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The Famine in the Land Was Severe:

Environmentally Induced Involuntary Migration and the Joseph Narrative

Abstract:

Although a number of issues related to involuntary migration feature in the Joseph narrative, the most prominent is the effect of environmental factors on migration. The protagonist Joseph is captured by his brothers, trafficked into Egypt, and imprisoned. Subsequently, Joseph rises to a position of immense power because he is able to interpret Pharaoh's dreams as pertaining to a famine. The denouement of the Joseph narrative unfolds as this famine drives along the plot. It is only when Joseph's brothers become environmentally induced involuntary migrants to Egypt that the opportunity arises for them to reconcile with Joseph. Indeed, the famine even enables the final scheme by which Joseph gets his brother Benjamin and father Jacob to Egypt. In this article, recent research on the how climate change and environmental factors impact migration decisions, how environmentally induced migrant communities determine where to migrate, and how such communities do and do not integrate with the host populations in their new settings is employed to analyze Genesis 37–47, with particular focus on chapters 41–47. Fresh interpretations of problematic passages emerge from this reading strategy. Finally, the argument explores what this approach suggests about the provenance of the Joseph material.

1: Introduction

Consider this atypical summary of the ancestral narrative in Gen 12–50.

Abraham migrates to Canaan, first through the choice of his father and then at the command of God. Immediately upon arrival (Gen 12:10), famine forces Abraham and his family to flee to Egypt. Abraham eventually returns to Canaan, where his son Isaac faces a famine too (Gen 26:1). Rather than leave Canaan, Isaac drifts within its boundaries, residing in various places to survive. Isaac's son Jacob grows up in Canaan, but spends his early

adulthood seeking asylum with his family in Haran to avoid the aggression of his brother Esau.[1] After 20 years, Jacob returns to Canaan to find a transformed, unrecognizable society, epitomized by the conciliatory attitude of Esau. The desire of Jacob's brother to reconcile with him, not commit homicide, exemplifies Jacob's reverse culture shock. Throughout, the patriarchs are called גר, a Hebrew term that connotes transitory residence, difference from the host population, and limited legal protection.

All this may be rephrased in terms employed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): Abraham is an environmentally induced externally displaced person, Isaac is an environmentally induced internally displaced person, and Jacob is an asylum seeker who subsequently repatriates by choice. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all experience forced displacement in one fashion or another, though at each stage they exercise some agency over where they migrate. In the terms of UNHCR, they are all self-settled involuntary migrants.[2]

Genesis does not offer merely a patriarchal narrative; rather, women play crucial roles and transform the story into an ancestral narrative that depicts the experiences of a whole

[1] Though well aware of the issues related to the naming of Jacob's destination as Haran and Padan-aram, for the purposes of this essay it is neither necessary to discuss the source-critical questions nor to complicate the point by employing both terms.

[2] Selecting the term involuntary migration rather than forced migration—the more frequent term in scholarly discourse and publication—foregrounds the migrant rather than the human or natural power that prompts the migration. This choice goes some (very limited) distance towards highlighting the agency that people retain in the midst of this experience.

family, not only three or four male figures.

The environmentally induced migrations of Abraham and Isaac are equally the involuntary journeys of Sarah and Rebekah. In route to Egypt, where they seek respite from the famine in Canaan, Abraham coaches his wife Sarah to identify as his sister, thus protecting him from any Egyptian who might consider murdering him to take this beautiful woman as their wife.[3] The ruse occurs again when Abraham and Sarah sojourn in the vicinity of Gerar, where Abraham once more fears outsiders might kill him to take Sarah for themselves. Like father, like son: when Isaac and Rebekah encounter a famine in Canaan and migrate to Gerar in order to survive it, they employ the same scheme for the same reasons.[4]

Adopting UNHCR categories again, Sarah and Rebekah are both environmentally induced involuntary migrants. Sarah is displaced externally the first time, internally the second. Rebekah experiences environmentally induced internal displacement. In all three cases, circumstances compel the women to enter into a form of sex work in order to provide

[3] When he first appears, Abraham is called Abram. His name is later changed to Abraham (Gen 17:5), but Abraham appears throughout this essay for simplicity. Sarah also undergoes a name change from Sarai to Sarah at the same time Abraham's name also changes (Gen 17:15), but again for simplicity, Sarah occurs throughout this piece.

