the Tanakh intentionally defies a progressivist reading, it can be stated that nevertheless an unfolding story of redemption is told throughout.⁷⁴ Even though the material is hardly always arranged chronologically, in keeping with Dempster's literary/theological focus⁷⁵ a definite telos is created by the unraveling narrative from Genesis through the post-exilic prophets, punctuated by the writings and capped by Chronicles, a statement of the “eschatological ending”⁷⁶ of a literary unity. Although this ordering of the books does not necessarily follow either the

⁷¹ Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 8.

⁷² It must of course be acknowledged that Vos worked within the Christian Old Testament rather than the Tanakh.

⁷³ Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 666–7. Childs notes the existence of a multiplicity of canonical orderings, citing studies that have argued that the order reflected in the LXX in fact predates the Talmudic order, concluding that the Jewish ordering should be given “priority,” but need not be considered superior to other orderings.

⁷⁴ Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible*. Rendtorff has written a theology of the Tanakh that, while acknowledging the shadow of Torah looming over all of its composite parts (5–6) nonetheless follows the unfolding of the redemptive story within. Particularly instructive are his insights on the canonical placement of Chronicles, which not only serves to exemplify the best examples of monarchy, temple worship, and obedience to the Mosaic law (403), but more importantly, points ahead by signifying a new beginning of the return from exile in Persia and addressing those “who bear the responsibility for Israel’s future.”

⁷⁵ Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*. 43. Specifically, this refers to Dempster’s viewing of the OT as a “Text” rather than a collection of disparate “texts,” due to the bare fact of its canonization. Dempster states, “if it is the case that the Hebrew canon is also a Text with a definite beginning, middle, ending, and plot, then the task of discovering a fundamental theme becomes not an exercise in futility but an imperative of responsible hermeneutics.”

⁷⁶ Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*. 42. For some preliminary thoughts concerning how Chronicles can be “eschatological,” see the insights of Rendtorff quoted in note 74 above.

chronology of the events described or the order of the writing (or final redaction) of each individual book contained, it is a literary ordering nonetheless deliberately created, and thus is worthy lens through which to read the OT.

3. A Canonical Reading of a Passage

Marshalling the results of the examinations of the different themes across the canon, the passage at hand will be read in such a way that it is situated on the developmental progression of these different themes.

This style of canonical exegesis differs from that of Lyons,⁷⁷ for whom the “canonical” aspect of exegesis seems to consist chiefly of highlighting similarities of phrasing and parallel concepts throughout the canon in the midst of a rather standard exegesis of Gen 18–19; this rather mundane exercise concludes with some reflections on the theme of justice throughout the OT in light of the example of Gen 18–19.⁷⁸

Concerning his exegetical practice, while there is nothing directly objectionable about such an endeavour, the identification of other occurrences of words and concepts in the canon is a common practice in commentating (and translation!) that simply does not merit a special title of its own. Also, given the explosion of post-critical methodologies in the present exegetical climate, simply placing an emphasis on the final form of a text does not seem to merit the title of “canonical.” These criticisms also apply to the work of Childs (see above). The term “canonical” would seem to be appropriate only if it is used to encompass the final form of the canon as a whole in an acceptably thorough fashion. Similar terminological and methodological imprecision is found in the essays found in the edited volumes dedicated to Childs, *Canon, Theology, and Old Testament*

⁷⁷ Lyons, *Canon and Exegesis*, 150–253.

⁷⁸ Lyons, *Canon and Exegesis*, 253–259.

Interpretation and Theological Exegesis.⁷⁹ Six essays in these volumes in particular stand out as having certain continuity with the present study. While the pieces by Moberly, Smith, Lyke, Coats and Tucker all share the common similarity of looking at themes throughout certain parts of the canon (and thus bear resemblance to the previous section of this methodology), it is the essay of Towner that comes the closest to the intent of the present study by examining Dan 1 in the context of the food laws in the rest of the OT.⁸⁰

Therefore, in light of the above critiques of Lyons and Childs, the present study can be situated as an attempt to develop a thorough and comprehensive examination of relevant canonical themes for the reading of a passage. This approach would view itself as only a part of the exegetical task and not an overarching framework into which to situate other methods. This constitutes both an attempt to articulate a vastly more rigorous and nuanced version of what is already a common practice in commentating (see survey of literature in previous chapter) and more simply, an attempt at definitional precision, at delineating precisely what is meant by calling exegesis “canonical.”

Further clarity is necessary, however, in explicating what it means to read a given passage through the lens of the development of a given biblical theme. The simple fact of a given passage’s placement within the larger contexts of book and canon necessitates it

⁷⁹ Seitz and Greene-McCreight, *Theological Exegesis*; Tucker et al., *Canon, Theology, and Old Testament Interpretation*.

⁸⁰ Moberly, “Toward an Interpretation of the Shema,” 124–144; Smith, “Matters of Space and Time in Exodus and Numbers,” 182–207; Lyke, “The Song of Songs, Proverbs, and the Theology of Love,” 208–223; Coats, “Healing and the Moses Traditions,” 131–146; Tucker, “The Law in the Eighth-Century Prophets,” 201–216; Towner, “Daniel 1 in the Context of the Canon,” 285–298. Moberly looks at the concept of love (of God and neighbour) in Deuteronomy, then briefly in the rest of the canon. Smith examines the function of geographical and temporal references in Exodus and Numbers and concludes with some reflections on how these markers function in the broader context of the Pentateuch. Lyke examines the spring imagery from the Song of Solomon by comparing it with similar imagery primarily found in Proverbs and Genesis. Coats examines some echoes of Moses’ healing activity in the rest of the canon. Tucker looks at what the eighth century prophets knew of the law and how they interpreted it. Towner reviews the traditional diachronic analysis of Daniel as reflecting Jewish traditions in the Maccabean period, then examines how it functions when read canonically, interacting with the OT food laws and its implications for the understanding of Daniel’s intentions.

being understood in light of the materials that surround it. The source critical approaches surveyed in the previous chapter were noted as being atomistic for focusing narrowly on a projected situation that led to the composition of a particular passage, to the neglect of the function of the passage in its larger context. Likewise, while the evangelical scholars surveyed showed great interest in the function of a passage within its immediate and book-wide contexts, there seemed to be dissension within their ranks as to how to evaluate later relevant canonical materials, and to what extent such materials should be allowed to bear on the interpretation of the passage at hand. While the methodology of Childs (see above) was primarily focused on the final form of the canon and yet inconsistent in its usage of conventional source and form criticism, and thus not interested in addressing this particular question posed by the present study, the method of canon criticism innovated by Sanders does somewhat speak to this concern. Unlike Childs, Sanders emphasizes the multiplicity of historical and confessional canons and argues that it is the context created by these collections that create the ultimate “meaning” of a passage, as opposed to the assumption of the priority of the original meaning dominant in critical scholarship.⁸¹ Furthermore, different levels of meaning can be built around a passage by noting similarities and differences between how it is used in its original context and how later texts either modify it or provide a broader context in which it can be situated.⁸² While the present study does not intend to exhume the canonical process in the style of Sanders, his comments on the topics mentioned above are relevant and insightful. In *Canon and Community*, he argues, much in line with Childs, that the Scriptures passed through a long process including the original moment of speaking,

⁸¹ Sweeney, “Canonical Criticism,” 47–8.

⁸² Sweeney, “Canonical Criticism,” 48.

hearing, editing, redacting, and so forth before being preserved in the canon.⁸³ Sanders uses the term “multivalency” to signify the fact of a given passage morphing in meaning when examined in broadening contexts. He states:

A primary character of canon is its *adaptability* as well as its *stability*...Repetition of a community value in a context other than that of its ‘original’ provenance...introduces the possibility, some would say necessity, of *resignification* of that value to some limited extent...Hence the character of the value was both to some extent *stable* and to some extent *adaptable*.⁸⁴

He then cites the list of David’s men in 2 Sam 23:8–39 as a surprising example of this phenomenon. While its earliest form may have had no intention beyond being a list, Sanders observes that when examined in the larger context of 2 Samuel it serves to illustrate faithful believers in the true God, those who served under the king of Israel and were used by God. Therefore, he notes that depending on the communitarian horizon in which the text is situated, its meanings can include, “recalling past glory to retain present identity, or anticipation of reestablishment of the monarchy, or expectations in an eschatological context, or challenge by a Judas Maccabaeus, perhaps, to keep the troops in tow.”⁸⁵ He further distances himself from Childs by noting that while Childs seeks to focus his analysis on the final form of the canonical text,⁸⁶ he himself is interested in all stages of the canon’s formation, including the time period after it was finalized in which various interpretive methods adapted it to further contexts.⁸⁷ Thus borrowing aspects of the thought of Childs and Sanders, the present study will look at a given passage and analyze the layers of meaning that accumulate through a comparison of the viewpoint of

⁸³ Sanders, *Canon and Community*, xvii. Sanders invokes the role of the Holy Spirit in this process, and to illustrate his point, states, “It is not Jeremiah who is canonical; it is the Jeremiah books that are canonical.”

⁸⁴ Sanders, *Canon and Community*, 28.

⁸⁵ Sanders, *Canon and Community*, 22–3.

⁸⁶ Whether Childs is successful in achieving this aim is disputable. See discussion above.

⁸⁷ Sanders, *Canon and Community*, 25.

that passage with additional (and possibly different) perspectives given on a topic through the course of thematically relevant passages in the canon. More concretely, the three divisions of the Tanakh will provide convenient resting places from which to stop and compare the passage at hand with the relevant materials inside the boundaries of the given section. Smaller subsections may be employed when it is logistically expedient to do so.

4. Concluding Thoughts

Thus, the present study, in seeking to read a given passage through the lens of later canonical materials, acknowledges a certain amount of “multivalence” present in texts in the sense outlined by Sanders above. It is therefore a legitimate interpretive exercise to differentiate between an isolated point of a passage (restricted to its immediate book wide context) and the continuities and discontinuities that emerge when it is compared with literature found in other surrounding books of the same collection. However, in contradistinction to the evangelical scholars surveyed in the previous chapter who saw little use for reading a given passage in light of later material, the priority of the final form of the canon as the culmination of the preserved witness would seem to elevate the perspective given by later materials to greater canonical weight and status than the “original” form of the text in question,⁸⁸ when careful exegesis determines that a genuine divergence exists between their perspectives. Thus an earlier passage is not relativized or

⁸⁸ Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority Volume IV*, 213. A word of caution is necessary at this point to guard against a potentially unorthodox interpretation of this concept. Article V of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy states, “We affirm that God’s revelation within the Holy Scripture was progressive. We deny that later revelation, which may fulfill earlier revelation, ever corrects or contradicts it. We further deny that any normative revelation as been given since the completion of the New Testament writings.” Any such development must be understood in terms of an outgrowth of an embryonic idea rather than the outright negation of an earlier teaching.

denigrated (see section on Vos above), but one can situate it within a progression of unfolding information on a topic.

CHAPTER THREE: SLAVERY IN THE PENTATEUCH

A. Introduction

It is the intention of this chapter to trace the materials relevant to slavery across the Pentateuch, with particular attention given to discerning the perspectives on the ethicality of the institution throughout. The results of this study will be organized by the individual books of the Torah, with a special section for an analysis of the main slave codes, and a final section providing a reading of Gen 47:13–26 by way of comparison with the other slave materials in the Pentateuch.

As the possible meanings of עבד and its cognates and synonyms¹ are many and varied, many previous summations of slavery in the OT have presented their results in preformed categories.² While the perspective of the present study will not significantly deviate from that of the works previously noted, its presentation of these different categories and symbolic functions within the Pentateuch will seek to be based on the shape of the books themselves. Some statistics on its occurrences are provided by *TDOT*.³ As a verb, it appears a total of 289 times, the vast majority being in the Qal. The noun has 805 occurrences. Ringgren also emphasizes the lackluster number of occurrences of the forms in the wisdom and prophetic literature. Naturally, many other words and

¹ While עבד and the related nouns עֶבֶד and עֲבָדָה are of central importance, one cannot overlook אָמָה and שִׁפְחָה which refer to female slaves or maidservants. מַס is another word that can be used to describe the institution of forced labour. For an overview of the various uses and meanings of מַס, see North, “*mas, sebel*” 427–430.

² So Ringgren, “*abad*,” 376–405; Harrill, “Slavery,” 299–308; Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 261–262; Gesenius, *A Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 712–714; *HALOT*, 773–777. Various categories include kings that are vassals, people described as servants of the LORD, and the use of “your servant” as an obsequious method of address. The present study will introduce its own set of categories. See below.

³ Ringgren, “*abad*,” 381.

phrases are used to reference slavery, including *שָׁבָה*, *מָכַר*,⁴ *סָבַל*, and various ways of referring to the Exodus from Egypt (see below).

The diversity of uses and meanings of *עֶבֶד* poses a difficulty for the present study. Not only does it signify various social institutions from worship, to work, to forced labour, it is often used in different ways within the same pericope or even the same verse, as in Exod 9:20, where it is mentioned that Pharaoh's servants have their own servants or slaves.⁵ Accordingly, while it is tempting to make much of these various meanings, it is difficult to ascertain to what extent the original reading audience would have seen intentional wordplay in the movements from slavery to human masters to slavery to God, or from serving Pharaoh to serving (worshipping) God.

It would be appropriate at this point to briefly survey some material relating to the social position and functions of slaves in the ancient Near East. Dandamayev notes that most slaves were privately owned but that information about the tasks they performed is scanty. Tentatively noting references to shepherding, herding, and "cultivating the land" as examples, he notes that it is difficult to differentiate "actual slave labor" and "hired free labor."⁶ Callender describes chattel-slavery as involving the sale of persons and their being treated as property;⁷ Chirichigno states, "it is most likely that chattel-slaves were treated more harshly than debt-slaves."⁸ Callender then differentiates chattel-slavery from debt-slavery. He states, "Israelites who became heavily indebted could be forced to

⁴ For an overview of the uses and meanings of *מָכַר*, see Lipinski, "*mkr*," 290–296.

⁵ Baker, *Tight Fists*, 111. This phenomena of social stratification is helpfully illuminated by Baker, who states, "In some contexts, the term 'slave' could refer to any hierarchal inferior."

⁶ Dandamayev, "Slavery(OT)," 64.

⁷ Callender, "Servants of God(s) and Servants of Kings," 74.

⁸ Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 145.

surrender or sell children or themselves as ‘men-servants’ (*bd*) or ‘women-servants’ (*mh*) to the creditor.”⁹ Significantly, this type of servitude typically carried with it a restriction on the amount of time it could continue. As Ringgren reports, “The Code of Hammurabi stipulates that a debt slave was to serve for three years, and in the fourth was to be released.”¹⁰ Due to the high costs of feeding and clothing chattel-slaves, it was often more economical to simply hire free labourers, and thus chattel-slavery was never a widespread practice.¹¹ Nevertheless, the institution lent itself well to a variety of symbolic and ideological purposes. For example, some Mesopotamian creation stories depicted humans as being made to be servants of the gods and perform work for them.¹² A lack of clarity regarding the roles of slaves is observed by Chirichigno, who states that two clear social classes existed in ancient Israel, “free citizens,” (who could become debt-slaves) and “chattel-slaves.” However, there seemed to be a trend of free citizens being taken advantage of by larger landowners starting as early as the Solomonic period, leading to larger levels of debt-slavery.¹³ At the same time, it seems that some chattel-slaves were able to earn their freedom. At this point Chirichigno cautions,

These slaves, however, must be differentiated from the foreign captives and conscripts who worked for the various palace households and industries...there was a clear distinction between chattel- and debt-slaves, since chattel-slaves most likely did not have individual rights to redemption...in the Old Testament legal corpora the term עֶבֶד ‘slave’ is used to designate both chattel- and debt-slaves. Therefore, it is often difficult to distinguish between chattel- and debt-slaves in the biblical legal corpora.¹⁴

⁹ Callender, “Servants of God(s) and Servants of Kings,” 74.

¹⁰ Ringgren, “*abad*,” 389.

¹¹ Callender, “Servants of God(s) and Servants of Kings,” 71; Baker, *Tight Fists*, 112–113. Baker states, “It seems that the number of chattel slaves in the ancient Near East was less than in Greco-Roman society, though in both cases they constituted a minority of the population.” For additional support for this assertion he footnotes the treatments of Dandamayev, Greengus, Mendelsohn, and Westermann.

¹² Callender, “Servants of God(s) and Servants of Kings,” 71–72.

¹³ Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 140–141.

¹⁴ Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 141–2.

Therefore, despite the convoluted nature of the broader debate (and the multiplicity of secondary sources that can be found defending a number of different positions on which type of slavery is being addressed in a given passage) Chirichigno is quite confident that close attention to definitions and context can provide clarity when attempting to differentiate between the two in the process of exegesis.¹⁵

B. The Law

1. Methodological Considerations

Unsurprisingly, the various laws dealing with slavery are of great importance for this section. Therefore, while prominence will be given to the relevant portions of the Mosaic law, it will be necessary to survey other places where slavery is mentioned. Least helpful for the interest of the present study will be passages that simply report the existence of the institution but provide no apparent moral perspective on its practice, whether positive or negative. At the same time, it may be possible in some instances to discern a soft undertone of disavowal or approval based on the rhetorical approach of the narrator. The seemingly elementary distinction between materials intended to be prescriptive and materials intended to be descriptive,¹⁶ as difficult as it can be to discern in some cases, is at times overlooked by scholars. A relevant example of this fallacy is found in Webb's study of the continuities and discontinuities between OT slave laws and comparable ANE legal materials. In three separate places in *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals* Webb creates lists of examples of OT slave laws and their ANE

¹⁵ Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 182–184. Here Chirichigno summarizes his conclusions regarding terminology. He also notes that passages that regard slaves as property of their masters are more likely discussing chattel-slavery than debt slavery. Additionally, the addition of “Hebrew” to the noun “slave” seems to generally indicate that debt- rather than chattel-slavery is being addressed. Other contextual factors can prove illuminating, for example, the suggestion that laws advocating slaves join their masters in religious festivals could be addressing chattel- rather than debt-slavery, because debt slaves would likely worship with their own families instead.

¹⁶ Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 355.

counterparts.¹⁷ However, in the midst of these lists that otherwise quite helpfully illustrate the “redemptive” function of Israelite slave laws as compared to other cultures at the time, Webb inserts as an example of a less progressive feature of Israelite society the use of slaves for procreative purposes as found in the narratives of Gen 16:1–4; 30:3–4, 9–10; 35:22.¹⁸ Its placement within a list of otherwise legal material would seem to flatten the distinction between the explicit teachings of the law and a narrative recounting of a practice, which if one pays attention to the outcomes described by the narrator, may be in fact having its ethicality disavowed by the text.¹⁹ Therefore, the present study will give greatest prominence to explicitly instructional material, while attempting to discern ideological slant or intent in less direct treatments of the subject. Additionally, imagistic use of slavery is important and will be examined as well.

After the initial survey of references to slavery in each book of the Pentateuch was conducted, it was apparent that each use of subservience language or references to slavery fit clearly inside one of the eleven categories listed below. Furthermore, the relevance of each category to the ideological slant of the narrator regarding servitude will be listed.

1. Prediction of slavery/subservience as a curse. Highly relevant, obviously portrays (some form of) slavery as something negative and a punishment.
2. Possession of slaves as blessing/gift. Highly relevant, shows that (some form of) slavery is not only permissible, but something the wealthy could be expected to have.

¹⁷ Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals*, 44, 74–6, 163–4.

¹⁸ Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals*, 44. An additional feature actually makes this particular list even more subjective than described above. Here, Webb simply slots slavery texts into two categories, “Already Some Movement,” and “Needing Further Movement,” but based on what he does not specify.

¹⁹ So the copulation with Hagar led to the consternation of Sarai and the descendants of Ishmael; Jacob’s impregnation of his wives’s maidservants was largely because of their mutual jealousy, and Reuben’s tryst with Bilhah was considered a very shameful act that led to his firstborn status being revoked.

3. Descriptions of slave activity. Minimal relevance, falling more into the category of the descriptive (see above).
4. Rhetorical self-description (relating to human). Minimal relevance, except for the handful of cases in which it occurs in situations where actual slavery is involved.
5. Rhetorical description of persons (relating to divine). Moderately relevant, as it is sometimes used in contrast to literal slavery to attack (some form of) the exercise of the institution.
6. Descriptions of someone being sold into slavery. Minimal relevance, except when the rhetorical function it serves in the narrative is clearly discernable.
7. Descriptions of harshness of slavery. Minimal relevance, except when the rhetorical function it serves in the narrative is clearly discernable.
8. Worship. Moderately relevant, as it is sometimes used in contrast to literal slavery to attack (some form of) the exercise of the institution.
9. Reminders of God's deliverance from Egypt. Highly relevant, as it clearly states deliverance from (some form of) slavery as something to be rejoiced in, in addition to being used in some cases to legitimate the avoidance of (some forms of) slavery.
10. Direct legal instruction. Highly relevant, but the precise implications of such passages must be evaluated on a case by case basis.
11. Serving idols. Moderately relevant, as it is sometimes used in contrast to literal slavery to attack (some form of) the exercise of the institution.

Although these categories will not be explicitly referenced in the book surveys below, they provide a framework for classifying references to servitude throughout the Pentateuch.

2. Genesis

A simple search of all related cognates of the root עבד returns 111 results in Genesis.²⁰ Many of these are irrelevant to the present study, comprising generic descriptions of working or simple reports that an individual possessed slaves or servants.

²⁰ All searches in this study were performed with BibleWorks 8. In this particular book, searches for אָמָה and שִׁפְחָה were mostly redundant and in cases of relevancy were usually combined with occurrences of עבד.

The following section will attempt to condense the different references to slavery into categories of function and perspective. This is more expedient than simply proceeding through each successive occurrence of the term due to the high number of repetitive kinds of uses of the term. Additionally, by compiling data regarding kinds of usage on a book by book or section by section level, one is far better equipped to discern changes in use or perspective over the course of the Tanakh than if one simply superimposed categories of kinds of use over the entire Tanakh.

The first relevant reference to slavery, or at least subservience in Genesis is found in the cursing of Ham's son Canaan in 9:25–27. Whatever the nature of Ham's offence, it is clear that this kind of servanthood for which his descendants are destined²¹ is considered to be a shameful punishment for his misbehaviour.²²

The use of slaves as a gift is found in 12:16, 20:14,²³ and 32:5. Additionally, in 24:35 and 30:43 possession of slaves is assumed to be a sign of blessing. This is quite similar to 27:29, 37 where the idea of nations in subservience is used in a blessing formula.

