

# THE AFRICAN JOSEPH AND HIS CONTRIBUTION TO AFRICA AND

## ANCIENT ISRAEL (GEN. 41:41-45)<sup>1</sup>

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### **Abstract**

The contentious Africanness of ancient Egypt/Egyptians is discussed at a great length since most Eurocentric biblical scholars erroneously believe that ancient Egypt/Egyptians belong to either Europe or Asia, despite the ancient Egyptian claim in their monuments (inscription of Hashepsut) that they belong to Africa, precisely Punt. A close examination of Genesis 41:41-45 shows that the purpose of the elaborate ceremony/ritual is not only for Joseph's promotion to the position of a vizier, but also mainly to make Joseph a full citizen of Egypt/Africa in order that he may be able to perform his duty as an Egyptian Deputy Governor. Unfortunately biblical scholars miss this fact. I have also emphasized that Joseph's contribution to ancient Israel and Egypt/Africa is of great importance, despite the underestimation of these achievements of an African Joseph. This article aims to emphasize the fact that Joseph was made an African citizen and that he made great contribution to ancient Israel and Africa which is seldom recognized by many biblical scholars.

**Key Words:** Africa, Egypt, Joseph, Genesis, Ceremony

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## INTRODUCTION

Many great scholars have written commentaries and articles on many passages in the book of Genesis (Rad von 1972; Bandstra 2008; Brueggemann 1982; Charles 2013). However, much attention has not been paid to this important passage (Gen 41:41-45) where Joseph was coronated with elaborate ritual of power and citizenship. Many of these commentators have missed the fact that the elaborate ceremony is not only to promote him but also to make Joseph a full citizen of Egypt/Africa. It appears to me that to exercise such immense authority, he needed to be made a full fledged citizen of Egypt.

In the Bible there are many Josephs. They include Joseph of Arimathea, Joseph, the husband of Mary and Joseph called Barsabas. I am interested in discussing the Joseph who belongs to Egypt/Africa and made great contribution to Africa and ancient Israel. That is, Joseph the son of Jacob and Rachael, who was elaborately made to be a citizen of ancient Egypt so that he could be very effective in his duty as vizier of Egypt. The author of Genesis particularly paid great attention to this event, probably because of the importance of the elaborate ceremony. This article examines the Africanness of ancient Egyptians, the date and setting of Joseph's career, the literary analysis of Genesis 41, the elaborate ceremony of Joseph's citizenship and his promotion to the position of a grand vizier of Egypt, as well as his contribution to Egypt/Africa and ancient Israel.

However, it is important to note that this paper represents my personal opinion on ancient Egypt and Egyptians in light of the testimonies of ancient writers such as Diodorus Scicilus, Herodotus and eminent Egyptologists such as Wallis Budge, Maspero, George Rawlinson, David O'Connor and some

modern scholars such as Knut Holter, Gleen Usry, and Craige Keener. Inscriptions of Hatshepsut clearly maintain that the ancient Egyptians came from Kush and Somali land.

## **THE AFRICANNESS OF ANCIENT EGYPT/ EGYPTIANS**

Since the title of this article is “The African Joseph (Gen 41:40-45)” it is important to discuss the Africanness and blackness of ancient Egypt and Egyptians since many modern biblical scholars are still in doubt as to whether Egypt/Egyptians are Africa/Africans or Europe/Europeans. The question of Africanness of ancient Egypt and Egyptians has been in contention since the days when Euro-Americans discovered massive monuments during their archaeological discovery in Egypt. Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798 opened up Egypt for archaeological discovery. Around this time the new Hamite hypothesis based on the theories about race which placed the Negro at the very bottom could not allow the possibility that Negroes had developed such a massive civilization discovered in the Nile Valley (Copher 1974:7-16). The Euro-American Egyptologists had to formulate the theory that Egyptians were not Africans or Negroes because they believed that it is impossible for Negroes to bring about such civilization (Junker 1921:121-132; Baldwin n.d:345; Blumenbach 1865; J. D Baldwin 1969:309). It was propounded that,

since Africans were so exceptional people, they cannot be classified into any distinct race because those who originally inhabited what we called Africa today were people of the ‘red-skinned race’ who later became so degenerated in body and mind, thus changing their types so that in the course of generations their fine forms became ‘ugly, their long curly black hair’ became short, crisp and woolly, their fine, olive-coloured complexion turned to a coal black’ (Adamo 1986:13).

This idea was formulated at the very time when justification for the enslavement of the Negro was feverishly sought. For example, Hermann Junker believed that both Egyptians and the Ethiopians which he called Nehesi, are not Africans and, of course, not black people (Junker 1921:121-132). The term Nehesi is an Egyptian term which means “black” and at times used as a name of a Kushite from Kush. This term Nehesi, was probably used to distinguish the southern Negro/Black in order to distinguish the southern Nehesi from themselves since they themselves were black (Budge 1978:386; 1976:505). In 1810 Blumenbach, a pioneer in racial classification was in Egypt studying human remains in order to prove that the ancient Egyptians-Cushites were not Negroes (Blumenbach 1865). Unfortunately, many other Egyptologists accepted Junker’s and Blumenbach’s views uncritically (Varcutter 1976:33-34). Hegel, in his lectures on the philosophy of history, held that ‘Africa is no historical part of the world: it has no movement or development to exhibit’ (Wilks 1970:7). Professor Trevor-Roper who held the Chair of History in Oxford University advanced the view that African past is “only the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe” (cited by Wilks 1970:7). A.P Newton also advanced the view that Africa had no history before her colonization by the Europeans (Fage 1970:1).