[4] For a full discussion of these stories, see C. A. Strine, 'Sister Save Us: The Matriarchs as Breadwinners and Their Threat to Patriarchy in the Ancestral Narrative,' pp. 53-66 in M. Halvorson-Taylor and K. Southwood (eds) *Women and Exilic Identity in the Hebrew Bible* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018).

for their families.[5]

Finally, the ancestral narrative trains its focus onto Joseph. Favored above his brothers, thus the source of familial conflict, Joseph antagonizes his brothers to boot. As a result, Joseph's brothers engage in human trafficking. They imprison Joseph, turn him over to people smugglers,[6] and allow him to be taken involuntarily to Egypt, where Joseph is sold into indentured servitude. Providential events subsequently place Joseph in a position to interpret a dream of Pharaoh. Joseph's interpretation wins him favor with Pharaoh, his freedom, and a high-ranking post in the Egyptian bureaucracy. In his new role, Zaphenath-

[5] For further discussion of sex work and the Hebrew Bible, see N. Nam Hoon Tan, 'Hong Kong Sex Workers: Mothers Reading 1 Kgs 3:16–28,' in Gale A. Yee and John Y.H. Yieh (eds), *Honouring the Past, Looking to the Future: Essays from the 2014 International Congress of Ethnic Chinese Biblical Scholars* (Hong Kong: Divinity School of Chung Chi College, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2016), p. 157–78, and idem., 'Breaking the Silence of the Dismissed Foreign Wives and Children,' in Lung Kwong Lo and Ying Zhang (eds), *Crossing Textual Boundaries* (Hong Kong: Divinity School of Chung Chi College of Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2010), p. 84-93.

[6] There are questions about this aspect of the text, which alternately has Joseph taken by Midianites or sold to Ishmaelites. The source critical issues shall not be dealt with here, though they are an important issue. For discussions of the source critical approaches, see D. Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), p. 271-83, and J. Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 1-12, 34-44.

paneah[7]—as Pharaoh renames Joseph—implements the economic strategy that enables Egypt to stockpile enough food not only to endure an imminent famine, but even to profit from selling its goods to people from surrounding places without food.

Jacob and his sons are among those struggling with the famine who come to buy goods from Egypt. Eventually, the famine compels the entire family to migrate to Egypt, a decision eased by the patronage of Zaphenath-paneah, who promises to oversee their integration into their new home.

The UNHCR, in this case, would characterize Egypt and Zaphenath-paneah as governmental actors receiving environmental refugees. Meanwhile, Jacob and his family are environmentally induced externally displaced involuntary migrants whose international mobility relies upon a transnational information network.

This unusual summary of the ancestral narrative demonstrates that the experience of involuntary migration features across all of Gen 12–50. Not just involuntary migration, but in at least four occasions, specifically environmentally induced involuntary migration—the need to move in order to obtain enough food to live. Far from some ancillary plot detail, involuntary migration provides the central theme that moves the narrative on from one moment to the next. Framed in this way, it is clear that a commentator justifiably employs the social scientific study of involuntary migration to interpret the texts. One might even conclude that a balanced interpretation of this text must attend to environmentally induced migration, though that does perhaps push the point too far. Nonetheless, it makes the notable absence of research foregrounding the role of environmentally induced involuntary migration

[7] Either "God speaks, he lives" or "creator of life" in Egyptian.

in Gen 37–50 all the more remarkable.