²¹ In v. 25, Noah states that Canaan will be a “servant of servants” (עֶבֶד עֲבָדִים) to his brothers, a forceful phrase found nowhere else in the OT. The phrase “and let Canaan be his servant” (וַיְהִי כְנָעַן עֶבֶד) (לְמוֹ) is found in both vv. 26 and 27.

²² Robertson, “Current Critical Questions,” 177–188; Wittenberg, “Let Canaan Be His Slave,” 46–56. Although these sources give a helpful overview of various interpretations of Ham's offence, observations on the precise meaning of his servanthood in the curse are lacking. If slavery in this case is used somewhat loosely to mean subordination to other nations, there is no problem, but if it is interpreted more narrowly to signify forced service to another people group, one encounters the problem of why the later Israelites were instructed to simply annihilate the Canaanites. This anomaly is simply glossed over by Robertson, “Current Critical Questions,” 185–186, as he correctly emphasizes the eventual ethnic universalism inherent in the promise, but simply notes that the destruction inflicted by Joshua was a “major fulfillment of this prophecy.” The error of the opposite extreme is committed by Wittenberg, “Let Canaan Be His Slave,” 53–54, who simply assumes a compositional context of the public works projects of the united monarchy, making the bizarre assertion that forced labour of the Canaanites was never widespread in the time of the conquest. This also fails to make sense of the canonical function of the text. See further discussion in chapter 4.

²³ Note that in 12:16 the giving of servants to Abram is stated to be part of Pharaoh's generosity to him, while 20:14 merely reports the gifting of men and women.

A double sided promise involves slavery in 15:13, 14. God informs Abram that his offspring will spend 400 years in slavery, but that they will be eventually set free by God's power and witness mighty judgement on their oppressors while accumulating material wealth.

The diversity of tasks for servants can be seen by comparing the apparently high standing of Abraham's unnamed servant (24:2), possibly originally intended by Abram to be his heir (15:2, 3) with the labour of heavy digging performed by Isaac's servants in 26:19, 25. Additionally, the relationship Jacob entered into with Laban is repeatedly characterized with עֶבֶד in chs. 29–31. Servants were sometimes given away (29:24, 29). A diversity of servant positions in the household of Pharaoh is also apparent, as 48:10 even applies this title to the cupbearer and the baker. Interestingly, Joseph is only called עֶבֶד by Potiphar's wife in 39:17, 19, and by the cupbearer in 41:12. Other attendants of Pharaoh are mentioned elsewhere, such as 50:7.

A significant amount of the occurrences of עֶבֶד in Genesis are due to the rhetorical device of referring to oneself as the "servant" of another.²⁴ This rhetorical use of language denoting subservience takes on a different dimension when applied to

²⁴ Dandamayev, "Slavery(OT)," 62. See also discussion in Ringgren, "*abad*," 392–3. Dandamayev describes this social practice by stating, "the term was used as a sign of servility in reference to oneself when addressing persons of higher rank." This attitude of self-effacement can convey either extreme respect for one much greater or additionally, tacit admission of fear of a party that would have reason to extract revenge. Unsurprisingly, this expression is used not only during the display of hospitality Abraham gives to the three men representing the LORD in 18:3, 5, but also Lot's initial offer of lodging and subsequent demand of a more convenient location of escape in 19:2, 19. It is also used to signify the favor shown to Abraham by God and the response of obedience by the latter in 26:24.

relationships between humans instead of between humans and a divine being as noted previously.²⁵

However, the most significant rhetorical ascription of servanthood to oneself occurs in the dialogues of Joseph's brothers with Joseph. Before discovering his true identity, they refer to themselves as "his servants" multiple times (42:10, 11, 13; 44:7, 18, 19, 21, 23, 32). Even with their father Jacob absent from the encounter, they do not hesitate to describe him as a "servant" of Joseph as well (43:28; 44:24, 27, 30, 31). In their anxiety to obtain desperately needed food, they do not hesitate to offer themselves into literal servitude in 44:9, 16, 33 (with Joseph accepting this agreement in 44:10, 17); this is in spite of the fact that earlier in 43:18 they express fear that Joseph will force them into service to himself. After the brothers discover who Joseph truly is and some measure of reconciliation is effected, Joseph instructs them to use this same kind of self identification when addressing Pharaoh in 46:34, and their obedience on this point is recorded in 47:3, 4. A curious sign that the brother's apprehension about Joseph's possible extraction of revenge has not completely subsided is evident in 50:17, as the brothers relay a message allegedly from Jacob instructing Joseph to show forgiveness. Here, the brothers refer to themselves as "servants of the God of your father," thereby linking shared piety with familial continuity. The final occurrence of this theme is in 50:18, in which the brothers prostrate themselves before Joseph and declare themselves to be his servants.

²⁵ It is used as a self-description multiple times by Jacob as he prepares to meet Esau after departing from Laban. Fearful of Esau's revenge, Jacob undoubtedly sought to portray himself as humbly as possible in order to soften his brother's anger and minimize the possibility of revenge in his addresses in 32:4, 11; 32:18, 21; 33:5, 14. This is highly ironic given the earlier material that prophesies the subordination of Esau to Jacob while both boys were still in the womb (25:23), and the similar pronouncement in Isaac's dubious blessing on Esau in 27:40.

Somewhat reminiscent of the interplay between the rhetorical and literal nature of servant language in the above example is the presence of both these aspects in the passage that is the focus of the present study. In 47:19, 25 the people declare themselves to be servants of Pharaoh, thereby employing both the rhetorical aspect in cautiously approaching one who has power over their lives, and the literal aspect, as they had been reduced to physical servitude.

One of the most significant slavery related events of Genesis is Joseph's being sold into slavery. The verb **מָכַר** is featured significantly when his descent into bondage is described and referenced (37:27, 28, 36; 45:4, 5). It may be noteworthy that every instance of this verb in Genesis is in some way related to subservience or bondage. In 25:31, 33 Esau sells his birthright to Jacob, thereby confirming the earlier predictions of his future state of servitude. Additionally, in 31:15 Rachel and Leah state that Laban "sold" them to Jacob. It also occurs twice in the central passage in this study, in 47:20, 22 as the narrator reports the people sell their land, yet the priests were not required to sell their land.

In conclusion, to speak of a value judgement on the institution of slavery emerging from Genesis is a paradoxical notion. From the above data, it is clear that one could be called a slave as a form of a curse and that it was a station in life to be avoided. The kinds of subservience described vary widely, from being the head of a household to performing backbreaking labour. At the same time, the possession of slaves was considered a blessing and they could be given as a gift. The rhetorical self ascription of servanthood is often used in such a way as to appease an overlord and escape falling into

physical bondage, while its lone use in relation to the divine suggests that this theme is yet undeveloped at this point.

3. Exodus 1–19

The portion of the book of Exodus that precedes the giving of the law at Sinai recounts the nation of Israel’s bitter experience of the bondage of slavery and God’s miraculous deliverance of the Hebrews from under the hand of their Egyptian oppressors. Unsurprisingly, this portion of scripture contains many references to slavery. A multitude of terms are used in 1:11–14, 5:9, 11 and 6:5 to convey the harshness with which the Israelites were treated, including the familiar עבד and עבֹדָה, סְבִלָה (rendered by the ESV as “heavy burdens”), and the verb עָנָה (rendered by the ESV as “afflicted”). Not unlike Genesis, עבד carries a rhetorical function when used interpersonally.²⁶ Blurring the line between rhetorical and figurative use of this phrase, the Israelites repeatedly address Pharaoh as “your servants” in 5:15, 16. The existence of servants/slaves of Pharaoh is noted throughout (5:21, 7:10, 20, 8:3, etc), and while this alone is relatively uninteresting, there is a reference noting that these servants themselves possess slaves (9:20), another indication of the diverse kinds of social stratification described by just one word.

The struggle to differentiate diverse meanings for one word from intentional wordplay noted above surfaces once more as one encounters the wealth of references to Israel serving and worshipping God (3:12, 4:23, 7:16, 26, 8:20, 9:1, 13; 10:3, 26), all of which use עבד (although עבֹדָה is used to this effect in 12:25, 26; 13:5). It is highly tempting to posit a deliberate distinction being established between “serving” the

²⁶ Moses addresses God as “your servant,” (4:10), and the narrator refers to Moses as a servant of God (14:31).

Egyptians and “serving God” in worship. This hypothesis becomes even more enticing when none less than the Egyptians (10:7) plead with Pharaoh to let Israel serve God, as the Egyptians have been practically ruined from all effects of the plagues. Furthermore, Pharaoh himself commands this in 10:8, 11, 24; 12:31.

Before and after the Israelites officially leave Egypt, this liberating act of God is considered to have substantial revelatory value, constituting an important part of his character and frequently used in self-descriptive contexts that validate his authority over his people. It is on this basis that the love of God and continuity with the object of patriarchal worship is evidenced (2:23–25; 6:6–7). Moses also underscores the importance of the Passover feast and its detailed regulations with this theme (13:3, 14).

Interestingly, in the giving of instructions around the time of the journey from Ramesses to Succoth (12:37), despite the fact that a dramatic overturning of social strata has just occurred, there is an assumption of the continuation of some form of slavery within Israelite society, particularly, slaves purchased by money (עֶבֶד אִישׁ מִקְנֵת-כֶּסֶף, 12:44), which are differentiated from hired servants (שָׂכִיר, 12:45). The Passover instructions allow the former to partake of the feast, but not the latter. Therefore, while the exodus event itself obviously makes much of God dramatically rescuing his people from the unjust bondage of slavery, there is clearly still room for different manifestations of the practice within Israelite society (though with inclusion of the underclass in the key religious celebration of emancipation).

4. Exodus 20–40

As the main laws regarding slavery in the Book of the Covenant are found in Exod 21:1–11, this section will be examined later in conjunction with Lev 25:39–55 and

Deut 15:12–18, as much debate exists regarding the relationship of these three sets of slave legislation and the possibilities of their harmonization.²⁷ However, several other didactic passages are of direct relevance to slavery. Slaves are to be given the rest on the Sabbath (20:10; 23:12), kidnapping is condemned and punishable by death (21:16), and the slave of a neighbour is not to be coveted (20:17). The goring laws (21:32) require the death of the bull in the case of the goring of a slave, as well as the payment of thirty shekels. This indicates that while the slave was considered to be a possession of his master, his own life was still valued.²⁸

Two passages discuss the limits of retribution against an owner that mistreats a slave. In 21:20–21, a beating with a rod that ends immediately in the slave's death will result in punishment for the owner, but if the slave survives for a couple of days, as Durham states, “he is to suffer no punishment beyond his financial loss in the death of his slave.”²⁹ In 21:26–27, the removal of an eye or tooth by an unjust master is enough to warrant the freedom of the slave.

Regarding other uses of subservience imagery, the action of God in Israel's deliverance from Egypt is used to inform his identity and legitimate his authority (20:2). The theme of worship is brought to the forefront in 23:25, which orders the Israelites to serve God, which contrasts to the worship of idols in 23:24. This theme is also addressed in 30:16 and 35:21. Elsewhere, עִבֹד is used for serving idols in 20:5 and 23:33. In Moses' prayer in 32:13, he refers to Abraham, Isaac and Israel (Jacob) as God's servants. In 29:46, God states that he is the one who brought Israel out of Egypt, which alludes to the

²⁷ McConville, “Old Testament Laws,” 260.

²⁸ Baker, *Tight Fists*, 48.

²⁹ Durham, *Exodus*, 323.

event of the Exodus without directly mentioning slavery. This “out of Egypt” (מִצְרַיִם) (מִצְרָיִם) phrase is used multiple times in the golden calf account of ch. 32. Here the people reference Moses as having brought them out of Egypt (32:1), and shortly declare the calf responsible for the deliverance (32:4). Informing Moses of this disturbance, God references Moses as having brought them out of Egypt (32:7), but in Moses’ impassioned plea for communal forgiveness, he states that God brought the people out of Egypt (32:11). Interestingly, in God’s affirmation that he will continue to enable the Israelites to complete their journey, he still describes Moses as the one who brought Israel out of Egypt (33:1).

5. Leviticus

The main legal matter dealing with slavery in Leviticus is found in 25:39–55. As noted above, it will be examined below in conjunction with the slave laws of Exodus and Deuteronomy. The most direct instructions regarding slavery elsewhere in the book are found in 19:20–22, where it is stated that if a man has sexual relations with a woman who is a slave, they will not be put to death, but he can make restitution with a guilt offering of a ram. In 22:10–11, it is commanded that a priest’s slave and his household may eat of the “holy things,” but a hired servant cannot. This is somewhat reminiscent of the Passover regulations of Exod 12:44–45, and would seem to indicate that slaves are afforded household privileges that would be denied to free workers. This contention would also seem to be supported when it is stated that the Sabbath of the land shall provide food for all, including slaves, in 25:6. Additionally, in 27:28 selling or redeeming a person previously devoted to the temple service of the Lord is prohibited. This is

clarified by Hartley, who states, “a person (אדם) who is devoted is a non-Israelite slave who has become the legal property of his master.”³⁰

One concept that is heavily repeated through Leviticus is that of God’s deliverance from slavery in Egypt. As was generally the case in the previous section on Exod 20–40,³¹ the institution of slavery is not directly mentioned but rather it is stated that the people were brought “out of Egypt” (מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם). This is used in a variety of contexts.³² Interestingly, the previously mentioned dilemma of differentiating intentional wordplay from simple multiple meanings of עֶבֶד seems to be resolved in favor of intentional wordplay in 25:42, 55 where Israelites are not to be sold as slaves on the basis that they are God’s slaves (or servants). On a different note, having other nations ruling over them is a punishment threatened for the Israelites if they are disobedient to God (26:17, 38). Interestingly, the previous part of the chapter that describes blessings for obedience does not describe ruling over other nations but instead chasing them and successfully cutting them down (26:7–8).

6. Numbers

The book of Numbers contains relatively few direct references to the institution of slavery. The most common use of עֶבֶד denotes tabernacle service, as it appears numerous times through the book’s descriptions of worship regulation, especially in chs. 3, 4, 8, and

³⁰ Hartley, *Leviticus*, 484.

³¹ The lone exception being Exod 20:2.

³² At the conclusion of laws prohibiting the consumption of creatures that crawl on the ground as an identification with God’s holiness (11:45), when commanding honesty in weights and measures (19:36), when describing acceptable animals for offerings (22:33), when giving instructions for the feast of booths (23:43), when commanding the Israelites to not take advantage of an impoverished brother (25:38), when mandating the release of slaves in the year of jubilee (25:42, 55), and at the beginning and conclusion of the list of blessings and curses that could be expected for obedience or disobedience (26:13, 45).

18. Aside from this, in one of Balaam's oracles (24:22), being taken into captivity (תִּשָּׁבֵד) is one of the curses pronounced upon the Kenites. Perhaps most significantly, שָׁבָה is used again in 31:9 as the Israelites take Midianite women and children captive in disobedience to the command to slaughter all the Midianites. This use of slavery in disobedience to absolute annihilation is a theme that will surface later in the conquest of Canaan narratives (see below).

The remembrance of the event of deliverance from Egypt also plays a noteworthy role in Numbers and is referenced several times in various contexts. Just as in Exod 20–40 (except for 20:2) and Leviticus, while the exit of Egypt is emphasized (מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם and equivalent phrases) the institution of slavery is not mentioned in these cases. Time is occasionally marked in the book by measuring the years and months from the Exodus event (1:1; 9:1; 33:38). Even Balak considers this fact significant enough to instruct his messengers to include it in the report about Israel (22:5, 11), and comically has it repeated to him as a sign of God's blessing on Israel in Balaam's oracles (23:22; 24:8). Elsewhere, it occurs at the conclusion of the stoning of the man caught gathering sticks on the Sabbath day as a reminder to carefully follow the law (15:41), and is referenced by Moses in his impassioned plea to the king of Edom for permission to pass through his territory (20:16). Subservience imagery also carries a rhetorical function in Numbers.³³

³³ In the wake of the people's ingratitude towards the provision of manna, Moses refers to himself as "your servant" when crying out to God (11:11). In his stinging rebuke of Aaron and Miriam's insubordination, God calls Moses his servant (12:7, 8). Following a promise that the generation of rebellious Israelites would not see the promised land (14:22–23), God calls Caleb his servant when promising that Caleb would see the land (14:24). The army officers address Moses as "your servants" when presenting the final tally of plunder in the aftermath of the raid of Midian noted above (31:49). Finally, in their suspicious request for property on the east side of the Jordan river, the men of Reuben and Gad call themselves "your servants" when addressing Moses in 32:4, 5, 25, 27, 31.

7. Deuteronomy

The main body of slave laws in Deuteronomy are found in 15:12–18, and this section will be examined below with the rest of the main stock of the slave legislation in the Pentateuch. A number of other passages didactically address slavery, however. The Sabbath rest includes slaves (5:14) and one's neighbour's female servant should not be coveted (5:21). Slaves take part in the worship of both the future temple in the promised land (12:12, 18) as well as future Passover celebrations (16:11, 14). The Israelites are commanded to make an offer of peace before attacking a city, and if the offer is accepted, to take the occupants and use them for forced labour (20:11). In the regulations concerning taking an attractive foreign captive of war as a wife (21:10–14), selling her as a slave in the event the union is found displeasing is explicitly prohibited. Returning an escaped slave to his former master is condemned as well; the slave shall have his choice of where to live (23:16–17). Kidnapping for the purpose of selling someone into slavery is condemned in 24:7.

The exodus from Egypt is referenced many times in Deuteronomy. Significantly, while the institution of slavery was often neglected in the occurrences of this remembrance formula in Exodus (except 13:3, 14; 20:2) and Numbers (see above), Deuteronomy includes it with the majority of the references to the exodus.³⁴ Sometimes the exodus is referenced using the phrase “from the house of slavery” (מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים) (5:6; 6:12; 7:8; 8:14; 13:6, 11), often in contexts concerning the general importance of

³⁴ Working with the canonical form of the text, this makes perfect sense, as the second generation being addressed in the book of Deuteronomy would not have experienced slavery firsthand and thus would be in greater need of being reminded of the hardships of their ancestors.

obedience of the commandments.³⁵ Another phrase used in reminiscence of the exodus event is the prompt “you shall remember that you were a slave” (וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ) (5:15; 16:12; 24:18, 22), which seems in each case to be used for either the inclusion of the subservient classes into religious festivals or the imperative to provide for the helpless in society.³⁶ It also appears an injunction to pass this knowledge on to one’s descendants (6:21). Exceptions to the abovementioned trend in which the exodus event appears without a reference to slavery include 4:37; 9:7, 26; 16:1, 3; 20:1; 26:8, which generally seem to involve a narrative recitation of God’s goodness to Israel.³⁷ Additionally, the brutality of the Egyptian slavery itself is has special attention given to it in 26:6. The concept of “serving” either God or foreign idols features prominently in Deuteronomy.³⁸

The concept of ruling over other nations as a reward for obedience is mentioned in 15:6 (also see 28:1). Having the occupants of a defeated city perform forced labour is considered to be something to be appreciated in 20:10–14.

Significantly, many other references to nations in Deuteronomy describe them as being “dispossessed,” “cut off,” or “driven out.” Perhaps annihilating them was more

³⁵ In respective order of the listing of the references, the contexts of the appearances of this phrase are the beginning of the ten commandments (5:6), a general reminder not to forsake commandments when prosperous (6:12), an explanation of the reason for God’s love for Israel immediately following the command to completely destroy the inhabitants of the promised land (7:8), another general reminder not to forsake commandments when prosperous (8:14), and a warning against following idols and an injunction to kill those who advocate the worship of idols (13:6, 11). Also see Exod 13:3, 14 and 20:2.

³⁶ In respective order of the listing of the references, the contexts of the appearances of this phrase are the reminder to keep the Sabbath day (5:15), reminder to keep the feast of weeks (16:12), reminder to provide justice for the widow, fatherless, and orphan (24:18), and the reminder to allow the less fortunate to glean from one’s crops (24:22).

³⁷ In respective order of the listing of the references, the contexts of the appearances of this phrase are a lengthy recitation of God’s goodness and patience toward Israel (4:37), a reminder in the form of speech and prayer of Israel’s continual rebellion (9:7, 26), reminders of the month and manner in which to celebrate the passover based on its first original occurrence (16:1, 3), a reminder not to lose heart when entering into battle (20:1), and a narrative recitation as part of the firstfruits offering (26:8).

³⁸ The Israelites are ordered not to serve idols in 4:19, 28; 5:9; 7:4, 16; 8:19; 11:16; 12:30; 13:7; 17:3; 28:14, 36; 28:64; 29:18, 25; 30:17; 31:20. Conversely, serving God is mandated in 6:13; 10:12, 20; 11:13; 13:4; 28:47.

desirable than enslaving them. Conversely, a curse for disobedience is enslavement to other peoples (28:32, 41, 48, 68). Rhetorical use of servant language in personal address is visible but minimal in Deuteronomy.³⁹

8. A Comparison of the Main Slave Codes

A number of studies have appeared that attempt to determine the precise continuities and discontinuities, as well as the diachronic relationship between the slave laws found in the Book of the Covenant (Exod 21:1–11), the Holiness Code (Lev. 25:39–55) and the Deuteronomic Code (Deut 15:12–18).⁴⁰ While the perspective of the present study, with its emphasis on the final form of the canon does not allow for extensive interaction with diachronic reconstructions of the documentary prehistory underlying the books in their present form, it is concerned with establishing the effect created by the order that information is presented by the Tanakh. As much of the scholarly discussion, governed by the ordering presuppositions of JEDP has focused on comparisons between Exodus and Deuteronomy (as Leviticus differs markedly from the other two) Chart 1 (see Appendix A) will present the slave laws of Exodus and Deuteronomy in a way that shows where their content is unique, and where it apparently overlaps (with some differences set in italics). With this preliminary comparison of Exodus and Deuteronomy in mind, one can note certain continuities and discontinuities when Leviticus is examined. See Chart 2 in Appendix A.

³⁹ Recounting a previous prayer in which he asked for permission to visit the promised land, Moses describes himself addressing God as “your servant” in 3:24. Telling another story of a prayer that was a plea for mercy towards the Israelites, Moses asks God to remember his servants, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (9:27). The compassion of God for Israel, his servants, is described in a song recounting the history of Israel in 32:36, and the account of Moses’ death describes him as being God’s servant (34:5).