It is unfortunate that even up till today many Euro-American biblical scholars believe in such theory that Egypt is not part of Africa. Thus, in scholarly essays, they frown at any claim that Egypt or ancient Egyptians are black people.<sup>2</sup> Lepsius

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<sup>2</sup>Kuntz discussed Egypt under the title, “The Ancient Near East during the Patriarchal Period” (Kuntz 1974:60-63). Ninian Smart discussed Egyptian Religion under the title “the Ancient Near East,” alongside Israelite Religions rather than under African religions (Smart 1992:vi).

says that the Kushites of the southern Wawat came from Asia between the time of Pepi I (1200 B.C E) and Amenemhat I (1700 BCE) and drove back the Africans who occupied the place (Maspero 1968:488 cited Lepsius). J. D Baldwin also maintained that the Kushites originated from Arabia and built settlements throughout Africa, down to the Eastern Coast, nearly to the Cape of Good Hope (Baldwin n.d:345). Lepsius' and Baldwin's theory of the origin of Kushites is very unlikely, if it has been generally accepted that Africa, south of Egypt, is the origin of human race.

Many ancient and modern scholars maintain that Egypt is part of Africa geographically and ethnically. Punt and Nehesi countries in ancient Africa were their places of origin and that the present location of Egypt was originally part of an ocean but Kushites inhabited the land (Adamo 1986:66). Ancient Egyptians themselves claimed that their place of origin is Punt. Diodorus Siculus, the Greek-born writer (59-30 B.C.E) who set out to write the general history of humankind says that the Ethiopians were the first of all people and the pioneer in worshipping the gods (Scicilus 2005 reprint 3.8.5, 3.15.2, 3.9.2). They are the sources of many of the customs of the Egyptians. They also sent the Egyptians out as colonists (Scicilus 2005 reprint 3.11, 3.2-3.11; Adamo 1986:67). E A Budge, George Rawlinson, and Maspero were emphatic that the original home of the Egyptian ancestors was Punt which is to be sought in the African side of the gulf where the present side of Somaliland is located (Budge 1976 512-513; Rawlinson n.d:72; Maspero 1968:488). Budge says,

It is interesting to note that Egyptians themselves always appear to have had some idea that they were connected with the people of the land of Punt which they considered

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It is important to note that the Hyksos were foreigners who came to rule Egyptians but they were later forced out of Egypt.

to be peopled by “Nehesh,” or “Blacks,” and some modern authorities have no hesitation in saying that the ancient Egyptians and the inhabitants of Punt belong to the same race. Now Punt is clearly the name of a portion of Africa which lay far to the south of Egypt, and at no great distance from the western coast of the Red Sea, and, as many Egyptians appear to have looked upon this country as their original home, it follows that, in the early period of dynastic history, at least, the relation between the black tribes of the south and the Egyptians in the north were of friendly character (Budge 1976:512-513).

Budge continues,

Many facts go to show the persistence of the Negro influence on the beliefs, and manners, and customs of the Dynastic Egyptians, and the most important thing of all in connection with this is the tradition which makes them to come from the land of Punt....We may accept without misgiving the opinion of Professor Maspero and of Professor Naville, both of whom believe that it was situated in Africa, at a considerable distance to the south-east, and south of Egypt..... All things considered, it is tolerably certain that the men of Punt, who influenced the manners, customs, and beliefs of the people of the Nile Valley were of African origin (Budge 1976:415-416).

According to David O'Connor,

Typically, the men [Punt] have dark reddish skins and fine features; characteristic Negroid types...and the Egyptians have always visited Punt from the time immemorial... The relationship has been of trade rather than political or subordination (O'Connor 1982:917-918).

The celebrated Father of History, Herodotus, who spent about two years in Egypt doing his research, regarded the Egyptians and the Colchians as black people. He says,

There can be no doubt that Colchians are Egyptian race. Before I heard any mention of the fact from others, I had remarked it myself. My own conjectures were founded first on the fact that they are black skinned and have woolly hair..... (Herodotus VII, 70).

The fact is that ancient Egypt and ancient Egyptians are Africans and black as attested to by Mokhtar,

The Egyptians used only one word to describe themselves: KMT the strongest term existing in the language of the Pharaohs to indicate blackness. This hieroglyphics was written with a piece of charcoal. The word KMT gave rise to the term Hamite which has been much used subsequently. It is also found in the Bible in the form of Ham (Mokhtar 1981:12).

Many other scholars such as Glenn Usry and Craig Keener have argued for the Africanness and blackness of ancient Egypt and Egyptians. According to them “most Egyptians were black by any one’s definition (Usry and Craig 1996:61). The Egyptians themselves considered Africa as their origin and not Asia. The inscription of Queen Hatshepsut attested to the fact that they originated from Punt to which they made several expeditions (Adamo 1986:32).

Knut Holter is right in his observation when he says,

In recent years, however, one has become increasingly aware of its African heritage. On the one hand, the geographical source for the peopling of the Egyptian Nile Valley seems to have been predominantly African, rather than European or Near East. On the other hand the civilization from here was to an extent, that is usually not recognized, fundamentally African; evidence of both language and culture point in this direction (Holter 2008:80-81).

The concept of Egypt as part of Africa is not a new one. However, it appears that people forget that Egypt is part of the

continent of Africa and only think of the modern state as part of the Middle-East. This is because Arabic is presently the main language and the country is predominantly Islamic, following the settlement there in AD 642 of people of Islamic culture.