In this article, I shall address this lacuna in the secondary literature by offering an interpretation of the Joseph novella through the lens of environmentally induced involuntary migration. This focus results in the greatest attention going to Gen 41–47, though other texts will appear in the analysis. The argument unfolds in four steps. First, I shall offer some comments on how environmental factors shape the narrative in Gen 37–40, despite the main issue of those texts remaining the human trafficking of Joseph. Second, I will provide a reading of Gen 41–47 guided by the study of involuntary migration, emphasizing the ways attending to these issues illuminates the text. Third, I will introduce findings showing that environmental catastrophes frequently consolidate existing wealth among the economically privileged at the expense of the less economically well off in order to show how this occurs in the Joseph narrative. Fourth and finally, I make some comparisons between the Joseph narrative and the three other stories about environmentally induced involuntary migration in Genesis (i.e., Gen 12, 20, 26), highlighting a few critical similarities to and differences from those stories about the endangered ancestresses.

2: Human Trafficking in Gen 36–40: Prelude to an Environmental Disaster

The Joseph narrative opens with the announcement of a new *Toledot*—that of Jacob—and the declaration that Joseph was favored among Jacob's son.[8] Immediately, the attention turns to Joseph's dreams. First, Joseph dreams of eleven sheaves of wheat bowing down to a twelfth.

[8] On the function of the *Toledot* formula, see M. A. Thomas, *These Are the Generations: Identity, Covenant, and the 'Toledot' Formula* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2011).

As commentators note, the dream is about the power dynamic with the family.[9] Yet, one should not miss that this dream adumbrates the environmental struggles that dominate the narrative very soon through the image of the wheat sheaves. Yes, Joseph will come to rule over his brothers; yet, equally importantly, the dream underscores that Joseph, the lone standing sheaf of wheat, will be the lone person with access to the essential agricultural produce necessary to survive a famine. Without disregarding the role of family power dynamics, one can also recognize that Joseph's first dream announces this will be a narrative about access to agricultural output.

Time and space will not allow an exploration of Joseph's dealings with Potiphar's wife and his time in prison. It is worth noting, however, that the human trafficking, forced, labor, and challenges encountered by Joseph due to those experiences of involuntary migration drive the plot forward. Joseph exhibits an admirable commitment to certain morals (perhaps more valued by later commentators than ancient communities), but Gen 40 makes the key trait in Joseph's ability to navigate his predicament his recognition that God (Elohim) provides the interpretation of dreams. In the immediate progress of the narrative, these are the dreams about the fate of Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker. It is unlikely to be an unintended coincidence that these two key figures represent the two royal functionaries most closely associated with food. Soon enough, these less explicit indications that access to food indelibly shapes the narrative about Joseph gives way to more dreams about climate stresses.

3: A Dream of Ascents: Upward Assimilation in Gen 41

[9] M. G. Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.109.

Environmental issues return to the center of the narrative in Gen 41, which opens with a description of Pharaoh's two dreams: the first concerns seven healthy cattle followed by seven gaunt ones; the second follows this pattern, with seven robust ears of grain preceding seven scorched ears. Once all the wise men and magicians of Egypt fail to explain the images of the cows and the stalks, Pharaoh's cupbearer remembers Joseph, who is providentially invited into the heart Egypt's political apparatus. Declaring that God, not he, will interpret the dreams, Joseph explains that both omens portend a seven year famine. Joseph does not stop there, but continues on to offer Pharaoh operational advice on how to mobilize the Egyptian state to deal with this impending crisis. Pharaoh not only accepts Joseph's unsolicited advice, but appoints Joseph as the one to implement it as his second-in-command.