⁴⁰ Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*; Klein, “A Liberated Lifestyle,” 212-221; Phillips, “The Laws of Slavery,” 51-66; Schenker, “The Biblical Legislation on the Release of Slaves,” 23-41; Wolff, “Masters and Slaves,” 259-272; McConville, “Old Testament Laws and Canonical Intentionality,” 259–281. In particular, in the bibliographies of Schenker and Chirichigno provide helpful lists and preliminary evaluations of further monographs relating to the topic.

The secondary literature that has accumulated around this issue has made much of the unique material as well as presumed instabilities between these accounts. As is apparent from the first chart above, Deuteronomy in two places (vv. 12, 17) inserts notices that female slaves should receive the same seventh year release benefits and permanent service markings that are on a surface reading seemingly given exclusively to males in Exodus.⁴¹ McConville is content to simply leave an instability here, stating that the inclusion of females into similarly worded laws, “seems deliberately to counter this distinction between male and female” of Exod 21:7.⁴² Klein seizes this feature as an example of a deliberate move to a “more humane” ethic, a sign that the laws were “subject to periodic reform.”⁴³ Phillips rejects the explanation that it represents a shift to higher plane of morality, but instead notes other instances of Deuteronomic versions of law codes which give greater prominence to women’s responsibility, citing 5:21;⁴⁴ 7:3; 13:6; 17:2–5; 22:22. Therefore, he states:

The laws of the *‘amah* of Exodus 21.8-11 became redundant as their absence from Deuteronomy 15.12-18 confirms. They had only arisen as a result of Exodus 21.7 specifically ruling that the female slave should not be released like the male. As a result of the Deuteronomic legislation, male and female slaves now enjoyed the same rights and privileges.⁴⁵

However, others argue that no tension exists between the treatment of female slaves in Exodus and Deuteronomy. Chirichigno, on the basis of similar laws in ancient Nuzi

⁴¹ For further discussion see McConville, “Old Testament Laws and Canonical Intentionality,” 261–262; Klein, “A Liberated Lifestyle,” 213; Phillips, “The Laws of Slavery,” 55–56; Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 279–283; Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1–21:9*, 320.

⁴² McConville, “Old Testament Laws and Canonical Intentionality,” 261.

⁴³ Klein, “A Liberated Lifestyle,” 213.

⁴⁴ Christensen, who on the issue of the treatment of female slaves is most optimistic towards the harmonization of the Exodus and Deuteronomy passages does seem to believe that some movement has taken place in the second version of the tenth commandment (5:21). In *Deuteronomy 1–21:9*, 126 he states, “Unlike the Exodus text, the wife enjoys a place apart in Deuteronomy as in some way distinct from the following list of specific types of property. From this fact, Moran concluded that this probably reflects the relatively higher status of women in the time this text was written.”

⁴⁵ Phillips, “The Laws of Slavery,” 55.

tablets argues that Exod 21:7–11 was specifically concerned with a type of “marriage contract,” the situation in which a woman is sold into concubinage, as opposed to the non-sexual household labour assumed by Exod 21:2–6 and Deut 15:12–18.⁴⁶ Clarity of the terms used in these sections is essential. While McConville makes much of the fact that Deuteronomy does not use the words עֶבֶד and אִמָּה until 15:17, this is not only an argument from silence but also overlooks the fact that the use of אִמָּה in Deut 15:12 likely means no more than that the person referred to is also an Israelite.⁴⁷ That a specific type of service is being described in Exodus is supported by Durham, who regarding Exod 21:7–11 states, “The provisions here stipulated for such a woman make it very likely that she was not sold into slavery for general purposes, but only as a bride.”⁴⁸ Chirichigno concludes that the slave regulations of Deuteronomy do not overrule those found in Exod 21:7–11, as Deuteronomy “most likely did not abrogate this institution,” of “the sale of a free-born Israelite daughter as a wife or concubine.”⁴⁹ This is supported by Christensen, who states regarding Deut 15:12, “The equal treatment of the sexes...does not indicate that the law here supersedes that of Exod 21:7–11, which refers only to sale for the purpose of marriage.”⁵⁰

A unique feature of the slave laws of Deuteronomy is the mandate for a master to bountifully supply a slave in the event of the slave’s freedom (vv. 13–14). The terse treatments of McConville and Phillips simply suggest that this may reflect a more

⁴⁶ Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 246–254.

⁴⁷ Christenesen, *Deuteronomy 1–21:9*, 320. Also see discussion in Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 278. McConville, “Old Testament Laws and Canonical Intentionality,” 261, seems to admit this but assumes it cumulatively contributes toward a non-objectified view of slaves in Deuteronomy as opposed to Exodus.

⁴⁸ Durham, *Exodus*, 322.

⁴⁹ Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 282.

⁵⁰ Christenesen, *Deuteronomy 1–21:9*, 320.

generous spirit than is found in the Exodus laws⁵¹ or that this provision would provide additional incentive for a slave to seek his freedom.⁵² Christensen adduces that this would allow the former slave to avoid getting into loans for survival.⁵³ However, Chirichigno's detailed treatment of this requirement, building on the use of the adverb "empty" (רִיקָם) notes that both vocabulary and themes may indicate the writer is making a sophisticated allusion to Gen 31 and Exod 3.⁵⁴ Jacob's protest to Laban after working six years (after his fourteen years to earn his wives) in Gen 31:42 that "Laban would not have given him anything" not only contains lexical parallels to Deut 15:13, it provides a convenient point of reference against which the writer of Deuteronomy can mandate that owners supply their slaves generously upon release. Similarly, the situation of coming out of slavery in Exod 3:21 involves the people of Israel leaving their enslavement bountifully provided for.⁵⁵ An echo from a different context can be located in the pilgrimage laws of Exod 23:14–19, 34:20–26 and Deut 16, which also emphasize not appearing before the Lord empty handed, a step of obedience that is a response to God's blessing (Exod 23:17); this blessing is the reason given that a master should bountifully provide for his freshly released slave (Deut 15:18).⁵⁶

Another intriguing comparison between Exodus and Deuteronomy is the motivation clause of Deuteronomy (v. 15), linking the impetus for masters to be generous when releasing their slaves to the Lord's miraculous release of his people from foreign bondage in Egypt. Phillips emphasizes its absence from the slavery laws of Exodus and

⁵¹ McConville, "Old Testament Laws and Canonical Intentionality," 260.

⁵² Phillips, "The Laws of Slavery," 56.

⁵³ Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1–21:9*, 320.

⁵⁴ Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 286–294.

⁵⁵ Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 289.

⁵⁶ Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 290.

the innovation of the Deuteronomist in applying it to slave laws when Exodus only uses it for the treatment of foreigners (22:20; 23:9). However, this phrase (כִּי conjunction + noun + הַיּוֹם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם) also occurs in Deut 5:15 to remind the Israelites to keep the Sabbath, among other uses to ensure fair treatments of foreigners (Lev 19:34; Deut 10:19; 24:22).⁵⁷

Moving to Leviticus, despite the skepticism of some regarding its accordance with Exodus and Deuteronomy,⁵⁸ excellent evidence exists not only that its provisions regarding debt slavery do not clash with laws found elsewhere but also that its position between the other two codes in the final form of the canon can be understood to create a cogent sequence. Key to understanding Lev 25:39–43 is noting the specific situation being addressed, which seems to be that it is the head of a household with his family, not just an isolated person. This seems unavoidable from the presence of the phrase “he and his sons with him” (הוא ובניו עמו) in v. 41. Chirichigno describes the gap between this and the circumstances described in Exodus and Deuteronomy, stating, “This law clearly refers to the head of a nuclear or extended family who is forced to enter into servitude with his family (v. 41). This law is different from those manumission laws...both of which refer to the sale of dependents by their family.”⁵⁹ In comparison, Exod 21:3 speaks to the situations of a slave who either stays single or married yet without sons, and Exod 21:4 portrays a scenario in which a man marries and has children while in slavery. This is

⁵⁷ Phillips, “The Laws of Slavery,” 56.

⁵⁸ Klein, “A Liberated Lifestyle,” 214. Klein states, “We are not told how this idealistic law against slavery was coordinated with the laws of Exodus and Deuteronomy, which permitted internal Israelite slavery.”

⁵⁹ Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 330.

supported by Schenker, who states, “Exodus does not consider the case where a debt-slave is bought and sold together with his children, while Leviticus 25 precisely deals with this case.”⁶⁰

The next difficulty present in the Leviticus text is the nature of the Jubilee ordinance. Chirichigno reports that a broad consensus exists among scholars that the “Sabbatical year” rule in Lev 25:2–7 seems to follow Exod 23:10–11.⁶¹ Following extended discussion of earlier critical views, he notes that unique wording and motivational statements notwithstanding, there is no reason to posit any significant disjunction between the teaching of the two passages.⁶²

Thus, if one presupposes Chirichigno’s criterion for differentiating between debt and chattel slavery (see above), it is not difficult to see how the slave laws of the Pentateuch can be combined harmoniously. Schenker’s amalgamation of them is helpful and worth quoting at length:

(1) male slaves: (a) an unmarried slave will be free after six years (Exodus and Deuteronomy); (b) a slave who is married before he becomes a slave, but without children, will be free after six years together with his wife (Exodus); (c) a slave married by his master while he is a slave, will be free after six years, but must leave his wife and children with his master (Exodus); (d) a married slave who is a father of sons before he becomes a slave, is not a slave *sensu stricto*, but like a hired man and an Israelite sojourner (*tosab*) who will be free in the jubilee (Lev. 25.39-41); (2) female slaves: either the law of Exod. 21.7-11 or that of Deut. 15.12 applies.⁶³

However, for the purposes of the present study it will be helpful to instead present this information with the rest of the didactic slavery passages in their canonical order. See Chart 3 in Appendix A.

⁶⁰ Schenker, “The Biblical Legislation on the Release of Slaves,” 33.

⁶¹ Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 303.

⁶² Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 303–311.

⁶³ Schenker, “The Biblical Legislation on the Release of Slaves,” 33.

9. (An) Inter-Pentateuchal Reading(s) of Gen 47:13–26

This section will attempt to reflect upon and survey the possibilities of how Gen 47:13–26 can be viewed when placed in dialogue with the rest of the materials relating to slavery in the Pentateuch. As such, it will be necessary to critically engage once more with some of the earlier approaches to the passage surveyed in chapter 1 of the present study, in order to revisit not only their assumptions of the kinds of slavery being discussed in Gen 47 and certain passages throughout the rest of the Pentateuch, but also the diverse ways in which the character of Joseph was viewed as an exemplar of certain types of behaviour projected onto later Israelite society. Note the leap made by both Wenham and Brueggemann who, when comparing Joseph's actions with later teaching on slavery automatically reference a legal teaching that addresses the situations of Israelites having other Israelites as slaves and foreigners having Israelites as slaves. Wenham specifically cites Lev 25:13–55⁶⁴ and Brueggemann refers to Lev 25:35–55.⁶⁵ Not only are these references imprecisely broad given the diverse situations being addressed inside Lev 25 (see above), but they also make the leap of reading the action of Joseph, an Israelite who has gained power in a foreign land, into the situation of either Israelite-Israelite slavery or foreigner-Israelite slavery. While these connections are tame compared to the later pro-northern monarchy polemic envisioned by Carr,⁶⁶ they still necessitate a certain transition being made on the basis of the isolated theme of slavery devoid of the surrounding context. Perhaps this is valid; if the concept of Joseph's administrative wisdom is the "ultimate referent" projected onto the passage (see chapter 1 section C.4) then it necessarily can serve as a point from which later didactic materials

⁶⁴ Wenham, *Genesis 12–50*, 452.

⁶⁵ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 356.

⁶⁶ Carr, *Reading the Fractures*, 274–276.

can be compared. However, it may be more fruitful to carefully compare the type of slavery Joseph engaged in with the various types described and addressed by later legislation. The two main differences between Joseph's slavery and the slavery of the Mosaic legislation involve nationality and nature; Joseph was operating not only on foreign soil but inside of the foreign power structures, and the people were owned by the crown, not each other. Thus analogies with any of the subservience models described in the Pentateuch are imperfect.

Perhaps the most direct thematic continuity with Gen 47:13–26 is promises of Israelites having dominion over other nations. One could then view the ascension of Joseph from lonely prisoner to second in command to Pharaoh as a dramatic account of God's blessing for obedience resulting in having other nations in subjugation and thus acting as an example of the promises made by texts grouped under category 2.

Unfortunately, this would fail to account for the fact that the Egyptians were only enslaved to Joseph to the extent that he was a part of the power structure of the nation of Egypt. Likewise, this intra-national subservience disqualifies any of the curse passages of category 1 from being applied to the text. It is likely that Gen 9:25–27 can be connected with the later blessing passages that envision the Israelites dominating the Canaanites, but the Egyptians were the sons of Cush, not Canaan, and thus a direct connection between Gen 9:25–27 and Gen 47:13–26 cannot legitimately be made.

However, the bare similarity of the situation of debt-slavery invites comparison between Gen 47:13–26 and the slave laws of the Pentateuch. Once again, elements of continuity and discontinuity exist. Setting aside for the moment the matter of Joseph being a ruling figure and for the purposes of comparison envisioning him as a great

landowner so as to see how this institution is further developed in the Pentateuch, many of the laws relating to slavery (see chart 3 in Appendix A) are simply irrelevant.

Instructions concerning the participation of slaves in the cult, slaves and marriage, and kidnappings and various kinds of physical mistreatment do not seem relevant in this case. However, the instructions concerning debt slavery in particular seem similar enough as to invite comparison. One initial difficulty arises when considering the seventh year release for single and married but childless slaves versus the jubilee release for entire families; it is unclear how a comparison could be made when an entire nation was sold to the crown.⁶⁷ However, one must also balance the genuine innovation of a mandated timed release and possibility of redemption for Israelite slaves with the law's equal opportunity for making this state permanent (Exod 21:2–6). Moving into Leviticus, ch. 25 outlines a process of a family sinking into progressively more desperate financial straits, not entirely unlike the three step process recorded in Gen 47:13–26 in which the Egyptians became more indebted to the crown.

Lev 25:25, 29 describe situations in which property or lodging is sold, and in both cases the possibility of redemption is generously held out. Leviticus 25:35–38 addresses the case of a fellow Israelite who has fallen on hard times; he is to be treated as a “stranger” (גֵּר)⁶⁸ and a “sojourner” (תּוֹשֵׁב).⁶⁹ Verses 36–38 prohibit lending money on interest to such a man based on a reminder of God's work in the exodus event, but most interesting of all is the comment made in v. 37, “nor give him your food for profit,”

⁶⁷ The fact that a mandatory release after a certain period of time is made explicit in the law constitutes a genuine break with the debt-slavery of Joseph, but this theme is not stressed further until Jer 34. See ch. 4.

⁶⁸ *BDB*, 158 supplies a definition as “temporary dweller, newcomer... dwellers in Israel with certain conceded, not inherited rights.”

⁶⁹ *BDB*, 444 suggests a meaning of, “*sojourner*, appar. of a more temporary and dependent... kind than the גֵּר.”

(וּבְמִכְרֵי בַיִת לֹא־תִתֶּן אֶבְלָה). This phrase almost exactly describes the specific aspect of Gen 47:13–26 that involved the trading of food for money, livestock, and ultimately people’s land and bodies. The implications of this parallel are far from obvious, however. As v. 35 makes clear, this teaching is addressed to intra-Israelite relations, as identified by the use of אָחִיךָ “your brother.” Returning to Gen 47, one could easily argue that Joseph was living out this command in exemplary fashion, as he provided for his Israelite family quite well (vv. 11–12, 27). Nevertheless, when Joseph’s practice of slavery with the Egyptian people is used as the prism through which to view later developments of the topic, it is possible to speculate whether the passage can be placed into dialogue with and used to critique the situation of Gen 47:13–26 when prohibiting Israelites from profiting from each other’s need for food.

Next, Lev 25:39–43 covers the situation where a man and his family are purchased (“he is sold/sells himself to you” וּנְמִכְרֵ־לְךָ) because of their economic impoverishment. As noted above, the most significant aspect of this passage is that they are not to be treated as slaves (לֹא־תַעֲבֹד בּוֹ עַבְדֵּי־תַעֲבָד) but instead as a “hired servant” (שָׂכִיר)⁷⁰ and a “sojourner” (תּוֹשָׁב). This can be compared to the use of גֵּר and תּוֹשָׁב as comparative treatment examples in the previous scenario of vv. 35–38. The difference here could possibly be for the purpose of emphasizing that the impoverished family is to be treated as free labourers and less as needy vagabonds in need of charity. After the instructions for the release in the jubilee year and return to the family land possession are

⁷⁰ Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 351–352, gives a definition of “day-laborer, hired laborer, wage-earner.”

given in vv. 40–41, a lengthy motivation clause is provided by vv. 42–43. When compared to the items listed to legitimate this behaviour in vv. 36, 38, both sections share an injunction to fear God (וַיִּרְאוּ מֵאֱלֹהֵי יְדִי). Though both give a reminder of the exodus from Egypt (vv. 38, 42), the subject and direct object of each sentence are different. V. 38 places the focus on God, who brought the successful landowners out of Egypt (אֲנִי יְהוָה (אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר-הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם)). The use of the second person plural suffix on the direct object marker indicates they are the party being addressed. By way of contrast, v. 42 starts with the focus on the dispossessed Israelites (כִּי-עַבְדֵי הֵם אֲשֶׁר-הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם), and states that God brought the beleaguered underclass out of Egypt. It is also interesting to note that the Niphal of מָכַר is used both in v. 39 and v. 42. Since in v. 39 it is describing a situation and in v. 42 it is specifically prohibiting an action, it must be read reflexively in one verse and passively in the other in order to prevent the section from becoming self contradictory.⁷¹ Once again, it is possible to see multiple possibilities for the relationship of this passage to Gen 47:13–26. If one makes the leap of reading Lev 25:39–43 as being in some way a response to Gen 47, it is possible to observe some continuities between the two passages, primarily willful self-sale. Note Gen 47:19, which in quoting the dialogue of the Egyptians uses the imperatival “buy us” (קָנֵה-אֶתְנוּ), with its purpose being later explained as the people and their land becoming enslaved to the crown (וַנְּהַיֶּה אֶתְכֶם וְאֶתְמֹתְכֶם עֲבָדִים לְפָרְעֹה). Though the commoditization of people is still

⁷¹ Alternatively, it might be possible to argue that v. 42 merely condemns the sale of people for a specific purpose, outright chattel slavery. Thus their sale (or selling themselves?) is allowed, but they must be treated as free labourers.

involved (Lev 25:39, 42), the use of קָנָה instead of מָכַר may serve to place the impetus on the buyer's willful acquisition of slaves (admittedly with possibly altruistic intentions) as compared to the seller's deliberate entrance into the state of subservience.⁷² It is interesting to note the Egyptians in Gen 47 seemed quite willing to initiate the idea of their entering into bondage; even granting the desperation of their situation, the legal materials of the Pentateuch seem to regard this as a last resort. Of course, the return of the land and release provisions of Lev 25:39–43 are a genuine break with what took place in Gen 47, as are the prohibitions against treating an Israelite as a slave and the motivation clauses.

Perhaps more directly applicable to the situation of Gen 47:13–26 is Lev 25:44–46, which provides a different set of instructions for the Israelites' treatment of foreign slaves. The Israelites are permitted to buy and sell men and women from surrounding nations (v. 44), as well as from those who are תּוֹשָׁב (v. 45) and are described with the verbal form of גָּוֵר. The repetition of these two terms used in v. 35 introduces a tension into the passage: while treating someone as a “stranger” or “sojourner” is used as a description of how to support and help out someone in need in v. 35, v. 45 uses these terms to describe the availability pool of chattel slaves. These foreign slaves can be “property” (אֲחֻזָּה) as well as objects of inheritance for one's descendants (v. 46). Verse 46 contains the provision that “you may make slaves of them” (בָּהֶם תַּעֲבֹדוּ),⁷³ which is

⁷² Compare Exod 21:2, which uses קָנָה.

⁷³ Compare with the slightly different constructions used to convey this idea in Gen 43:18; 47:21 (LXX); Exod 1:13, 14; Lev 25:39.

contrasted with the prohibition against ruling over other Israelites.⁷⁴ Once again, as Gen 47:13–26 is compared with this particular injunction, elements of continuity and discontinuity as well as multiple possibilities for interpretation can be noted. Significantly, this describes an Israelite owning foreigners, which provides for a less torturous route to comparison than what exists when trying to compare intra-Israelite slave passages with Gen 47. However, the situation being described here has been taken by many scholars to be describing chattel rather than debt slavery (see above), which would be a discontinuity, although the buying and selling of persons is still involved. When the Genesis and Leviticus passages are brought into dialogue with each other, the validity of enslaving foreigners indefinitely would seem to be affirmed, in direct contrast to the higher level of solidarity that is expected when dealing with fellow Israelites. Looking back, this standard would seem to approve of the differing treatments of the brothers and the Egyptians during the famine period in Gen 47.

The final set of regulations concerning foreign ownership of Israelites within Israel (Lev 25:47–55) seem more difficult to be read in light of Gen 47, except perhaps to note that it presents the inverse of the situation of an Israelite enslaving (in debt-slavery) foreigners in a foreign land. Discerning any implications from this, or even determining if doing so is a legitimate exercise seems difficult. The only other notable points in this section are the provisions for redemption at any point, and certainly at the time of the jubilee, the injunction that the Israelite will be treated as a “שְׂכִיר” (see above for previous uses of this word in this section), the prohibition against ruling over him with cruelty (same words in a similar phrase used in v. 43), and the ending, which legitimate this

⁷⁴ Compare with other constructions using רָדָה and שָׂרַד in Lev 25:43, 53; Ezek 34:4.

treatment of Israelites on the basis that they are God’s servants and were saved in the event of Exodus, which follows the wording of the exodus reminder given in v. 42 instead of v. 38.