From the above testimonies of the ancient Egyptians themselves, the Greek writer, Diodorus Siculus, eminent scholars such as Budge, Maspero, Rawlinson, Mokhtar, Usry, Kenner, Holter and others, one can say comfortably that ancient Egyptians and Egypt are Africans and belong to Africa even ethnically. Therefore, if we accept Egypt as an African country and that ancient Egyptians are Africans, then the assumption that Joseph is an Egyptian and an African is correct. The recognition of Egypt and Joseph as Africa and Africans shows that Africa and Africans participated in the drama of redemption, not as slaves as some Euro-American scholars have alleged in their biased biblical exegesis (Mckane 1963:267; Philbeck 1970:123; Ullendorf 1968:8; Smith 1910:359). The story of Joseph and his wife is part of the drama of redemption. It shows that the Bible is not a foreign book in Africa and to Africans as some political agitators or anti colonialists in Africa have claimed. If the Bible is not foreign to Africa and Africans, it means that Christianity is not a foreign religion as stated above. The fact is that the history of ancient Africa is as unthinkable without Egypt as the history of Egypt is without Africa (Davidson 1964:43).

## **THE POSSIBLE DATE AND SETTING OF JOSEPH'S STORY**

There have been different opinions as to the date and setting of the story of Joseph. Two positions exist regarding the date of Joseph among eminent scholars of the Joseph story. While some scholars date Joseph to the Second Intermediate Period of Egyptian history (1786-1570BCE), that is, the period when the Hyksos ruled the Delta in Egypt (Kitchen 1962; Stigers 1976; Coogan 2009), others date it to the 19<sup>th</sup> century BCE during the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty of the Middle Kingdom. The dating of Joseph to the Hyksos period (1786-1570) was based on two assumptions: that the late date of Exodus, during Ramses II (13<sup>th</sup> century), is acceptable; and that the rise to power of the Asiatic people should be the period when the Hyksos ruled Egypt. If the date of the Exodus is 13<sup>th</sup> century BCE and the sojourn in Egypt lasted for approximately 400 years (430 in Exodus 12:40), Joseph would have been in Egypt in the 17<sup>th</sup> century BCE. However, if the date of Exodus is 15<sup>th</sup> century BCE, Joseph must have been in Egypt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century BCE during the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty of the Middle Kingdom. If the biblical numbers are taken literally and at face value the probable kings during the career of Joseph and the period of the enslavement would have been Sesostris II (1897-1878 BCE) and Sesostris III (1878-1843 BCE). This argument depends on how one interprets I Kings 6:1 which dates the Exodus 480 years before the fourth year of King Solomon (966 BCE). As said above if one accepts the verse literally the date of Exodus will be 15<sup>th</sup> century, but if one totally disregards the verse's historical value, the Exodus can be dated to any time. However, if one accepts the verse to be less than a literal 480 years, then Exodus will be dated to the 13<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

However, this writer holds to the late date of Exodus (15<sup>th</sup> century BCE) and Joseph career dated back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century BCE during the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty of the Middle Kingdom for the following reasons.

In view of the rivalries and inter-tribal wars in Canaan, it is unlikely that Syro-Palestinians would favour a Hebrew.

The 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty date for Joseph agrees with the biblical chronology of the Exodus and sojourn because I Kings 6:1 is probably dating the Exodus to 1446 BCE and Exodus 12:40 appears to place Jacob's entrance into Egypt during the reign of Sesostris II.

In Genesis 39:1 Potiphar is an Egyptian and a commander of the royal bodyguard of Pharaoh. It is therefore unlikely that the Hyksos would choose a native Egyptian as a bodyguard.

Since the Hyksos ruled only the northern part of Egypt and not the entire Egypt, and the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty ruled the entire Egypt, It will likely not be correct to date Joseph career to the time of the Hyksos who did not control the entire Egypt. Joseph controlled the entire Egypt (Gen. 41, 42 and 45). It is likely that by the time Joseph arrived in Egypt he met a united kingdom around 1898 BCE with the Twelve Dynasty (1937-1759) in power (Burton 2007:75).

Joseph shaving and putting on new clothes when he was to meet Pharaoh in Genesis 41:14 would reflect actual native Egyptian customs and traditions and not the Syro-Palestinians'.

A papyrus in the Brooklyn Museum published by Hayes mentioned Asiatic slaves in Egypt during the Middle Kingdom ( a few generation after Joseph) with their duties as household servants like that of Joseph (Hayes 1955:103).

Although the majority of modern scholars holds to the period of the Hyksos, in the light of the evidence above I hold to the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty early date for Joseph in Egypt.

## **LITERARY ANALYSIS OF GENESIS 41**

A close examination of Joseph's story shows that the story is unfolded through a veritable roller coaster of plot twists (Collins 2004:101-102). The artistic characteristic of the story of Joseph in Genesis has been described with effective insight. This entire story builds its plot with careful attention for symmetry which employs among other techniques, an interaction of extremes" (Coats 1976: 7). This story as it is written reveals "a broad range of literary devices such as "irony, simile, metaphor, double entendre, hyperbole" and deals with "subtle emotions, like guilt, fear, despair." (Coats 1976:7). Coats also described the story as

"Leading the action to a point of crisis, then leaves that plot dangling while a new line of action develops, and then with deft strokes picks up the dangling ends. It controls the pace of action by retarding development of the plot, by recapitulations, by embellishment"(1976:7).