From the perspective of an involuntary migrant, what is even more striking is Joseph's subsequent willingness to integrate into Pharaoh's court and Egyptian society when offered the opportunity. To start, Joseph is given a 'proper' Egyptian name: Zaphenath-paneah. Some ambiguity remains as to the name's meaning, but the translations "Joseph, called 'he will live'" or "Joseph, the vizier who lives" capture the gist.[10] This new name connotes the preservation of life Joseph offers in the face of the coming food shortage. What is more, Joseph accepts the Egyptian woman Asenath as a bride, resulting in the birth of two sons with her. Called Ephraim and Manasseh, the meaning of these names is so important to the author that they are specifically stated: Ephraim is "God has made me forget all my

[10] K. A. Kitchen, "Genesis 12–50 in the Near Eastern World," in *He Swore an Oath:* ed. Richard S. Hess, Gordon J. Wenham, and Satterthwaite.P. E. (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2007), p. 80-84.

hardship"; Manasseh is "God has made me fruitful in the land of my hardship."[11] Far more than pedantic onomastics, the boys names underscore the extent of Joseph's integration into this foreign culture, which involves not only erasing the memory of past hardships, but also celebrating the bounty of this new country. Two specific aspects of Joseph's integration merit further attention.

First, Joseph assimilates upwards in his new society. Genesis 37 already envisions Joseph as the youngest son in a wealthy, landowning family, thus hardly from a meagre background. And yet, it is impossible to miss how his new life as Zaphenath-paneah involves not only an astonishing rise from his imprisonment in Egypt, but even an upward move compared to his prior status as the most favored son of Jacob in Canaan.

Second, Joseph willingly accepts the opportunity to marry an Egyptian woman and to have Egyptian sons with her. This is implicit in the text, but still clear. Joseph has already been presented as a man who can steadfastly withstand the advances of Potiphar's wife at great personal cost. Surely this man could politely demure Pharaoh's invitation to marry an Egyptian woman should he feel it necessary. He does not. Nor does Zaphenath-paneah hesitate to have sons with her and to give the boys names that show his fondness for Egypt. Indeed, as boys born in Egypt—at the epicenter of its political apparatus—Ephraim and Manasseh likely would have considered themselves Egyptian, for they would have been thoroughly Egyptian.[12] Joseph embraces all that the identity of Zaphenath-paneah offers,

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[11] C. Westermann, *Genesis 37–50: A Continental Commentary,* trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1986), p.97.

[12] T. Römer refers to the two boys as "half Egyptian", which one must allow as a possibility ('The Joseph Story in the Book of Genesis', p. 192 in *The Post-Priestly Pentateuch. New*

indicating no hesitation whatsoever at the way this might discount or even disparage his prior identity.

The first effect of the environmentally induced food shortage, therefore, is to facilitate Joseph's upward assimilation into the host culture of Egypt. Viewed through the concerns of involuntary migrants, Joseph's experience represents an involuntary migrant who is forcibly placed in an integrated living setting; despite the lack of agency Joseph has in this process, he learns this new context well enough not only to navigate it without further harm, but even to ascend socially. Joseph is an involuntary migrant who assimilates to his host culture while achieving upward social integration.

4: Environmentally Induced Wealth Consolidation in Gen 42–47

Among social scientists studying involuntary migration, the events of the past few decades have placed ever more focus on the ways environmental strains and climate-related catastrophes generate involuntary migrants. Though there is much debate whether a class of migrants known as "climate" or "environmental" refugees exists,[13] there is no doubt that the desiccation of land, rising sea levels, more frequent and acute storms, and other environmental events do drive migration decisions. In a recent and significant intervention on the topic, Roger

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Perspectives on its Redactional Development and Theological Profiles [FAT 101; ed. Federico Giuntoli and Konrad Schmid; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015] p. 185-201).

[13] J. Morrissey, "Rethinking the 'Debate on Environmental Refugees': From 'Maximalists and Minimalists' to 'Proponents and Critics'," *Journal of Political Ecology* 19(2012), p. 36-42.