The last slave law passage in the Pentateuch similar enough to Gen 47 to bear mention is Deut 15:12–18. Though it largely overlaps with Exod 21:2–6, several of its unique features can profitably be compared with the laws of Lev 25 and by extension, Gen 47. Since it speaks exclusively to intra-Israelite slavery, all of the caveats given above regarding the degree to which similar passages can be compared to Gen 47 apply here. Nevertheless, a curious verbally derived contrast is created when comparing the blessing provisions described in v. 14 with the process of enslavement in Gen 47. A departing slave is to be liberally gifted with livestock (צאן); this contrasts with the trading away of livestock in desperation for food that happened in Gen 47:17. While the word for “threshing floor” (גֶּרֶן) does not appear in Gen 47, food was something that was used as a bargaining piece that caused people to surrender all their money, cattle, land, and selves. Joseph provided well for his brothers (who were only coming out of slavery in the sense that they did not have to directly fear his wrath) as Joseph directly provided not only food for them (Gen 47:12), but possibly cattle as well (Gen 47:7, 17), which stands in stark contrast to his extortion of cattle from the Egyptians. Also, it is interesting to note how in v. 15 there is a preponderance of the use of the second person in the motivation clause: (עֲבָד הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּפְדֶּךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ), placing the emphasis on how the wealthy

landowner was once a slave in Egypt, rescued by God, and stands responsible for how he treats those in need.⁷⁵

10. Excursus: Carmichael's Treatment of Leviticus 25

Carmichael's article, "The Sabbatical/Jubilee Cycle and the Seven-Year Famine in Egypt,"⁷⁶ argues that the Jubilee and Sabbath year laws of Lev 25 are written as a legal response to the narrative presentation of Gen 47. Thus, his topic is particularly relevant for the current portion of the present study and deserves extended interaction, as he not only presents a fascinating perspective on the composition of biblical law, but also isolates a large number of potential parallels between Lev 25 and Gen 47 that demand careful examination. Carmichael begins by questioning the practicality of the Jubilee and Sabbath year regulations, arguing that if literally followed, these laws would lack both agricultural purpose and cause havoc with the various times at which slaves were released.⁷⁷ He particularly emphasizes the desolation that letting land lie fallow for one or two years would cause the population. This leads Carmichael into the central thesis of his essay, which is that the main point of laws is to bring about reminiscence of historical events, and in doing so establish a cultural identity for the Israelites that stands in contrast

⁷⁵ It is also interesting to note that here the Israelites are explicitly said to have been slaves in Egypt, as compared to the statements found in Lev 25:38, 42, 55 which simply mention the Israelites being brought out of Egypt. The chief contextual difference would seem to be that the motivation clause of Deut 15:15 directly follows the command to give generous gifts to a departing slave in v. 14. The regulations of Lev 25 do not mention giving gifts to a departing slave. That being said, it should be remembered in the larger contexts of both books that Exodus and Leviticus generally do not mention slavery when referencing the Exodus, and Deuteronomy often includes the concept of slavery in its references to the exodus (see above).

⁷⁶ Carmichael, "The Sabbatical/Jubilee Cycle," 224–239.

⁷⁷ Carmichael, "The Sabbatical/Jubilee Cycle," 224–227. In response to his contentions concerning the instability and impracticality of the slave release regulations, see above. Concerning the slave issue specifically, he does not demonstrate a great deal of familiarity with the secondary literature that has accumulated on that topic. His skepticism towards the agricultural purpose of the fallow years would be disputed by Baker, *Tight Fists*, 82–83, who, citing Milgrom, argues that the larger problem with implementing this would be "resistance by the rich and powerful." He also emphasizes that the purpose of such regulations is not agricultural in nature but is to instill trust in God's provision (Lev 25:18–22).

to the ways of other nations.⁷⁸ Correctly observing the links established in Exod 12:14–27; Deut 5:12–15; 16:1–8 between Israel’s bondage in Egypt and the Passover and Sabbath, Carmichael then proceeds to make the leap of asserting that Moses was a fictional mouthpiece for a later writer. He then states that this fact accounts for the phenomena of Moses only directly invoking historical occurrences he experienced.⁷⁹

There is much that deserves a skeptical appraisal in this assertion. The character of Moses seems at least aware of the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as the event of creation.⁸⁰ Furthermore, whether or not there was a historical Moses, it seems bizarre to express surprise that he is not described as having knowledge of future events. It also seems arbitrary to not even consider the possibility that the narrator, wishing to appear realistic describes him as giving teaching that could apply to events that took place later in the history of Israel.⁸¹ This narrow approach seems to disregard the larger canonical context and function of Moses’ teaching.

Carmichael then briefly examines how commentators have dealt with “the contrast between the Israelites and the Egyptians at the time of the famine” in Gen 47.⁸²

⁷⁸ Carmichael, “The Sabbatical/Jubilee Cycle,” 227.

⁷⁹ Carmichael, “The Sabbatical/Jubilee Cycle,” 228. Carmichael expresses surprise that Moses never mentions episodes in Genesis that directly parallel certain laws (he cites Jacob’s polygamy and Deut 21:15–17), nor does Moses mention events that took place after his death (!), noting the obvious link between Deut 17:14–20 and Solomon’s behaviour. In the context of Carmichael’s argument, this assertion is necessary for explaining why Moses never directly refers to the events of Gen 47.

⁸⁰ It is not until Deuteronomy that the narrator voices such claims as coming out of Moses’ mouth. In the prior books of the law, such references to the patriarchs were attributed to God or spoken by the narrator (Exod 2:24; 3:6, etc). In Deuteronomy Moses refers to the promises made to the patriarchs (Deut 1:8; 6:10; 9:5, 27, etc). While Carmichael may not consider this to be a historical “event” as such, Moses references creation in Exod 20:11. Finally, if Moses was a fictional character, how would that stop knowledge of previous “events” in Israel’s history (assuming some of which were not fictional) from being attributed to him?

⁸¹ To say nothing of the possibility that he was actually a historical figure that delivered inspired teaching with a foretelling component.

⁸² Carmichael, “The Sabbatical/Jubilee Cycle,” 228. This examination is very brief indeed. Not only does he only cite Skinner and Wenham (two very different time periods and approaches) he completely misrepresents Wenham when he states that Wenham does not give a reason for comparing Gen 47 and Lev 25. Wenham’s stated intent, as described (and critiqued) several times in this study, is to merely

He reiterates his contention of the impracticality of the two fallow years created by the Sabbath and Jubilee ordinances, calling the effect a virtual “famine,” then cites a parallel between Gen 47 and Lev 25 being God’s miraculous provision of a bumper harvest preceding the famine to enable people to survive (Lev 25:20–22). This is followed by a sweeping claim that all biblical laws are formulated in response to previous narrative events.⁸³ In the case of the Sabbath year and Jubilee laws, the previous historical event serving as a prototype would doubtless be Joseph’s famine. He cites parallels between Gen 47 and Lev 25, not only in the two year “climactic periods” (the two years of economic changes of Gen 47 and the final sabbatical year and the year of Jubilee), but also in the seven years of famine (which occurred consecutively in Genesis and non-consecutively in the seven Sabbath years of Lev 25).⁸⁴ Additionally, both the final “climactic year” of Gen 47 and the year of Jubilee instigate massive social upheaval.⁸⁵ Citing Lev 25:42, 55 he accurately notes that the Israelites were not to permanently enslave each other since they were all slaves of Yahweh, who freed them from slavery to the Pharaoh. It here that Carmichael’s logic becomes somewhat thin. Paralleling the Israelite’s slavery to Pharaoh with the earlier slavery of the Egyptians to Pharaoh, he claims the main point is that the Israelites do not end up like the Egyptians. This seems problematic, as debt slavery and the forced labour inflicted on the Israelites are hardly

note that Joseph’s treatment of the Egyptians falls well within the boundaries fixed by Lev 25. Carmichael then cites Levine, *Leviticus*, 272, who simply notes the similarity with no further discussion.

⁸³ Carmichael, “The Sabbatical/Jubilee Cycle,” 228–9. As support for his contention that all law is based on narrative, he cites his *Law, Legend and Incest*, 9–10, where he simply asserts the same conclusion and makes the same historical assumptions outlined above. Regardless of the historical realities at work, this requires a deliberate reading against the grain of the implied chronology laid out in the canonical form of the material. However, in this specific test case, there is nothing objectionable to about reading Lev 25 as responding to Gen 47.

⁸⁴ Carmichael, “The Sabbatical/Jubilee Cycle,” 230.

⁸⁵ Carmichael, “The Sabbatical/Jubilee Cycle,” 231.

comparable.⁸⁶ He then isolates further contrasts and parallels. The enslavement of the Israelites to Yahweh still allows them to enslave one another, but the enslavement of the Egyptians to Pharaoh flattened all social distinctions.⁸⁷ At the same time, both systems freeze the possibility of land changing hands (though through different means) and both afford the priestly class additional privileges.⁸⁸ Carmichael then reiterates and further develops his central thesis, stating, “The occasion of the Jubilee year is, I submit, to celebrate the difference between the Israelites and the Egyptians in line with the lawgiver’s declared aim to set out a policy for the Israelites that contrasts with Egyptian policy.”⁸⁹ The confusing aspect of his approach is that in interpreting the laws as having chiefly symbolic significance, he completely disregards the stated theological “symbolic” intentions of the text, which include the importance of God’s land observing the Sabbath rest (Lev 26:34, 43), and the obvious humanitarian element of the feeding of the sojourner and even the wild animals (Lev 25:6–7). Another parallel is identified, the announcement of Jubilee on the Day of Atonement, and Joseph’s forgiveness of his brothers occurring in the same year as the massive economic changes.⁹⁰ Also, Pharaoh’s dispensing of the seed in Gen 47 is said to coincide with God’s promise to grow crops in Lev 26:3–5,⁹¹ and like Pharaoh, God can request beasts and even humans (Lev 27:8–9).⁹²

⁸⁶ Carmichael, “The Sabbatical/Jubilee Cycle,” 231. It might be possible to claim that the text of Lev 25 itself indirectly draws this parallel by the use of the reminder of the exodus event in the admonitions to treat one’s country-men fairly (vv. 38, 42, 55). However, in each case, the inference is made from God’s act of deliverance to the desired behaviour. No mention is made of the contrast to the earlier slavery of the Egyptians to Pharaoh. Additionally, Exod 1:8 would seem to imply that Joseph’s economic arrangement was regarded with gratitude by the Egyptians as long as they remembered him. It is actually quite difficult to ascertain exactly what Carmichael is trying to argue at this point.

⁸⁷ There are two problems here. First, this is not self evident, and second, many would view this as a positive development.

⁸⁸ Carmichael, “The Sabbatical/Jubilee Cycle,” 232.

⁸⁹ Carmichael, “The Sabbatical/Jubilee Cycle,” 232.

⁹⁰ Carmichael, “The Sabbatical/Jubilee Cycle,” 234.

⁹¹ Carmichael, “The Sabbatical/Jubilee Cycle,” 235.

Carmichael also highlights the “one fifth premium” in common between Pharaoh’s requirements and the dedication of a field to Yahweh (Lev 26:19).⁹³ At this point, Carmichael repeats himself, saying, “The laws in Leviticus 25–27 are of this kind. They are literary constructions that incorporate symbolic pointers to historical events.”⁹⁴ It is highly ironic that he considers Moses fictitious but Gen 47:13–26 factual, since many of the critical sources surveyed (see chapter 1) isolated 47:13–26 as a fanciful addition to the narrative.

In the evaluation of Carmichael, it must be stated from the outset that his identification of the Sabbath years and Jubilee years as being virtual “famines” is overly forced. Not only is this a connection never made explicitly in the text, there would seem to be far too much disparity between the theme of “famine” and the theme of rest and renewal emphasized by the text. These themes of rest and renewal are completely lacking in discussions of explicit “famine.” This parallel would work far better if it was set up as a contrast rather than an example of continuity.⁹⁵ Much like the discussion of “The Discernment and Implications of Literary ‘Back-References’” in chapter 1, section C.2, one is left uncertain concerning the criterion Carmichael is relying upon to validate these allusions and their consequences. Even if some of the numerical similarities are not coincidental, the given purpose of establishing identity seems unclear. If the years of slave releases are not meant to be carried out, then there would be little difference

⁹² Carmichael, “The Sabbatical/Jubilee Cycle,” 236. This seems somewhat weak, as the cited text is referring to the devoted things.

⁹³ Carmichael, “The Sabbatical/Jubilee Cycle,” 237.

⁹⁴ Carmichael, “The Sabbatical/Jubilee Cycle,” 237.

⁹⁵ For further discussion of the pragmatic and theological dimensions of the Sabbath year and Jubilee laws, see Barker, “Sabbath, Sabbatical Year, Jubilee,” 695–706; Baker, *Tight Fists*, 80–87, 223–232. Both note that there is little evidence the Israelites practiced either the Sabbatical year or Jubilee in biblical times; perhaps one could extrapolate from this that the Israelites as well struggled with the practical dimensions of both institutions and simply did not have the faith to carry it out.

between the Hebrew and Egyptian ways of treating slaves and thus one could not meaningfully distinguish their cultural identities on that issue. The contrast between the Hebrew and Egyptian mentalities is difficult to establish due to the fact that, as previously noted, the identification of Joseph's policies as either "Hebrew" or "Egyptian" is unclear. Genesis 41 establishes that the policies were original to Joseph, possibly providing evidence that these concepts were to be regarded as examples of "Hebrew" administrative wisdom, although this could be balanced with the evidence for the "Egyptianization" of Joseph (see the summary of Janzen in chapter 1) and the fact that he was operating as part of the Egyptian governmental structure. It would likely not be difficult to establish similar links between any two passages from the OT with such minimal criterion for comparison. In fact, many of his posited parallels are so vague that they border on allegory. Although he does not intend to specifically comment upon the morality of Joseph's actions in Gen 47:13–26, which the examination of the present study above showed that the basic concept of debt slavery is not explicitly condemned,⁹⁶ his conclusions would indicate a greater degree of disapproval from the Levitical author than the conclusions of the present study found.

C. Concluding Thoughts

After granting the considerable difficulties in comparing Gen 47 with later types of slavery discussed in the Pentateuch, several observations were made regarding the perspective cast on Gen 47 by later slave texts of the Pentateuch. Although the practice of debt slavery is never condemned, a number of restrictions are placed on the institution when it is Israelites who are enslaved, including a prohibition on selling food to the needy

⁹⁶ To say nothing of the multiple possibilities for how this institution can be actualized and mapping their relationships with what happened in Gen 47:13–26.

for profit, mandatory releases after a period of time as well as generous provisions for the newly freed. While some of these elements would seem to be improvements when compared to the situation of Gen 47, disjunctive elements such as the national enslavement make direct comparison difficult. Elements such as the continual possibility of property redemption in Lev 25:25, 29 would seem to show a greater degree of sympathy for property ownership, but it is important to remember that Leviticus describes this as happening through the generosity of friends and family, not crown relief. Nevertheless, it is difficult to discount the message of Lev 25:37, which prohibits selling food to the dispossessed for profit. The text of Lev 25:39–43, 47–55 seems to emphasize the initiative of the ones selling themselves into slavery (in cases where Israelites become slaves), as compared to vv. 44–46 which speak directly of purchasing foreigners and holding them indefinitely as chattel slaves. Deuteronomy 15 introduces the concept of liberally giving gifts to a departing slave, and the motivation clause in v. 15 does directly mention the slavery of the Israelites in Egypt, but it is difficult to discern if this element can be directly compared with the motivation clauses of Lev 25 or if this is simply in keeping with the tendency toward more direct acknowledgements of slavery in Deuteronomy. Finally, Carmichael's interpretation of the Sabbath year and Jubilee being an exercise in cultural identity emerging from a comparison to the Egyptian traits of Gen 47 was examined and found wanting. The key point emerging from a comparison of the slave materials of the Pentateuch with Gen 47 is not so much the morality with the institution of slavery itself as it is the spirit behind the distribution of material resources to the impoverished and to departing slaves. This data supports my thesis that when read in the broader context of passages dealing with slavery, the practices of Joseph in Gen 47

are not culpable on the basis of his employment of debt slavery, but seem less than ideal in the area of resource distribution.

CHAPTER FOUR: SLAVERY IN THE PROPHETS AND WRITINGS

A. Introduction

This chapter will examine materials relating to slavery throughout the Prophets and the Writings, and compare them with Gen 47:13–26. Due to the high volume of occurrences of slave imagery in these sections of the OT, this portion of the present study will focus chiefly on passages that most transparently reveal the ideological bias of the narrator towards the institution of slavery.¹

B. The Former Prophets

1. Joshua

Joshua 9 records the story of the Gibeonite deception. Successfully convincing the Israelites that they lived far away, the Gibeonites were able to establish a covenant of peace with Israel. In revenge for this act of trickery, the Gibeonites were consigned to acts of service for the people and the tabernacle. Most significant is Josh 9:23, which quotes Joshua as stating that they are cursed (אָרֵר) and will be servants (עֲבָדִים) henceforth.

This enslavement of the Gibeonites seems to be less than ideal, as the Israelites were originally to take their land by force, and thus this passage would seem to fit well within the pattern of subservience being a less desirable substitute for annihilation, previously seen in Num 31 and to be further witnessed below. Similarly, Josh 16:10 reports that the tribes of Ephraim son of Joseph did not drive out the Canaanites residing in Gezer (an act of disobedience and showing a lack of faith) but instead made them do forced labour

¹ In the previous chapter on the Pentateuch, an attempt was made at conducting an exhaustive summary of all references to subordination or enslavement. Although this was useful for illustrative purposes, it should be acknowledged that many of these references harvested were only tangentially related to the overall attitude of the narrator towards the institution of slavery.

(מס). Manasseh likewise chose to enslave the Canaanites instead of obeying and driving them out (17:13), yet still had the gall to complain about not being given enough land (17:14–18). It is difficult to tease out of these stories a direct moral concerning slavery, as the main point of the complete cleansing of the land seemed to be religious purity and the removal of temptation for the Israelites. This kind of enslavement is clearly a curse on the enslaved (note similar vocabulary used in Gen 9:25) but in its context was clearly a less obedient choice than annihilation.

2. Judges

The first chapter of Judges opens with a series of reminders of Israel's failure to take the land as they were commanded. After some initial positive reports, v. 19 notes the difficulty created by the iron chariots of the Canaanites (similar to Josh 17:14–18). Thus, several times throughout the rest of the chapter (vv. 28, 30, 33, 35) it is reported that the Canaanites were put into forced labour (מס) instead of being driven out.² Once again, this enslavement of the Canaanites was clearly a step of disobedience, as the instructions were to drive them out of the land.

A variety of terms are used to describe the bondage into which the Israelites are repeatedly subjected by the Canaanites throughout the book. They are described as serving (עבד) foreign kings (3:8, 14), being sold (מכר) to their enemies (2:14; 3:8; 4:2; 10:7), and being given (נתן) into the hands of their enemies (6:1; 13:1). It is repeatedly emphasized that, true to the promises of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, such oppression at the hands of foreigners was the price for serving idols rather than God.

² All four verses listed here use the same ל preposition + מס construction found in Josh 16:10 and 17:13.

3. 1 and 2 Samuel

The first significant occurrence of the topic of slavery in 1 Samuel is found in 8:11–18, Samuel’s list of dire warnings about the perils of having a king like the other nations. Among the potentials dangers of electing a king he lists the use of the people’s children in his service, the seizure of their lands and their crop, the seizure of their servants and flocks, and most significantly, in v. 17, that the people would become slaves of the king. It is difficult to determine whether this form of subservience was merely a descriptor for the various goods and people the king was said to confiscate, or whether something along the lines of debt or chattel slavery was in view. Teasing out connections between this passage and any of the OT slave laws is difficult, as the OT laws specifically address slavery between persons and not under the crown as an institution. However, some preliminary points of comparison and contrast might be found in the instructions for liberal provisions of recently released slaves of Deut 15:12–18 as well as the various laws of Leviticus mandating provisions for slaves; these would seem to contrast with the way in which the future king would confiscate resources. Additionally, one of the curses is confiscation of servants (v. 16), which could potentially be a description of how someone with power and authority would break the commands of Exod 20:17 and Deut 5:21. Aside from this threat, the men of Jabesh are found considering a servitude treaty in 1 Sam 11:1 when besieged, Samuel references the cycle of national bondage from the Judges stories in 12:9, and David and his men experience a mild catastrophe when their wives and children are captured in 30:2.

Second Samuel 8 references a string of David’s military victories resulting in the enslavement of those he defeats, and the narrator emphasizes that this outcome is clearly

a blessing from the LORD's hand. A rough pattern is formed throughout this chapter of a report of David striking down great numbers of an enemy (vv. 2, 5, 13), these enemies becoming servants to David (vv. 2, 6, 14),³ great wealth being accumulated (vv. 2, 6, 7–11), and an affirmation of the LORD's granting of victory (vv. 6, 14). The theme of foreign kings becoming subject to David is referenced again in 10:19 as all the kings who were under Hadadezer become servants of David. Finally, 20:24 simply reports Adoram being in charge of the forced labour (מַס), presumably for the conquered peoples in keeping with Deut 20:11 (or in fulfillment of 1 Sam 8:17?).⁴

4. 1 and 2 Kings

Aside from a perfunctory notice regarding foreign kingdoms serving Solomon in 1 Kgs 4:21, the majority of the significant passages dealing with subservience in 1 Kings are from those referencing Solomon's labour projects. First Kings 4:6 reports Adoniram in charge of the forced labour (מַס) (likely the same person referenced in 2 Sam 20:24).

First Kings 5:13, 14 (27–28 MT) describes the labour (מַס) force drafted by Solomon from the Israelites. Interestingly, the failure to take the land in the conquest of Canaan is referenced in 9:20–21, as the various people groups who were originally supposed to be destroyed are said to have become a slave labour (לְמַס־עֲבָדִים) force for Solomon.⁵ In vv.

³ In vv. 2, 6, and 14, similar clauses are found involving the “to be” verb (הָיָה), the name of the foreign nation, “to David” (לְדָוִד), and (literally) “to slaves” (לְעֲבָדִים). V. 14 somewhat deviates from this pattern by reversing the order of the ascription to David and the phrase “to slaves.” It also omits the לְ preposition on the עֲבָדִים.

⁴ The difficulties encountered in harmonizing the various accounts of the forced labour practices of the united monarchy will be discussed further in the Chronicles section.

⁵ At this point one cannot help but think of Noah's curse in Gen 9:25–27. However, the prediction that Canaan was destined to enslavement seems to clash with the reality that the Israelites were in fact commanded to destroy many Canaanite people groups and that their enslavement was in many cases an act

22–23, the narrator specifically reports that Solomon did not make the Israelites serve as slaves (עֲבָדָה) (thus allaying the fear of 1 Sam 8:17), but they instead served as commanders and chariot operators (thus fulfilling the prophecy of 1 Sam 8:12). Konkel clarifies the relationship of this passage with 1 Kgs 5:13–14 (27–28 MT) stating, “The Israelites were never subject to continuous servitude.”⁶ Later, when recounting the idolatry of Solomon and God’s subsequent raising up of those to torment him, it is stated in 11:28 that Jeroboam was originally in charge of forced labour (סִבֵּל) over the house of Joseph.⁷ In 12:1–19 the dialogue between Rehoboam and the people is recorded, along with the resulting consequences, which includes the aforementioned minister of forced labour Adoram being stoned to death (12:18). Finally, although the text does not seem to imply a value judgement on it, 1 Kgs 15:22 mentions King Asa’s conscription all of Judah for a building project.