Joseph's story is different in kind from other stories in Genesis because it has "a certain amount of local color (Collins 2004:103). Joseph's story has been considered a novella, a superb example of early prose fiction. and is traditionally attributed to J and E. (Collins 2004:101; Coats 1976:7).

Chapters 39-41 is the third structure in the story of Joseph and shows "a very remarkable symmetry and artistic skill in conception" with three major scenes which constitutes a subplot and a digression from the movement of the major plot that has been established in chapter 37. Each one of the scene is intricately related to one another.

According to Coats, this unit seems to have had a life of its own before it was incorporated into the body of the Joseph story and he also considered it “a political *legend*” (Coats 1976:32). Yet no part of the scene can be separated from the Joseph’s story as an independent unconnected or unrelated story (Coats 1976:48). The Joseph’s story shows a remarkable internal unity.

Chapter 41 concludes what appears to be the great interlude in the life of Joseph as described in chapters 39-41. Chapter 41 contains the third scene in this episode (the first in chapter 39 and the second in 40). This third episode closes with an anticipation of what is to be unfolded in the following, that is, Joseph sharing food to the hungry masses. Chapter 41 can be divided as follows (Wenham 2000:389).

Scene 1: Pharaoh’s dreams reported (1-7)

Scene 2: Interpreters fail to explain dreams (8-13)

Scene 3: Joseph’s audience with Pharaoh (14-46)

Scene: 4: Joseph’s work in seven years of plenty (47-57)

Scene 5: Joseph’s work in famine (53-57).

The first scene which recounts Pharaoh’s dreams is told in the third person and later it was described in the first person by Pharaoh. The second scene is verses 8-13 which recorded the failure of the royal dream interpreters. The third scene 14-46 constitutes the climax of the chapter, when Joseph was transformed from nobody to somebody, that is, number two man in the whole of Egypt. The finite verbs “rushed,” “summoned” expressed the urgency of Pharaoh’s feeling and the “rapidity of Joseph’s metamorphosis from slave to courtier.” In verse 16, Joseph made use of oblique

rhetorical question to draw away attention from himself to God, “Who can announce Pharaoh’s welfare.” Verses 25 -35 appears to be “the first longish speech” in the Joseph’s story. It is divided into two parts, verses 25-32 and 33-36 (Wenham 200:393).

This chapter coheres well with the rest of Joseph’s story. Source critics have generally believe that verses 1-32 are from a single source (E) as it continues with the account of chapter 40. It was believed by some scholars that the rest also come from E even though without unity (Wenham 2000:390). According to Wenham, Gunkel, Skinner, von Rad and Schmidt believe that verses 33-57 is a mixture of J and E material because there is amount of contradiction and redundancy especially in the description of Joseph’s promotion (Wenham 2000: 390). Redford believes that those discrepancies were read into the text. (Redford 19:166) *Biblical Story of Joseph*. Wenham thinks that there is substantial literary unity in the whole chapter despite the discrepancies (Wenham 2000:390). Verse 26 used allegorical language when Joseph interpreted the dream. The cows and ears of grain symbolize the harvest of the land.<sup>3</sup>

Verses 29-31 used a prophetic language (“Behold seven years are coming,” that is the prediction of famine. It is noticeable that the years of plenty was described in one sentence while five clauses described the famine (30-31).

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<sup>3</sup> Siheil text in Southern Egypt dating from the second century BCE mentions a seven year famine and then followed by the years of plenty during the time of Djoser (2600 BCE). This shows that there is a memory of a seven-year long famine and plenty was known in ancient Egypt and other parts of ancient Near East (Wenham 2000:393).

Verses 36-46 is found Pharaoh's expression of appreciation of Joseph's advice, thus his promotion as a vizier (Prime Minister), and also the honour of citizenship to make his authority properly acceptable by the Egyptian people.

In verses 39-40 the nature of Joseph office is not really clear. What is certain is that the description of his responsibility means he is second in command. "Only as regards to the throne will I be more important than you," and in verse 41 "I have set you over all the land of Egypt." His responsibility resembles that of the Egyptian vizier described as the great supervisor over all Egypt who is in control of all governmental activities (Breasted 1906:7).

Verse 41 seems to be a duplication of verse 40 as some source critics sometimes alleged. However, it is not, because of the "imperative see!" and the perfect 'I have placed' in verse 41 necessitate the presence of verse 40 before, and show that 41 is a dependent, though certainly repetitive statement (Wenham 2000:396).

Coats's conclusion about literary unit of the story of Joseph is this:

Thus it seems to me to be clear that the Joseph story must be understood essentially as a unit, and artistic masterpiece. But the masterpiece do not appear to me to be a product of redactor who expressed his art by weaving together two originally distinct sources. Nor does the masterpiece appear to me to have been compromised by a later, clumsy hand. The masterpiece remains masterpiece as it now stands, each piece in its place. Rhythm, symmetry, harmony, heightened on occasion by contrasts, contributes to the flow of this ancient literary symphony (1976:75).

According to Coats, Hannelis Schulte believes that the story of Joseph in Genesis must have gone through four oral

stages and two written stages before it gets to the final present stage (Coats 1976: 74). Coats disagrees with this theory because when one looks at the structure and genre the story belong to the production of the artist's hand at a literary level rather than the production of the folk at an oral level (1976:76-79). Von Rad believes that Joseph story is related to the teachings of wisdom and can be dated to the Solomonic or post-Solomonic period (Von Rad 1972:435; Coats 1976:78).