Zetter and James Morrissey explain that one can never separate environmental factors that induce migration from the wider context of "social, economic, and political factors that induce" or constrain people's decision to migrate,"[14] with the result that one must consider the "socio-political processes and the distribution of social and political power that shape and mediate household access to resources, and thus their propensity/capacity to migrate in the context of environmental stress."[15]

Zetter and Morrissey orient their discussion towards developing policy proposals. And yet, they emphasize that unequal access to power and contextual knowledge massively influences environmentally induced migration decisions. Focusing on the vulnerable and marginalized within such communities, they remark:

> vulnerable, or potentially vulnerable, communities are distinguishable by their exclusion from the structures of power which might normally allow either *access to the material means necessary to secure their livelihoods and minimize exposure to hazards* (e.g., through adaptation and resilience strategies or facilitating mobility), or the *decision-making processes required to ensure the relevant interventions* (e.g., participatory approaches to resettlement).[16]

In short, the cross-cultural research Zetter and Morrissey have conducted demonstrates that environmental factors affect people at different places on the socio-economic spectrum

[14] R. Zetter and J. Morrissey, "The Environment-Mobility Nexus: Reconceptualizing the Links Between Environmental Stress, (Im)mobility, and Power," in *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, ed. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 343-44; cf. Morrissey, "Rethinking," p. 26-49.

[15] Zetter and Morrissey, "Environment-Mobility Nexus," p. 343-44.

[16] Zetter and Morrissey, "Environment-Mobility Nexus,", p. 344. Emphasis added.

differently. When climate stresses intersect with migration decisions, those already higher on the socio-economic spectrum are better informed about the nature and severity of the challenge, better insulated from the initial impact of such events, and more capable of moving in order to survive such environmental stresses over the longer term. In short, mobility decisions influenced by environmental stresses tend to magnify the unequal distribution of resources within societies.

One version of this scenario sees the economically privileged use their resources not only to survive a famine, but to become even more financially well-off in the process by acquiring the land and resources those less well-off have to sell in order to survive. In another scenario, the socio-economically powerful are the ones with the necessary knowledge networks and required financial resources to migrate away from an environmental stress and to integrate successfully in a new place of residence. Whatever the specific set of circumstances, the crucial insight remains that environmental strain very often magnifies existing economic disparity.

This finding about environmentally induced migration provides for a range of insights about features of the Joseph narrative in Gen 42–47. The opening statement of Gen 42, for instance, implies that Jacob benefits from an existing transnational knowledge network. The remark that "Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt" (42:1a) appears innocuous enough. Those commentators who notice it observe only that Egypt was historically a place where Israel might buy food.[17] True enough; yet Jacob's knowledge—depicted in him seeing (ויּרא) the food in Egypt while his sons who are 'looking about' see only one another—enables him

[17] G. von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary,* trans. J.H. Marks (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1961), 382; Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, 104; Garrett Galvin, *Egypt as a Place of Refuge* (FAT 2, 51; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

to instruct his sons to "go down and procure rations for us there [in Egypt], that we may live and not die." (42:2). For an audience attuned to dealing with climate related struggles, this brief statement indicates something key about Jacob: he is from the echelon of society that has access to information to aid in the decision making processes (i.e., international knowledge networks) and the material resources (i.e., the money to travel to Egypt and buy food) that make all the difference in times of climate stress.

The remainder of Gen 42 depicts the encounter between Joseph/Zaphenath-paneah and his brothers, Zaphenath-paneah's subsequent trickery of the brothers, and the brothers return to Jacob with rations, but without Simeon. The plot moves forward again with another mention of the famine, which Gen 43:1 states "was severe". Commentators note that this statement recalls the initial announcement of the famine in 41:57,[18] and evokes the language in Gen 12:10 that introduces Abraham and Sarah's environmentally induced involuntary migration there. [19] Verse 1 gives the essential information that the rations purchased from the first trip to Egypt are spent; but v. 2 implies the equally critical point that Jacob must still possess the financial resources to purchase more supplies, enabling him to send his sons to Egypt again to buy more food.

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[18] *Contra* Westermann, 43:1 and 41:57 are not "word for word the same" Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, p.120; initially the famine is strong (חזק), then it is severe (כבד). It is hard to tell a great semantic difference between the two, but since what follows in Gen 43 is clearly linked to the story in Gen 42, and thus this introduction of the famine in Gen 41:57, it probably indicates some nuance of increasing severity.