Second Kings 4:1–7 records an instance of a woman whose sons are about to be taken into debt slavery.⁸ Elisha’s miraculous provision of oil allows the woman to pay off

of disobedience on the part of the Israelites. The question becomes whether Noah correctly foresaw the future Israelite enslavement of Canaanites (regardless of his awareness that this would be in many cases an act of disobedience), or whether this subservience language should simply be taken the vague sense of domination in general. Otherwise, while noting that diachronic criticism is not the focus of the present study, it would seem speculatively tempting to posit that this episode (or specific aspect of the curse) was in fact a later insertion intended to justify the Israelite practice of enslavement of the Canaanites, in opposition to the teaching that they were to be annihilated. That Gen 9:18–27 functioned as an etiology to legitimate Canaanite slavery is assumed rather than argued (with little extra detail given) by Harrill, “Slavery,” 300.

⁶ Konkel, *1 & 2 Kings*, 199. Unsurprisingly, many scholars remain incredulous towards the possibility of harmonizing 1 Kgs 5:27–28(MT) and 1 Kgs 9:22–23. For an example, see Cogan, *1 Kings*, 229–230, 304. Issues related to the internal difficulties of the Kings account and its relationship with parallel portions of 2 Chronicles will be explored below.

⁷ North, “*mas, sebel*,” 430. North states that סִבֵּל is a northern Israelite synonym for נָסַב. Different forms of this consonantal structure occur 19 times in the OT, in the books of Genesis (only in 49:15), 1 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Nehemiah, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, and Lamentations. *BDB*, 687 offers basic definitions of “bear a heavy load,” and “load, burden.”

⁸ It is difficult to make a definitive pronouncement on whether there is any significance to the fact the creditor is said to be “taking” the children as slaves, as opposed to the “buy”/“sell” terminology favored in the OT laws. As noted above, there seemed to be some elasticity in their range of meaning as regards the

her debts and live with her sons. In ch. 5, the use of servants as gifts is indirectly mentioned (v. 26) when Elisha's servant Gehazi surreptitiously tries to obtain gifts from Namaan. Other than these accounts, there is a multiplicity of references to national subservience. Hoshea king of Israel is turned into a vassal by the Assyrians in 17:3, and chs. 24 and 25 detail the exile of Judah to Babylon.

5. Genesis 47:13–26 in the Context of the Former Prophets

As was the case when looking at Gen 47:13–26 through the lens of slave materials of the Pentateuch, in each case continuity and discontinuity between the specific situation and the scenario described in Gen 47 must be identified. Additionally, even after this step has been completed several divergent implications from the process of comparison can usually be highlighted.

It is difficult to identify any specific implications for a canonical reading of Gen 47 from the passages in Joshua and Judges describing the forced labour of the Canaanites. Genesis 47 does not involve any forced labour on the part of the Egyptians, and furthermore, in the specific context of the invasion of Canaan, enslavement was an act of disobedience resulting from the failure to wipe out the inhabitants of the land (though it was permissible for people groups not specifically falling under the ban). Any attempt to trace similarity between the two events under the broad category of Israelite domination of other nations would run the risk of being unhelpfully general. Similarly, the servitude to which the Israelites were reduced under foreign kings in the book of Judges barely resembles the relief program of Gen 47.

instigator of the transaction. However, it does somewhat evoke a resonance of the kingly misbehaviour described in 1 Sam 8:11–18.

A more promising opportunity for comparison is found in Samuel's warning speech of 1 Sam 8:11–18. Using the verb לָקַח four times, Samuel emphasizes how a king would seize various assets that belonged to the Israelites.⁹ Lexical parallels between things that the king was said to seize and things the Egyptians gave up or suffered dearly to obtain in Gen 47:13–26 include fields (שָׂדֵה Gen 47:20/1 Sam 8:14), grain/seed (אֲרָבָה Gen 47:19, 23, 24/1 Sam 8:15), donkeys (חֲמֹרִים Gen 47:17/1 Sam 8:16), and flocks (צֹאֵן Gen 47:17, 21/1 Sam 8:17). Additionally, the phrase used in v. 17 to prophesy the king's enslavement of the Israelites uses the same לְ preposition + עֲבָדִים construction found in the Samaritan Pentateuch reading of Gen 47:21.¹⁰ (Also compare the pledges of the Egyptians that they will be slaves of the crown in Gen 47:19 and v. 25 using the verb חָיָה and עֲבָדִים.) In 1 Sam 8 the Israelites are threatened with having to turn over a tenth of their grain and vineyards (v. 15) and their flocks (v. 17). Interestingly, the verb used in these two verses, עָשָׂר, is elsewhere used in Jacob's vow to God in Gen 28:22, Levitical tithing regulations in Deut 14:22 and 26:12, and the renewing of the practice of the tithe in Neh 10:38, 39. This possibly may suggest that the kingly behaviour described here was a wrongly monarchal appropriation of a donation that was meant for the house of God.¹¹

⁹ The steady repetition of “take” found in the ESV is slightly misleading, as the verb used in v. 15 and v. 17 is in fact עָשָׂר.

¹⁰ The BHS apparatus indicates that the Gen 47:21 LXX reading of “κατεδουλώσατο αὐτῷ εἰς παῖδας” follows the meaning of the SP (as compared to the MT) at this point, although it certainly differs (in wording if not greatly in meaning) from the 1 Sam 8:17 LXX reading of “καὶ ὑμεῖς ἔσεσθε αὐτῷ δοῦλοι.” The synonymous use of δοῦλος and παῖς in Lev 25:44 may indicate a great deal of overlap in their meanings.

¹¹ Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, 258. Tsumura seems to provide evidence for this assertion but does not fully draw out its implications when, partially quoting McCarter, he notes that the religious

Additionally, some secondary sources have noticed the similarities between 1 Sam 8 and Gen 47.¹²

The relevance of the contemporary Canaanite parallel (see previous footnote) is contested by Klein, who notes that the Canaanites did not seem to find this semi-feudal system objectionable, as well as the lack of apparent reference to foreign rulers in the passage.¹³ Nevertheless, in the context of this passage this description clearly functions as a warning (1 Sam 8:9).

In the relation of 1 Sam 8 and Gen 47, once again the question must be asked how the bridge is being crossed between Joseph's (functioning as part of the Egyptian government) treatment of the Egyptians and the Hebrews and a later political situation

tithe is itself based on the political model of a Yahwistic kingship. Does this indicate a wrongful human appropriation of divine privilege?

¹² De Vaux, *The Early History of Israel*, 306–307; Weinfeld, Review of *Der Widerstand gegen das Königtum*, 100–101, 103. While the canonical focus of the present study is chiefly interested in investigating the literary effect of the ordering of the books in the Tanakh, it is not inappropriate to interact with how earlier diachronic studies have compared viewpoints advocated by different passages, regardless of the reconstructions of their compositional histories proffered. Although the interpretation of Carr has already been noted (see overview in ch. 1), De Vaux and Crüsemann likewise date the composition of Gen 47 during the periods of the rule of David and Solomon, and thus functioning to legitimate their practices. De Vaux assumes (without arguing) that the author of the material dealing with Joseph's agricultural policies found his economic innovations in Egypt superior to the Israelite economy. His solution to the apparent discrepancy created when this is contrasted with 1 Sam 8 is to assign the Joseph materials to a later period during the reign of Solomon, supporting this assertion by noting the connections between the Joseph story and wisdom literature as well as the tendencies toward empire in Solomon's reign. While the present study has contended that the narrator of Genesis did not appear to censure Joseph's economic policy in Egypt, the evidence seems too scanty to confidently claim that the narrator sought to portray it as superior to the Israelite system. A somewhat similar hypothesis, formulated as a rebellion against older critical theories that assigned apparently anti-monarchal passages to the hands of a post-exilic redactor is advanced by Crüsemann, who argues that 1 Sam 8:11–17 originated from those who found the forced labour practices of David and Solomon odious. This thesis is supported on the historical grounds that comparable semi feudal practices can be documented from extant records of surrounding Canaanite kings in this time period. The Joseph material, believed to have been composed later functioned, as Weinfeld explains, "a polemical reaction to 1 Sam. viii 17: people do become slaves to the sovereign, but only in order to maintain their own existence, as happened in Egypt. Thus the royal levies are a necessary evil and are not to be condemned." Assuming the intended referent of 1 Sam 8:17 is some kind of forced labour, the discrepancy between the two passages appears too great to sustain this kind of hypothesis. It is also a very awkward reading of Gen 47, as in the story it is the Egyptians who are forced in slavery while the Israelites enjoyed handouts from the crown.

¹³ Klein, *1 Samuel*, 73–74; Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, 254–255. Conversely, Tsumura offers additional support for the possible influence of Canaanite thought on this passage, as its discourse style bears great similarities to comparable documents listing the rights of a king.

involving intra-Israelite subservience. Additionally, while 1 Sam 8:11–18 repeatedly emphasizes the future king’s “taking” things belonging to the Israelites,¹⁴ the progression of verbs in Gen 47 is rather cluttered with terms such as “give,” “buy,” and “sell,” which throughout emphasize (at least after the initial exchange of vv. 15–17) the initiative of the Egyptians in instigating this particular arrangement.¹⁵ Furthermore, the type of slavery referenced in 1 Sam 8:17 is most generally interpreted as forced labour for building projects, such as that later incorporated by Solomon,¹⁶ while as mentioned before, there is no hint of forced labour in Gen 47, which most clearly resembles debt slavery. Read canonically, multiple possibilities unfold as Joseph’s much gentler treatment of his own countrymen must be taken into account as well (following Carr).

The first option, viewing Joseph’s treatment of the Egyptians as being responded to by 1 Sam 8,¹⁷ would involve Joseph coming off substantially better than the hypothetical being described by Samuel. While Samuel’s king only “takes” (giving to his select favorite officials) the bargaining process of Joseph was for the purpose of giving provisions to the Egyptians to get them through the famine. Furthermore, the institution of debt slavery can hardly be compared to the harshness of forced labour. Nevertheless, the one-fifth tax imposed by Joseph comes off as harsh when a one-tenth tax described by Samuel is intended to be an extreme punishment, and furthermore, Joseph’s brothers in

¹⁴ The precise force of this “taking” is disputed. While Klein (*1 Samuel*, 77) reads this as straightforward unlawful seizure, the treatment of Weinfeld (Review of *Der Widerstand gegen das Königtum*, 106) instead interprets “take” in this context as referring to Ugaritic and Hittite legal idioms referencing “conscription to royal forces” and “gifts to private individuals.”

¹⁵ An interesting grammatical observation is made by Klein (*1 Samuel*, 76) who notes that in 1 Sam 8:11–18, the object is always placed first in the sentence, emphasizing the goods being taken from the Israelite people (to the extent that word order can always be taken as a reliable guide of emphasis in a sentence). This construction does not seem to be followed anywhere in Gen 47:13–26, which generally prefers a traditional verb-subject-object word order throughout.

¹⁶ Klein, *1 Samuel*, 77–78; Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, 259–260.

¹⁷ To clarify, this would compare Joseph’s treatment of the Egyptians with the way that a future Israelite king treated Israelites. Nothing in 1 Sam 8 pertains to the way an Israelite king would treat foreigners.

Gen 47 sound suspiciously familiar to the officials mentioned in 1 Sam 8:14–15 who receive handouts from the king while the rest of their countrymen have property confiscated and are put into slavery. Perhaps the canonical function of 1 Sam 8 (when read in light of Gen 47) is to emphasize the cruelty of the Israelite monarch to come (primarily his property seizures and forced labour) while simultaneously casting doubt upon the morality of Joseph's tithe and preferential treatment of his brothers.

Conversely, one could instead compare Joseph's treatment of his own countrymen with the actions of the kings described in 1 Sam 8 and produce a much different reading. While the seizures and enforced taxes described by Samuel seem entirely absent from Joseph's treatment of his brothers, there was a measure of voluntary servitude toward him on their part as well (see discussion in chapter 3 section B.2), but hardly one that would be comparable with forced labour practices (thus rendering the critical thesis of justification of later forced labour practices doubtful). When compared with the ruler of 1 Sam 8, Joseph's treatment of his brothers seems extravagantly generous.

Thus, no matter which option is taken, when read in canonical order, one senses a resonance of the loss of property and tax burden suffered by the Egyptians, though as a whole Joseph comes off much better than Samuel's future king. The main point drawn out of this comparison, then, would seem to acknowledge that some aspects of Joseph's policies for the Egyptians were less than ideal.

Little else in 1 Samuel seems relevant enough to compare to Gen 47, as the potential slavery treaty with the Ammonites in 11:1, the recounting of the Judges cycle in 12:9 and the captivity of 30:2, while stating the obvious that certain forms of subservience are undesirable, have little in common with the debt slavery of Gen 47.

Likewise, little from 2 Sam 8 can be drawn other than a general affirmation of the blessing of subjugating foreign nations (as none of the peoples put to forced labour in this chapter fell under the ban for total destruction).

The emphasis on forced labour through the rest of the materials in 1 Kings erects a substantial bridge to cross if one wishes to reflect on potential comparisons to Gen 47. While the approach of the critical sources surveyed above seems excessively speculative, it could be noted that if one were to compare Joseph's treatment of the Egyptians with the forced labour practices of the united monarchy that the purpose of forced labour was building projects for the crown, not national relief, that the forced labour was even less voluntary than debt slavery for the impoverished, and that these projects likely did not immediately benefit the population in any way, thus showing Joseph in a fairly good light. The matter of the narrator's occasional insistence on the exemption of the Israelites from the labour draft introduces an anomaly in the understanding of the 1 Kings data that will be examined further below.

The mention of debt-slavery in 2 Kgs 4:1–7 introduces a more promising opportunity for comparison. Reminiscent of the (albeit regally oriented) warnings of 1 Sam 8, 2 Kgs 4:1 uses an infinitive construct form of קָחָה to describe the taking of the woman's children as slaves.¹⁸ That this state of debt-slavery (while permissible by Pentateuchal legislation) is undesirable is shown by Elisha's immediate action in miraculously providing (through material provisions!)¹⁹ a means for the woman to pay

¹⁸ Though the extent of the implications of this fact may be limited, it is interesting to note that nowhere in the slave laws of the Pentateuch is this verb used to denote someone acquiring a slave. See footnote discussion in section above.

¹⁹ Though its authorial intention is unlikely, this contrast is speculatively interesting. Joseph's actions resulted in the people's loss of material possessions that kept them in a state of debt slavery, while Elisha provided materials that allowed a woman to get out of debt slavery.

off her debts and live in freedom with her children. Of course, the discontinuity between this and the debt slavery of Gen 47:13–26 that must be noted is, of course families were not fractured and people were not uprooted from their homes in Gen 47.²⁰

In conclusion, the primary text from the former prophets that bears comparison with Gen 47:13–26 is 1 Sam 8:11–18, and when read in canonical order, it would seem to for the most part describe an Israelite king far harsher than Joseph was to the Egyptians, while gazing unfavourably on his tax system and overall tendency towards the extraction of material resources.

C. The Latter Prophets

1. Isaiah

A number of passages in Isaiah reiterate the predictable themes of the servitude of Israel being a curse and its domination of other nations being a blessing. For a couple of examples, 14:2–3 depict Israel turning the tables and taking their former oppressors as slaves, while in 31:8 the Assyrians are said to be put into forced labour as a punishment. The description of a glorious future time found in 60:12 states that nations that refuse to serve Israel will be destroyed, and 61:1 portrays God as one who releases slaves in a dramatic prediction of the return from exile.

2. Jeremiah

Jeremiah frequently drives home the point that servitude to foreigners is a punishment for Israel's disobedience to God (5:19; 17:4; 25:11, 14; 27:6–11; 28:14), although this is sometimes portrayed as outright destruction (21:7). At the same time, the promise of eventual release and restoration is held out in 30:8–10 and 46:27, 28. Most relevantly for the present study, the concept of slavery is directly dealt with in ch. 22 and

²⁰ Assuming the correctness of the LXX and SP readings over the MT reading of 47:21.

ch. 34. In the context of 22:13, the sins of king Jehoiakim are in focus, and this “oracle of disaster” directly indicts him for his forced labour practices, particularly building a lavish palace at the expense of others (see vv. 14–19).²¹ In particular, this verse evokes the commandment of Lev 19:13, which shares the admonition to not mistreat one’s neighbour (רַעַ), as well as the command to promptly pay wages.²² It is also reminiscent of the warning of 1 Sam 8:17.

Jeremiah 34 deals quite in depth with the debt slavery practices of the Israelites during this time. After a recorded prophecy in vv. 1–7 promising the imminent destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar yet the prospect of a peaceful death for Zedekiah, an announcement of another prophecy occurs in v. 8.²³ Some background information for this prophecy is provided by vv. 8–11, which note that King Zedekiah had made a covenant with the people that involved the people promising to release their male and female Hebrew slaves. After brief time of following this mandate, the people then recaptured their slaves. The content of the prophecy itself, found in vv. 13–22 begins with a reminder of the covenant made with the Exodus generation, which included the (possibly oft-transgressed?) mandate to free all Hebrew debt-slaves after six years (vv. 13, 14). The decree to free the slaves was a righteous act (v. 15) but its breaking constituted profaning God’s name (v. 16) and as a result judgement and destruction for Jerusalem and its people is described in vv. 17–22.

²¹ Allen, *Jeremiah*, 250; Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 319–320. As wages are not mentioned in earlier accounts of forced labour practices, it is difficult to ascertain if earlier kings committed this sin of nonpayment as well. The elasticity of potential meanings of עָבַד complicates the interpretation of v. 13, as it could simply refer to work performed or the situation of outright enslavement.

²² Though note the use of the feminine singular construct form of פָּעֻלָּה in Lev 19:13 as opposed to the masculine singular construct form of פָּעֻל in Jer 22:13.

²³ Note that both v. 1 and v. 8 begin with “The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD” (הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר-הָיָה אֵלַי-יְרֵמְיָהוּ מֵאֵת יְהוָה).

A number of key words and phrases tie this passage to the slave codes of the Mosaic law and other relevant passages. Beginning in v. 8, “liberty” (דְּרוֹר) occurs also in the jubilee year commandment of Lev 25:10, the promise of national restoration and freedom in Isa 61:1, and a law mandating that inheritances given by the future prince to one of his servants be returned to the family in the “year of liberty” in Ezek 46:17.²⁴ In v. 9, the verb for “set free” (שָׁלַח) also occurs in the context of releasing (chattel, not debt) slaves in Exod 21:26, 27 (elsewhere in this passage it occurs in vv. 10, 11, 14, and 16). The adjective “free” (חֲפֵשִׁי) is also found in vv. 9, 10, 11, 14, 16 (though obscured by many English translations in v. 9).²⁵ It is found in the context of releasing slaves in Exod 21:2, 5, 26, 27; Deut 15:12, 13, 18; Job 3:19; Isa 58:6. Holladay states that the two terms (שָׁלַח+חֲפֵשִׁי) occur together in the context of releasing slaves in Deut 15:12, 13, 18; Isa 58:6; Job 39:5 (though he omits Exod 21:26, 27 possibly because they deal with injuries to a chattel slave).²⁶ It is repeatedly pointed out that these slaves were male (טֶבֶד) and female (שִׁפְחָה) (vv. 9, 10, 11, 16). This emphasis on inclusivity of both genders is reminiscent of the diction of Deut 15:12–18 (which uses אִמָּה to signify the female slave), but crucially, שִׁפְחָה is found in a legal context only in Lev 19:20. Holladay observes some 13 non-legal passages where the טֶבֶד/שִׁפְחָה pair is used to denote male and female

²⁴ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 240. Elsewhere in this passage it occurs in v. 15 and v. 17.

²⁵ This adjective is curiously not rendered in the ESV, NASB, or NIV. It can be found in the KJV. The BHS apparatus does not list it as missing from any of the other versions.

²⁶ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 240.

servants.²⁷ However, a search for verses containing אָמָה/עֶבֶד for male and female servants returns the interesting result of being found, predictably in a glut of legal passages²⁸ but elsewhere only in Ezra 2:65/Neh 7:67; Job 31:13, as well as the servant/son of maid servant pair in Ps 86:16; 116:16. The specific notice that these slaves were Hebrew (עֶבְרִיָּה and עֶבְרִי), (v. 9, 14) also deserves attention. While the male form of this noun is used to describe a slave in Exod 21:1, the female form is only found elsewhere in Deut 15:12.

Verse 14 is introduced as a summation of instruction given to the Israelites when they came out of Egypt (v. 13),²⁹ and it is thus instructive to note its use of legal terminology and phraseology. The opening phrase (מִקֵּץ שְׂבִיעַ שָׁנִים) follows exactly the phrasing of Deut 15:1, which specifically refers to the release of what a creditor has lent to his Israelite neighbour (although omitting the *maqef* found in the Masoretic text). The following verb (שָׁלַח) is used in legal contexts to denote the freeing of slaves only in Exod 21:26, 27 (which was chattel slaves, not debt slaves) and Deut 15:12, 13, and 18. Other texts use יָצָא, likely to emphasize the action of the slave leaving rather than the master releasing.³⁰ The use of the descriptor “your brother” in legal texts discussing slavery is found in Lev 25:39, 47 as well as Deut 15:12. As previously noted, the specific

²⁷ Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 240. His texts are Gen 12:16; 20:14; 24:35; 30:43; 32:6; Deut 28:68; 1 Sam 8:16; 2 Kgs 5:26; Isa 14:2; Joel 3:2; Eccl 2:7; Esth 7:4 2 Chr 28:10. To this one might also add Isa 24:2; Ps 123:2.

²⁸ These passages are Exod 20:10, 17; 21:7, 20, 26, 27, 32; Lev 25:6, 44; Deut 5:14, 21; 12:12, 18; 15:17; 16:11, 14.

²⁹ Jeremiah 34:13 contains the prepositional phrases מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֶבְדִים. Note how the specific reference to the institution of slavery in Egypt, and not just the event of being brought out of Egypt further reflects Deuteronomistic terminology (see discussion in chapter 3 section B.7).