According to Coogan, it is difficult to set a precise date because there is no mention of Joseph so far in any of the Egyptian documents as one expects (2009:69). However, many scholars have tried to find a kernel of history in the story of Joseph by dating it to the time when the Hyksos ruled Egypt (1750-1550 BCE). Others date the story to the post exilic period (Coats 1992 :976-981) and also to the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty of Egypt during the reign of Sesostri II (1897-1878 BCE) and Sesostri III (1878-1843 BCE). In the above discussion, I believe that there is a kernel of historical information which has been originally passed around orally before it was finally committed into writing from memory by an expert artist using all kinds of literary genres to achieve the purpose of his writing. In this process there were some expansion and addition which does not make the story loose the event that lies behind the story once upon a time.

## **RITUAL OF PROMOTION AND CITIZENSHIP OF JOSEPH**

Chapter 41:41-45 which deals with the ritual of promotion and citizenship is very important to this article according to the title. Therefore, verses 41-45 will be the focus of this section with some elaborate treatment of Egyptian/African context.

Verses 41-45 are the installation ceremony of Joseph as a vizier of Egypt. This is the events that can be visualized in

detail according to Egyptian/African custom and representations. The narrator was careful enough to have described in detail the Egyptian usual ritual of acceptance and upliftment. Among the rituals (taking of ring of authority, wearing of fine linen, gold chain on the neck, riding on chariot, and crying and bowing before Joseph, and giving of a new name 41:42-43, 45) the giving of Asenath to Joseph as a wife seems to be of utmost importance. Change of clothing was necessary to suit Joseph's status as a wise counselor (Stigers 1976:288). One of the major reasons for these detailed rituals is to make Joseph socially acceptable. That of giving an African wife (Egyptian) and a new name appears to be the most important. Perhaps, it was not only to make Joseph socially acceptable but also to Egyptianize him.<sup>4</sup> Examples of the promotion of Semites rising to the positions of great authority in Egypt are many right from the Middle Kingdom, Hyksos and New Kingdom period (Wenham 2000:395). What can be considered as a striking parallels from the period of Akhenaten is Tutu who was appointed the "highest mouth" in the whole country which means that he had the total authority in the special task that he was assigned and he was responsible only to Pharaoh (Wenham 2000:395). It is likely that it is one of the titles that were given to Joseph. At Tell el-Amarna, the painting on the wall shows Pharaoh appointing Tutu and putting the golden necklace of office around his neck. It was also shown leaving the palace. This is an important and excellent illustration of what might have taken place when Joseph was crowned as the chancellor of Egypt and made a citizen of Egypt (Gen. 41:41-43). What is particularly important is that

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<sup>4</sup> I discussed in detail who were the African-Israelites in Egypt in my previous article, "A Mixed Multitude: An African Reading of Exodus 12:38," *Exodus-Deuteronomy*, Fortress Press, 2012.

the person being honoured with Egyptian/African citizenship is a Semite (R. de Vaux, 1978:1-299).

### **The Giving an Egyptian Wife, Asenath to Joseph**

The name, "Asenath" appears three times in the book of Genesis 41:45, 50 and 46:20. The name "Asenath" is an Egyptian name which means "belonging to or the servant of Neith goddess (Buttrick 1982:247-248). According to Jones it means "Who belongs to Neith" or "she who is of Neith" (Jones 1990:41). He also reported Jablonski as saying that the name is a "compound from Coptic Neith, the titular goddess of Sais, the Athena of the Greeks; and on the whole means a worshipper of Neith" (Jones 1990:41). She was the Minerva of the Egyptians and the goddess of wisdom "(Jones 1990:41). Lockyer also says that the name is an Egyptian name which means "one who belongs to Neith, the heathen goddess of wisdom of Sais (Lockyer n.d:32). Asenath means "she belongs to the Goddess neit or "she belong to her father" or "she belong to you" (Wenham 2000:397). Such name is well attested in the Middle Kingdom and the Hyksos period (Kitchen 1962:1012; Wenham 2000:397).

Genesis 41:42 exposed more than any other passage, the original Egyptian/African culture. The giving of Asenath to Joseph, the giving of signet ring, the giving of white linen and the riding on a royal horse and the bowing down and kneeling down for Joseph is a sign of respect and political authority. All represent the nature of respect, authority and protection that are given to the royal person in Egypt as it has been in the other African countries. The culture of giving a wife to the royal person is indeed the height of the mark of citizenship in Egypt. Even though Joseph had become number two in the nation, perhaps, he had not completely identified himself with

African/Egyptian life until his marriage with Asenath was consummated. The marriage that Pharaoh arranged for Joseph reveals his determination to completely identify Joseph with the royal family and Egyptian/African life and citizenship. She has an Egyptian name and was also given to Joseph not only as sign of promotion but also to make him Egyptian (Schneider 2008:162).

The giving of a wife is not just a mark of honour bestowed on Joseph as a citizen but also a mark of protection and authority as the second in command. Evidence of giving a wife to the royal person as a mark of honour in Egypt as it is in other African countries abounds. In ancient Egypt it appears that everyone belonged to the king. He could do whatever he liked with them. He could give their daughters to anyone he liked.

The given of a wife, Asenath, from one of the Egyptian top families actually set a seal on Joseph promotion and citizenship.