[19] For simplicity, the names Abraham and Sarah have been used here despite appearing as Abram and Sarai in the text.

Commentators usually focus on the discussion about Benjamin's participation in the trip, thus missing the important point that ends it. Jacob accepts that Benjamin must go only with the proviso that his sons "take some of the choice products of the land in your baggage, and carry them down as a gift for the man—some balm and some honey, gum, ladanum, pistachio nuts, and almonds" (43:11b). What is more, they are to take twice the amount of silver as before. Just how acutely is the famine impacting Jacob and his family? The command to take the delicacies of Canaan suggests that the famine had not yet totally depleted the stores of such valuable resources in Canaan.[20] Furthermore, this set of instructions underscores Jacob's wealth to possess such things in the first place, as well as the fact that Jacob could still gather together the economic resources needed to navigate the ongoing climate stress. But what about those less well off? If wealthy men like Jacob were running out of rations purchased from Egypt, surely those less well off were in a far more precarious position.

The second trip ultimately results in the revelation to Jacob's sons that Zaphenath-paneah is Joseph. Without ignoring the role of the brothers' reunion in the narrative, the next thing to move the plot forward is Joseph's insistence that Jacob be brought to Egypt because the famine will yet worsen (Gen 45:9-13). Recognizing that Jacob will require persuading to emigrate, Joseph implores his brothers to tell their father 'everything about my high station in Egypt and all that you have seen' so that he will not delay in coming (45:13).

Approached through the perspective of environmentally induced migration, a number

[20] For discussion of the food and diet for the period, see C. Shafer-Elliot, *Food in Ancient Judah: Domestic Cooking in the Time of the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), especially pp. 11-32.

of factors influence Jacob's eventual choice to migrate into Egypt: there is an existing environmentally induced food shortage; an international knowledge network indicates to Jacob that this famine will continue, and even worsen; that transnational information network indicates a similar food shortage does not exist in Egypt; and, critically, Jacob learns of a serendipitous supply of social capital—in the form of his close relationship with a very senior Egyptian political official—that will smooth the way for his immigration and settlement in Egypt. The famine in Canaan directly influences Jacob's decision to migrate to Egypt, but in a way that is wholly inflected by his socio-economic status.

All of this corresponds to the findings that Zetter and Morrissey offer on how environmental stresses influence mobility decisions in a way that cannot be separated from social, economic, and decision making resources. What comes next in the narrative corresponds to their other insight, specifically, that environmental catastrophes like these tend to consolidate resources among the economically powerful. To see that, one must move on to the denouement of the narrative in Gen 47.

After Jacob and the remainder of his household arrive in Egypt and Zaphenath-paneah receives them, the vizier of Egypt informs them that they must visit Pharaoh. This visit allows Zaphenath-paneah to introduce Jacob and his sons as shepherds and to persuade Pharaoh to settle them in Goshen. Pharaoh agrees, even authorizing Zaphenath-paneah to put the best shepherds among them in charge of Pharaoh's own livestock. "Joseph settled his father and his brothers," the text says, before specifying they were granted "a holding in the land of Egypt, in the best part of the land, in the land of Rameses." (47:11). In short, since they enjoy the patronage and sponsorship of Zaphenath-paneah, Jacob and his family gain permission to settle in a prime place with broad autonomy.

By contrast, under the crafty, unforgiving leadership of Zaphenath-paneah, Pharaoh's state apparatus sells its storehouse of food to the starving Egyptians in exchange for all their money (47:14), livestock (47:17), land, and eventually their own persons (47:18-19). Pharaoh obtains ownership of literally everything in Egypt. Zaphenath-paneah then provides seed for the people to grow crops—but only with the stipulation that they pay 20% of their harvest to Pharaoh as a tax. The story depicts an astonishing concentration of wealth among the already wealthy as a result of this climate disaster.