³⁰ Note how it occurs multiple times through Exod 21:2–11; Lev 25:41, 54.

identification of slaves as Hebrew (עֶבְרִי) is a feature unique to Exod 21:2 and Deut 15:12. The next significant word (מכר) is only used for transactions involving debt slaves in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. While the predominant use of “sell” in Exodus might simply indicate the impetus being on the slave who sells himself, the reflexive use of מכר elsewhere would caution against hasty conclusions. The service length of “six years” (שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים) is found in Exod 21:2 and Deut 15:12, 18. As previously noted, the use of “free” (חֲפְשִׁי) in slave laws is exclusive to Exodus and Deuteronomy. In conclusion, although the terminology employed for the legal paraphrase in Jer 31:14 is sometimes exclusive to the laws of either Exodus or Leviticus, it is consistently found in Deuteronomy, and thus it would seem that for this “quotation” Jeremiah was primarily relying on Deuteronomy, (though referencing the phrasing of a general seventh-year release text as well as texts more directly dealing with slavery). Nevertheless, his choice of diction is somewhat more freely plucked from other books in vv. 8–11.

Turning to the significance of the all the phenomena just identified, the particular word choices made in this section emphasize the initiative of the slave owners, who themselves were slaves in Egypt, in releasing their slaves. This mixes the idea of release from debt slavery with the jubilee (a connection already found in Lev 25). Therefore, this passage illustrates how seriously the release laws were taken in the eyes of God. The implications of the overwhelming emphasis on Deuteronomistic phraseology and vocabulary would seem to point to the specific debt-slavery situation described in Jer 34 being more similar to Deut 15:12–18 than Exod 21 or Lev 25, while the Levitical jubilee

terminology may have been intended to emphasize the importance and significance of the release itself. The fact that most of the words and phrases studied above can be found in Deuteronomy would seem to cast doubt upon Holladay's assertion that, "the specific application of the law referred to in the present passage of Jer uses phraseology that does not reflect directly any single extant formulation of the law."³¹ Further commenting on the apparent discrepancy between the release periods of seven years and forty-nine years found in Deuteronomy and Leviticus respectively (as well as the fallow laws interspersed throughout), Holladay takes this as a sign of redactional activity that did not quite result in a coherent end product, stating, "It is thus evident not only that the laws recorded variously in Exodus 21, Leviticus 25, and Deuteronomy 15 have undergone a complicated evolution..." Notwithstanding the reality of the compositional process of these documents (the possibility of objective access to which is dubious), there is great reason for optimism regarding the feasibility of harmonizing the various fallow and release laws, as argued by Chirichigno.³² Holladay also fails to correctly deal with the different situations being described by the three slave laws when he not only states that discrepancies exist between their release laws, but that Leviticus outlaws debt slavery for Israelites in 25:42–43, 46.³³ In the case of vv. 42–43, this completely overlooks the complexities surrounding the issues of whether to translate "sell" in this case passively or reflexively (see Pentateuch section above), and would introduce an outright contradiction with v. 39. Furthermore, v. 46 is clearly addressing the issue of chattel slavery, not debt

³¹ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 238.

³² Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 343. Providing examples of ancient Near Eastern parallels that cast doubt upon the Wellhausen era argument that the forty-ninth year release was a much later innovation, Chirichigno presents the conclusions of his harmonistic reading, stating, "these different dates of release reflected the severity of the debt involved. The seven year release...was stipulated in those cases in which a debtor was forced to sell a dependent in order to pay an antecedent debt...However, the 50-year release...stipulated...people who were forced to sell all of their patrimonial land."

³³ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 240.

slavery and thus cannot be claimed as evidence against the legitimacy of the institution of debt slavery between Israelites (when practiced within appropriate limits). Therefore, in summary, Jer 34 clearly shows the importance of following the release laws in debt slavery, but does not directly attack the institution itself.

3. Ezekiel

Like the book of Isaiah, Ezekiel is relatively uninteresting for those seeking to detect ideological bias for or against the issue of slavery. Instead, the familiar themes of God freeing Israel from foreign captivity (34:27), and enslavement to other nations being a punishment for disobedience (39:23) are found. Also worth noting is the admonition that the future “prince” must have his land revert back to being in the family name in the year of jubilee if he gives any of it as an inheritance to his servants (46:17).³⁴

4. Book of the Twelve

Relatively few ideologically significant references to slavery exist in the Book of the Twelve. Joel’s vision of a dramatic outpouring of the spirit in a future time includes male and female slaves being included in this experience of dreams and visions (3:1–2 MT/2:28–29 Eng). Selling and buying the poor for silver are condemned in Amos 2:6 and 8:6, respectively.³⁵ Malachi 1:6 seems to assume that a servant honours his master.

³⁴ While the specific focus of the present chapter is slavery, it is worth noting that Ezek 46:18 can be taken as creatively responding to 1 Sam 8:10–18, emphasizing that the future prince will not take anyone’s property. Also, the fact that this prince may potentially be giving property to his servants rather than seizing it places him in a somewhat different light than previous Israelite rulers.

³⁵ Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 164–166; Hamborg, *Still Selling the Righteous*, 202–207. Despite the contentions of some that these verses refer to bribery in a court setting, most scholars agree that debt slavery is in focus. However, it is not the institution of debt slavery that is condemned, but rather the unjust way in which it is carried out.

5. Genesis 47:13–26 in the Context of the Latter Prophets

The only passage in the corpus of the latter prophets that directly comments on the institution of debt slavery is Jer 34,³⁶ and as such the following section will attempt to reflect upon the possibilities arising from the comparison of Gen 47:13–26 with Jer 34. Upon preliminary inspection the disparities between the two scenarios are so great as to discourage the attempt at relating the two passages, but several concepts create useful linkages. To establish the potential discontinuities from the outset, it must again be remembered that Joseph's relationship with the Egyptian people could potentially be mapped out in different ways. The various critical theories that posited a relationship between 1 Sam 8 and Gen 47 surveyed above clearly assumed it was legitimate (or part of the intention of the original author of the account) to take the actions of Joseph (acting as part of the Egyptian ruling hierarchy) towards the Egyptian people and almost allegorically transfer them to an application of an Israelite ruler and Israelite people. Accordingly, the previous sections of the present study that have sought to read Gen 47:13–26 through the lens of later canonical materials relevant to slavery have mapped out various possibilities for how the bridge between the two contexts can be crossed.³⁷ With this in mind, it can be stated that Jer 34 specifically deals with debt slavery, wherein Israelites own other Israelites. Furthermore, the main point being dealt with in Jer 34 is

³⁶ Brief mention should be made of Jer 22. While the materials relating to forced labour in 1 Kings presented the interpreter with some difficulties, it is the contention of the present study that the actions of Joseph in Gen 47 would compare favourably with the labour practices of the monarchy. Since Jer 22 presents an explicitly negative appraisal of (at least one instantiation of) this institution, the same conclusion regarding its canonical function would only be more emphasized in this case.

³⁷ Although it has not been explicitly stated thus far in the present study, it would not be amiss to simply point out that four such quasi-allegorical applications of Gen 47:13–26 could be made: 1) A foreigner ruling over foreigners, 2) A foreigner ruling over Israelites, 3) An Israelite ruling over foreigners, and 4) An Israelite ruling over other Israelites. Naturally, 3 and 4 would be the most likely dialog partners. Additionally, one could be working with Joseph's treatment of the Egyptians or his treatment of his brothers.

the obedience to the release year, a factor that is not mentioned in Gen 47. Genesis 47 describes a people group voluntarily entering debt slavery for the purpose of alleviating economic unease. However, several interesting thematic parallels between the two passages are worth noting. The kingly participation in Jer 34 is a unique feature, as here the king enacts a covenant to free all of the people's debt slaves during a time of national unsettlement. This can be compared to the ruling figure of Gen 47, who progressively trades food for all the people's resources until they are forced to sell themselves into slavery. However, the king of Jer 34 was not indicted for directly enslaving anyone, and as has been done before, Joseph can be compared with the landowners of this passage. Here, the landowners did initially follow the covenant initiative to release their slaves (something Joseph is not recorded as having done), but they then quickly slid away from this attempt at obedience and took their slaves back (a situation not encountered by Joseph). The difficult aspect of this situation is determining the motivation for the people's actions, as the warfare conditions and costs of maintaining slaves would conceivably have presented a deterrent to their upkeep.³⁸ Unlike Joseph, who had the means to maintain the people's wellbeing, this choice of the Israelites in Jer 34 seems ill-informed given the siege conditions. In Gen 47 this economic arrangement is motivated by the hard conditions of the famine, while in Jer 34:17 famine is a punishment promised

³⁸ Some of the debate on this question is summarized in Keown et al., *Jeremiah 26–52*, 187: "Many commentators speculate about the motivations for releasing slaves during a siege. Three possibilities are usually mentioned: (1) Economic—to reduce the number of mouths to feed. According to documents from the siege of Nippur, some people sold their children into slavery in part to ensure that they would be fed, believing that slaveholders would protect their investments by keeping their slaves alive...Taking the slaves back as soon as the Babylonian forces withdrew makes less sense, as it presumes an extraordinary level of confidence about the future. (2) Military—to make more men available to defend the city. Why couldn't they fight while they were still slaves? The release of female slaves along with males is not explained by this hypothesis. (3) Religious—to gain the LORD's favor. The Babylonian withdrawal could be interpreted as God's response to their act of obedience. Nevertheless, to subjugate their slaves again right away would have been remarkably cynical, showing profound disrespect for the king as well as God. The passage itself shows no interest in discussing such matters, however."

for the Israelites for their disobedience in the act of taking back their slaves. In Gen 47 the loss of people's resources is reported as a fact of the situation of the famine (but Joseph's economic arrangement provided for resources to be sent to the crown which was then able to support the people), while in Jer 34:17 the destruction of the Israelite's property is proclaimed as a curse for their injustice to their own people. Another shared concept is death. While in Gen 47:19 the Egyptians request an arrangement of debt slavery to obtain food and avoid dying (at the cost of some of their animals), in Jer 34:20 the high officials and people of the land are told that as punishment for breaking the covenant of the release of slaves, their dead bodies will become food for birds and wild animals.³⁹ The theme of resource distribution can also be detected in Jer 34:22, which warns that enemies will seize and destroy Israel's cities, a fate far worse than the sacrifice of some material resources.

For a somewhat ambiguous conclusion, as was the case when looking at Gen 47:13–26 in the context of the slave codes found in the Pentateuch, one must admit that the mandatory release regulations are a genuine advance over the situation of Gen 47. Additionally, Zedekiah's initiative in freeing the Hebrew slaves can be contrasted with Joseph's initiative in enslaving the populace. Aside from these two factors which would gaze unfavorably on Joseph's actions, in almost every other way (particularly concerning resource distribution) the actions of Joseph seem quite reasonable and certainly more benevolent than those of the Israelite landowners of Jer 34.⁴⁰

³⁹ Admittedly, this kind of creative word association may indeed border on deconstructionism.

⁴⁰ While this did not seem important enough to address above, one should also keep in mind that it was specifically Hebrew slaves being discussed in Jer 34. If Joseph's actions are mapped onto the way Israelites treated foreign slaves, there would be no censure of his behaviour.

D. The Writings

1. Psalms, Proverbs, and Job

Several passages from these three books provide a window of insight regarding how slavery was viewed in a general wisdom context. Psalm 18:44, 45 features David thanking the Lord that foreigners were subservient to him. Proverbs 12:24 states that the destiny of the lazy is to be put to forced labor (עֲמָל). Proverbs 17:2 predicts a share in the master's inheritance and rule over the master's children for a faithful servant. In Prov 19:10, it is stated that it is shameful for princes to be ruled by slaves. A more cynical attitude towards slaves is taken in ch. 29, as v. 19 states that mere words will not be sufficient for their discipline, and v. 21 states that a pampered servant will end up becoming an heir. Proverbs 30:10 warns against criticizing a servant to his master, and v. 22 states that it is unbecoming for a slave to become a king. Proverbs 7:2 seems to acknowledge that a hard life is to be expected for a slave. A lack a response and recognition from his servants is taken by Job to be a curse in 19:15–16, while in proclamation of his innocent in 31:13–15 Job protests that he has not ignored any of his servants when they were in distress.

2. Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther

The books of the Five Megillot contain only a handful of direct references to the institution of slavery. In Lam 1:1, Israel's status of servitude is mourned, while in 5:8 somewhat disparaging imagery is used of the nation's oppressors in the phrase "slaves rule over us." In Eccl 2:7 the possession of male and female slaves is assumed to be a material blessing. In 10:7 the coexistence of slaves on horseback and princes walking on foot is taken to be a great evil. Interestingly, in Est 7:4 slavery is used as a hyperbolic

comparison to the prospect of annihilation; Esther dramatically claims that slavery would not have been worth complaining about compared to the prospect of destruction for all the Jews.

3. Ezra-Nehemiah

The placement of Ezra-Nehemiah within the Tanakh is problematic on the grounds of its subject matter describing events chronologically after those of book that follows it, Chronicles.⁴¹ However, this can likely be explained on the grounds of the special function of Chronicles, which reaches back to the beginnings of the world,⁴² recounts the story of the monarchy, and ends with a promise of a return to the land and a rebuilt temple.⁴³

The number of slaves owned by the people who came up out of Nebuchadnezzar's captivity (Ezra 2:1/Neh 7:6) is counted as 7,337 (Ezra 2:65/Neh 7:67), out of a total Jewish population of 42,360 (Ezra 2:64/Neh 7:66). It is worth noting that the function of this notice in the list is to show that the slaves were considered as property, and that some of those returning from exile were quite wealthy.⁴⁴ It is unclear whether foreign chattel slaves are specifically designated by this notice or not.

Nehemiah 5:1–13 describes the intriguing and relevant problem of intra-Israelite debt slavery faced by the returned Jewish community. Vv. 2–5 describe three different groups of people who have been mistreated by being forced to surrender their children to slavery or their lands and property to creditors in order to afford to purchase grain or pay

⁴¹ Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 389.

⁴² Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 402.

⁴³ Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 404.

⁴⁴ Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 38; Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 93. That this notice accurately displays a high level of wealth for the community is contested by Blenkinsopp, who argues that presumably a small number of people would have a large number of servants.

the taxes imposed by the nobility. This enrages Nehemiah (v. 6) and he calls a meeting, accusing the nobles of exacting interest from their own people (v. 7). He further argues that while he and some of his followers have been attempting to buy back their fellow Jews from foreign enslavement, what the nobles are doing is counterproductive because it simply places the lower classes into enslavement to other Israelites (v. 8). Nehemiah then states that this practice goes against the fear of the Lord (v. 9), orders an ending to the gathering of interest (v. 10), and commands that all seized property must be returned (v. 11). The people's response of obedience and Nehemiah's dire warning for those who reneged on their promise are recorded in vv. 12–13.

For the purpose of discerning the precise outlook this passage displays on slavery, it is helpful to compare its themes, phrasing and vocabulary with the materials found in the slave codes of the Mosaic law (and elsewhere when appropriate). The word used to reference one's countrymen as "Jewish" (יהודי) in Neh 5:1, 8 is found only in the books of 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Nehemiah, Esther, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Zechariah. By way of contrast, "Hebrew" (עברי) is found in Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, 1 Samuel, 1 Chronicles, Jeremiah and Jonah. They appear together only in Jer 34:9, where they appear to be used synonymously.⁴⁵ There would seem to be good reason to believe that in this context (Neh 5:1, 8) "Jew" functions in a way roughly congruent with the use of the

⁴⁵ Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 223–224, 256. Blenkinsopp states that יהודי can have different senses in the book of Nehemiah, at times carrying territorial, ethnic, or religious designations and sometimes a mix of all three. Commenting on the use of the term in 2:16, he notes it functions territorially in pre-exilic biblical writings, some post-exilic biblical texts and contemporary Assyrian inscriptions as well the writings of Josephus. However, Blenkinsopp notes it acquires an "ethnic sense with religious overtones" as it is used to refer to those living outside the land occupied by the post-exilic community. The use of the term of community "brother" (אָה) together with "Jew" is found only in Jer 34:9 and Neh 5:1, 8, while with "Hebrew" is found only in Deut 15:12 and Jer 34:14.

“Hebrew” in Deut 15:12. In Neh 5:8 in particular, it is clear that enslaved Hebrews were in focus, while in Neh 5:1 these fellow Jews were the wealthy oppressors.

The loss of possessions bemoaned by the people in v. 3 points to a situation in which they, as Williamson states, “owned land that they could use as security against a loan to tide them over the period of difficulty.”⁴⁶ Inability to repay these loans resulted in the loss of fields, vineyards, and houses, thus by the vehicle of default on a loan rather than sale forced by poverty breaking the prohibitions against the permanent loss of such things in Lev 25:31–34. Fensham notes that the word translated here as “mortgage” (עֲרֵב) is only used in this way in this place in Nehemiah, as it more commonly means “surety” or “barter” elsewhere.⁴⁷

Regarding v. 5, both Blenkinsopp and Williamson make the observation that neither the Jews nor Nehemiah state that the law has been broken, and neither does Nehemiah appeal to the law to enforce correct behaviour.⁴⁸ As previously noted in the present study, debt slavery as such and even selling one’s children into slavery was permissible under the law (Exod 21:2–11; Deut 15:12–18) albeit with the stipulation of a seventh year release (a feature never mentioned in Neh 5). Both Blenkinsopp and Williamson cite Exod 21:1–11 as proof of this point,⁴⁹ evidently not realizing that vv. 7–11 does not seem to be addressing debt slavery, as v. 7 clearly states that a daughter sold into slavery (for the purpose of marriage) will not be released in the same way as the man described in vv. 2–6. However, they both raise the excellent point that in cases where

⁴⁶ Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 237.

⁴⁷ Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, 191.

⁴⁸ Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 258; Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 239.

⁴⁹ Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 238; Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 258.

money is lent to the poor (הַלְוָה + הַסֵּךְ, v. 4),⁵⁰ the exacting of interest is forbidden (Exod 22:24; Lev 25: 36, 37; Deut 23:20, 21; the violation of this ordinance is reported in Neh 5:7, 10),⁵¹ and furthermore anything essential for his livelihood taken as collateral (the cloak being the prime example of Exod 22:24–27 and Deut 24:10–13) cannot simply be seized. From this comparison both Blenkinsopp and Williamson conclude that there was in this case a general concern more for the spirit of the law than the letter of the law (a point they both return to later), as Blenkinsopp states, “procedures permissible in themselves are excluded in the case of the poor, and one of these is forcible seizure of pledges against defaulting.”⁵² Central to this claim is the repeated use of “brother” (אָח), here placed in the mouths of the Israelites instead of the narrator as in v. 1. Reminiscent of the diction of the slave laws of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, this serves to emphasize the solidarity the Israelites are to have with each other,⁵³ and brings to mind several passages that use “brother” and would speak harshly of the treatment they are undergoing, such as the passages mentioned above prohibiting exacting interest from an Israelite, as well as the seventh year release based command of Deut 15:2, 3. Based on these passages which directly prohibit exacting interest from a fellow Hebrew or seizing his property permanently, it is not entirely clear that Blenkinsopp’s diagnosis that Nehemiah acted on a, “traditional ethos, which comes to only partial expression in the

⁵⁰ The only other verse that contains both these words is Exod 22:24.

⁵¹ Note however that instead of the forms of the root הָשַׁךְ used in the law, Neh 5 uses the noun אֶשְׁכָּה, which is elsewhere only found in Neh 10:32.

⁵² Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 258. It would seem here that the theme of resource distribution becomes prominent, as has been noted in previous discussions above.

⁵³ Note the similar combined usages of אָח and אֶשְׁכָּה in Gen 37:27 and 2 Sam 19:13.

law,”⁵⁴ is correct. As the issue of the periodic release is not mentioned in this passage, it may be the case that enforcing the practice would be impractical,⁵⁵ or that, as Williamson argues, the year was too far away to make possible the necessary righting of wrongs in an acceptable amount of time.⁵⁶ If so, then there could be legitimate grounds for stating that Nehemiah was in some way going beyond the literal legal code to a more realized application of the purpose of the law.⁵⁷

In v. 7, the substance of Nehemiah’s charge is based on the outrage of the collection of interest from fellow Hebrews, the legal basis of which has been addressed above. It would seem apropos at this time to note that beyond the legal passages of Exod 22:24; Lev 25:36, 37 and Deut 23:20, 21 a number of wisdom and prophetic passages condemn unjust exaction of interest: Ezek 18:8, 13, 17; 22:12; Ps 15:5; Prov 28:8. This accusation is further fleshed out in v. 8, as Nehemiah notes that while he and his compatriots have been redeeming fellow Jews from slavery to foreign masters (in keeping with the mandate of Lev 25:48–49), other Jews have been selling their countrymen into slavery. The wording of this phrase does not clarify whether these Jews

⁵⁴ Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 258.

⁵⁵ This seems dubious on the grounds that Nehemiah’s forced return of all seized property seems just as difficult to enforce, yet he was able to pull it off.

⁵⁶ Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 238.

⁵⁷ It may be overly simplistic to speak of “going beyond” the law. (Going beyond to what, a “higher ethic”?) Clines, “Nehemiah 10 as an Example,” 111–117 analyzes some of the exegetical principles involved in Nehemiah’s use of the law in the summary statements of 10:29–40 and tries to draw some broad conclusions. On pg. 113, he lists four principles: That Nehemiah never displays significant discontinuity with the Pentateuch, that “extension or re-application is possible,” that extra laws are needed to work out the implications of Pentateuchal law, and that the law should be seen as harmonious. Fishbane, *Biblical Exegesis*, 129–131 argues that Neh 10 functions as a summary of all the legal innovations mandated by the situations encountered in Nehemiah’s time in power, citing parallels between his various rulings throughout the book and certain passages in Neh 10. Fishbane (130) claims historical precedent for this practice in the basis of the ancient Mesopotamian kings, who often to “instituted a series of temporary reforms at the outset of their reign in order to alleviate inherited socio-economic inequities, and these measures were subsequently reformulated as a royal (*mīšarum*) edict.” In the case of Neh 5, Fishbane cites a parallel in 10:32 (v. 31 Eng.), which forbids harvesting crops every seventh year and demanding repayment of all debts. Here, the proscriptions of chp. 10 merely reinforce what is already laid out in the Pentateuchal legislation.

are being sold to other Jews or to foreigners (to be later redeemed by other Jews).⁵⁸ In any case, this selling of fellow countrymen would violate Lev 25:42. The admonition to the fear of God in v. 9 recalls the use of this theme in Lev 25:17, 36, 43 as a motivational statement for obedience (though in Nehemiah “fear” is cast as a noun rather than a verb). The further threat that this behaviour results on the reproach of other nations (מְהַרְפֵּת (הַגּוֹיִם) recalls the use of these two words elsewhere as a warning in prophetic literature.⁵⁹

Nehemiah’s description of his “lending” (ESV) money and grain to his fellow Israelites is taken differently by Blenkinsopp and Williamson; for Blenkinsopp, “he is not confessing guilt...he is saying it is possible and necessary to do so without the abuses which they had come to abolish,”⁶⁰ while for Williamson, “Nehemiah candidly admits that he, his family...have also been involved in these practices.”⁶¹ Lexical evidence would seem to favor the position of Williamson; not only does BDB list only a definition of “lend, become creditor,”⁶² even some of the references given for the mildest meaning listed by Holladay (“lend, make a loan”)⁶³ seem to carry a negative connotation of one who lends unjustly (Jer 15:10; Isa 24:2). Furthermore, the use of the first person plural in the next clause (“Let us give back”) would support the theory that Nehemiah is involved in this restoration as well.