### **Pharaoh's Signet Ring giving to Joseph**

In ancient Egypt as it is in most African countries, men and women are great lovers of jewelry such as amulets, pendants, bracelets, necklaces, head jewelry, rings, anklets, collars, diadems insignia and others. Gold was the most common material used in Egyptian/African jewelry since it was easily available from Nubia. Egyptian jewelry was not made only for decorative purpose, for it contains symbols that make the wearers, dead or alive, feels the expectation of protection, good luck, and prosperity. These materials are for protection against evil forces both natural and supernatural. Egyptian rings can be made with some seals impressed on them such as images of gods, magical signs, hieroglyphs and animals. The ancient Egyptians were not satisfied to adorn themselves

with jewelry when they are alive; they loaded the important dead people with jewelry. They loaded the arms, the fingers, the neck, the ears, the brow, and the ankles of the dead person with costly jewelry.

The rings that were won by important official men in ancient Egypt were not mere decoration but an actual necessity. This may not be only true of Egypt but also other Ancient African countries. Official documents were not signed but sealed and the seal was good in law and every Egyptian person seemed to have a seal kept as a personal belonging ready for use whenever it was required. Such was the royal ring in ancient Egypt and the one given to Joseph to wear as a mark of honour, authority and as of true citizen of Egypt.

The use of ring in the Israelitic culture is similar to that of Africa/Egypt. The word ring in the Bible is טָבַעַת which means “to impress with a seal”(Alexander 1980:342).<sup>5</sup> It denotes an official seal-ring of the Pharaoh or king which makes decrees official by its imprint as in Genesis 41:42, Esther 3:10; 12; 8:2, 8,10 and appears twenty-eight times in the Old Testament (Alexander 1980:342). Ring is also considered an indispensable article of a Hebrew’s attire in as much as it contains the wearer’s signet. Thus the transferring of Pharaoh’s ring from his own finger to Joseph’s finger is a sign of investing Joseph with royal authority and respect, protection and success as is the culture of ancient Egyptians. It means that Pharaoh’s power was vested on Joseph because Pharaoh’s name was probably impressed on the ring (<http://www.bible-history.com/eastons/S/Signe>).<sup>6</sup> In this way Pharaoh gave him the

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<sup>5</sup> Alexander, Ralph, “tabba’at. Ring or Signet Ring” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, R.Laird Harris, Gleason Archer, Jr, Bruce K Walke Ed, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980).

<sup>6</sup> There is a discovery of a signet ring on fine clay in the ruin of Nineveh which bears the name and the title of an Egyptian king, Cheop

delegated power of the sovereign and constituted him as his prime minister or “grand vizier.” Joseph’s ring was both a token of highest dignity , and an instrument of greatest power by which he had all authority to make and sign what decrees he thought fit in the king’s name (Gen. 41:40-42; Esther 3:10, 8:2).

## **Necklaces**

One of the items given to Joseph was necklace. The ancient Egyptians loved to wear a variety of necklaces and collars made from different kinds of materials. Only the rich could afford the ones made with gold, silver or precious stones but the poor ones made use of the ones made from shells, wood, and bones. The gods, kings, priests or the upper class would generally wear a significant quantity of jewelry (Ancient Egypt online, 1-3 accessed 11/13/2015). It is a badge of rank and it was used to identify the degree of rank and dignity. This was a badge of office worn in Egypt by the judge and the prime ministers. It has a similar use in Persia and Babylon as recorded in Daniel 5:7. This is part of the symbol of authority. The necklace on Joseph’s neck was a symbol of authority and royal respect.

## **Joseph’s Riding on a Royal Chariot**

It is generally believed that chariots were introduced by the Hyksos (Watterson 1998:133). However, the discovery of horses is dated to the Thirteenth Dynasty, that is, during the second intermediate period. One can say that by the New Kingdom chariot was very much a part of ancient Egyptian society. Pharaohs such as Thuthmosis II had more than a thousand charioteers in his army (Watterson 1998:133). It was believed that the ancient Egyptian chariot was lighter and

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and Horus (<http://www.bible-history.com/eastons/S/Signe> wide t/1.

faster than the standard form used in the ancient world (<http://www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/timelines/topics/chariot.htm>). It was used to carry the feared Egyptian archers into the battle. The king's horse was specially decorated elaborately. Pharaoh made Joseph ride on a royal horse as part of the ritual of kingship, reward and respect and a sign of a royal citizenship. This is also a symbol of authority for Joseph.

### **Bowing down and Kneeling for Joseph**

The use of the Hebrew verb קָשַׁב means to kiss, therefore the author of Genesis is using the correct equivalent of Egyptian vizier (Wenham 2000:395). Several suggestions were offered. It was suggested that it may mean kissing the earth (Redford 1970: 166) and may come from the root קָשַׁב which means “other themselves,” or literally means “seal the mouth,” hence “kiss” or as it is here “be silent,” “submit to” (Wenham 2000:395).

Most Western scholars, unlike many African scholars, will not be able to understand fully the above actions. For example, among the Yoruba people of Nigeria it is a sign of absolute respect. It was also a common tradition and a serious sign of respect and adoration among the ancient Egyptians, particularly for the gods and the royal people. This is mostly for the gods and the royal family. This is in form of obeisance. According to the Yoruba people of Nigeria paying obeisance is a common action. When a child wakes up in the morning he/she is expected to pay obeisance to his mother and father. Boys will prostrate while girls would kneel down every morning as a mark of honour and respect. Apart from this, whenever, any male/female child meets an elderly person in the locality who may not even be related biologically, he/she is expected to bow down by lying flat on the ground (prostrate) as a sign of respect. Whenever the king of a village passes

on a street, the entire people on that road are expected to bow by lying down flat and say “*Kabiesi*” even on the road, not caring whether any vehicle is coming or not. This is what we call royal respect. Yoruba culture can here be used to understand Genesis 41.