How do Jacob and his family experience this famine? The text is terse but indicates that "they gained possessions in [Goshen], and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly." (47:27). Unlike the Egyptians who survive the famine at the cost of all their possessions and their freedom, these expatriates, who live in relative isolation at some remove from the Egyptian population who is not enamored by their presence (46:34), do exceptionally well amid these brutal circumstances.

To summarize the preceding exegesis, note how deeply the theme of environmentally induced involuntary migration shapes the Joseph narrative. To be sure, it is not the only concern of the text; and yet, it occurs at the very outset of the story, and thereafter never drifts far from the center of the plot. Furthermore, recent research on how environmental factors drive migration decisions and exacerbate existing socio-economic inequality illuminates the way the story unfolds in Gen 41–47 and offers a clear framework in which to interpret the experience of Jacob and his family, both prior to and also after their move to Egypt.

Though there is always a risk in introducing jargon to encapsulate a longer discussion, Joseph and Jacob's experiences can be summarized helpfully with some technical terms for

their experience. Joseph is a victim of human trafficking placed into forced labor. Serendipitously, Joseph finds favor with Pharaoh, enabling him to upwardly assimilate into his host culture. Joseph pragmatically embraces this opportunity to integrate, symbolized by taking the Egyptian name Zaphenath-paneah, marrying an Egyptian woman, and having sons called "God has made me forget all my hardship" (Ephraim) and "God has made me fruitful in the land of my hardship" (Manasseh) with her.

Jacob has high socio-economic status and a transnational information network. During an escalating climate crisis, Jacob utilizes these resources to purchase rations from Egypt, not once but twice, allowing he and his family to remain in Canaan. Although Jacob does not seem inclined to move to Egypt, his transnational information network eventually enables him to ascertain the full extent of the climate disaster and to identify a political sponsor within Egypt that will negotiate his resettlement there. After moving to Egypt, Jacob lives as an expatriate shielded from the crushing effects of the famine experienced by the Egyptian population. Left unstated is how catastrophic the famine was on those even less well resourced in the land of Canaan Jacob left behind. Jacob, in short, appears as an environmentally induced involuntary migrant with immense social capital that enables him to settle in Goshen with great autonomy there. By contrast to Zaphenath-paneah, he shows no signs of integrating with the foreign host population and retains a deep desire to return to his previous home (49:29-32).

5: 'YHWH Adds Another Famine': Environmental Disasters across Gen 12–50

Finally, to appreciate some of the key elements of the Joseph narrative, one can compare it with the three other stories of environmentally induced involuntary migration in the book of Genesis. The so-called endangered ancestress stories in Gen 12, 20, and 26 share famine as the

motivating factor for the migrations of Abraham and Sarah as well as Isaac and Rebekah. Since I have treated the three endangered ancestress stories in detail elsewhere, only a few salient points about these stories need explanation here.[21]

Abraham and Sarah as well as Isaac and Rebekah are environmentally induced involuntary migrants. Abraham and Sarah are displaced externally (to Egypt) the first time (Gen 12:10–13:1), internally the second (Gen 20:1-18); Isaac and Rebekah experience environmentally induced internal displacement (Gen 26:1-22). In all three cases, circumstances compel the women to enter into a form of sex work in order to provide for their families. This deceptive strategy occurs because the ancestors do not know whether they can trust these foreign hosts. At no point in any of the three stories do the ancestors integrate with their foreign host population. Indeed, one of the implied features necessary to make sense of the narratives is their identifiable difference from the host population, who (at least) the patriarchs fear may take advantage of them because of their minority status. Finally, at the end of each instance, the ancestors leave the situation they were driven in to by climate stress with greater wealth than when they entered.