The commands for enacting justice are given in v. 11: all property and taxes of assets must be returned to those who forfeited them due to debt. This constitutes an

⁵⁸ Thus the disagreement between Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 259, who cites v. 9 as evidence that foreign owners were involved and Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 239, who sees this verse as evidence that being sold to a fellow Jew was considered by Nehemiah hardly preferable to being sold to a foreigner.

⁵⁹ Specifically see this combination used as a warning in Jer 29:18; 44:8; Ezek 5:14, 15; 22:4. The negation of this status as a blessing is witnessed in Ezek 36:15, 30; Joel 2:19.

⁶⁰ Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 260.

⁶¹ Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 240.

⁶² *BDB*, 674.

⁶³ Holladay, 247.

annulment of the original loans. Thus Blenkinsopp concludes that Nehemiah's actions in some ways resembled the carrying out of a year of Jubilee, citing the parallels of "fear of God" (noted above), "restitution of ancestral property" (Lev 25:27–28, 41), "prohibition of reducing fellow Israelites to slavery" (Lev 25:39, 46), and "charging interest on loans to the poor" (Lev 25:36).⁶⁴ It may be worth noting that 1 Sam 8:14 list fields, vineyards and olive orchards as things that an unjust ruler would confiscate. The use of "מֵאָה" is here somewhat difficult to understand, as taken literally interest of a "hundredth" (presumably every month) would lead to a rather low annual interest rate of 12%, and as a result some have suggested in this context it might better be taken as meaning "percentage."⁶⁵

In conclusion, while only indirectly alluding the commandments of the Mosaic law, Nehemiah enforces its strictures and possibly applies it in a way that transcends a wooden application.⁶⁶

4. 1 and 2 Chronicles

As Chronicles covers much of the same ground as Samuel-Kings, it is instructive to note the way the Chronicler has recontextualized and reshaped the account of the united and divided monarchies. Some passages familiar from Samuel-Kings have been virtually repeated verbatim, others are slightly reworded, and still others are curiously excised. Finally, the Chronicler unsurprisingly includes some material that is not found in

⁶⁴ Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 259.

⁶⁵ Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 233, 241.

⁶⁶ Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 245. To cite Williamson's final comments, "Somewhat characteristically, he made no direct appeal to the law. Although it made some humanitarian provision for those in such straits, it was never Nehemiah's style to be content with a legalistic minimum once his conscience and passion were aroused. Rather, he cut through to the spirit that lay behind the law and work positively to rectify the damage that had been caused."

Samuel-Kings. For a comparison of parallel and unique forced labour texts in Kings and Chronicles, see Chart 4 in Appendix A.

For the purposes of a thorough comparison, it should be noted that Chronicles omits the list of Solomon's officials that contains the notice about the man in charge of forced labour (1 Kgs 4:6). Several things are notable about the use of the labour description found in 1 Kgs 5:13–16 (27–30 MT). Aside from the fact that the surrounding dialogues with Hiram and reports of the temple construction are substantially different, it is interesting to notice that the report of Israelites being conscripted into labour (1 Kgs 5:13–14, 27–28 MT) is absent in Chronicles. In its place (2 Chr 2:16, 17 MT) the Chronicler substitutes a notice that Solomon counted all the “sojourners” (גַּר) in Israel, and in conjunction with the following verse the message is clearly conveyed that these “resident aliens” constituted the labour pool, not Israelites as in the account of 1 Kings. The following count of the stonecutters, carriers, and foremen (1 Kgs 5:15–16, 29–30 MT) is found in both 2 Chr 2:2 (v. 1 MT) and 2 Chr 2:18 (v. 17 MT), albeit with slightly different wordings in all three accounts. The only notable difference is the report of 3,300 foremen in 1 Kings and 3,600 foremen in 2 Chronicles; this discrepancy could likely be explained through the dropping of a lamed, resulting in the transition from שלש to שש. The most significant issue to deal with in the Chronicler's use of this material is the apparent inconsistency between the Israelite labour force of 1 Kings and the foreign labour force of 2 Chronicles. While Myers is content to allow a contradiction to stand between the two accounts,⁶⁷ Japhet believes that some degree of harmonisation of the two

⁶⁷ Myers, *II Chronicles*, 10. Myers states, “The Chronicler modified the claims of his source by limiting the levy to foreigners in Israel.”

sources is possible. Referencing 1 Kgs 9:20–23, which is paralleled by 2 Chr 8:7–10 (see below), she argues that the “officers” (שָׂרֵי) of 1 Kgs 9:23 and 5:30 are identical, resulting in Israelites only being overseers of the workers, who were composed of the foreigners living in Israel. This is supported on the grounds of the greater separation between the groups apparent in the 1 Kings text as compared to the accounts of the Chronicler. The different phrasing in Chronicles can be explained on the basis of the Chronicler’s view that these aliens are “attached to the people of Israel and sharing their destiny,”⁶⁸ and the way the Chronicler has amalgamated these groups of people by first presenting a large body counted by a census (2 Chr 2:17, MT 16).⁶⁹ However, the identification of the officers from 1 Kgs 9:23 (2 Chr 8:10) with those of 1 Kgs 5:16 (2 Chr 2:18) still results in a significant clash between their reported totals. Japhet’s solution, chalking it up to “different views of their role in the labour force,”⁷⁰ is somewhat less than satisfactory.⁷¹ Also still problematic is the fact that 2 Chr 8:7–10 seems to make a distinction between foreigners living in the land and “true” Israelites; the total number given in 2 Chr 2:17 is said to be specifically that of the foreigners in the land, and the chief officers in 2 Chr 2 seem to be foreigners.⁷² (While Japhet’s argument was specifically directed at harmonization the parallels of these two passages in 1 Kings, it does not seem to work for the 2 Chronicles texts.) A more satisfying solution is advanced by Rainey, who argues

⁶⁸ Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 547.

⁶⁹ Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 547. Japhet also notes the Chronicler explicitly portrays these actions of Solomon as following in the ways of his father David (1 Chron 2:17; 22:2).

⁷⁰ Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 547.

⁷¹ Somewhat more promising is the observation of Selman that in both cases the total adds up to 3850, but this hardly solves the entire problem. Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 348.

⁷² The total number of “aliens” given is 153,600 and since the figures of carriers, quarriers, and supervisors add up to this number it seems logical to assume that these “aliens” were supervisors. Thus Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 348 would seem to be wrong when he states that, “it is incorrect to argue that Gentile supervisors are mentioned in 2 Ch. 2:18, since no statement is made about their nationality.”

that different levels of officials oversaw the Israelite labour of gathering wood in Lebanon for shifts of a month (1 Kgs 9:23; 2 Chr 8:10) and the foreign labour (1 Kgs 5:16; 2 Chr 2:18).⁷³

Closely related to the passages addressed above are the issues generated by the relationship between 1 Kgs 9:20–23 and 2 Chr 8:7–10. 1 Kgs 9:20 and 2 Chr 8:7 are virtually identical except for the different ordering of the names of the people groups (the Hittites and Amorites are reversed) and the use of the “sons of Israel” instead of just “Israel” in 1 Kings. Likewise the beginning clauses of 1 Kgs 9:21 and 2 Chr 8:8 are almost indistinguishable,⁷⁴ but then diverge into “לֹא־יָכְלוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהַחֲרִימָם” (1 Kgs 9:21) and “לֹא־כָּלְוּם בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל” (2 Chr 8:8). Although the phrase “sons of Israel” is visibly found in both, the verbs beginning the clause are different and the Chronicler omits the final infinitive construct found in Kings. Thus in the Kings account the Israelites “were not able to destroy them,” (1 Kgs 9:21) while for the Chronicler, the Israelites “did not destroy/finish them.” (2 Chr 8:8) The two points worth mentioning coming out of the comparison of these clauses are that while the omission of חָרַם in the Chronicles account may be a significant sign of rhetorical reshaping,⁷⁵ the piel of כָּלָה seems to just as clearly communicate the idea of destruction, thereby tempering the plausibility of this

⁷³ Rainey, “Compulsory Labour Gangs,” 200–201. While this could still leave open the problem of the ethnicity of the supervisors, this could potentially be addressed by noting that Solomon was following David’s census of Israel (2 Sam 24; 1 Chron 21) which likely also served to identify the foreigners living in the land who comprised the “availability pool” for forced labour (2 Chron 2:17)

⁷⁴ The addition of the מֵן preposition at the beginning of 1 Chron 8:8 may be noteworthy, as Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 624 notes it possibly serves the function of “implying a more partial levy from the non-Israelites.” However, it is equally possible the Chronicler inserted it so as to match its use with the “sons of Israel” at the beginning of v. 9, thus nullifying the political polemic interpretation of this variant.

⁷⁵ De Vries, Simon J. *1 and 2 Chronicles*, 268. De Vries confidently asserts, “[2 Chron 8:8] has somewhat softened the harshness of 1 Kgs 9:21...thereby enhancing Solomon’s image.” However, an Israelite reading audience may not necessarily have blanched at the slaughter of surrounding nations.

hypothesis.⁷⁶ In the final clause of the verse, the Chronicler omits עֶבֶד from the construct לְמַס־עֶבֶד found in Kings.⁷⁷ Once again, while it may be tempting to posit this omission as a softening effect, it would be wise to heed the words of Selman, who argues that on the basis of the presence of עֶבֶד in v. 9 that its force is still implied here, regardless of the softer implications of מַס used alone elsewhere.⁷⁸

In 2 Chr 8:9, aside from a non-consequential insertion of a relative pronoun, the first variant of note is the transformation of the simple object of the verb “slave” לְעֶבְדִים לְמַלְאכָתוֹ found in 1 Kgs 9:22 into the longer phrase “to slaves for his work” לְעֶבְדִים לְמַלְאכָתוֹ. This seems to have the effect of intensifying the adamant negation of Solomon’s enslavement of his own people, although it also could simply be clarifying the native Israelite’s exemption from labour in the public works projects. Additionally, a number of minor grammatical alterations have been made in the list of administrative positions, most significantly the removal of the second item in the Kings version of the list, טָבָד. The impact of this on the meaning of the passage is difficult to ascertain, as while it may be enticing to consider an attempt at softening the portrait of Solomon found in Chronicles, this word can have meanings other than “slave,” so it would be unwise to jump to conclusions based on political polemics hastily.

⁷⁶ It should also be noted that the consonantal structures of יָכַל and כָּלָה are tantalizingly similar enough to suggest some kind of misreading, but this kind of speculation need not be given special attention in the present study.

⁷⁷ This construct is found elsewhere only in Gen 49:10 and Josh 16:10.

⁷⁸ Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 347.

Somewhat less subtle are the alterations found in 2 Chr 8:10. The Chronicler omits the phrase “over the work” (על־הַמְּלָאכָה) and inserts the relative pronoun and the descriptor “king” (אֲשֶׁר־לְמֶלֶךְ) before the name of Solomon. The number of officers is reduced from 550 to 250, and concerning this issue it should be noted that when comparing the Hebrew text of these numbers, both share an initial חֲמִשִּׁים, then diverge as Chronicles omits the וְחִמְשָׁ of 1 Kgs 9:23 and for the next word reads וּמֵאֲתָיִם instead of מֵאֹת. Finally, the Chronicler omits the final phrase found in the 1 Kings text, “doing the work” (הָעֹשִׂים בַּמְּלָאכָה). This may possibly serve to harmonize with the insertion of “slaves for work” in v. 9. Thus a consistent pattern is visible throughout of the Chronicler removing references to Israelites performing work. This shaping of the material is interpreted by Japhet as irreconcilable with the Kings account. She identifies a three-step process of the shaping of the forced labour texts, beginning with the Israelite and alien forced labour recorded in 1 Kgs 5:13–14; 9:20–21 and 11:27–28, moving to the rhetorical manipulation of 1 Kgs 9:22, and concluding with the completely different perspective of the Chronicler.⁷⁹ While the textual evidence demands some different bias for the Chronicler, it may still be possible to rescue these accounts from utter contradiction by positing that as noted above in the Kings section, the account of Israelite labour in 5:13–

⁷⁹ Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 624. It seems hasty to maintain a stance of such confidence in one’s ability to detect moments of inconsistency in a given writer’s agenda when the only materials for determining that agenda is the one writing itself.

14 does not numerically coincide with any other account of forced labour, and is only for short periods of time.⁸⁰

The Chronicler's version of the rebellion against Rehoboam (2 Chron 10:1–14, 18) also provides an opportunity to discern any potential reshaping of material relating to Solomon's forced labour practices (paralleled in 1 Kgs 12:1–14, 18). The most striking feature about this passage in Chronicles is its general lack of divergences from the Kings account. Given the (occasionally overblown) differences in perspective between Kings and Chronicles on the issue of Israelite labour detected above, the degree of consistent divergences through this passages is much lower than in the two passages examined above.⁸¹ In fact, the implications of the most commonly cited "alteration" in this passage are far from obvious. In v. 7, both Japhet and Myers⁸² observe the alteration of the words of the elders, which are changed from 1 Kgs 12:7 "If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them" (אִם־הָיוּם תְּהִי־עֲבָד לָעַם הַזֶּה וְעַבַּדְתֶּם) to 2 Chron 10:7 "If you will be kind to this people and please them" (אִם־תִּהְיֶה לְטוֹב לְהַעֲמֵם הַזֶּה וּרְצִיתֶם). For Japhet, these differences are a sign of a softer ideal of ruling. She states, "The elders' advice of

⁸⁰ Though it is tempting to posit that the writer of Kings uses *מס* alone when discussing the Israelite forced labour (1 Kgs 4:6; 5:13, 14; 9:15; 12:18) as compared to the use of *לְמַס־עֲבָד* (1 Kgs 9:21) when discussing foreign labour, this distinction is not necessary, as elsewhere they seem to be used synonymously. See Rainey, "Compulsory Labour Gangs," 200–201. Rainey draws on cuneiform evidence to argue for a difference between "levy" (*סבל*) and "corvée" (*מס*), arguing that the levy drew on resident aliens. Thus Jeroboam, head of the forced labour over the house of Joseph (1 Kgs 11:28, no parallel in Chronicles) very possible only drafted aliens living in the territory of Joseph (an assertion Rainey supports with extensive reference to earlier geographic references to settlement patterns).

⁸¹ Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 653. Within Japhet's interpretive framework as surveyed above, this creates a catastrophic rupture in the ideological integrity of the book. Due to the omissions of certain materials relating to Israelite labour in Chronicles, in Japhet's words, "If we base ourselves on the history of Solomon as told in Chronicles, the people's complaint has no basis whatsoever and is merely a false provocation, an excuse for rebellion that should never have been humoured...[these tensions] are the inevitable results of the logic and dynamic of adapting existing material to the framework of a new historical philosophy."

⁸² Myers, *II Chronicles*, 66.

leniency represents not only an interim tactic to overcome a pending crisis, but a regular policy – no doubt the Chronicler’s own view of proper rule.”⁸³ However, it is not self evident that such a wording change necessitates this appraisal. A king who is “servant” of the people could be interpreted as embodying a softer ideal of leadership than one who is merely “kind” to them (a sort of benevolent dictator, perhaps.) In any case, the final clause indicating that the people will be the servants of the king is retained in both accounts. Finally, it must be observed that even if the Israelite “forced labour” was substantially lighter than what was inflicted on the resident aliens, v. 18 indicates that they were infuriated enough to kill Adoram/Hadoram, the leader of the forced labour.⁸⁴ A different perspective is provided by Rainey, who distinguishes against the “levy” (of aliens) and the “corvée” (of Israelites). Based on this distinction, the Israelites, who would have only served in administrative capacities for the labour in Israel, would likely have admired Jeroboam’s leadership (over the levy). However, Adoram/Hadoram (head of the corvée) would have been much less welcome. As Rainey states, “It was as if the new young king sought to reduce the entire population to the corvée status.”⁸⁵

The last significant passage of 2 Chronicles that will be examined in the present study will be the account of Ahaz in ch. 28. Some of the surrounding events in this chapter are paralleled in 2 Kgs 16. Second Chronicles 28:8–15 reports a situation in which the Israelites capture 200,000 people from Judah. They are then admonished by a prophet named Oded, who affirms that they were used by the Lord to execute judgement

⁸³ Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 654.

⁸⁴ Although relatively minor, it may be worth noting the two variants found between 1 Kgs 12:18 and 2 Chron 10:18. First, the Chronicler changes “all Israel” (כל־יִשְׂרָאֵל) to “sons of Israel” (בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל). Given Japhet’s claims about the Chronicler’s revised conception of ethnic identity, this could potentially be significant, although determining its implications is elusive. Both phrases seem to occur throughout most of the Tanakh (although “all Israel” is only found a few times in the prophetic literature). Furthermore, the word order of the clause describing the stoning is changed from verb-subject-object to verb-object-subject.

⁸⁵ Rainey, “Compulsory Labour Gangs,” 202.

on Judah, but that their brutality had gone too far and they themselves were guilty of much sin. Then some Ephraimite leaders clothe and feed the Judahite captives, then let them return home. For some scholars, this story constitutes a departure from the Chronicler's usual distinction between Israel and Judah.⁸⁶ Japhet lists a number of factors that make it and the previous battle story an anomaly compared to other passages found in Chronicles, including the lack of an emphasis on features such as the mismatched contest and the role of the divine in determining the outcome of the battle. Additionally, a number of the titles found in v. 7 are not commonly found in the Chronicler's vocabulary.⁸⁷ While Oded's speech (vv. 9–11) makes it clear that enslaving Israelites was wrong, it seems that the main point of the account had more to do with the unity of the nation as a whole. This is apparent through the exposition of the fact that both political entities had sinned and were accountable to the same God.⁸⁸

In conclusion, regardless of the difficulties involved in harmonizing Kings and Chronicles (or Chronicles with itself) there is a definitely detectable (but not universal) pattern throughout of the Chronicler shaping his version of the forced labour practices in order to soften the idea of the Israelites being enslaved to their own monarch.⁸⁹

5. Genesis 47:13–26 in the Context of the Writings

The two key items in the Writings profitable for comparison with Gen 47 are Neh 5 and the Chronicler's appraisal of the forced labour practices. Neh 5 in particular contains a number of features that parallel the situation described in Gen 47: Desperate times created by a famine, the dire necessity of obtaining food/grain, some form of a tax,

⁸⁶ Myers, *II Chronicles*, 162.

⁸⁷ Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 900–901.

⁸⁸ Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 900, 903.

⁸⁹ For a helpful survey of representative approaches to the harmonization of the forced labour texts of Kings and Chronicles, see Dillard, "The Chronicler's Solomon," 294–295.

the seizure of fields for payment of debts, and eventual enslavement for debts. As has been mentioned before, mapping two the continuities and discontinuities between such passages involves some measure of uncertainty. However, based on the vocabulary and situation it may be profitable to compare the way Joseph treated the Egyptians to the way Nehemiah treated the Israelites; both were figures of authority in difficult circumstances. Additionally, Joseph could be compared with the Israelite landowners. If Joseph is typologically to be considered an Israelite figure of authority (and the Egyptians are typologically considered to be Jewish people) then one of the most striking contrasts is the response of the common people. While the Egyptians seem to accept their fate of loss of resources and servitude (after the initial request for a handout in Gen 47:15), the Israelites find similar circumstances to be unacceptable. Likewise, while acknowledging the discontinuities between the regal position of Joseph and the position of Nehemiah, Nehemiah becomes angry when he learns of this extraction of fields and even people as slaves, demanding reparations, while Joseph is directly responsible for the withholding of resources for food. However, on a cautionary note it should be realized that the outright seizure of lands and houses leading to dispossession in Nehemiah would have looked somewhat different than the implementation of the semi-feudal system describing in Gen 47. Additionally, it seems as though the Israelites in Neh 5 were selling off their children into debt-slavery, while entire families (or the nation as a whole) was taken into debt-slavery in Gen 47. There is no charging of interest in Gen 47. It is also fruitful to compare the previous findings of how the passages have compared to the Mosaic law. For Gen 47 (making the transition from crown to individual based slavery), it was discovered that while debt slavery was permissible, it operated within carefully defined boundaries, the

withholding of resources was not allowed (Lev 25:37), and an eventual release was mandatory. In the case of Neh 5, while any kind of legal argumentation is absent, it seems to be the case that Nehemiah is applying principles inherent in the law, enacting a virtual release year in order to restore justice to the land. Thus while it would be overly simplistic to state that Nehemiah is operating with a “higher ethic” than Joseph, there does seem to be a different set of principles applied to approaching a situation involving impoverished and desperate people. While both technically operate within the confines of the law, Nehemiah seems to emphasize generosity to a greater degree than does Joseph. In fact, Nehemiah’s actions are virtually the opposite of those of Joseph; while Joseph leads a nation desperate for food into debt-slavery and loss of their property, Nehemiah commandeers a reversal of a somewhat analogous situation, setting people free from their creditors and making it possible for them to obtain food without entering a cycle of bondage to lenders.⁹⁰ Once again, it is this theme of resource distribution that seems to emerge in the context of situations involving debt slavery.

However, if Joseph is compared to the nobles (Neh 5:7) then Nehemiah’s accusations would seem to apply against him. In a famine situation where people were desperate for food, he confiscated their other material resources and eventually their property and bodies due to their need to survive. The only difference is that he carried it out on a grand scale as opposed to the situation in Nehemiah.⁹¹ While all the observations from the previous paragraph would still apply against Joseph (even more strongly when he is compared with the Israelite landowners), another intriguing shared feature is the

⁹⁰ Note Neh 5:11, which quotes Nehemiah ordering the return of, among other things, the people’s fields and money.