The bowing down and kneeling for Joseph was a sign of royal honour and respect for Joseph which I think also belonged to Pharaoh. This honour and respect fits the character of Joseph having been the only figure who could interpret Pharaoh's dream. Because of this action of wisdom to interpret Pharaoh's dream, Joseph was looked upon as a god and that makes him worth all these royal respect usually given to Pharaohs who claim to emanate from the gods of Egypt. In fact, this is African culture of respect and honour demonstrated to Joseph not only because of his wisdom, but the fact that he has been appointed as Pharaoh's vizier.

### **Joseph Receiving White Linen**

The word used in this verse is Egyptian loan word and in Hebrew *לש* which signifies a kind of flax from which linen of great fineness and whiteness is made. Ancient Egypt held the most respected place in the production of linen. The Egyptian linens were composed of different qualities and fabrics all of which had a worldwide celebrity and the more civilized the people the more highly were they appreciated. The city of Thebes was celebrated early for its linens. This fine white linen was the special dress of the king and priest in Egypt. It takes the first place after the Bible linen. Ancient Egyptian celebrated very early, the superiority of their linens more than four thousand years ago. The quantity of linen manufactured in ancient Egypt was very great (History of Lenin <http://www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/timelines/topics/chariot.htm>). Independent of what was made up into articles of

dress, the numerous wrappers required for enveloping the mummies, both of men and animals, show how large a supply must have been kept ready for the constant home demand. In addition to this, a very large quantity was regularly exported to foreign markets where it was in great demand and eagerly purchased by all who could afford to do so.

Not only was the linen and brodered work highly appreciated by other nations, linen yam was also bought by them. It was in fact, mentioned in the Bible that King Solomon brought linen yam out of Egypt, and there is no doubt he was not the only foreign buyer of this much prized and really valuable product. When the Israelites left Egypt it is known that they were intimately acquainted with the art, not only of making fine linen, but also of embroidery. They actually put their knowledge in practice by using linen to make hanging for the tabernacle and robes for the priests. A change of fine linen for Joseph means favour and an induction into the priestly class, therefore, Joseph was given the daughter of a priest of On. The priests were the highest and most privileged rank in Egypt, hence intermarriage with such caste bestowed upon Joseph such privilege. As mentioned above, Joseph who become the second in command, that is, the vizier of Egypt, of priestly caste by marriage and divine because of his performance of knowing the mysteries of the dream actually worth that honour and respect of wearing the best linen that was bestowed on him. The Israelites probably inherited this tradition from Egypt and much of the dresses of the Levitical priests were made of this flax called *byssus* in the Bible. In fact, the word "linen" appears more than 80 times in the Old Testament.

## **Change of Name for Joseph**

The change of name was common with promotion like that of Joseph and citizenship. Joseph's name was changed to Zaphnath-paaneah the meaning of which is uncertain. However, it was suggested that it means "the revealer of secrets" or "the God speaks and he lives" (Rad 1972:378). With this Pharaoh designated Joseph as the preserver of life. Some even translate this new name as "the saviour of the world." While it was suggested that it means "hiding discoverer," others suggested "the god has said 'he will live.'" or "the man he knows," (Wenham 2000:397).

Name is a universal concept all over the world. This name is a symbol of complete Egyptian/African citizenship so that Joseph would be well accepted and performs his duty effectively as an Egyptian citizenship.

Example of name change in Egypt/Africa is many. It is usually done not only for religious purposes, but also as a symbol of power, expectations, commitment or devotion to state affairs. In order to demonstrate his close link with the new supreme deity, Amenhotep IV changed his name to Akhenaten. Nefertiti married the boy-king Tutankhamen and changed her name to Ankhesenamen. King Tut's original name was Tutankhaten which means "the living image of Aten". After the death of his unpopular father, he changed his name to Tutankhamun which means "the living image of Amun" (Watterson 1998: 113). The habit of changing names in ancient Israel is also common. As it is in Egypt, names are changed for religious purposes and as a declaration or evidence of descent from the gods. Examples of name-changed by God of Israel or by human are: Abram (high father) was renamed Abraham (father of multitude) by God to indicate expectation of bless-

ing. So also Sarai (my princes) became Sarah (mother of nations). Jacob (supplanter) was changed by God to Israel (the one who has the power of God). As the change of name means power in Africa so also it is in ancient Israel.

As the change of name in Egypt may mean real citizenship so also it can mean such in the Bible. Examples is Jacob which means (supplanter) whose name was changed to Israel which means the power of God. In Daniel 1:7 the name of Daniel was changed to Belteshazzar, Hananiah was changed to Shadrach, Mishael was changed to Meshach and Azariah was changed to Abednego the court of Nebuchadnezzar. Eliakim was changed to Jehoiakim by Pharaoh Necho. Hadassah (Myrtle) was also changed to Esther (Star) to indicate a Persian citizenship. There are so many others (about 16) in the Old Testament whose names were changed. It seems to me that the case of renaming Joseph (Zaphenath-Paneah) by the Egyptian Pharaoh as a mark of citizenship, power and blessing was wide spread in ancient Israel.

