

him out. Probably the place where the brothers were lunching (v25) was a bit distant from the pit, so the Midianites managed to get to the Ishmaelites first and sold Joseph to them. (3) Reuben was the first of the brothers to discover that Joseph was gone when he visited the pit in an effort to surreptitiously free Joseph. So we have a case of the star-crossed brothers, like the star-crossed lovers at the death scene in *Romeo and Juliet*. Lowenthal notes that this frees the brothers of Joseph from having committed, as is commonly assumed, the crime of the century in selling Joseph. In all this Lowenthal follows Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir. It is also significant that Lowenthal's proposed action sequence does not impair the unity of the passage; he accomplishes his exegesis without resort to source criticism.

Source criticism is, however, much more severe on the passage. In presenting a typical source-critical view I turn to Speiser and the Anchor Bible on Genesis⁵. Speiser here notes that in the broader context of these verses, there is tension/contradiction at three points: (a) a "Reuben story" and a "Judah story"; (h) "Ishmaelites" and "Midianites"; (c) "Israel" versus "Jacob" as name for the clan head.

Specifically, Gen 37 is regarded as largely from source J but with intrusive material from E. Thus, 37:1b-20 is J (although with some diffidence, on Speiser's part, as regarding the latter portion of this sketch). The assignment of this part of the passage to J is largely because of the occurrence of the proper name Israel in vv3 and 13 -- since it is considered that we can with some confidence posit that J uses Israel and E uses Jacob (Speiser, 293). Verses 21-24 are assigned to E, which presents Reuben as Joseph's protector, while vv25-27 are assigned to J, which presents Judah as Joseph's protector (he commutes the proposed murder of Joseph to selling him as a slave). The first part of v28, "Meanwhile Midianite traders passed by, and they pulled Joseph up from the pit." is assigned to E, while the central clause of v28, "They sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for 20 pieces of silver," is assigned to J. With the third clause of 28, we return again to E, since the whole stretch 28c-36 is characterized by 'Reuben', 'Jacob', and 'Midianites', which are hallmarks of E.

Speiser specifically rejects a complicated scenario of the sort proposed above by the tradition running from Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir to the present time (e.g., Lowenthal) in favor of clearing up the assumed confusion by resort to source criticism:

"All this confusion is dissipated automatically once the narrative is broken up into two originally independent versions. One of these (J) used the name Israel, featured Judah as Joseph's protector, and identified the Ishmaelites as the traders who bought Joseph from his brothers. The other (E) spoke of Jacob as the father and named Reuben as Joseph's friend: the slave traders in that version were Midianites who discovered Joseph by accident and sold him in Egypt to Potiphar. Each story is entirely self-consistent thus far, and goes on to build on its own set of data, which hold up meaningfully as the story unfolds."⁶

Speiser further comments that "in all the existing differences in detail, sight should not be lost of the prevailing similarities," admits that the precise documentary assignment "may not be clear in every instance," notes that the ultimate compiler "was not free to suppress any statement in