⁹¹ Of course, his mechanisms were somewhat different. Joseph did not exact usury (except in the sense of controlling the price of food) or sell people into slavery (he bought them instead).

appearance of priests near the end of each account. In Gen 47:22, 26 the narrator mentions that the Egyptian priests are exempt from the land buyout and receive an allowance from the crown, while Neh 5:12 the priests join with the other in pledging that they will not be complicit in the extortion of the common people. Therefore, in many ways Neh 5 significantly contrasts with Gen 47, as it depicts the overturning of a somewhat similar situation, and it is primarily in the realm of resource distribution that Joseph compares poorly with Nehemiah.

Regarding the Chronicler's treatment of Solomon's forced labour practices, it is the conclusion of the present study that a significant disparity exists between forced labour for public works and debt slavery. However, since a significant strand of the critical tradition (allegorically?) equated them in an argument than envisaged Gen 47:13–26 as a retort to 1 Sam 8 (see above), it would seem appropriate to examine the implications of the perspective of the Chronicler for that theory. If one accepts the diachronic reconstruction of 1 Sam 8 – Gen 47:13–26 – Chronicles, there does not seem to be any detectable stable development, because this would result in an (allegedly) antimonarchic text warning of subservience to a king being followed by a text (interpreted as) arguing for the necessity of subservience, followed by a text that softens the record of the subservience that took place. In canonical context, from the perspective of the present study the connections with the 1 Sam text were largely on lexical/thematic grounds, while the forced labour materials of Kings and Chronicles have little to do with the debt slavery of Gen 47. Nevertheless, the way the Chronicler downplays the forced labour practices of the throne shows a definite shift in the ideal of a ruler evident at the end of the canon. This national subservience to the throne is something that is clearly less

desirable in this writing of a “new beginning”; thus while acknowledging the divergences between debt slavery and forced labour, there may be a contrast found in the types of administrative wisdom on display in these texts. Therefore, the conclusions of section B.7 above which dealt with the interplay between the forced labour texts of 1 Kings and Gen 47 would only seem to be strengthened, as Joseph’s actions were still far preferable to those of the later Israelite kings, but the narrator of Chronicles seems to be gazing less approvingly on forced labour.

E. Conclusions

The principal texts from the prophets and writings that this study found fruitful for comparison with Gen 47:13–26 were 1 Sam 8; Jer 34; Neh 5, as well as the various texts relating to forced labour in 1 Kgs 5:13–14 (27–28 MT); 9:20–23; 2 Chron 2:17–18; 8:7–10. When read in the broader context of these accounts, Joseph’s actions are in some ways discontinuous with all of the above texts, but can still be understood in their broad context under certain qualifications. In many cases the purpose and application of Joseph’s debt slavery was for the most part more benevolent than the situations described in the above texts, but the theme of resource distribution persistently reappeared in ways that would contrast between the effect of the depletion of the Egyptian population in Gen 47:13–26 and the overall impetus and imperative towards charitable and generous resource distribution mandated throughout relevant slavery passages in the prophets and writings. Additionally, the stress placed on the release of slaves in Jer 34 shows Joseph’s actions to be deficient in this area. There, these findings support the thesis of the present study that when read in the broader context of slavery materials in the Tanakh, Joseph’s

enslavement of the population was non-objectionable but his resource distribution practices were less than ideal.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

A. Introduction

This chapter will present the conclusions of the present study and offer some broad methodological reflections on the type of exegesis carried out by the present study as well as possible currents for future research.

B. Summary of the Canonical Reading of Genesis 47:13–26

Certain features of Gen 47:13–26 are highlighted and contrasted when read in the broader context of surrounding canonical materials relating to slavery. Due to the inevitable dissimilarities arising from the juxtaposition of different texts, the present study always attempted to account for multiple potentialities of this textual interplay as it sought to discern the implications of situating Gen 47 in the Tanakh.

When read in light of Pentateuchal legislation concerning slavery, allowance must be made for the fact that the various debt slavery laws mainly address slavery between two Israelites, not the crown and the population as a whole or people of differing nationalities, although this is not to say that comparison of Gen 47 and various debt slavery laws is completely impossible. Exodus 21:2–6 introduces a mandatory release of a male Hebrew debt slave (but not a wife and/or resultant children given to him by his master) after seven years of service, with an option of making the enslavement permanent if the slave so desires. This year of release constitutes a genuine divergence from Joseph's policies, but does assume that the newly freed slave would be capable of sustaining himself by other means (and Joseph, by enslaving an entire population, did not potentially divide families created in servitude). Leviticus 25:23–28 state that in a case of a poor man selling some of his land, the poor man always has the right to redeem it (and

it will eventually be given back in the jubilee), which contrasts with Joseph's permanent economic alterations. Selling food for profit to an impoverished man is forbidden in Lev 25:35–38, which contrasts with Joseph's use of food as a bargaining chip to gain the money, land, and bodies of the Egyptians. Leviticus 25:39–42 specifies that one is not to treat the poor man as a slave, and entire families sold into debt slavery will be redeemed in the year of jubilee. Deuteronomy 15:12–18 reiterates much of the content of Exod 21:2–6 (though including single female slaves) but further ups the ante by demanding that a departing debt slave be given generous gifts, which would seem to create a precedent for the reversal of the trend towards the extortion of resources from the impoverished.

When read in the broader context of the former prophets, the most suitable conversation partner for Gen 47:13–26 was found in 1 Sam 8:11–18. For the most part this dire warning of a future ruler who would ruthlessly seize material (and human) resources for his own ends sounds a warning bell far more ominous than that heard in Gen 47:13–26, although his proposed tax (1 Sam 8:17) is not as steep as Joseph's.

The most relevant text for the present study offered by the corpus of the latter prophets was Jer 34:8–22, which depicts slave owners taking back slaves they had only recently freed. While the chapter emphasizes the importance of releasing slaves (as well as King Zedekiah's initiative in releasing slaves, something that contrasts with Joseph), it would seem the intentions of the Israelite slave owners contrast greatly with those of Joseph, who when compared to them comes off as somewhat more benevolent in the area of provision, if not in freedom.

The evidence offered by Neh 5 finds Nehemiah overturning a situation that is similar to (though far less benevolent) than the arrangement of Joseph in Gen 47, culminating in the order to return the people's fields and money in Neh 5:11. This would seem to be a virtual reversal of the effects of Joseph's economic policy. Finally, tracing the issue of the forced labour practices of the monarchy through 1 Kings, Jer 22, and 2 Chronicles one can clearly detect that regardless of the various anomalies encountered in attempting to harmonize the accounts, there was a clear understanding on the part of the Chronicler that forced labour of Israelites was undesirable. Notwithstanding the skepticism of the present study towards scholars who saw Gen 47 as a creative apologetic for forced labour practices, it would seem that the subtle tendency of the Chronicler to downplay these mass drafts for public works projects indicates a greater preference for individual freedom than was apparent in Kings.

Therefore, after considering the previous interpretive approaches and questions that have been taken to Gen 47:13–26, the present study has concluded that when this passage is compared to the viewpoints on slavery emerging from other texts in the Tanakh, the employment of the institution of debt slavery is not objectionable, but the frequent stress on generosity in the area of resource distribution finds Joseph's actions in this area wanting.

C. Reflections on the Application of the Two-Stage Canonical Approach

The present study created a reading of a passage informed by an examination of the development of a theme across the Tanakh that was relevant to the passage under investigation. While it would be intriguing to speculate if the conclusions of the study would be substantially changed if a greater number of relevant canonical themes had

been incorporated, it is interesting to notice while the project focused strictly on comparing Gen 47:13–26 with later slave related materials, the theme of resource distribution kept on re-emerging unprovoked,¹ a fact perhaps not surprising given the obvious connection of impoverishment to such passages, but also encouraging in terms of the fact that the “objectivity” of the approach in previous incarnations has been criticized as variously as smacking of either fundamentalism or deconstructionism.² Additionally, while not all the observations arising from the process by which the attributes and outlooks of the various slave texts were compared with Gen 47 would be entirely immune from criticisms of subjectivity, rigorous engagement with both the text itself and the resultant secondary sources of various persuasions would seem to have safeguarded the present study from accusations of ignorance of alternative approaches. On this note, one of the oft-cited shortcomings of Childs’, his failure to truly reconcile and integrate traditional diachronic criticism with his beloved canonical approach to scripture, has perhaps partially been overcome in the present study by its policy of taking into account the interpretive results of source critical approaches when relevant but never allowing them to set the agenda by always adhering to the implied chronology presented in the canonical order itself.³ Additionally, the survey performed on materials relating to slavery across the Tanakh may serve to contribute to the broader literature that has accumulated on the subject of slavery in the Hebrew Bible.

¹ A logical next step to take would be examining the theme of resource distribution across the Tanakh. A preliminary survey of texts that may be fruitful for a canonical reading of Gen 47:13–26 may include Gen 25:27–34 (Jacob manipulates Esau for his birthright), Exod 22:25 (prohibition on exacting interest from the poor), Deut 23:19–20 (Eng.) further prohibitions on collecting interest, Psa 15:5 (praising the man who does not lend money at interest), Pro 11:26 (withholding grain is spoken against, but selling it is praised), and Amos 5:11 (condemning the one who takes taxes of grain from the poor).

² Crenshaw, Review of *Die “Bindung Isaaks” im Kanon (Gen 22)*, 154.

³ As hinted at several times in various discussions of Gen 9:25–27, certain texts present remarkable anomalies when examined in their canonical contexts.

D. Possibilities for Future Research

Currently, thoughtful discussion concerning exactly what it means to read a passage canonically is lacking. The present study has attempted to compare the perspectives on the institution(s) of slavery in different texts in order to discern if large scale divergences of ideology exist across the canon on this issue. However, the usefulness of such a model of interpretation could be greatly assisted if more work were put into the theoretical basis of the mechanics of this kind of textual interplay. Perhaps it would be fruitful to adopt the framework provided by some form of intertextuality. Finally, the process of textual interplay in the present study re-raised some of the questions mentioned in sections C and D of chapter 1, in particular because of the fact that the present study was asking one particular question of Gen 47, and consequently asking a fairly narrow range of questions about the texts within which it was drawn into dialogue, questions that may or may not be consonant with the intended meaning of those texts. Further investigations may also do well to more stringently delineate boundaries for the various layers of meaning that are being excavated when one looks at a passage in historical critical, literary and canon wide contexts, as the wealth of material potentially arising from such interplay should not be surprising when dealing with such a rich and multifaceted book. Finally, the subject matter of the texts examined in this study inevitably raises the question of the economic teaching of the Bible, a perennial flashpoint of controversy at the academic and popular levels.⁴ Further development of the thesis that the Tanakh encourages generosity in the area of resource distribution would

⁴ One simple example can be found in Boot, Review of *Generous Justice*, 10–14. The popular apologist Joe Boot critiques Tim Keller's work on social justice as endorsing the bogeymen of Marxist views of forced redistribution and humanist views of human equality while himself approvingly quoting the theologian Ray Sutton.

have to further qualify what this was intended to look like and inevitably reflect on its application in the context of the competing political ideologies of modern Western society.

Some of these hermeneutical concerns are mirrored in Childs' own article "Critique of Recent Intertextual Canonical Interpretation."⁵ Focusing chiefly on the contributions of Steins and Moberly,⁶ Childs voices worry about the uncritical adoption of postmodern literary models by some,⁷ that the concept of revelation can be swallowed by audience-oriented reception theories,⁸ and that the intrinsic instability guaranteed by such theories can run counter to the stabilizing purpose of the canon itself.⁹ More significantly for the present study, Childs isolates as troubling a tendency to read back later theological meanings of certain phrases onto earlier accounts. He states that it is, "a misunderstanding of the term canonical context to see it as a monolithic, unstructured theological construct from which intertextual resonances can be freely garnered to form patterns of moral behavior."¹⁰ After some comments about the tension between traditional diachronic approaches and the centrality of the canon, he finishes with some reflections on the nature of midrash and allegory.

By way of interface of the themes of Childs' essay and the present study, it should be noted that while the present study perhaps suffered from the lack of a sophisticated theoretical basis from which to interact with different texts, it did not fall prey to the postmodern tendency to nihilistically collapse the worlds of the reader and the text.

⁵ Childs, "Critique of Recent Intertextual," 173–184.

⁶ Steins, *Die "Bindung Isaaks" im Kanon (Gen 22)*; Moberly, *The Earliest Commentary on the Akedah*.

⁷ Childs, "Critique of Recent Intertextual," 175.

⁸ Childs, "Critique of Recent Intertextual," 176.

⁹ Childs, "Critique of Recent Intertextual," 177.

¹⁰ Childs, "Critique of Recent Intertextual," 179.

Additionally, the present study strenuously attempted to nuance the possibility of anachronistic interpretation by stressing the legitimacy of multiple layers of meaning in unfolding larger contexts of a text, and made clear the claim that these broader “canonical” significances of a text did not negate the purpose it may serve in its more immediate literary context. The readings of Gen 47:13–26 generated by way of its comparison with the later slave materials are not meant to eliminate its “original” intent, (in canonically implied context). While the accusation of the dismissal of authorial intent is leveled by Childs at some studies attempted to build on his work, the present study began by acknowledging it was asking certain questions of texts and at least seeking to compare the perspectives of the texts themselves. Such an approach would seem to be the ideal way of balancing the viewpoints of the various texts with the structure created by the larger Tanakh as a whole.

**APPENDIX A
CHARTS**

Chart 1: Parallel Slave Codes of Exodus and Deuteronomy

Exod 21:1–11 (ESV)	Deut 15:12–18 (ESV)
“Now these are the rules that you shall set before them.	
² When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing.	¹² “If <i>your brother</i> , a Hebrew man <i>or a Hebrew woman</i> , is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you.
³ If he comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. ⁴ If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out alone.	
	¹³ And when you let him go free from you, you shall not let him go empty-handed. ¹⁴ You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your winepress. As the LORD your God has blessed you, you shall give to him. ¹⁵ You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today.
⁵ But if the slave plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,’ ⁶ <i>then his master shall bring him to God</i> , and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever.	¹⁶ But if he says to you, ‘I will not go out from you,’ because he loves you and your household, since he is well-off with you, ¹⁷ then you shall take an awl, and put it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your slave forever. <i>And to your female slave you shall do the same.</i>

	<p>¹⁸ It shall not seem hard to you when you let him go free from you, for at half the cost of a hired worker he has served you six years. So the LORD your God will bless you in all that you do.</p>
<p>⁷ “When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. ⁸ If she does not please her master, who has designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has broken faith with her. ⁹ If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her as with a daughter. ¹⁰ If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, or her marital rights. ¹¹ And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money.</p>	

Chart 2: Main Slave Codes of Leviticus with Some Observations

Preliminary Observations	Lev. 25:39–55 (ESV)
<p>Outright slavery of Hebrews forbidden.</p> <p>Jubilee language unique to Leviticus. (cf. Num 36:4)</p> <p>Is this only addressing the situation of a father whose entire family has been enslaved? (See discussion below).</p> <p>This command is legitimated</p>	<p>³⁹ “If your brother becomes poor beside you and sells himself to you, <i>you shall not make him serve as a slave</i>: ⁴⁰ he shall be with you as a hired worker and as a sojourner. <i>He shall serve with you until the year of the jubilee</i>. ⁴¹ Then he shall go out from you, <i>he and his children with him</i>, and go back to his own clan and return to the possession of his fathers. ⁴² For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as</p>

<p>by the exodus event (like Deuteronomy) and fear of God (unique).</p>	<p>slaves. ⁴³ You shall not rule over him ruthlessly but shall fear your God.</p>
<p>Separate section dealing with foreign slaves.</p>	<p>⁴⁴ As for your male and female slaves whom you may have: you may buy male and female slaves from among the nations that are around you. ⁴⁵ You may also buy from among the strangers who sojourn with you and their clans that are with you, who have been born in your land, and they may be your property. ⁴⁶ You may bequeath them to your sons after you to inherit as a possession forever. You may make slaves of them, but over your brothers the people of Israel you shall not rule, one over another ruthlessly.</p>
<p>Separate section dealing with foreign masters within Israel.</p>	<p>⁴⁷ “If a stranger or sojourner with you becomes rich, and your brother beside him becomes poor and sells himself to the stranger or sojourner with you or to a member of the stranger's clan, ⁴⁸ then after he is sold he may be redeemed. One of his brothers may redeem him, ⁴⁹ or his uncle or his cousin may redeem him, or a close relative from his clan may redeem him. Or if he grows rich he may redeem himself. ⁵⁰ He shall calculate with his buyer from the year when he sold himself to him until the year of jubilee, and the price of his sale shall vary with the number of years. The time he was with his owner shall be rated as the time of a hired worker. ⁵¹ If there are still many years left, he shall pay proportionately for his redemption some of his sale price. ⁵² If there remain but a few years until the year of jubilee, he shall calculate and pay for his redemption in proportion to his years of service. ⁵³ He shall treat him as a worker hired year by year. He shall not rule ruthlessly over him in your sight. ⁵⁴ And if he is not redeemed by these means, then he and his children with him shall be released in</p>

	<p>the year of jubilee.⁵⁵ For it is to me that the people of Israel are servants. They are my servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.</p>
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Chart 3: Synthesis of All Pentateuch Slave Laws

Exodus	Leviticus	Deuteronomy
<p>Exod 20:10 Slaves are to join in Sabbath observance.</p>	<p>Lev 19:20–22 Penalty of a guilt offering of a ram imposed for sleeping with a female chattel slave.</p>	<p>Deut 5:14 Slaves are to join in Sabbath observance. Compared to Exod 20:10, it contains an additional purpose clause stating that is for the sake of giving rest to slaves.</p>
<p>Exod 20:17 Prohibition against coveting a neighbour's male or female servant.</p>	<p>Lev 22:10–11 A priest's slave may eat his food.</p>	<p>Deut 5:21 Prohibition against coveting a neighbour's male or female servant. Identical to Exod 20:17 except for reversal of order of house and wife.</p>
<p>Exod 21:2–6 A debt slave is to be released after six years, in the marital state prior to his enslavement. Instructions for making this state permanent.</p>	<p>Lev 25:6 Slaves to enjoy eating from Sabbath of the land.</p>	<p>Deut 12:1,18 (Chattel?) slaves to join family in centralized worship in promised land.</p>
<p>Exod 21:7–11 Instructions for care of female</p>	<p>Lev 25:39–43 Israelite debt-slave with children shall be set free at the year of</p>	<p>Deut 15:12–18 Single male and female debt-slaves to be released after six</p>

matrimonial chattel-slave. If not provided for, she goes free.	Jubilee.	years. Command for liberal release provisions. Instructions for making this state permanent.
Exod 21:16 Death penalty for anyone who kidnaps a man for the purpose of selling him.	Lev 25:44–46 Only foreigners may be bought and sold as chattel slaves.	Deut 16:11,14 (Chattel?) slaves to join family in centralized Passover celebration in promised land.
Exod 21:20–21 Penalty for killing one's chattel slave.	Lev 25:47–55 If an Israelite becomes the debt-slave of a foreigner, he can be redeemed at any time and must be treated well.	Deut 20:11 When attacking a city, the Israelites are first to make a peace treaty that would involve placing the citizens in forced labour.
Exod 21:26–27 Slave will be set free if owner knocks out an eye or a tooth.	Lev 27:28 A chattel slave devoted to the service of the Lord cannot be sold or redeemed.	Deut 21:10–14 Regulations for marrying a foreign female chattel slave. She is to be set free if the relationship doesn't work out.
Exod 21:32 Thirty shekel payment if one's ox gores someone else's male or female slave.		Deut 23:15–16 Prohibition against returning an escaped slave to his master. (Likely mostly applied to chattel slaves).
		Deut 24:7 Kidnapping a man to sell him as a slave is prohibited and punishable by death.

Chart 4: Forced Labour Texts in Kings and Chronicles (NASB)

<p>1 Kgs 4:6b and Adoniram the son of Abda <i>was</i> over the men subject to forced labor.</p>	
<p>1 Kgs 5:13–14 ¹³ Now King Solomon levied forced laborers from all Israel; and the forced laborers numbered 30,000 men. ¹⁴ He sent them to Lebanon, 10,000 a month in relays; they were in Lebanon a month <i>and</i> two months at home. And Adoniram <i>was</i> over the forced laborers</p>	
	<p>2 Chr 2:17 ¹⁷ Solomon numbered all the aliens who <i>were</i> in the land of Israel, following the census which his father David had taken; and 153,600 were found</p>
<p>1 Kgs 5:15–16 (vv. 29–30 MT) ¹⁵ Now Solomon had 70,000 transporters, and 80,000 hewers <i>of stone</i> in the mountains, ¹⁶ besides Solomon’s 3,300 chief deputies who <i>were</i> over the project <i>and</i> who ruled over the people who were doing the work.</p>	<p>2 Chr 2:18 ¹⁸ He appointed 70,000 of them to carry loads and 80,000 to quarry <i>stones</i> in the mountains and 3,600 supervisors to make the people work.</p>
<p>1 Kgs 9:20–23 ²⁰ <i>As for</i> all the people who were left of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, who were not of the sons of Israel, ²¹ their descendants who were left after them in the land whom the sons of Israel were unable to destroy utterly, from them Solomon levied forced laborers, even to this day. ²² But Solomon did not make</p>	<p>2 Chr 8:7–10 ⁷ All of the people who were left of the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, who were not of Israel, ⁸ <i>namely</i>, from their descendants who were left after them in the land whom the sons of Israel had not destroyed, them Solomon raised as forced laborers to this day. ⁹ But Solomon did not make slaves for his work from the sons of Israel; they were men of war, his chief captains and commanders of his chariots and his</p>

<p>slaves of the sons of Israel; for they were men of war, his servants, his princes, his captains, his chariot commanders, and his horsemen. ²³ These <i>were</i> the chief officers who <i>were</i> over Solomon's work, five hundred and fifty, who ruled over the people doing the work.</p>	<p>horsemen. ¹⁰ These were the chief officers of King Solomon, two hundred and fifty who ruled over the people.</p>
<p>1 Kgs 11:28 ²⁸ Now the man Jeroboam was a valiant warrior, and when Solomon saw that the young man was industrious, he appointed him over all the forced labor of the house of Joseph.</p>	

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