The critical similarity among all four stories is the theme of economic gain for the ancestors of Israel. Whether it is the gifts Abraham and Sarah receive from foreign leaders (Gen 12:16, 20; 20:14-16), the agricultural bounty gained by Isaac and Rebekah (Gen 26:12-16), or the various forms of increased wealth accrued by Joseph and Jacob, one consistent feature across these four stories remains the ancestor increasing their financial resources. These stories originate a long time after their purported setting and likely in disparate settings

[21] For the full discussion, see Strine, "Sister Save Us," 53-66.

from one another.[22] And yet, they share this concern. The prominence of environmentally induced involuntary migration in the Joseph narrative, along with its role in the endangered ancestress stories, indicates that migration driven by food insecurity was an important concern in ancient Israel and Judah, to the extent it featured heavily in their cherished origin narratives.

It is also striking to note the verisimilitude of this feature to the experience of environmentally induced migrants. Just as Zetter and Morrissey stress that a common result of environmentally induced migration is the consolidation of resources among those with the greatest pre-existing access to financial resources and decision making processes, so also the socio-economically privileged ancestors in Genesis employ their resources in order to benefit from climate related challenges. In this respect, the stories in Gen 12, 20, 26, and 37–50 agree with one another and correspond to cross-cultural research on this topic.

That, however, is where the similarities stop. The first of two key difference is the attitude of the ancestors towards their foreign hosts. Whereas the endangered ancestress stories depict the protagonists carrying a deep suspicion of their foreign hosts, Joseph never exhibits any distrust for his Egyptian hosts. A critical plot point common to Gen 12, 20, and 26 is that the ancestors fear the way they will be treated by their foreign hosts, of whom they appear ignorant. This is even the case when Isaac and Rebekah go to Gerar in Gen 26 although Gen 20 indicates Abraham and Sarah also fled there. In all three cases, the ancestors engage in deceitful behavior, doing so specifically to determine whether their foreign hosts are trustworthy. By comparison, nothing in the text of Gen 37–50 suggests Joseph distrusts

[22] For a succinct summary of views on the provenance of the Joseph narrative, see Römer, 'The Joseph Story,' 189-95.

Potiphar, his jailer, or Pharaoh at any point. The same is true of Jacob later in the narrative. It seems relevant to note that Jacob's transnational knowledge network owing to his relationship with Zaphenath-paneah enables this open attitude, something nonexistent in Gen 12, 20, and 26. Still, the disparity between how Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Rebekah act with suspicion and the way Joseph and Jacob engage the Egyptians without overt anxiety for their intentions is stark.

The second difference, related to the divergent attitudes of trust the protagonists display towards their host, is the willingness—or unwillingness—of the ancestors to integrate into their host culture. Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Rebekah never take any tangible step to integrate with their foreign hosts. Crucially, within the Joseph narrative of Gen 37–50, not even Jacob shows any noteworthy change that indicates he is adopting aspects of Egyptian culture.

By contrast, Joseph wholeheartedly embraces the opportunity to assimilate into Egyptian culture. Joseph benefits financially by adopting an Egyptian identity and upwardly assimilating into its culture. His willingness to marry and Egyptian woman and to name their sons in a way that suggests a strong affinity for Egypt departs entirely from all the protagonists of Genesis that proceed him. This posture towards integration in neither a result of economic success, which occurs in all the stories, nor of the Egyptian's treatment of Joseph for Jacob benefits financially and is well treated too, but remains entirely separate from his foreign hosts, to the the extent that he and his expatriate family live segregated from the Egyptians.

Taken together, these two differences highlight that Joseph's open, trustworthy attitude towards the foreign Other and his pragmatic willingness to adopt foreign cultural

distinctives is not just inconsistent with other stories in Gen 12–50, but a direct departure from every other figure in the ancestral family who deals with environmentally induced involuntary migration. Joseph stands, in the end, like a lone sheaf of wheat apart from his brothers, neither just as the more powerful figure nor as the only one with access to food, but as the sole example of an ancestor in Genesis who unreservedly adopts a foreign identity. This feature has been noted by scholars before, for sure. Still, the finely pointed nature of the contrast emerges with fresh clarity and further significance when it is outlined through a hermeneutical lens that recognizes and adopts the centrality of environmentally induced involuntary migration for the ancestral narrative.