## **CONTRIBUTIONS**

Joseph's contributions to Egypt/Africa are enormous. One can imagine if Joseph had not gotten the divine wisdom to interpret the dream, Egypt would have been starved to death and possibly the whole of ancient world of that time. Probably there would have been no family called "ancient Israel." Eventually, Egypt/Africa became the arena of salvation where the world was taught that Yahweh is a God of salvation.

The principal goals of the story of Joseph are not only to describe reconciliation in a broken family and the depiction of Joseph as an ideal administrator but also to provide a bridge between the patriarchal narrative and the exodus (Coats

1976:55, 89-92). It includes the fact that promotion to the position of power is as a result of God's presence and that God is in control of history and human destiny.

Joseph also became the epitome of wisdom and theology both in ancient Israel and Egypt/Africa. That patience is essential and that God can bring good out of evil is an enduring lesson for the whole world. It teaches that no matter what obstacle is placed on one's journey; God will surely accomplish his will.

Joseph's marriage into the family of a priestly caste is one of the ways Pharaoh bestowed honour on him. This also was a diplomatic one and it sealed the agreement in love between Israel and Africans. Asenath's marriage to Joseph "brings royalty and world of creation to the family. So the marriage became a full joining both literally and figuratively, of Egypt and Israel at multiple levels" (Meyer 2000:54). It also shows that marriage to a foreigner can produce politically valuable alliances (Meyer 2000:54).

The two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath bore for Joseph, are very significant. Manasseh means "For," he said, "God has made me forget all my trouble with my father's household." Ephraim means "For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction (41:50-52). The bitterness was gone. Joseph was able, even now, to see that while his brothers were wrong in their actions, God had meant it for good (cf. 50:20). With this attitude Joseph could exercise sufficient self-control to keep him from revealing his identity too quickly, and thus bring his brothers to genuine repentance by a careful programme of instruction unimpeded by feelings of anger and vengeance. Joseph life with his brother shows that everyone needs the practice of the spirit of reconciliation.

In the biblical tradition, Manasseh and Ephraim, became great and became two of the twelve tribes of Israel. From the tribe of Ephraim, Elishama was to stand with Moses and Joshua, the son of Nun (Num. 1:10). Under the leadership of Joshua, Ephraim along with other tribes received its inheritance which is described in Joshua 16. It includes what we call Samaria as distinguished from Judea and Galilee. The tribe of Ephraim was commended for being among the first to respond to the summons to arms (Judg. 5:14). During the early monarchy the tribe of Ephraim manifested a domineering, haughty and discontented spirit. When the tribe of Ephraim was merged with the Northern Kingdom it remained a dominant factor, so much so, that her name became the name of the ten tribes. By African and Israelite traditions, the entire family is an African family. Could this not mean that the latter tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh are of African blood and were legitimately Africans-Israelites? The main implication is that African blood runs throughout ancient Israelites. Looking at the significance and strength of the tribe of Ephraim, the men of valour such as Joshua who became leader of Israel after the death of Moses, one can safely conclude that Ephraim contributed to the life of ancient Israel. One important fact is that Ephraim was an African born in Africa and was the descendant of Joseph and Asenath who were all truly Africans by birth and nationalization through elaborate rituals as is in Genesis 41:41-45.

Manasseh, the son of Joseph and Asenath, became the name of one of the tribes of ancient Israel. According to the census taken at Sinai (Num. 1:10, 35, 2:20), Manasseh became another dominant tribe. Forty years afterwards its number had increased and she became the most distinguished of all the tribes (Num. 26:34, 37). Among the renown men of

valour and heroes were Gideon and Japheth from the tribe of Manasseh.

## CONCLUSION

I have discussed in this article the reason why I consider ancient Egyptians as purely Africans, the possible date of Joseph's story, the literary analysis of Genesis 41, the elaborate ritual of royal power for the purpose of conferring on Joseph Egyptian/African citizenship and success in his enormous task ahead of him. Furthermore, Joseph contribution to ancient Africa and Israel is also discussed according to the biblical narrative.<sup>7</sup>

The marriage was what Joseph needed to complete his citizenship. This indicates the respect and the importance of women in African/Egyptian culture unlike some societies where women are not respected as essential but just as property. The marriage between Asenath and Joseph and the production of two children, Manasseh and Ephraim, who became the most dominant tribes in ancient Israel, have some important implications. They do not only show that African blood

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<sup>7</sup> I am aware that certain scholars called "minimalist," that is, those who believe that external document such as archaeology, should be of paramount importance in determining whether the story of Joseph is historical or not. Since there is no straightforward archaeological document discovered so far that mention Joseph's story, it is dismissed as unhistorical. However, the maximalist, that is, scholars who believe that the biblical record should be the main evidence for the historicity of Joseph narrative and therefore, the narrative has some kernels of historical information. From the above discussion, it is evident that there is an elements of historical fact mixed with some embellishment in the style of novella as a narrative style of writing.

have run in ancient Israel people, but also show the destruction of the myth of pure race. Most of the multitudes that left Egypt were Africans. In fact, the entire nation of ancient Israel by the time they left Egypt were Africans/Israelites if one takes the Bible narrative seriously. The elaborate ritual in Genesis 41:40-45 and the use of these items throughout ancient Israel also show the extent to which African/Egyptian culture has influenced ancient Israel. Perhaps, that may be the reason why ancient Israel's culture and tradition are very similar. That may also be the reason why Africa and Africans are mentioned in the Bible (Old and New Testaments) more than any other nation and people, except ancient Israel (Adamo 1986; 2001, 2006).

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